

To those who smile, wherever they may be.

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Reasons to Kill God

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“Everybody aspires that at least one’s death will turn him into a good memory. However, my father is gone now, yet he, like so many mortals, stands trial before me.”

Chapter 1

The Trial

"Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?"

"I do, your honor," I replied, loud and clear.

"Are you Mateus Esperança?" the Prosecutor asked.

"Yes, I am," I replied once again, with confidence.

Silence fell over the makeshift courthouse erected especially for me in that godforsaken town, usually visited by only ghosts and mortals gone astray.

"Was your previous name Klaus Holland? Are you the son of Maria and Albert Holland?" the Prosecutor kept asking, without waiting for my answer.

"Yes," I confirmed, triggering an explosion of loud curses, cries, and wailings, which the Judge's gavel tried in vain to suppress.

"Quiet, quiet! Order in the court!" a dark-skinned, great-legged court orderly cried on and on, almost cracking his voice.

"Please, tell me, sir, about your procedure over there, in Undespul Camp," the Prosecutor enquired once the atmosphere in the courtroom calmed down a little.

"The format was very simple," I replied.

"Format, sir?" he said.10 Reasons to Kill God

"Yes, a format, as it is called by viewers of American reality shows," I replied, slightly amused by my spontaneously clever answer. "Nobody may die until I permit him to."

"Which means?" the Prosecutor asked with his eyes wide open, and the crowd, too, grew tense with anticipation of my answer.

"Mr. Prosecutor speaks as if he has no idea about concentration camps or a reality TV shows," I laughed. "But I will gladly explain it to an ignoramus like you: all those who got lucky enough to get there as corpses, and stank accordingly, were thrown from the train straight to the burial pits, and fully covered with lime. Unlike them, those who survived the journey and got off the train alive were given a sleeping berth, clean clothes, a little hot soup and my permission to live another day with us in Undespul."

"Have you ever granted any of the prisoners the permission to die?" the Prosecutor asked, with a touch of a cynical tone, adding a little wink, as if he was pleased with all my answers so far.

"Certainly, all of them. But not right away, since we had a format to follow," I replied, with a wink of my own.

"Well, sir, what was that format?" the Prosecutor asked, giving up, at last.

"I was afraid you would never ask, Mr. Prosecutor," I replied, breathing a sigh of relief.

"Well, as I said, the procedure was very simple," I rolled my eyes upwards in an attempt to recall everything, down to the smallest details. "Every day, I held a lottery, where I picked

several lucky long-timers. On some occasions, they were ten, and on other occasions, one hundred. Each prisoner was given one hundred and eighty fresh sheets of paper, a quill pen, and an inkwell, and was told to write The Trial 11

down their life story. Everyone who dropped his quill in the midst of writing, succumbing to either hunger or hand pains, was shot right away, while those who managed to complete their life stories, filling up all the sheets on both sides, I kindly granted my permission to summarize what they wrote, with a trembling voice, in front of the entire Camp."

"And what happened then," the Prosecutor asked with amazement. "Did you let the winners go?"

"Certainly not! What's the point, if this was the end!?" I replied, giggling. "That was not part of the format. Then we buried them," I concluded, taking a little sip of water from the glass which rested on the witness stand in front of me.

"You mean, those who died?" the Prosecutor insisted on using his layman's terms.

"No, sir. Those were buried long before," I replied instantly, proceeding without letting him pop more questions. "We buried them all, even the living - the winners. We called it a 'quick release'."

The Prosecutor took his glasses off, wiping his eyes as if to remove some irritating piece of sand or rheum, and right afterwards, refitting his glasses on his nose, he remarked with bewilderment absolutely beyond my understanding "But they won!"

"They did," I replied, "and under the format rules, the winners had the right to read out their life stories to the crowd, and then were buried alive. They were the luckiest ones."

"Sir!" the Judge interrupted me, "How many people died in this horrendous manner?"

"You mean, won, Your Honor," I protested quietly. "Won," I repeated aloud, yet he only kept staring straight into my eyes. I looked at him amazed and then gave the Prosecutor an 12 Reasons to Kill God

inquisitive look. After all, it was an excess of judicial authority to manipulate the trial this way.

The courtroom fell silent, with only the rumbling of the fan preventing the microphone in front of me from receiving my pounding heartbeats. Looking around, I saw hundreds, or maybe even thousands of people occupying the wooden benches of the colossal roofed hall built especially for that trial.

I looked at the Judge once again. "As far as I know, when I left the camp there were five thousand people in it," I finally replied.

Yet the tiny Judge's face kept reddening, with sweat dripping down his forehead all the way to his cheeks. He combed with his hand the remnants of hair on his head, wiping the back of his hand with his robe, not attempting to conceal this seemingly inappropriate gesture at all. Then, once he calmed down a little and restored his normal breathing, he persistently asked, "And how many were there in the Camp before, since it was opened?"

I shook my head, lifting my eyes up to the ceiling, pretending to calculate, even though I knew the precise number. "From the moment the camp was opened, until I left it, sixty

thousand people managed to win under the format rules, while another two hundred and fifty thousand didn't make it."

"In other words, under your order, about three hundred thousand people were killed in the Camp?"

"Your Honor, I strongly object!" I cried, rising, before two muscular guards grabbed my shoulders, forcing me back to my seat.

"Your Honor," I begged his pardon again, this time, with a more appeased tone. "To begin with, as I mentioned before, The Trial 13

slightly over three hundred fortunate ones underwent the format. Secondly, Your Honor, I neither killed nor ordered to kill any of those people. They chose their own fate: back then, it was common knowledge that everybody entering the Camp should sign, willingly, an agreement to all the format rules, as they all did."

"Mr. Holland, do you...?" the Prosecutor attempted to keep asking, yet the Judge interrupted him instantly, making that lanky man in the bluish cotton suit fall silent.

"Mr. Prosecutor, this will not be necessary," the Judge said, adding right away, "Following the witness's own words, I can convict and even sentence him right away!"

The Prosecutor turned around, raising his hands and displaying two rows of yellowing teeth to the crowd, as if trying to impress on them he won this case single-handedly.

"Stop it now!" the Judge cried, rising furiously.

"All rise!" the orderly exclaimed, confused, with his coarse voice, making the great crowd rise even though the trial was still on.

The trial was resumed after a several hours' recess, during which the courtroom was washed and the TV cameras placed in all its corners. At about three o'clock that afternoon, I was escorted back into the court by two guards. A tumultuous crowd crammed the courtroom and all TV cameras were trained on me while I entered the room.

"All rise!" the court orderly cried again, routinely, and the courtroom fell silent. The crowd took their seats, and so did I.

"Well, Mr. Holland, following your confession," the Judge went on, "and due to the horrible story you told the court, I see no point in any further deliberation of your case. Therefore, I found you guilty of genocide!"¹⁴ Reasons to Kill God

Loud jubilant yells filled the courtroom, gradually giving way to weeping. Most of the crowd seemed to consist of my ex-prisoners in Undespul. "They weren't even lucky enough to participate in the game," I thought. "That's a sufficient reason for delaying the sentence." I found the thought so amusing I smirked, quickly catching myself hoping no one noticed.

"Does something amuse you, Mr. Holland?" the Judge asked furiously, his face reddening, which occurred frequently during the trial.

"Not at all," I replied.

“Well, Mr. Holland, I sentence you to death,” the Judge went on, smiling as if paying me in kind, “As for the manner of execution, it will be exactly according to the very rules you designed yourself – to the letter!”