THE HUNT

I will send for many hunters, and they will hunt them down on every mountain and hill and from the crevices of the rocks.

—JEREMIAH 16:16

ONE

The central market is expansive. It stretches six city blocks, with sheets of corrugated metal covering almost every square inch. Each sheet was puzzled into position by someone wanting to extend the market by just a few more feet. A labyrinth of stalls piled high with everything from bags of toothpaste to boxes of broccoli, the market echoes with different reggaeton tracks as hawkers compete for customers. So unplanned is the place that it once burned to the ground because there was no clear way for the fire engines to enter the area. Volunteers ran in and out of the flames with buckets of water.[1]

How did they know where to go? Because it is the shadows that really set the scene. An almost complete lack of natural light meets an uneven assortment of low wattage bulbs, each hanging from a cord. With aisles that sometimes pinch so tightly that you have to turn sideways just to pass, the market can conjure a sense of vertigo. I, for one, did not know which way was up, let alone out, which is why I tried my best to keep up with Santiago as we paced the market. It wasn't easy.

"They've hunted me before," Santiago said. He looked weathered, with a beard that seemed unintentional.

A man carrying a bucket of tomatoes suddenly pushed past us as a pastor preached into a bullhorn. The machine made him sound distant, from another world. "He paid the ultimate price," the pastor said, "to save us from our sins. Christ rescued mankind and all he asks from us is that we obey him, that we bathe ourselves in baptismal waters to know the true glory of God."

Santiago wasn't listening. He was visibly uneasy, with what seemed like paranoia setting in. Some of this had to do with the crack cocaine. Vaporized with a lighter and then absorbed through the lungs, the drug hits the bloodstream almost immediately, flooding the brain with dopamine. This jolt causes crack cocaine's characteristic high. It constricts blood vessels, dilates pupils, and increases the user's body temperature, heart rate, and blood pressure. But this euphoria only lasts about five minutes, even less if the crack is of poor quality (and the crack sold at the market is almost always of poor quality). This sudden spike and equally abrasive drop can foster a sense of anxiety, of near despair—but so too can the hunt.[2]

In a series of sharp lefts and hard rights, Santiago dodged vendors in an attempt to bury himself even further in the market. "The deeper I go," he reasoned, "the harder it is for him to find me."

Him? I wondered.

At first I thought that Santiago had a plan, that he knew where he was going. Maybe he was looking for a friend who might hide him somewhere. A needle in a haystack, I thought. No one would ever find him here, but it eventually became clear to me that Santiago's only strategy was to keep moving, to compulsively wend his way through the market.

He did this for hours, and I followed the movement of Santiago's feet in the hopes that they might give me some advanced warning as to which way he would turn, but he often pivoted so quickly and with such purpose that I struggled to keep pace. Either incapable or unwilling to stand still, we ended up discussing his history with hunting in short bursts.

"I wasn't working," he said, "I wasn't doing anything. I was just smoking, and so she had me hunted." Santiago tripped past someone selling pirated DVDs.

She? I asked.

"My mom," he said.

Santiago had not worked in weeks. In his early twenties, with sturdy hands and a quiet demeanor, Santiago's natural strength availed him to the city's construction sites, where multinational corporations built condominium complexes, office towers, and shopping centers. More than one hundred high rises had gone up over the course of a decade, presenting Guatemala City with a new skyline while at the same time providing Santiago with a steady stream of income. He shoveled dirt and cleared debris for cash-in-hand, throwing grey chunks of concrete into dumpsters for upwards of twelve hours a day.[3]

"He's an excellent worker," his mother later told me as we spoke in her living room. Maria owned a two-bedroom house in a rather poor part of Guatemala City. It was a cinderblock structure with an aluminum roof, but it also had fresh tiles on the floor. Her two eldest children had paid for the flooring. They lived in the United States and wired money to Maria in small denominations. One hundred dollars here, two hundred dollars there. It added up in ways that elevated Maria and her family toward some sense of middle-class respectability, but then there was Santiago, her youngest.

"He scares me when he smokes," Maria said. She then whispered, as if the neighbors might hear, "Oh, Lord, no one can hold him down."

Over the years, a number of substances had made Santiago rather hard to pin down: marijuana, solvents, paint thinner, the occasional pharmaceutical, and, to a growing extent, crack cocaine. He also drank, but that no longer held his attention. Instead, crack bounced Santiago between

increasingly shorter bouts of work and progressively longer stretches of drug use, which made Maria concerned not just for her son's safety but also for his soul. "The way of the Lord," she said, "is the only way to truly liberate someone from sin."

So will you have him hunted? I asked.

Maria's Bible answered for her. She turned to Romans 5:3–5 and began to read aloud in a slow, steady voice: "We also glory in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." She traced the words with her finger while striding from one end of her living room to the other. Soft-spoken and gray-haired, Maria always seemed inspired when she had a Bible in her hands. "And hope does not put us to shame," she read, "because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us." Maria then fell silent, eventually answering my question. "Yes," she said, she would have Santiago hunted.

Back in the market, under the sheet metal, Santiago speculated that "she's going to call the pastor." He paused just long enough to talk, to square himself to me, adding, "Maybe she's already called him . . . I bet she's already called him." Santiago then ticked off the reasons why he thought the hunt was already underway: "This is what happened last time," he said. "I stopped going to work. I couldn't handle the crack. I stopped going home to sleep. I was gone for days."[4]

So why are we at the market? I asked. The crowds seemed absolutely antithetical to an escape. Wouldn't Santiago want to distance himself from people rather than run right at them?

Santiago explained to me what scholars have long known—that the crowd can be a resource. The crowd can turn a blind eye to abduction, but it can also turn the tables. Or, as Santiago said, "If you scream and make a scene, then sometimes people help you out. Sometimes people will step in long enough for you to slip away." Upon a second look, the market did present a confounding web of alleyways that Santiago could use to his advantage. "All I need is a head start," he said, "and I can disappear."[5]

But wouldn't it be easier to just go back to work? I asked.

By work I meant the construction sites, with their steady pay, rather than the errands that Santiago had been running for vendors inside the market. He would haul bags of onions and boxes of dried fish from the trucks to the stalls for spare change, eventually earning enough to smoke for an hour or two, and when his high faded, he would hoist yet another box onto his back. Not having been out from under the market for nearly

a week, avoiding the light of day for far too long, Santiago found himself trapped by his own desires, seemingly bound hand and foot.[6]

"I can't get myself back to work," Santiago admitted, "not on my own, and if I did, I'd just smoke the money." He was being honest. Steady work had always been a problem for him—largely because a two-hour crack session can cost upwards of $50 USD, and these crack sessions rarely ever lasted two hours. They tended to extend across a day, even two, and so Santiago ended up spending all of his money to keep the sessions rolling. Then he would steal. This meant taking cash straight from his family's pockets but also stealing hard-earned appliances from under their noses. He even sold the family's microwave for pennies on the dollar and pilfered light bulbs straight from their sockets. "He sold my table saw," his brother huffed, "and that [machine] was how I made money."

Santiago's family was not alone. Prior to 2006, when there were only dozens rather than hundreds of Pentecostal drug rehabilitation centers in Guatemala City, hunting parties would track down and capture those who drank too much. This was a different kind of hunt, with a different set of techniques. Alcohol slows down the user, even puts him to sleep, which can make hunting look a lot like fishing. "If he drinks," a hunter once explained to me, "we let him drink. And then we'd give him more to drink. Until he couldn't talk. Until he couldn't walk. Then we'd take him." With just a bit of bait, the hunter would reel in user after user. The work was easy. It was also inspired. "If you're in the streets," Alejandro said, "you'll end up dead."

But then nets turned into hooks as crack cocaine flooded the city. Unlike alcohol, crack cocaine does not slow down the user but instead speeds him up. It speeds everything up, which is why Santiago looked over his shoulder. He scanned the horizon, reading every vendor for signs of a chase. Though he occasionally mistook a pedestrian for a predator, Santiago knew who was looking for him.

Alejandro had hunted Santiago before. Ten years older than Santiago, with a stronger, wider frame, Alejandro was an imposing figure. "I don't feel anything anymore," Alejandro told me. We sat inside Pedro's center, among the general population, while Alejandro kept watch over the captives. "You know that feeling," Alejandro asked me, "when you're about to get into a fight, like when your hands start shaking? I don't feel that anymore." With a round face and strong arms, a nose that broke stage left, Alejandro walked smoothly when he wanted to be seen, but he could also hide in plain sight when he needed to disappear. Accustomed to wearing secondhand T-shirts with the sleeves cut off, Alejandro had a tattoo on his left shoulder. It looked

like the earliest version of Mickey Mouse, the one with the spindly legs and a button nose. The tattoo was the kind of commitment that some people might regret, but Alejandro never seemed to care. "That's the least of my worries," he once told me.[7]

Inside the center, well before Santiago's panicked tour of the central market, Alejandro described the market as one of his hunting grounds. "We pick up guys there all the time," he said. "It's not easy. The lighting is terrible, and there are thousands of people. And stuff's everywhere. I've twisted my ankle there while chasing down a guy."

How do you find someone in the market? I asked.

"The family calls us," he said. "They let us know where he is, and what he's doing.'" Alejandro then echoed Santiago's strategy about the crowds. It seemed to be common knowledge. "But you need to watch out for the crowds," Alejandro said. "They'll back a guy up if you just try to hook him in the market. You need to wait a bit, watch the situation."

By this time, Alejandro had relaxed against a wall and was taking his time to answer my questions. He seemed to enjoy these moments of reflection, the chance to really consider his techniques.

"I'm waiting for the guy to separate from the group," Alejandro said, "to go buy some more drugs or just take a walk. You need to wait until he's alone, on his own."

And then?

"And then you walk up to him," Alejandro said, "and grab his thumb." Alejandro took my hand and turned my palm upwards. My arm locked as I suddenly found myself standing on the tips of my toes. "I then tell him that 'you either walk out of here with me quietly, or I'll break your arm and drag you to the car.'" He paused. "It's actually pretty wild," Alejandro said, "to know that you're being hunted. You don't know where to go. You don't know what to do. You just start to panic because it could be anyone. Different guys hunt for different centers and they're all from the streets. So you don't know who is going to grab you." Alejandro knew both sides of this exchange.

"When I'm hunting," he said, "I use it to my advantage. I hang back, watch the situation, and let the guy get comfortable. Because maybe he doesn't see me waiting for him. Maybe he doesn't know I'm the guy hunting him." Alejandro then flipped perspectives. "But when I'm being hunted," he said, "it scares me. Because I'm usually pretty fucked up [by the time I'm being hunted] and I don't know who is watching me. I mean, it's like you got God calling out your name."[8]

TWO

Pedro often called out Alejandro's name.[9] A man of faith, with long hair and a bulging stomach, Pedro was well past middle age. In the past, a quarter of a century earlier, Pedro had spent a year inside of a Pentecostal drug rehabilitation center for drinking and drugs and living on the streets. "How is it that I managed to escape from drug addiction?" Pedro once wondered aloud as we stood inside the center. "How is that I managed to escape from smoking marijuana, from injecting cocaine, from having gone mad, from ending up a prisoner, from getting to the point where I had to sleep in the streets?" Pedro paused. "I experienced God's mercy," he said. "Christ rescued me. He brought me to a place where I met . . . where I met myself, where I met God." Pedro would later start his own enterprise out of a two-story house. We talked on the first floor of his center, inside his front office, while a wall opposite of us announced in bold blue font: "The man who falls and then gets back up is greater than the man who has never fallen."

"We give the family peace," Pedro said, "because they prefer to have their father or brother or son locked up here so that he doesn't get himself killed." Pedro rested his elbows on his knees, leaning forward until he was balancing on the edge of his chair. He looked uncomfortable, with his soccer jersey starting to bunch around his belly. "There are people here against their will," he said, "and they want to get out, but why do they want out?" Pedro answered the question for me: "Because they want to do drugs." At the time, fifty-five captives lived above Pedro's front office. Santiago would make it fifty-six.

The house was never meant for any of this. While Pedro lived with his family on the first floor, using the space largely as it was intended, with family meals eaten around a kitchen table, the second floor strained to keep up with the demands of captivity. Roughly 1,200 square feet, the second floor had a total of three bedrooms. Two of them had been converted into dormitories, with each holding a cluster of bunks stacked three beds high. Pedro called the third bedroom the morgue (*la morgue*). This is where new arrivals recuperated from withdrawals. Offering nothing more than a king-sized mattress splayed out on the floor and a few buckets, the morgue held three to five captives at any given time.

Then there was the family room, with its southern facing windows. It was not large, maybe 400 square feet, but it served a number of different purposes. It was where the captives ate their meals, listened to sermons,

and slept on the floor. Every night, as many as thirty men zigzagged across the room, piecing themselves together so that they fit just right. The second floor's toilets, both of them, still functioned as such, but they strained from overuse.

The bars were also conspicuous. Pedro secured every possible avenue of escape. He capped the door at the top of the stairs with a metal gate, and he plugged the morgue with a heavy door. Both had padlocks. Pedro also lined those southern facing windows with bars and then topped them with corrugated metal.

A door connected the former family room to a balcony. I often imagined the kind of plans that the architect must have had for this space. The house was obviously built with upward mobility in mind. The architectural intention, it would seem, was to have the balcony just off the family room—so that the patriarch and maybe even his wife could have a drink while the children played with toys or even roughhoused until the man of the house told them to cut it out. I could even imagine a real estate agent touring a young couple through the house, quickly admitting that the space was obviously much too large for them "for now" but that they would one day grow into it. The agent might have even tried to sell the very same scene that came to my mind whenever I looked onto the balcony: the kids, the cocktails, the stern but loving plea to just be quiet. But none of that made sense anymore, given that Pedro had fortified the balcony's door with padlocks, lined the edges of the veranda with razor wire, and posted two guard dogs there.

I asked Pedro about human rights.

"Talking about human rights," Pedro waxed, "makes me sad." He leaned back in his chair, resting his forearms atop his stomach. His front office lent him a kind of executive aesthetic, with its filing cabinets and calendar, but everything within eyesight was secondhand, down to the desk blotter. He had even fished his office chair out of a landfill.

Why do human rights make you sad? I asked.

"Because people want human rights for the thief or the addict or the trafficker or the murderer, but what about the rights of the mother who right now is calm and relaxed because she knows that her son is in good hands?" Pedro looked tired. He had been up well past midnight on a hunt that dragged him across the city, into alleyways, and eventually to the very edge of a canyon. "And what about a father who is too old to physically dominate his son," he asked, "but he knows that today his son is here? He knows that his son is not going to turn up dead." Pedro looked me in the

eyes, adding: "This is not about the individual. This is about the family and society."[10]

Is this why you run this center? I asked with a kind of naiveté. I always prodded the pastor with the most basic of questions, which sometimes he appreciated and other times he didn't. I had apparently caught him at a bad time.

Pedro scoffed, answering, "I do all of this because I love my neighbor, and I love helping the needy." He pointed at a locked door, one of four that held fifty-five users against their will, adding, "And I will not turn my back on these victims. They are dying because of drugs."

Pedro was right. Drugs are deadly serious in Guatemala City, not necessarily because of overdoses but because users tend to make increasingly poor decisions as they overextend themselves with their substance of choice. They steal from their neighbors, go into debt with their dealers, and pick fights with gang members. They even pass out in the streets. All of this can add up to a death that very few people mourn. "Try to get the police to give a shit about someone on crack," Pedro once challenged me. "You should see the look of relief on their faces when they toss one of those guys into a bag."

Pedro's center kept users alive. Pedro often preached about the power of conversion, about the thrill of standing on one's own two feet, but he also was patently aware that his mission was to hunt down those sheep that had wandered from the herd.

Pedro had inherited this mandate from the center that once held him. Opened in 1981 and shut down thirty years later, that house was Central America's first Pentecostal drug rehabilitation center. The founding pastor was a former soldier and a convicted criminal, but he was also a changed man. In his early years, he went by the nickname Bad Luck (*Malasuerte*) and served multiple prison sentences. On July 5, 1970, following an uneventful military career, he was sentenced to twenty-four months of prison for theft. On June 11, 1971, while still in prison, he was sentenced to another forty-eight months for disorderly conduct, and on August 8, 1977, he was sentenced to prison for three and a half years for drug trafficking. But, as people would say metaphorically, "Malasuerte died in Pavón."[11]

Malasuerte, otherwise known as Jorge Ruiz, found Christ in Guatemala's largest prison: Pavón. This sprawling prison farm once represented the very cutting edge of liberal reform in Latin America but then fell into disrepair, with prisoners eventually taking full control of the institution. For decades, guards never entered Pavón. Instead, they walked the perimeter.

In Pavón, Jorge learned about prison, and these were lessons that he would articulate through the classic Christian idiom of warfare. "One wonders if it is worth it," Jorge writes, "I mean to engage in a direct war against evil, when in most cases one becomes a victim of the very system that one fights." In search of higher ground, amid his own conversion to Christianity, Jorge took aim at drugs.

Reflecting on humanity's inherent weaknesses and its predilection toward sin, Jorge narrated his life as folding along a bright divide. He sinned before his conversion in prison, but after salvation, he thrived as a Christian through his rehabilitation center. His redemption, he insisted, came by the grace of God. The prison itself did nothing to better him. It only made him more of a criminal. He sought a context in which people could change, where the individual could come to terms with sin. And so, within an ever-changing capital city, one tested not just by unemployment and gross socioeconomic inequalities but also a genocidal civil war, Jorge met the woman who would become his benefactor.

María Elena was an eccentric Pentecostal whose wealthy husband had been murdered by leftist rebels during the country's civil war. The heir to her husband's estate, María Elena found herself taken by Jorge's swagger. A photograph of Jorge from the mid-1980s has him leaning against an American roadster with tight blue jeans, a white T-shirt, and a gold chain. A comically oversized cellular phone hangs from his hip.

"He was so charismatic." She blushed. We spoke in one of her homes as she petted a white lap dog. Another sat at my feet. "We used to discuss the Bible, the power and the authority of God. He treated me like his mother, and I treated him like my son. And oh how he would protect me." María Elena told a story of a man who loitered by one of her many stores. He bothered the customers, she said, but the police were unwilling to do anything about it. So she told Jorge about the man, and he was gone the next day. "Jorge just grabbed him, put him in his van, and took the man back to his center." She smiled. She then admitted to missing him terribly. Jorge died in a car accident in 1991, and so Jorge's wife ran the center for a decade until his daughter took over for another ten years. "I miss him so much," María Elena said.

Jorge spent much of his time hunting sinners. He would wait for the sun to set, for the city to turn quiet, and then he would wake a pair of his most trusted captives. They would cast about the city, searching for lost souls passed out in the streets or huddled in doorways. There are also stories of Jorge and his men stalking specific users. They would park their truck and then follow on foot the tracks of someone on the lam not simply

from society but, more importantly, from God. There was an obvious thrill to this kind of pursuit, which mixed the adrenal pleasures of domination with an evangelical sense of purpose.[12] It was this sense of adventure that attracted people to Jorge.[13]

María Elena was one such admirer, eventually lending one of her homes to Jorge at no cost. Located in the very center of the city, just steps away from the national cathedral, the house's floorplan boasted fourteen rooms, four bathrooms, two expansive terraces, and an industrial-sized kitchen. Jorge used every square inch of it. At the height of its run, roughly twenty years before the police would raid the house for harboring members of organized crime, the center held as many as 250 captives.

"We sleep on the floor like spoons," a man once told me with tears in his eyes. We were speaking inside Jorge's center—in 2011, just months before the raid. Jorge's daughter managed the enterprise, largely by handing over all pastoral duties to a cohort of former captives. Her lack of interest in the everyday running of the center had created innumerable opportunities for abuse. The very same captive explained how he had to scrub the floors on his hands and knees, naked. "As punishment," he told me.

During that same visit, another captive whispered to me, "No one is going to tell you the truth." We sat in the front office while Jorge's daughter entered and exited, going about her business.

"It has been a real opportunity to be here," the captive suddenly backpedaled when she reentered the office, "a real blessing."

Jorge's daughter left again, and the captive mouthed a few words that I couldn't understand. I squinted until he spoke up. "Out of control," he whispered. "This place is out of fucking control." He kept his eyes trained on the door. "She has two friends," he said. "They always come here at night. All drunk and shit, with two Rottweilers and machetes. Just to fuck with us. Just to have the dogs growl in our faces."

"Then leave," I told him. "Call your family."

"They put me here," he said. "My family has no idea what they've done to me." He leaned toward me to keep his whisper at a minimum. "The only thing I can say about this place is that at least I know where I'm gonna get hit from. Out there I'll get killed. In here, I'm not gonna get more than a beat down."

Jorge's daughter entered once more. "That's about everything," he said. Full stop.

Given the uneven quality of care that Jorge's center provided, expansion might have seemed improbable, but the radical absence of government

programs allowed the center to become a recognizable social resource, with transfer sheets lining its archives. State institutions (courts, prisons, mental hospitals) brought men of all ages to the center—even young boys. A civil servant from the Secretary of Social Services signed over a fourteen-year-old drug user on October 16, 2001: "The minor says that it has been a year since he has seen his parents. He says that he has no brothers or sisters." Another transfer sheet describes a ten-year-old boy as "very disobedient. Cries at anything. And poorly behaved." The center took them all.[14]

Jorge's pastoral efforts eventually set the conditions for a much larger kind of expansion, with a dozen or so captives leaving Jorge's center to start their own outfits. Pedro was one of them. By the late 1990s, Pedro had saved up enough money to open his own rehab. These second-generation centers often proved to be far more improvisational than Jorge's, if only because pastors such as Pedro never enjoyed the support of a benefactor like María Elena. Instead he and other former captives scoured the city for abandoned buildings and low-rent opportunities, spending all of their money on the basics: bars, padlocks, and razor wire. Many of them didn't even have furniture, but Pedro knew that all he needed was two dozen or so captives not only to recoup his initial investment but also to keep his center afloat. These entrepreneurial efforts eventually formed a web of some two hundred Pentecostal drug rehabilitation centers in Guatemala City. "They all had their start with Jorge," Pedro once mused. "Even the new centers have a connection to Jorge." Only months earlier, one of Pedro's first captives opened a center in one of Guatemala City's outer suburbs. Having been hunted by Pedro, who had been hunted by Jorge, this third-generation pastor now hunted at the margins of the capital.[15]

THREE

Back in the market, still beyond the reach of natural light, Santiago found himself at a decision point. Midday had become late afternoon, with the sun beginning to set and vendors starting to close up shop. Uninterested in spending yet another night in the market, Santiago considered returning home to have a meal. He also wanted to talk to his family. "It's better than smoking all night," he reasoned. I agreed.

We took a series of public buses back to Santiago's home, with no small amount of trepidation. As the bus sputtered and choked its way across the

capital city, Santiago insisted that we hover near the back of the bus in case a huntsman entered through the front door. "We can slip out," Santiago reasoned, but then he caught himself, knowing full well that the pastor's men often rush the front door of buses in the hopes of pushing their prey out the back door. "They then tie you up right there on the side of the road." Santiago winced.

I felt compelled to calm his nerves, to reason with Santiago that no one could possibly know which bus he was on and that he should probably just rest for a moment, but Santiago was beside himself, afraid of the inevitable, and yet growing ever closer to his family's home, where he would most certainly come into contact with the pastor's men.

Did Santiago want to be caught?

I once had a conversation with one of Pedro's captives. The young man had been hunted by Pedro's men and described his capture in crisp detail. There was an alleyway and a chase; he ran as fast as he could, but then he tripped over something. Tumbling to the ground, the men quickly picked him up and tossed him into the pastor's car. "But I'm not here [inside the center] against my will," he then told me. Reading a look of confusion on my face, he added: "I let them catch me." The young man didn't seem to be making excuses—for running, falling, or even being caught—but rather he wanted to communicate a delicate point about submitting to the hunt. "Once they had a hold of me," he explained, "I knew it was over, and so I let them take me."

Was this bus ride home a moment of Santiago "letting" Pedro take him?

As we hopped off the bus and walked the last two blocks to Santiago's home, past some of the very places where he bought his drugs, Santiago seemed more confident in his decision to return home—to have a conversation with his family about a fresh start. "I'll talk to them," was the last thing Santiago said to me before he walked through the front door.

Maria received her son with a sigh of relief. "When he passes out in his bed," she told me, "then I know where he is, and I know that he's safe." But an ulterior motive also piqued Maria's interest in her prodigal son. As Santiago collapsed onto his bed, his shoes still fastened to his feet, Maria fished a business card from her Bible. It was for Pedro's center. Maria had called the number before, and so she knew full well what she was about to do. "I hate having him hunted," she told me, "I hate to see them grab him." But Maria dialed the number anyway, and as she did, I caught a glimpse of the card. It read: "Drugs in your family? There's a solution. Call anytime. Open

24 hours a day." Next to the text sat a sketch of Christ as shepherd, with a staff in his hand and a lamb slung across his shoulders.

Maria had first come across Pedro's card years earlier. A neighbor's son had struggled with drugs, resisting his family's help at every turn. Fed up, the family paid the pastor to hunt him. Four men tied him up in the middle of the night and brought him to Pedro's center. Before driving away with their catch, one of the huntsmen left a dozen cards with the family. Maria's neighbor then passed her one of those cards, which she tucked into her Bible—just in case. When I asked her why she had kept the card, Maria simply said: "Santiago makes me cry. He's always made me cry."

Pedro's center was not the only outfit handing out cards. The expanding network of centers produced a thicket of paper that circulated throughout the city, each making promises in language that had been lifted from the corporate worlds of hospitality management and customer service. The first was usually that the center is "at your service 24 hours a day." Many of them went even further, insisting that they provide "a friendly, agreeable environment" for drug rehabilitation. "Do not give up!" other cards encouraged. "We are here to help!" The vast majority of these cards were results oriented. "If there's a problem of drugs in your family, then there is a solution." A different card squeezed the following information into a single frame, with exclamation points punctuating nearly every phrase: "Open 24 hours a day! Visiting hours Saturday to Saturday 10:00am to 5:00pm. Ring the doorbell! Or call now! It would be a pleasure to serve you!"

They often included multiple phone numbers and the occasional email address. One notorious center handed out cards that announced its mission in suspiciously oblique ways: "Helping those with problems with drugs, alcohol, and etcetera." The "etcetera" signaled just how undefined a center's mission can be. Serving as a kind of moral catchall, centers often did not target addiction so much as sin and, thus, did not hunt users but rather sinners.

Variations of stock images also appeared on the cards, usually featuring a silhouette of a businessman running from one corner of the card to another, briefcase in hand while his tie trailed behind him. Another set repositioned the businessman so that he held his hands above his head to show the chains of addiction.[16] Yet another depicted him trapped inside a bottle. "Call now!"

Other pastors, such as Pedro, adorned their cards with images of Jesus Christ, depicting their savior in a range of settings—as a shepherd with a sheep atop his shoulders; as a prophet extending his hand towards the

heavens; or as a beneficent father figure walking children through open fields. One card placed a user at the foot of Christ's cross in the midst of full supplication.

Pedro's son, Roberto, had designed his father's business card using an online template. In his midtwenties, with his two young children almost always by his side, Roberto's entrepreneurial spirit had helped make the center successful. In addition to the sheer force of the hunt, these business cards proved vital to Pedro's pastoralism. They enabled Pedro to communicate legitimacy, authority, and piety, the sense that there was a plan of some kind, a modicum of expertise at play. These cards transformed desperate families into willing clients.

The strategy seemed relatively straightforward. Roberto made his father's center look credible by modeling a level of corporate formality. Albeit designed on a secondhand computer and printed at a local internet café, with paper purchased at the central market, these cards provided Pedro's center with a sense of gravitas. Every detail seemed to be meticulously considered, down to the weight of the card, its cut, and its glossy finish.[17]

"We had to throw away a hundred of these cards," Roberto once told me, "because we didn't cut them right."

So what? I wondered aloud, but my flippancy missed how these centers prioritized aesthetics over information, and so Roberto defended his decision.

"Who's going to take us seriously with an imperfect card? Who's going to trust us with their son? Or their father?"

Roberto knew all too well that the size and shape of each card was essential to the center's performance as a believable entity. Their card needed to be on the same level as any other business card produced by a government agency or international organization. He did it to increase awareness of the center, to be sure, but he also wanted to create an air of lawfulness. Roberto needed to feel legitimate so Maria could feel like a client. To leave a dozen business cards with a family after dragging their son into a vehicle was a modest effort at networking and also an effective way to transform a kidnapping into a business transaction—to convert a manhunt into a fee-for-service arrangement.[18]

To spread these cards across a tabletop, to take them in all at once, demonstrated the ways both empathy and abduction formed overlapping webs of predation. It also charted the affective dimensions of being chased as well as living in captivity—while also addressing the paradoxes of escape as not a singular event but a constant effort. For while Pedro had most

clearly hunted Santiago, Maria too was prey to the pastor, as a customer. These cards also demonstrated that the pastor's enterprise was not entirely hegemonic. Roberto deployed market strategies to position himself within the industry; he actively sought out customers by presenting them with a solution to a problem that he himself tried to frame. Yet Maria was no fool. She was never duped; in fact, she may very well have been the most informed consumer in the capital city.[19]

"Did you know that they shot Santiago?" Maria once asked me.

Who? I asked.

"Some kids in the neighborhood. He was buying drugs, and they shot him in the stomach." Santiago later showed me a thick scar that snaked up his abdomen. He also insisted that I touch a nub of bone that never properly healed. It was a piece of rib that protruded whenever he lost too much weight.

"The doctors had to open me up," Santiago said, "to make sure that my organs were okay. That everything was good."

Distracted by a wave of memories, Maria eventually added, "He almost died." Without Pedro's center, with its standing offer to hunt loved ones at all hours of the night, even to the very edge of canyons, Santiago would have walked the streets. "But in the center," Maria insisted, "Santiago is safe. No one can shoot him there."

The fundamental obstacle was that Santiago had absolutely no interest in entering a drug rehabilitation center. Also adding to the problem was a lack of muscle. No one in Santiago's family had the strength needed to bring him to the center. Pedro's house was also an hour away from the family's home, and so with no steady access to a car, there was simply no conceivable way for the family to get Santiago to the center without having him hunted. After haggling with Pedro over Santiago's monthly fees, even downgrading Santiago's stay from a bed to a floor mat, the family eventually agreed to stretch their budget and pay a lump sum to transport Santiago from the streets to the center.

Alejandro did the honors.

FOUR

The bat hung in Pedro's front office, right above his desk. Weathered and metallic, made for children's T-ball games, the stick was strong enough to break grown men.

"I hit them," Pedro admitted. "I get down to their level and sometimes I take a swing."

Santiago had told me the same. "The pastor beats people," he said as we circled the market. "He'll beat people with his fist and then with his bat." Pedro would also poke them in the gut, pushing a captive onto his heels with each prod until his back was up against a wall.[20]

Pedro dominated both body and soul, his hunts demonstrating day in and day out that caring for the sheepfold demands as much muscle as it does heart. "Above all," he insisted, "I put salvation in the hands of God, as he's the only one who is able to rescue us." But staging an audience before God took some effort on Pedro's part.

Pedro's central task, as he understood it, was to get users to sober up just long enough for them to hear the word of God, and so he fielded a hunting party to grab their attention. "I make mistakes," Pedro admitted, "so I can't tell the guys here that I'll be able to help them. But it's not about me helping them. It's God who helps them, in the same way that God helped me."[21]

Pedro never hunted by himself. Part of this had to do with his age. Since starting his center he had grown sluggish, gained weight, and picked up a slight limp. He always denied the limp ("I walk just fine") just as he dismissed his diabetes ("It's not a problem"), but both strapped his mood to a rollercoaster of emotions.

Pedro usually hunted with four men, whom he pulled from the second floor. "The first thing you have to realize," Pedro explained, "is that hunting is a privilege. How many guys do I have here? Close to sixty or something? Not all of them can hunt. Not even a handful of them can hunt."

Why? I wondered.

"Because they'd run away!" he said. We spoke in his front office as he stretched out in his chair behind a desk. "They'd take one step outside the center and then just disappear, and I don't want to make more work for myself."

There are stories of a hunting party losing men. A group of four suddenly becoming a group of three. It is a remarkable moment of reversal. For when the hunter makes a break for it, he suddenly becomes the hunted, and he rarely gets far. Once the remaining three complete their immediate task, those same huntsmen then set out to find the escapee. "We drag that guy back to the center," Pedro huffed, "and beat the shit out of him." He then said, "Because only a few of these guys can be trusted, and it takes months to gain that kind of trust, to know if someone is really sincere."[22]

By sincere, Pedro meant transcendently trustworthy. He was talking about whether a captive could be brought to the very brink of freedom,

shown a clear pathway for escape, and then trusted to return to his own captivity—with the pastor's newest catch, no less. "Do I know the man's heart? Can I trust his soul?" These are the questions that Pedro asked himself about each of his huntsmen, and only the most sincere, only the most transparent of these men, ever hunted on his behalf.

Sincerity inside this center was always a performance; it was far more a matter of doing than being. Within the Christian tradition, going as far back as the sixteenth century, the rhetoric of sincerity has tried to reconcile the paradox of the forced confession with an authentic affect, and in the end it has generated a field of expectation that routinely attempts to connect inner states to external representations.[23] The important amendment here is that these centers have made sincerity a technique of governance.

Sincerity structured so much of life inside Pedro's center that captives self-consciously tried to make their inner self outwardly legible to the pastor. These signs of sincerity included clean clothes, an upright posture, and a positive attitude. "But I really know that someone has changed," Pedro once told me, "when I can wake him up in the middle of the night and tell him to hunt." All of this made the practice of hunting the most prized privilege inside the center—not simply because the hunt pleased Pedro so much (and it did) but also because hunting was the purest means by which to perform Christian sincerity.

This led to one of hunting's most confounding paradoxes: "The pastor knows that you're ready to leave the center," Santiago once explained to me with a bit of a shrug, "when you no longer want to leave the center."[24]

Tomás no longer wanted to leave the center. In his midthirties and originally born in Nicaragua, Tomás moved to Guatemala City when he was a young boy, but then his parents abandoned him. Tomás lived on the streets of Guatemala City from the age of ten. He never joined a gang, though he also never finished school, instead relying on petty theft and drug dealing to get him from one day to the next. By the time he was twenty, Tomás had become dependent on a constellation of substances, with rubbing alcohol and solvents topping the list. He also smoked crack cocaine when he could afford it, but those opportunities were few and far between. With no family to fall back on, Tomás often had nowhere to go until he found himself hunted by Jorge's center.

"I was just walking the streets one night, looking for a place to stay," Tomás remembered, "when this truck pulled up. Three guys got out and wrestled me into the truck. I ended up back at the center." Tomás spent a

year inside of Jorge's center, completing a home renovation project to pay for his captivity, and then he began to hunt.

Tomás proved to be an excellent huntsman—not so much at tracking, for he was often far too slow to keep up with the group, but he was deft at capture. His muscular back and chest proved invaluable. So too did his swagger. He felt unnervingly comfortable approaching his prey, talking to the user calmly, and then giving the person an ultimatum. Either the person could come to the center or he would be brought to the center. Tomás was also willing to take a hit, with a captive once breaking his nose in a way that permanently deviated his septum.

Given his abilities, Jorge kept Tomás for an additional twelve months. Afterwards, upon his release, Tomás found himself on the streets again. Far from sober, after only two weeks of freedom, Pedro picked him up. "Someone told me that a guy from Jorge's center was back on the streets," Pedro remembered, "and so I went looking for him. I knew that he could hunt, and so I wanted to have him."

Tomás's memory of the event paralleled his first abduction all too well: "I was in the streets. It was night. This truck pulled up and a bunch of guys got out. They dragged me into their truck and took me to the center." Tomás started to hunt for Pedro almost immediately.[25]

Emilio was one of the four men who hunted Tomás, and then the two eventually hunted alongside each other. Solidly middle class, Emilio used to steal from his father's pharmacy, working his way through an assortment of over-the-counter pain killers before trafficking drugs. The police caught him in the late 1990s moving bricks of marijuana across the capital, but his father raced to his side, calling in a favor with a judge. Instead of sending Emilio to prison, the judge allowed the family to commit Emilio to Jorge's center. This kind of offloading became increasingly common as government officials found that families often preferred Pentecostal drug rehabilitation centers to state prisons.[26]

Spindly and at times hauntingly quiet, Emilio's work ethic eventually earned him the opportunity to hunt for Jorge's center, his calm demeanor providing a nice counterbalance to a cohort of reactive personalities. Hunting also made Emilio's time inside the center more comfortable. "Huntsmen get better food," Emilio said. "They get more privileges, more freedom. You get to leave the center [for the hunt] and sometimes get to sleep late." After two years at Jorge's center, Emilio bounced between the streets and other centers until Pedro hunted him.

Bautista was the youngest huntsman by years. Exceedingly scrawny, with a tattoo of a marijuana leaf behind his left ear, he never knew Jorge's center. "Everyone talks about it like it was hell," Bautista said, "as if I care about any of that." Having been hunted for his crack cocaine use, Bautista quickly rose through the ranks of Pedro's center, becoming the pastor's right-hand man after only a year.

"His family called me," Pedro explained. "They said that Bautista couldn't stop smoking. So we grabbed him and brought him here." Pedro painted a quick picture of the kidnapping. "He's skinny," Pedro said, "so it wasn't too hard."

When did Bautista start hunting for the center? I asked.

"After only a few months," Pedro answered. "I could tell that he's smart. I liked him, and I could trust him with everything."

By everything, Pedro meant the keys, the front door, and even the bat from time to time. Bautista shuttled newly acquired users past the front office and up the stairs to the general population. He also answered the phone. This tended to place Bautista in the front office, lounging on a couch, watching television with his feet propped up on a chair. It sometimes looked like Bautista owned the place.

You ever get jealous? I asked Tomás.

"The favorites fall fast," he said with a shrug.

None of this seemed to bother Bautista, probably because he had not yet experienced a fall from grace, and so his responsibilities expanded to the point of becoming Pedro's surrogate. "It's better if I speak to the families," Pedro reasoned, "but Bautista can handle everything else."

The final member of Pedro's quartet was Alejandro, who had been in and out of Pedro's center for years. I had actually met Alejandro five years before he handed me his letter for the National Police. He was inside a different center, on the other side of town, and trying to find his way back to Pedro. Alejandro never had any real family in Guatemala. He arrived in Chicago in the late 1980s and quickly became a ward of the state. He shuffled from one foster family to another until getting married at fifteen. He worked union jobs for years while making deliveries for members of organized crime. Then Alejandro got arrested, serving five years with the Illinois Department of Corrections across a number of institutions until the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement deported him to Guatemala. "They put me on a plane," he said. "I didn't really know Spanish. I didn't have any family. I didn't know what I was going to do."

Ever since he was thirteen years old, Alejandro struggled with substance abuse, mostly alcoholism, but he increasingly came to use whatever

drug was within arm's reach. "I drank a lot in the States, and I did some cocaine. I got out of control too many times and that wasn't fair to my wife." They separated after a few years.

Once deported, Alejandro struggled to find work in Guatemala City. With only an inattentive aunt in the capital, Alejandro took to the streets, trying to make money by moving drugs. "I thought to myself, 'I don't know how to sell but I know how to move stuff from one dealer to the next.' "

Cocaine's commodity chain in Central America proved completely foreign to Alejandro in ways that prompted him to smoke more than he sold. "I mean, how fucked up is it that I come to Guatemala and end up smoking crack? I never smoked in the States. Never. But here I end up losing days to that shit." Alejandro lived on the streets, often spending weeks inside the market moving produce from trucks to stalls. Pedro eventually picked him up while casting about for new captives.

"These days, we usually wait for families to call," Pedro explained, but years earlier he actively sought out the deported. "They have more money than other people here in Guatemala," Pedro explained. "The deported have family in the States that can pay for their captivity." Money orders from Western Union lined Pedro's archives, with distant family members often paying above market rates for captivity. None of this was true for Alejandro. No one ever paid for his captivity. Yet before Pedro could wash his hands of him, Alejandro proved to be a leader. He began to run the general population, discipline the men, and manage a whole range of activities, including the kitchen. Alejandro had a knack for making himself useful.

Pedro's huntsmen were all rather senior except for Bautista. Each had years of experience, which eventually allowed Pedro to pack as many as sixty captives into his second floor. The sight was often difficult to see, with captives literally pressed against each other, but Pedro never seemed concerned. "The important point," he insisted, "is that this is about love rather than hate; this is about rehabilitation rather than retaliation. We want users to live rather than die. This is about forgiveness and not retribution."[27] I remember thinking to myself how sincere Pedro sounded when he said those words to me.

FIVE

Not everyone thought that Pedro sounded sincere. Even though these centers provided a necessary service to the city, as the government flatly refused

to provide any kind of care for drug users, the most cynical of citizens understood Pedro's mission as nothing more than a business. They would call Pedro the equivalent of a shyster and a charlatan, and a whole range of people dismissed these centers as fee-for-service providers that took advantage of vulnerable families. In a series of interviews that I completed over the course of many years, government officials called pastors such as Pedro "vultures." Public health workers shrugged them off as parasitic while human rights lawyers saw them as nothing more than agents of greed. Even the pastors of established churches would raise their eyebrows, often wondering whether any of these centers did more good than harm.

Much of this suspicion had to do with the business model that most of these centers maintained—which they relied on not necessarily for profit but survival. It was a hardscrabble kind of strategy that admittedly made Pedro look like he was running a bit of a hustle, but none of it seemed out of step with the city itself. As I would remind those working in government, public health, and human rights, only a third of Guatemalans at any given moment work in the formal economy.[28] Everyone else is just trying to cobble together a bit of stability.

Cultivating compassion for Pedro's business model was admittedly hard for me—not necessarily because I was suspicious of Pedro but because money is not an easy topic to discuss, whether in Guatemala or elsewhere. And given that the price of captivity and the promise of salvation are slippery topics at best, it took years of fieldwork inside of Pedro's center to muster up enough courage to ask him a relatively simple set of questions. I remember first broaching the subject of money inside his front office, with Pedro sitting high in his office chair and me slumping forward on a stool. The conversation felt uneven from the get go.

What do you pay your huntsmen? I asked.

Pedro just stared at me.

Over time, Pedro had become completely forthcoming about most every aspect of the industry, from his own history of addiction to the hunting of drug users, but the money was always a mystery. I had seen cash change hands and had often heard him haggle with families, but telling me the specifics of these exchanges always seemed out of bounds for Pedro. Never did my fieldwork feel more like a cat and mouse game than when we discussed finances.

"What do you mean?" he eventually asked. I repeated the question, asking as clearly as I could how much money he gave each of his huntsmen in exchange for his labor. I had always been amazed by how much labor

Pedro was able to squeeze out of his men. They not only tracked and captured drug users, often in the most extreme circumstances, but also kept the second floor from erupting into a riot. They were often obedient to Pedro and yet strict with the captives, respectful of the house but unbending with the men. They could be cruel at times, but they always performed in a way that allowed Pedro to float above the messy details of running his center. Yet my sense was that Pedro did not pay them. So I asked again.

What do you pay your huntsmen?

Pedro again stared back at me. The question seemed impolite, even crass. It also seemed to call into question Pedro's own sincerity—his motives and aspirations. He knew better than anyone that a misinterpretation of his intentions, a small adjustment to his objectives, could transform him from a shepherd to a mercenary.

This is one reason why Pedro did not answer my question. Instead he avoided eye contact while feigning dumb in ways that not only confirmed that he did not pay his huntsmen at all but also that I had not yet learned the right language to ask him the right questions.

What I did know was that Pedro had bootstrapped his center from the very beginning. This meant paying out of pocket for renovations and repairs, food and medicine, as well as the unwavering march of utility bills. With these demands, many pastors found it difficult to stay in business, and it was common to see centers open and close within a matter of months. So I tried a different tack.

Can you make a living doing this? I asked.

"It's like this," he said, weighing his words carefully. "They say that every job has its wage." We spoke in his office as he straightened himself up in his chair. "I do other things, right? I have some small jobs on the side. So I make a bit of money from that." He then squirmed toward a more satisfying answer: "But I don't need money, because this isn't about getting rich." Trying to strike just the right balance, he added, "The Bible says something like, 'Look at the birds in the field. They don't sow or harvest, and yet their father feeds them.'" He then posed a question: "If that's what God does for the smallest of creatures, then why wouldn't he do it for me? I am a child of God." He finally leaned back, adding, "So to be here, with a bit of bread, is more than enough." Pedro looked satisfied.

But how much does each person pay to be here? I pressed. I wanted to understand his business model, but I again felt that my questions were missing the mark. I could also feel my forehead beginning to perspire as I burned the social capital that I had worked so hard to earn with Pedro.

All the trust and affection that he bestowed on me came from years of my observing and then obeying a million little rules—about what I could know and what I could not; about where I could go and where I could not; about whom I could interview and whom I could not. And it had paid off, with me gaining access not only to the hunts, the center, and the families but also to long stretches of conversation with Pedro that always proved intimate and, at times, inspiring. My question about money seemed to risk all of this.

Pedro asked me to repeat the question. Again he acted as if he did not understand, almost as if giving me one last chance to sidestep the conversation—to back out before we ever really got into it. But I pressed on. These centers obviously functioned through a moral economy of exchange, but their captivity also had a political economy.

How much does each captive pay to be inside the center? I asked.

Pedro just shook his head. The question was impossible to answer—not because there was no number to name but rather, he explained, because the question opened onto a rambunctious theological debate. "No one pays to be here," Pedro said. "This is not about money, and I do not charge for this house." He was very clear about this last point. "I do not charge families for this house," he said. He then doubled down on the impossibility of paying for redemption: "I do the work of God here, and you don't pay for the work of God. You do not pay for salvation. You can't put a price on redemption." Pedro's voice began to rise: "I don't let anyone pay for this place. No one is paying for this place. I wouldn't even let someone pay to be here." Pedro was visibly upset.

Then how do you pay your bills? I asked.

"Offerings," he answered. "People make offerings."

Offerings are not payments? I wanted clarification.

His answer seemed simple enough. "No," he said, "offerings are not payments. They are not the same thing at all."[29]

Payment for Pedro was money for work done, goods received, and debt incurred. Pedro paid for renovations and repairs. He paid for food and utility bills. An offering was something different. Families did not pay Pedro to save their loved ones. Instead they offered Pedro gifts of money at the very same time that he saved their loved ones from sin. These two gifts—offering and salvation—ran parallel to each other. They never overlapped, at least for Pedro. It was a distinction that allowed Christian compassion never to be confused for economic compensation.

"I do this out of love," Pedro insisted. "I do this to save people."

All the while families offered gifts of money. This was a delicate dance, especially given the fact that redemption has always been an economic metaphor for salvation. Redemption, theologically speaking, straps the sinner with a debt that only the grace of God can repay.[30] And so while business cards demonstrate how these centers align with the logic of capitalism, Pedro's insistence on offerings as opposed to payments bent the entire operation back onto more redemptive terrain.

"I am telling you," Pedro insisted, "nobody pays me." And to argue otherwise, the logic extends, was to confuse taking care of someone with simply taking them.[31]

So how do you make money? I asked.

"I do not make money," Pedro answered.

Then what do the families offer?

Pedro seemed more comfortable with this question and so he laid out some of the numbers, but not before schooling me on the centers themselves. As he would explain, his bottom line began with an affordable space. Most of the city's centers started out as factories, garages, store fronts, apartment complexes, single family houses, and military barracks—until something failed, be it a family, a neighborhood, a business, or the state. All of these structures sat empty until pastors renovated them into rehabilitation centers. The process was apparently not hard.

"It doesn't take much to turn one of these places into a rehab," Pedro explained while touring me through his own center. "You add a few doors. You secure the windows. Maybe you change some of the rooms." He noted a few other items that would complete the transformation, such as a desk for the front office and some cots for the general population. "A new sign is always important," he added, "but the first step is finding cheap space." Pastors have done this for decades by searching Guatemala City for abandoned buildings and low-rent opportunities. These pastors have steadily shadowed the disaggregation of the capital from an urban formation with a recognizable city center to a sprawling region studded with pockets of blight. "You can't just tie a bunch of guys up," Pedro once said. "You need to put them somewhere."

Once somewhere, the families of captives made their offerings. The average family, he said, offered him Q800 ($100 USD) per month, with the hunt requiring an extra Q400 ($50 USD), but the families of some users offered as little as Q200 ($25 USD) per month to have their loved one sleep on the floor. Others offered as much as Q1,600 ($200 USD) per month for

a private bed in one of the dormitories. The family of a mentally ill captive could offer anywhere between Q1,600 ($200 USD) and Q2,400 ($300 USD) per month for long term care. The center tended to hold at any given time about a half dozen captives with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or severe depression. The money quickly added up. Holding an average of fifty captives at a time, with each family offering an average of Q800 ($100 USD) per month, Pedro's center generated around Q40,000 ($5,000 USD) in offerings every month.[32] Padding his margins, Pedro also completed anywhere from ten to thirty hunts a month for both his own center and for smaller operations, moonlighting for pastors who had not yet formed a sincere enough hunting party. Together, all of these hunts pulled in as much as Q12,000 ($1,500 USD) a month.

This is considerable money in Guatemala City. Pedro's living expenses were always pretty low. Pedro paid Q3,200 ($400 USD) per month in rent for the center, around Q3,200 ($400 USD) per month in food for the captives, and less than Q1,600 ($200 USD) per month in utilities for the building. Local churches often lightened those numbers with donations of bread and vegetables, and Pedro routinely received hundreds of pounds of charitable provisions from the United States Agency for International Development. Boxes of vitamin-fortified lentils sat on the roof, brought there by subcontractors who saw Pedro's center as a charitable organization.

There were also dozens of other tactics that redirected resources toward Pedro. Once, while holding an electrician captive, Pedro had the man splice a mainline so that the center could pirate electricity from the city, cutting the electricity bill in half. And this was only the start. Given that Pedro often held mechanics, barbers, and carpenters, he never paid for car repairs, haircuts, or home repairs. He also never paid for any of the labor that sustained his center. Everything from the cleaning to the cooking, even down to the hunting, involved conscripted labor; each of these assignments offered captives an opportunity to perform their sincerity to Pedro.

All of this seemed to make Pedro financially comfortable, especially given the fact that he and his family lived onsite. While this made him available at all hours of the day and night, it also allowed him to sidestep the cost of maintaining a private residence. And so while the average Guatemalan earns around $2,750 USD a year, Pedro cleared about $5,000 USD per month after expenses, propelling him and his family well into Guatemala's middle class. "Oh," Pedro added, "the center is registered as a church property. So I don't pay taxes."[33]

SIX

There would be nights when Maria would lock Santiago out of the house and make him sleep in the streets. "I'd also lock him inside his room," she told me, "and I'd keep him here in the house. But then he'd just get mad and fight his way out." Along the way, he would tear his room apart, breaking furniture and throwing objects. So Maria began a conversation with Pedro about her options, which revolved around the saving powers of Jesus Christ.

As both Santiago and his mother grew older—he in his twenties and she in her sixties—the future prospects for long-term care seemed to diminish, and Pedro's center emerged as the only viable solution for Santiago's survival. "I've fasted," Maria said. "I've fasted for twelve hours and then for twenty-four hours. But nothing works. Nothing at all."

We spoke just outside Maria's home. She leaned against a door as she thought out loud. "He needs help," she said. "I've spoken so often with him about his vices." She was careful to use the word vice as opposed to sickness. "We've prayed together about his vices," she said, "and I've told Santiago that he needs to make the decision to change." Maria began to calculate the cost of it all. She did not have the money to put him in a center more than once. "And so I want to put him inside the center for a long time," she told me. "I want to make the decision to put him there for a really long time."

How long? I asked.

"A year," she said, "maybe more." She flinched at hearing herself say those numbers out loud: "I want him with me. I want him with me right now, but he just doesn't make the decision to change. He always says that he'll come to church with me tomorrow or the next day, but he never does." And the risks were real. "I hurt so much for Santiago," she said, "and at night, I dream for my son and I pray for him." Out of sheer heartache and pure love, but also through streaks of anger, Maria eventually called Pedro. "Santiago also needs to be punished," Maria once told me.

Maria revisited the center before she called Pedro to hunt her son the second time, wanting to see the house one more time before making her decision. Fighting traffic on a Saturday afternoon, transferring from public bus to public bus, Maria eventually arrived at Pedro's front door. She rang the doorbell and Alejandro welcomed her into Pedro's front office.

Entering the center was no small task. Opening the front door meant finding the right key, unlocking the padlock, and then carefully positioning

one's body to allow a visitor to enter the center while guarding against the off chance that someone might make a break for the door. This process took time—to find the key, which was not always where it should be, but also to prepare the room for a momentary breach in security. Each metal door, outfitted with a padlock, demanded the same kind of discipline for entry. There was the front door, which Maria entered, and then there was the door at the top of the stairs, which Tomás and Bautista kept watch over. Alejandro was also tasked with managing the door to the morgue.[34]

Walking into the center was nothing short of an event. It was a common occurrence for Bautista to scream for Alejandro and then have Tomás open the door at the top of the stairs just enough that Alejandro could reach the front door. To the unfamiliar, this production might have seemed ludicrous, but such measures were absolutely necessary for Pedro to maintain a sense of control. Never did any single person have all the keys to each of the doors.

To further boost security, Pedro eventually added another locked door between his front office and the hallway that led to the stairs. This meant that a few months into Santiago's eventual captivity, four different doors, four different padlocks, and four different keys separated those inside the morgue from the streets.

Aren't four doors a little extreme? I asked Pedro.

He stared past me, refusing to engage with what seemed like a naive question. I pressed on: Isn't it at least dangerous? A fire could spread faster than any effort to unlock those four doors would take. Even at their best, the guys took twenty minutes to get me from the morgue to the streets. Pedro also passed on answering that question, saving it for a future conversation. Instead, he wanted to focus on Maria.

With Christian murals hanging along the wall and Roberto's children toddling about the office, Maria asked some standard questions—about the quality of the food, where Santiago would sleep, and how many men the pastor held upstairs. Pedro answered each question with a confidence that came from years of experience.

"The food is fine," Pedro said. "And Santiago will sleep on the floor, unless a bed opens up. Are you interested in Santiago having a bed?" Maria avoided the question, not wanting to negotiate over anything at that time. "And I hold as many men as God wants me to hold," Pedro added. "No more. No less." She then asked Pedro for a tour of the facilities.[35]

Pedro first showed Maria the front office. "Here is the phone." He gestured. "And this is one of our diplomas." The certificate, written in English,

came from a training workshop hosted by the United States Embassy. These are two-day events held inside one of Guatemala City's international hotels. North American experts on mental health and addiction guide pastors through a series of PowerPoint presentations, instructing them on the rights of the patient (not captive) as well as evidence-based approaches to rehabilitation (rather than theological therapy). These are quick events. "I like the lunches," Pedro once mentioned, "but the lectures are terrible. They don't know what we go through. They don't have any experience working here in Guatemala City. They don't even know the people we help." Christ is also conspicuously absent from the conversation. "And Jesus. Faith. They don't talk about any of it," Pedro said.

The real payout comes at the end of the two-day session, when each participant receives a certificate for completing the course. The piece of paper is easily mistaken for a diploma, especially when pastors frame them for their front offices, allowing the English to obscure the scope of its significance.[36] "I haven't learned a single thing from those events," Pedro once told me, "but the families appreciate the paper." Pedro hung several of these certificates in his front office as if he were a doctor or a lawyer with his degrees on display.

Maria took it all in for a second time. "Here is a photograph of a young man before he entered the center," Pedro said as he pointed to an image that he had taped to one of his walls. "And here is an image of him after he left the center." Roberto had edited the two images together, dividing them with a split screen and pasting "Before" at the bottom of one image and "After" at the bottom of another. The transformation on display was dramatic, with a shower, shave, and a fresh shirt signaling a new beginning for a man who had come straight from the streets. Pedro then led Maria to a small side room. Here she could visit with Santiago any time she liked. "Every day is a visiting day," Pedro insisted. "You want to visit Santiago? Then come visit Santiago." The visits could only happen in that room, he said, ensuring that Pedro could eavesdrop on conversations from the comfort of his desk.

Pedro then led Maria up a small flight of stairs to a barred door. Locked from the outside with a key, the door separated the first floor from the second floor. "I can't take you inside the general population," he told Maria. "I don't let people inside, but you can take a look." Maria leaned toward the door, pressing her forehead against a pair of bars. She then looked from side to side.

Directly in front of Maria was a gray wall and to her right was the morgue, but she was not at the right angle to see inside the room. To her left,

Maria could see, even if only out of the corner of her eye, the former family room. It was midmorning and the men had gathered inside the main room to listen to a sermon from a visiting pastor. It was a delicate scene, if not a reassuring one, suggesting a comfortable level of care and Christianity's central role in the center. At one point, as we stood at the top of the stairs, with Maria's face pressed against the door, we could hear the pastor read from his Bible, allowing Psalm 27:4–6 to echo across the second floor.

"One thing I ask from the Lord," he read, "is that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple." He read with some force, pushing his words at the captives. "For in the day of trouble, he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock." All Maria could see from her perch was the pastor behind a thin pulpit. "Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the Lord."

What Maria could not see was Tomás watching over the captives, making sure that the man at the podium delivered an acceptable sermon and that everyone listened intently. Maria also could not appreciate the intimate dynamics of nearly sixty captives living in such a small space—for weeks, months, and sometimes years.[37] There were often fistfights between captives over what seemed like the scarcest of resources: a piece of bread, a sliver of soap, or even a week-old newspaper. Maria could also never have anticipated how hungry these men got, especially when the center's already bland menu lost its taste because of extreme bouts of depression. Some captives even experimented with starvation, refusing meals in the hopes that that their family and friends might visit them and see what the center had done to their bodies. Captives would lose ten and then twenty pounds, the most extreme of them holding their pants up with makeshift belts.

From where she stood, Maria could also not see the stretches of inactivity that these men endured. There were sermons and meals, and these men also cleaned rooms and engaged in a series of chores; but there was also often nothing to do for hours on end. "It's the boredom that's the most difficult part of all of this," Tomás once admitted to me. Finally, Maria could not have anticipated how easy it could be to not see any of this. Many people would visit their loved ones weekly, even daily, at first, but then slowly pulled back until those in captivity became an afterthought.

Instead of seeing any of this, Maria listened to a pastor preach about the Lord sheltering sinners inside his sacred tent. With such an amenable

vision of the center in full view and with no other options in sight, Maria ended her tour with a bit of optimism. "Just call me," Pedro told her as they walked to the front door. "Call me if you ever need me, and listen, if possible, call me when he's asleep. It's easier that way."

SEVEN

So much had changed over the years. For a stretch of time, Santiago drank too much, and this was a problem, but it was a different kind of problem than drugs. Santiago could stay drunk for less than $1 USD a day in Guatemala City. In many ways, that was a simpler time for Maria and her family. Rubbing alcohol (*quimica*) is incredibly cheap. It is also unbelievably accessible. Most corner stores sell it for a few cents, which explains why little plastic bottles often litter the sidewalks of the capital city, pooling next to men too drunk to pick themselves up off the ground.[38] But Santiago no longer wanted to get drunk. He wanted to get high, and he wanted to stay high.

"It can get bad," Alejandro admitted. "A mother had us pick up her son the other day. The problem was that he was high when we showed up, and so he took off running once he saw us. We chased him, but then he climbed up a three-story building." Alejandro paused to let me imagine the scene. "He made it all the way up to the roof. And along the way he picked up a pipe." The problem was suddenly obvious even to me, but Alejandro spelled it out: "He had the high ground and there was only one ladder leading up to the roof. So it was impossible to get up there without getting hit on the head."

So what did you do? I asked.

"We waited him out," Alejandro said, "and then we distracted him while two guys scaled the other side of the building. They took him from behind." Alejandro then paused, shaking his head. "But that hunt took five hours."[39]

Santiago did not make it to any roofs. Instead, moments after Santiago returned home from the central market Maria called the center to say that Santiago was asleep in his bed. Pedro's four huntsmen arrived by car within the hour. They spoke to Maria just outside of her home, insisting that she leave for a few minutes.

"Bautista told me that it can get really bad," Maria said.

"It does get physical," Bautista later explained to me, "and then mothers sometimes want to call off the hunt. They want to stop it, and then I

don't know what to do. Because the pastor wants us to bring the guy in, but then the mother all of a sudden doesn't want us to hunt her son." Bautista closed off that option by pushing Maria out the door.

With Maria across the street inside a neighbor's kitchen, Bautista and Alejandro quietly searched the house for weapons. The home was quiet and completely dark, and so they tiptoed around the space looking for anything that could be used against them just in case Santiago wrestled free, but they found very little. There were a few knives in the kitchen, but this seemed like an improbable place for a struggle. There were also a couple of plastic chairs that he could throw at the men, but this was a minor concern. There were no stones, bars, or bats as well as no guns or needles. The room was clear. Bautista seemed satisfied.

The four men then moved into position, slowly creeping into Santiago's bedroom. It was well past sunset, and the room did not have windows. Hauntingly dark, without any light, Bautista cast a soft glow across the room with his cellphone. This allowed Alejandro to find his way to the left side of Santiago's bed and Emilio to the right side. Tomás then took his position at the foot of the bed while Bautista managed the doors. All the while Santiago slept on his side, his chest expanding and contracting at a calm, meditative pace. He had absolutely no idea what stood above him. Emilio asked the group to bow their heads as he whispered a quick prayer. He prayed for their safety, for Santiago's redemption, and for peace to return to this household.

Bautista then nodded and the men pounced. "You have to move quickly," Tomás later explained to me, "with as much force as possible. This is not a conversation. You need to dominate the person immediately, so that he knows who is in charge."

Emilio grabbed Santiago's left arm, pinning his shoulder to the bed. Alejandro did the same to Santiago's right arm while also pressing on Santiago's chest. Tomás controlled his legs, wrapping his arms around Santiago's knees in such a way as to press Santiago's shins into his chest. They then picked him up and carried Santiago through the front door while Bautista kept a step ahead of everyone, arriving at the car just in time to open the door.

In a matter of seconds, Santiago had gone from his bed to the car, finding himself wedged between Alejandro and Tomás as Bautista started the engine. Emilio rode shotgun.

From start to finish, Santiago's hunt took less than five minutes. Santiago was sober and so his capture was without incident. He did not struggle when they carried him to the car. "I knew it would happen," he later told

me, "and once I knew it was happening, I just let them take me." But this was not always the case. The drive to the center is often a matter of chemistry. The hunted can be belligerent, erratic, and violent. They can also punch and kick the entire car ride or arch their backs like defiant children.

"We just hold their arms at their side," Emilio explained.

Do you ever hit back? I asked.

"Of course," Tomás said. "We punch, but only in the stomach. We don't want him bleeding for the pastor."

The abducted can also be nauseous, paranoid, and desperate. It is not uncommon for Alejandro to arrive at the center with vomit on his pants. When adrenaline mixes with alcohol and crack cocaine, the abducted are sometimes completely overcome.

"I hate it when they beg," Alejandro once complained. "They beg us to set them free. They promise to never get high again, and I just tell them to shut the fuck up."

The huntsmen also play with their catch, telling them fantastic stories that often leave these poor, vulnerable men frantic for answers. "Sometimes we tell them that we're taking them to a bridge." Emilio chuckled. "A lot of these guys don't know who we are or why we're there, and so we tell them that they owe someone money and that we're going to throw them off a bridge."

Bautista found this particularly funny, adding another layer to the gag. "I'll even convince them that we've got the wrong guy. I'll call them some other guy's name and tell them that they owe us money. They spend the whole time trying to convince us that we have the wrong guy." Bautista, chortling at this point, delivered his punchline: "And then they end up at the center."

Over the years, I often tried to account for such cruelty, sometimes wedging it into some broader theological statement about pastoralism, but no easy answer ever really emerged. When I pressed the point that such antics were anything but Christian, Emilio, and Alejandro as well as Tomás and Bautista would double down on a rather rough and tumble take on their faith. What mattered to them and to Pedro were the ends and not the means—that these users would land inside the center rather than die in the streets. And by committing themselves to sustaining life, to making sure that the sinner lived to see another day, these men forgave themselves for enjoying what could only be described as the thrill of the hunt.

None of it seemed to contradict their Christianity. Instead, the raucous ways in which they hunted these lost souls allowed Pedro's huntsmen to

imagine themselves not just on the margins of society but also at the vanguard of Christ's Great Commission—as not just fishers of men but, more interestingly, as bounty hunters for Christ. It was a freewheeling kind of faith that answered to nothing but Pedro's singular question: Did you get your man?

Given that these new captives would soon have to perform their own sincerity to Pedro through such classic Christian techniques as proper hygiene, upright posture, and a positive attitude, the latitude that these four huntsmen enjoyed always foregrounded the Christian realism that so often structured the center's commitment to predatory pastoralism. Their mission remained as simple as it was salvific: drag wayward souls back to the fold.

In this instance, the four huntsmen had captured their man, and so Santiago stared straight ahead, letting the city race past him as Bautista drove the car. I later asked Santiago what he was thinking. "Nothing, really," he said. "I guess I was thinking about the last time I was locked up in the center, and how long I'd have to be inside this time." He paused for a bit, adding, "I was also thinking about how much I had fucked up."

The only real hiccup came when Alejandro and his men transferred Santiago from the car to the center. There is a short stretch between the curb and the center's front door, a seemingly inconsequential patch of concrete along an otherwise quiet residential street. But it is almost always a hurdle. The hunted can lull his hunters into a sense of calm with an uneventful car ride and then access a final jolt of energy, of sheer desperation, when he finds himself out of the car but not yet inside the center. This is when Santiago made a run for it, pushing past Tomás and Alejandro. "I just wanted to escape," he later told me. "I just couldn't accept the idea that I would be inside the center for months." But Santiago did not get very far. The four men took chase, caught him a half a block later, and pulled him into the center. They even smiled as Santiago struggled, enjoying the inevitability of it all.

Santiago never really had a chance.[40]

CAPTIVITY

If you do not listen, I will weep in secret because of your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly, overflowing with tears, because the Lord's flock will be taken captive.

—JEREMIAH 13:17

EIGHT

Alejandro mixed the drink with sacramental precision. Standing behind Pedro's desk, inside his front office, Alejandro held a plastic mug filled with hot water and rubbing alcohol. As steam rose from the cup, painting the room with a medicinal smell, Tomás and Bautista stood on either side of Alejandro like a pair of wayward altar boys. They kept close watch over Santiago's every move, as if he might make another break for freedom, but Emilio had already locked the center's front door, the key now safely stowed in his pocket.

"The hot water makes the alcohol hit the guy harder," Alejandro told me.

Why do you want that? I asked.

"To keep him alive," he said.

Worried about the immediate symptoms of detoxification, the cocktail was a makeshift effort to manage the dangers of withdrawal, as well as to induce users into a state of calm as they slowly weaned off their drugs of choice. And so Santiago gagged his way through the drink while Alejandro hounded him to finish it even faster.

I mentioned to Alejandro that Santiago was not drunk, that he was in fact completely sober, but Alejandro wouldn't take me at my word. "You don't know that," he said with some wisdom. No one ever really knew the full details of any of these men, he explained. During a conversation later in the week, Pedro admitted that he had missed the signs of withdrawal, which can include disorientation, confusion, and hallucination, far too many times.

"We've lost ten guys this year," Pedro told me.

So what do you do with the bodies? I stammered, knowing full well that some centers ditch them in the streets, especially if the pastor had not been in contact with the families.

"We call the police," Pedro said, "and they collect the body."

But then what do you do with all the men? I followed up, wondering how a police officer could enter the center without asking questions. Even one mention of coercion from a captive could hypothetically initiate an investigation, inviting the officer to ask each one of the men whether they were inside the center of their own free will. To Maria's horror, Santiago would have been the first to step forward, and the scene would have undoubtedly cut Pedro's population in half, if not more, within a matter of minutes.

"We put them in the [former family] room," he said. "I tell them to shut up and then I lock the door." Pedro looked a little defensive. "We aren't doing anything illegal here," he reminded me. "We just don't want the guys talking to the police."

Or passing them a note, I thought to myself.

Alejandro continued to shout at Santiago to finish the drink. "Even if they aren't drunk," Alejandro later told me, "the alcohol calms them down. It takes the edge off. We even slide sedatives into the drink sometimes, if the guy is really wild."

But Santiago wasn't wild. By the time Santiago stood inside Pedro's front office, he seemed to be thoroughly wiped, appearing almost resigned to the situation. You could see it in his shoulders. In the market, he would bow his chest, as if reassuring himself that he knew what he was doing, but now he slumped forward, completely bereft of the confidence that I had witnessed earlier that day. Now well into the night, amid the calmer space of Pedro's front office, we all watched Santiago while hints of the hunt lingered, radiating off of everyone's bodies. Santiago was the most visibly worn out, with beads of sweat forming on his forehead. His shirt was also wet, in parts translucent.

The fluorescent lighting invited an almost surgical gaze. My attention immediately landed on the patches of lint that clung to Santiago's beard. I also noticed for the first time that the tips of his fingers had been burnt from smoking out of metal pipes and that his teeth had yellowed. A rash of bug bites studded one of his forearms. All of these details had escaped me in the market, its shadows softening the severity of Santiago's state. Under a new light, in a new space, Santiago looked like a completely different person.

It was this crushed vision of Santiago that Bautista captured with a photograph.[1] "We take a picture when they enter the center," Pedro later explained, "and we take a picture when they leave." The photo would prove vital in determining when Pedro would release Santiago from his center. "It's so that I can show the family how much the guy has changed," Pedro explained. He later added that he wanted to capture a visceral sense of life before the center so that he could stage a redemptive vision of life after. Part of Pedro's process included producing a classic Christian division between a life before Christ and a life after Christ. If there is no before, Pedro reasoned, then there can be no after. The taking of men was dependent on the taking of photos.[2]

Unbeknownst to me, Bautista had also made a smartphone recording of Santiago's capture. It was not a perfect production by any means. There

was not enough light, and the phone's fixed-focus lens simply could not keep up with Bautista's jittery camera work. What eventually appeared on screen proved to be nothing more than a mix of shadows and muffled sounds, most of which came from Bautista's own finger tripping over the device's embedded mic. The video would have been completely incomprehensible to the unfamiliar viewer, and yet, for me, it was nothing short of haunting. I was immediately struck by how differently events unfolded in the video versus how they replayed in my mind. Fully aware of the intricacies of memory, with its tricks and discrepancies, it was nonetheless odd, even perversely intimate, to reexperience the abduction from the foot of Santiago's bed, to hear that muttered prayer one more time, and then to see Santiago set upon. At the time of his taking, Santiago seemed to have gone so peacefully, with more of a shrug than a struggle, but the video showed him resisting far more than I remembered. At one point he arches his back in sheer horror.

What do you see in this video? I later asked Pedro. We spoke in his office, days after the hunt. Both of us huddled over his smartphone in some effort to make out the video. It wasn't easy but Pedro seemed confident in his interpretation.

"I see someone who needs to change," he answered.

After the drink, Pedro ordered Alejandro to move Santiago from the front office to the morgue.[3] This meant pushing Santiago down a short hallway and then up a set of stairs. Along the way, a half dozen of Pedro's lap dogs howled at Santiago. One bared his teeth. The barking and nipping put me on edge as Santiago walked past a message that Pedro had written on one of the house's interior walls. Painted in big black letters, for newly acquired men to read as they lumbered towards the morgue, the letter taunts:

> *Dear friend,*
>
> *Value the roof over your head. Value the food. Value your family. You alone choose between the bitterness of alcohol and drugs and the love of your mother, wife, and children. Keep consuming, my stupid little friend, and I'll keep waiting for you here.*
>
> *The Pastor*

Alejandro knew the morgue well. The room was the color of mildew, yet it smelled like disinfectant. With no windows and only a king-size mattress flopped on the floor, a couple of buckets sat in the corner while a stool lingered near the door. The stool was for one of Pedro's huntsmen—so he

could manage the morgue—and the bucket was for those who couldn't make it to the bathroom in time.

"I once woke up in the morgue," Alejandro remembered. "I asked this guy next to me if he'd stop me if I tried to escape." The man told Alejandro that he would not. "And so I got up and started acting crazy." Alejandro apparently banged against the morgue's metal door, screaming for help. Pedro unlocked it to see what was going on, which allowed Alejandro to push past him, grab a chair, and start hitting the locked door at the top of the stairs. "You either let me out of here," Alejandro screamed, "or I want drinks." Pedro had someone fetch three glasses of rubbing alcohol. "But they must have had pills in them," Alejandro guessed, "because I started to get all quiet. I was all wired on cocaine, but I started to calm down." Alejandro did the math: "I had an eight ball of cocaine before I got picked up. I smoked ten rocks the night before, but they just kept giving me pills and drinks." Alejandro eventually settled into his cell.

Santiago proved to be far more submissive. He had been defiant when they dragged him across those last few meters of freedom, but then he capitulated, quietly obeying every order. Perhaps the most invasive was to strip naked in front of the other captives before entering the morgue. This strip search was standard practice.[4]

On the second floor of the center, just outside of the morgue, Santiago stood naked as he waited for instruction—to be told to bend over and then to squat down; then, at the bottom of the squat, to pull his scrotum to one side and to cough. All of this was to search for contraband and concealed weapons, but also to enact an intimate kind of dominance over the captive, to communicate to him that he had no right to privacy, that his body was no longer his own.[5]

The strip search often took only a moment, but if the captive resisted, the process could drag on across an entire afternoon. Santiago did not put up a fight. He stumbled into a fresh set of clothes that Bautista handed to him. Green shorts and a secondhand sweatshirt—this would be his uniform for his foreseeable future.

This intake process was more or less the same at the 200 or so centers around Guatemala City. Pastors would capture and then search captives, though sometimes they would just drag them straight to the morgue so that they could cool off or sober up. The only part of the process that Pedro left out was a ritual that had become legendary years earlier in Jorge's original center.

In the 1980s, a man named Frener was living in Maryland, learning English and building a life for himself. He was undocumented and spent

years working small jobs until one day he slipped into a kind of depression, started using drugs, and spiraled out of control.[6]

In a terrible state, Frener walked to a gas station, doused himself with gasoline, and then swallowed a lit match. His body erupted into flames, from his mouth outward. He survived, but only after a long stretch in a public hospital to treat the third-degree burns. His body was crippled and his hands bent inward, their tips melted off in the fire.

When telling me the story years later, Frener explained how he had been medevaced to a hospital in Maryland. "I flew in a helicopter," he said, reflecting some pride that someone, somewhere, took an interest in him.

Once he was stable, the United States deported Frener back to Guatemala, and he convalesced in a hospital. On March 3, 1989, his family sent him to Jorge's center, where he would stay for over twenty years. The stated reason, as scribbled on his intake form, was the use of drugs and bad conduct (*mala conducta*). Frener was in the center when police raided and closed it in 2011, but even after that, after every captive had scrambled to escape, Frener found himself unable to leave. He wandered the house, not knowing where else to go.

"I just feel locked up sometimes," Frener mentioned to me as we toured the empty center, which the police had raided only a few days earlier. "I can't really get through the door." He walked through the main hall, where his fellow captives once lived. "The penalty for leaving is kind of bad," Frener explained. "They keep you locked up in the morgue, or we need to be against the walls." With the voice of a child, he confessed that "they mostly be mean with us." After twenty-three years of captivity, Frener felt positively trapped even when the front door hung open.

For years, Frener played a special role at Jorge's center. During the strip search, after a new captive had been told to bend over and squat down, Frener would slyly join the circle. After being prompted by another captive, Frener would approach the new man, stand close to him, and announce: "Welcome to hell!"

The joke was that Frener, because of his burned body, was thought to resemble Freddy Krueger, the evil protagonist from *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. "Frener Krueger," they called him.

The alcoholic drink, the photograph, the strip search, and even Frener's nearly forgotten routine, all confirmed that while the hunt is a game, captivity is a ritual, with Pedro's acquisition of Santiago opening a window into a deeply patterned process.[7] And so, exhausted and a little drunk, Santiago entered the morgue and collapsed into a deep sleep.

NINE

Maria arrived at Pedro's front door the next morning having again worked her way through city traffic with a combination of public buses. The trip took over an hour, but she nevertheless looked rested. Following the hunt, while Alejandro and his men drove Santiago to the center, Maria took a few minutes to straighten up her home. Tomás and Baustista had dragged dirt into the house and knocked over a few chairs on their way out. She also found patches of mud on her tiles. But none of this took long to clean. With a quiet house and Santiago off the streets, she had gone to bed with a weight lifted from her shoulders. Her son was safe inside a center. There was even a slight skip in her step as she walked through Pedro's front door. Maria would later mention to me that she had never slept more soundly. No longer in the streets or at the market and well beyond the reach of those kids who had once shot him, Santiago was now under lock and key.

Maria took a seat on a rickety stool while Pedro sat commandingly in his office chair, a desk dividing the space between them. The optics of the front office made clear who was in charge. Pedro's chair literally lifted him ever so slightly above Maria as the stool forced her to slump forward. Upstairs, Santiago sat in the morgue.

Maria looked nervously around the office as Pedro pulled an intake form from his desk drawer and slid it through a typewriter. With his reading glasses slipping to the tip of his nose and his posture accentuated, Pedro hunted and pecked his way through a series of questions that he posed to Maria, carefully establishing a modicum of a paper trail. I sat in the back on a stool.[8]

"What is Santiago's complete name?" Pedro asked Maria. He punched out the answer with two fingers.[9]

S-a-n-t-i-a-g-o . . .

"What is his date of birth?" Pedro took his time, documenting every detail with a snap of a key.

D-e-c-e-m-b-e-r-0-9-1-9-9-0

"What is his level of education?"

P-r-i-m-a-r-y

"What is his permanent address?"

Z-o-n-e-2-1

"What are the phone numbers we should call, if we need to contact the family?"

5-5-7-6-3-3-4-1-and-5-5-8-8-3-2-1-0

Pedro then arrived at the most important question of all: "Who will be the person to decide when Santiago can leave?" There can only be one person, Pedro explained. Convincing or comforting more than one guardian was both taxing and confusing. Instead, he preferred a single point of reference, which was perfectly fine for Maria. She alone would make the decision to set her son free. Pedro typed out that answer.

M-a-r-i-a

Months after Santiago's hunt, during a bit of downtime, I asked Pedro why he used a typewriter. Over the years, I had often seen him struggle to collect basic information, and the machine always seemed to jam or the ribbon would break. And sometimes, when Pedro would strike two keys at roughly the same time, they would tangle and he would have to separate them in ways that inked his fingers and, in turn, the forms. Wouldn't it be easier to use a pen or maybe a computer?

"I like how the typewriter sounds," Pedro admitted. "You can't hear a pen and you can't hear a computer." Pedro apparently wanted his clients to experience the formalization of their loved one's captivity. The sound of every keystroke gave authority to a contractual relationship that was otherwise dubious at best. More than creating a set of coherent files, Pedro cared about cultivating an atmosphere. The process of completing the intake form was less about collecting information than delivering a sensation. The main message was that a son or brother or husband was now under Pedro's jurisdiction.[10]

The intake forms were also part of the process. Pedro had lifted much of his legalese from Jorge's forms. One of Jorge's original forms read: "The center offers security to the detainee, delivered by professional and specialized staff members trained to recuperate the fallen from such problems as alcoholism, drug addiction, delinquency, homosexuality, and other problems."[11]

Jorge's intake forms also stated that detainees are only allowed to have a toothbrush, toothpaste, underwear, a change of clothes, soap, toilet paper, and a BIBLE. Bible was written in all caps. "There will be no phone calls," the form flatly stated. If the detainee tried to escape, the center was "not responsible for this: neither for what happens during an escape nor for what happens after the escape." If the detainee turned violent and destroyed furniture inside of the center, "the family is responsible for replacing these broken objects." The very bottom of the intake form cited Isaiah 40:10: "The Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm."

And then there was the contract that the captive signed. Above the space for the signature read: "For my own rehabilitation and my own good I promise to comply with the regulations of this house, and also to comply with its disciplinary rules." The form continued, "As I have stated when seeking rehabilitation, I have no outstanding warrants for my arrest with either the civil or military authorities. And I also authorize the authorities of this house to keep my belongings in case I ever escape." If the captive could or would not sign the form, he provided a thumbprint against his will.[12]

The filling out of the form, with all of its overextended language, was part of a broader performance. From the stool upon which Maria sat to the office chair in which Pedro perched, the imbalance between them was embodied in their postures and compounded as Pedro pecked at his typewriter. But Pedro's performance was also an obvious conceit, for the relationship was not as asymmetrical as Pedro would have liked. Without Maria's consent, without her business, then Pedro had nothing. This ritual of signing bound Maria to Pedro, confirming his authority over her son through an act of submission.[13]

Maria nervously tapped her heel as she balanced atop the stool, remarking, "He's a beautiful person until he gets money in his pocket." She then got deadly serious: "And he's going to die in the streets without this center." Her dark prophecy hung in the air as she began signing the papers that Pedro placed in front of her. Written in the first person, the following are only some of the conditions to which Maria agreed on behalf of Santiago:

> I hereby voluntarily enter this ministry to submit myself to treatment for alcohol detoxification and/or drug rehabilitation, located at the address stated clearly at the top of this form. I give formal consent to my total, complete, and voluntary submission for the restoration of my complete person during what will be my internment. I commit myself to strict observation and follow the given rules for the reestablishment of my health. I will be transferred to another ministry within this network if I do not comply.
>
> **a.** I understand that the treatment will last seven months, which the institution understands as an appropriate length of time for my restoration and recuperation.
>
> **b.** At the moment of entering this center, I have given a nonreimbursable donation of the following amount: _____.
>
> **c.** To cover any additional medical, psychiatric, or psychological care, I have provided a nonreimbursable sum of money of the following amount: ____.

d. Whatever debt that I incur through the destruction of furniture and equipment will be paid by me or whoever is responsible for me.

e. I promise not to ingest toxic substances, drugs, and/or alcohol during my time of treatment for detoxification with this ministry because it can be hazardous to my health and contrary to the interests and the objectives of my restoration.

f. I accept to see visitors on Thursdays and Sundays but only after the first fifteen days of my treatment and only by family members, such as a father, mother, wife, brothers, and children.

g. I accept that I may be subjected to the following laboratory tests: 1—drugs, 2—HIV/AIDS, which would immediately cancel my stay at the center.

h. The decision to enter the center is mine. I enter because of alcohol and/or drugs, my own loss of control, and the danger to which I have put my family and society.

i. So that there is no confusion about my decision to enter this center, I have asked a family member to accompany me to serve as a witness. He or she signs this paper along with me and shares in the responsibilities detailed by this contract.

j. I accept this contract completely, and by the power and authority of this institution I have read, accepted, ratified, and signed (or give a thumb print from my right hand because I cannot sign) this document, confirming with a witness that has accompanied me and has been previously identified.

With pen in hand, Maria signed her name at the bottom after negotiating some conditions. Both she and Pedro agreed that Santiago would stay inside the center for seven months; Maria would also offer the center Q600 [$75 USD] per month; the offering would cover three very basic meals a day but not a bed. Santiago would sleep on the floor. Maria handed over another Q600 for possible medical expenses and added another Q400 [$50 USD] to cover the hunt. "That was nearly all the money that I have." Maria winced as we walked out of the center.

As we spoke on our way to the bus stop, Maria marched more confidently than I had ever seen in the past. I asked her if she understood the form that she just signed. "To tell you the truth—" she blushed "—I didn't really read it." The details, she said, seemed like an afterthought. Santiago

was already inside the center and she had already given Pedro her money. Most importantly, Santiago was off the streets.

What else could you ask for? I asked.

"A miracle," Maria answered with some certainty. "I want him to change."

TEN

Alejandro once complained that "there's just so much time inside the center. What do we do with all of this time?" The answer was to wait.[14] Over the years, I found that waiting could look a lot like sleeping, with a captive's head propped against a concrete wall, arms folded across his chest. Santiago often wore a hooded sweatshirt that he was able to pull over his head, straining the strings to close the hood almost entirely over his face. Only Santiago's nose stuck out. Others sat on the floor, hugging their legs in such a way as to create a tent when they stretched their T-shirts over their knees, allowing them to duck under their collars for a bit of privacy. As the second hand pushed the minute hand and the hours added up, these captives created their own spaces and simply waited for the day to end.

"But then you go to bed," Santiago said, "on the floor, next to these same guys." And so waiting for the next moment ultimately became a meditation on waiting itself. The question that emerged for all captives at one time or another was not how to wait, but, rather, what they were waiting for. Nothing about life inside the center ever proceeded according to concrete markers. There was no talk of steps and stages or even progress and growth; the dominant experience of captivity was just waiting.

"Waiting keeps these guys off the streets," Pedro told me, knowing full well that the therapy he offered did not lead in any particular direction. "It's better that Santiago is upstairs just waiting around rather than running the streets." He added, "You can get yourself killed out there." This is no exaggeration. The principle argument for holding these men captive was to keep them alive. At the very least, even during the most excruciatingly repetitive days, while listening to yet another testimony, these captives were nonetheless passing the time rather than waiting to die. "Because out in the streets," Pedro insisted, "you're going to get shot. At least here you're not waiting for that." A few weeks later, having thought about my question more, Pedro approached me again. "They're waiting for a better perspective on life," he

added. "They're waiting for a chance to make a good decision. They're waiting for a chance to know better." Waiting apparently had therapeutic value in itself.

The captives were also waiting for their families to heal. "The families need a break," Pedro also told me. We spoke just outside the center, a few days after Santiago's capture. "They come here with their son or brother or husband, and they are tired. They've had their money stolen. Their sleep stolen. Their pride broken. Their loved one has been scandalous, and so they come here for a break." The language of warehousing suddenly became literal—families stashed a loved one inside this center not so they could be saved, but rather so they would be stored.

"I'll come back later for him," a mother once told me. We had just driven away from the center after delivering her son to the pastor. She was angry at her son and somewhat pleased that Pedro's men had roughed him up; she was also relieved that she could go home to sleep. "I don't have to worry about him at night running around getting high," she said. "I don't have to keep counting my money and hiding my stuff." With the city streaking past us out the window of a taxi, the woman said, "He can just wait there. He can just wait there. Until I'm ready to get him out, he's just going to have to wait." She then turned to me. "And he might have to wait there for a very long time."

Most of Pedro's captives found themselves waiting for a very long time, which is why Pedro committed them to a daily schedule that he had also borrowed from Jorge's center. The schedule was, in many ways, inspired by the very penitentiary system that once held Jorge.[15]

5:00	Bathroom
5:30 to 6:00	Hygiene and house cleaning
6:00	First worship service

During these two hours, detainees dedicate themselves to prayer, praise, and testimony as well as prayers for the pastor and singing in chorus. Prayers led by the pastor. Meditation on the Word of God is followed by songs and then a closing prayer.

8:00	Breakfast
9:00	Cleaning

The following hour is dedicated to playing ping-pong and chess and reading the Bible, until the next worship service begins.

10:00 to 12:00	Second worship service
12:00 to 14:00	Lunch
14:00	General cleaning
15:00	Third worship service

The detainees practice "fencing" between worship services. This is a game to see who can find the appropriate Bible verse first.

16:30	Visits

Visits by family and friends until 19:30. During this part of the day, detainees spend time maintaining and repairing the vehicles used to evangelize, assist, visit, and collect people from the streets.

19:30	Dinner
20:00	Evening prayers

The schedule could look busy, at least on paper, but there was never much to do.

The vast majority of the captives didn't have responsibilities. They were either straight from the streets, such as Santiago, or unfit to work. The latter routinely spoke out during sermons, constantly barking their frustrations at having been locked up by their family. Their anger was understandable. My own daylong shifts inside the center often left me breathless, sometimes forcing me to fumble my way out for fresh air. Stretches of fieldwork left me with a mix of horror and admiration that individuals could sustain that style of captivity for so many months without revolting. But frustration, as understandable as it was, also kept a captive from working through the system and, thus, working their way out of the house. Pedro never released captives for good behavior, but they could perform a kind of Christian piety for Pedro that suggested a certain degree of salvation. This is why the rebellious never really got anywhere. "They don't let me do shit here," one captive told me, "because of my attitude." He thought about it for a moment and then fell back into the same trap that Pedro had set for him months ago. "Well, fuck 'em." He shrugged, and Pedro obliged, quashing any chance for this young man to ever prove himself inside the center.

Cleaning the floors was one way for captives to prove themselves. It was also a way to keep them occupied, as they essentially walked in circles while mopping. The process went something like this: Those charged with

washing the floor would get everybody's attention at the top of the appointed hour. The most senior among them would then actively shepherd everyone against a wall, huddling the men together to expose as much of the floor as possible. The newest of the captives would then collect and discard any debris. Scraps of paper. Used tissues. A broken pencil or two. The others would mop the floors and later dry them by snapping towels just above the tiles to create a trace amount of wind. When the captives were done, they would allow the rest of the men back across the room.

Cleaning the floors took up an hour and a half of every day, with the rest of the day largely spent waiting. Alejandro, for one, would wait to use the bathroom. He would wait for his morning tortillas. He would wait for worship services to end. He would then wait for lunch and for dinner, and even for the end of the day so he could fall asleep. "And once you start thinking about all of this waiting," Alejandro admitted, "it can drive you crazy. Like, you can't do anything but wait. It can start fucking with your mind."

The mind-numbing nature of it all was palpable. Users often entered the center, sobered up, and dove into the sessions before the repetition became obvious. Each day would bleed into the next, losing any distinct quality from one to the other. Fridays could be Wednesdays, and Tuesdays would feel no different than Thursdays. "The only day that saves us is Sunday," Tomás explained. "There are no sessions on Sunday, and so that breaks the rhythm a bit." Tomás sat on the floor, slowly kicking a bottle cap with his foot. "So Saturdays can feel a little different because it's the day before Sunday, and Monday is a little better because it's the day after Sunday."

What do you do on Sundays? I asked.

"Oh, we don't do anything," he said. "There are just no sermons. So we just sit around all day instead of having to do the sessions."

In the same room? I asked.

"Yes, in the same room," he said with a bit of impatience. "There isn't any other room here."

On Sundays, the captives chose where to sit, when to sleep, and how to pass the time. No one forced them to sit up, keep their eyes open, and/or listen to each other. They could turn away, which was exactly what Santiago did on his first Sunday. He sat himself in a corner, with his hood over his head.

"People deal with this in different ways," Tomás said. "Some guys come here ready to fight. Others start working right away for the community, helping with stuff around the center, and others just get really quiet. They're here, but they're not really here."

Like a ghost? I offered.

"Like a ghost," Tomás echoed.

The breaking point would come when captivity felt utterly without end. There were few ways to gauge the passage of time, except the walls. The walls marked the change of seasons.

On the second floor, inside of the center, the walls changed colors. They were once green, and then they were blue and then white and then blue again. I knew this because the captives scratched at the walls. There was nothing desperate about it. They just quietly picked at the paint with their fingernails, gently scratching the surface so as to carefully (if not compulsively) separate one layer of paint from another.

"You have to go slowly," Alejandro explained. "You have to take your time or the paint just falls off the wall." You could tell from the sound of his voice that this frustrated him when it happened.

In the former family room, where most of the captives ate, slept, and prayed, men would lie on their sides for hours and slowly peel their way from one layer of paint to the next. Sometimes I would see them doing this during sermons or as they drifted in and out of sleep. These were not expansive projects. No one ever tackled more than a small patch at a time, usually something the size of a postage stamp, and most of these men placed their work near the bottom of a wall. These were discreet efforts that could easily be overlooked. I'm not even sure Pedro ever noticed them, but picking at paint occupied a good deal of the men's time.

Repaintings took place on a regular basis, and they happened through the bartering of goods and services, with a family exchanging the captivity of a loved one for a fresh coat of paint. This was also how Pedro had his car serviced, appliances updated, and center fumigated. Pedro once landed a commercial refrigerator for a hunt and a few months of captivity.

I once asked Alejandro about the significance of picking at the paint, of literally scratching at the walls. I could see that the colors allowed him to move from one era to another, to link the present to his expansive history of captivity. Each layer of paint seemed to harbor a different set of memories for Alejandro, with each era somehow color-coded in his mind. "When the room was blue, that's when things were pretty bad. There were lots of fights between the guys. No one was really in control. Green was a lot calmer."

The scratching always struck me as an effort to repurpose the room into a resource for rehabilitation, with the paint itself providing these men with the means to work with their hands as they thought through their lives. I pressed Alejandro on the therapeutic possibilities that literally scratching

at the walls provided. The question immediately felt naïve. Does it help? I asked.

"Guys are just trying to kill time," Alejandro said. When these captives scratched at the walls, they did so out of boredom, for the simple delight of peeling one layer of paint from another. "There's not much else to it," he added.

More defiant men would make their mark in deliberate ways. With a paper clip or pen cap, they would scratch their name into a wall, usually with the dates of their captivity. They would write the month, day, and year of their arrival, and then they would make an open-ended dash. Many would commit to completing the record on the day of their release, but no one ever did. The thrill of release always overshadowed the little promises that these men made to themselves during the quieter moments of their captivity, and so their names hung on these walls with open ended dashes, suggesting that confinement may never actually have an end date. It might just go on forever.

ELEVEN

Sermons always seemed to go on forever, with visiting pastors sometimes showing up multiple times a day. Pedro preached on occasion, but he typically outsourced most of the sermons to a cohort of preachers who spent their days travelling to different centers across the city. One day, I walked up to the second floor and encountered a man I happened to know well. He was older, or maybe just weathered by life, with a gaunt face and a brown suit. His tie was tight around his neck. I had first heard him preach at Jorge's center several years earlier. At that time, Jorge's center was just beginning to slow down, and held fifty rather than its usual 250 captives. Frener was still one of them, as was a young man hiding from the police. He had tattoos across his fists and face and would always ask me if the police had come to the front office for him.

"Are they here?" he would ask me.

No, I always answered, assuring him that he was well beyond reach of the law.

When I first heard the visiting pastor speak, I was struck not so much by his moral ambition but rather by his commitment to engage these centers. He himself had been taken captive years ago for drinking too much.

His daughter had apparently paid a pastor to hunt him, and now he seemed committed to staying out of places like Pedro's, which oddly meant visiting them almost every day. The sight of someone like Santiago seemed to scare this visiting pastor straight in ways that made this man of God need the center as much as the center needed him.[16]

Back inside Pedro's center, the visiting pastor greeted me with a business card that peddled his Pentecostal skills as a spiritual director, theological therapist, and motivational speaker. There was also a phone number and an email address. Before he began preaching, however, he insisted that I make a digital recording of his sermon so that he could hand out copies to whoever would listen. I happily obliged as he settled behind a makeshift lectern.

The pastor would deliver the very same sermon that he had given at Jorge's center years earlier. With its well-rutted peaks and valleys, the pastor preached on a single virtue for over an hour: a positive attitude. It was a message that shifted the scale of the hunt from the streets to the soul, with the sinner suddenly invited to hunt himself—to track down his own appetites and put them in a cage.

"So let's talk about having a positive attitude," the pastor said to all fifty-six men. Some sat on chairs but most had found space on the floor. The lucky few leaned against a wall in ways that allowed them to pick at the paint. They surreptitiously scratched, studied, and then scratched some more. Santiago was in the very back of the room with his hood over his head. He seemed to be sulking. I sat attentively on a stool.

"If you think you can do something, you can do something," the pastor said, "and when people change their attitude, they change their life." He effused positivity, his energy almost assaulting this seemingly anesthetized audience. The contrast in affect could not have been more dramatic. "Jesus Christ came," he said with verve, "to set the captives free, to give freedom to the prisoners and to the oppressed. And the biggest discovery of this generation is that human beings can change their lives by changing their minds." He shot a quick glance at my digital recorder, to make sure that it was working—and so tipped me off to his real interest. Preaching at a clip that far outpaced the energy of the room, the pastor obviously had his ambitions on accessing an imagined audience through the recording.

"In other words," he said, "all people can change, but what do you need to have?" The question hung in the air until he answered it: "You need to have a positive attitude. We all have problems in life, and God has the solution for us. Jesus is the way. He is the truth. He is life, and no one comes to the Father except through the Son."

"Thomas Edison," he then proposed, "was the one who invented the light bulb. And how often did he fail? He failed nine hundred times. But he also succeeded. He just kept trying over and over again." The pastor's point seemed to be about persistence. "You have to persist over and over again. Because you don't have to stay here." Santiago flinched at this last point, shaking his head side to side. "You can get up," the pastor reasoned. "You must get up! God wants to bless you. He wants you to prosper. He wants the best for whatever you touch. Whatever you do in life—be blessed."

He then instructed the men to turn toward each other. "I want you to tell something to the person next you," he said. "'Tell him: 'Jesus has something special for you.'" The men turned to their side and repeated the phrase. "Then say: 'He wants to change your life.'" The men did this. "Then add: 'God has miracles for you. God will do extraordinary things in your life.'" The group echoed the words back to the pastor in sync. "Now say: 'God will change your attitude.'"[17] They all did—even Santiago joined in this time.

"We can change," the pastor explained, "but it all depends on us. You have to have the desire. If you have the desire to change, then you will change. You need to say to yourself, I'm going to do it." He stood firmly in front of the men, acting out success through his bodily comportment. "Success lies in your habits and customs. People who have bad habits fail. People who have good habits succeed. A winner is not born super gifted or with high intelligence. A winner's advantage is his attitude, not his fitness. Attitude is the standard for success. It is crucial because it determines the way you act."

Alejandro stood over the men to ensure that everyone participated.

"But do not pity yourself," the pastor insisted. "We instead need compassion. Because compassion is one of the most remarkable emotions that we have as human beings. Self-pity is possibly the worst. Self-pity is an emotional disease. It's a terrible thing to have. But compassion is what we need to have for ourselves and our neighbor."

The sermon halfway through, the pastor asked captives when they were going to improve their attitudes. Without pause, he answered his own question with zeal: "Today! Today is the day when the weak will become strong! Today is the day that the fool will become smart!" He tapped his Bible while surveying the room for a pair of eyes to engage. He settled on Tomás. "God gave us special gifts," he announced. "God gave us talents. And God has special things for each of us. But everything depends on us. We need to have the desire to do these things." He took a step back. "Look,"

he said, "your attitude is very important. I am constantly amazed by how many people have a poor attitude but still want others to be optimistic. If you have a poor attitude and tell your family, 'Well, that's just how it goes,' then what?" No one offered an answer.[18]

"And I'll tell you something," the pastor continued. "Your family is my family. It doesn't matter if you tell me that your dad is involved in drugs or that that your mom is doing drugs. Those things do not matter. God wants something special for you." His voice began to peak: "You can leave this house. You can do it, but it all depends on your desire to do so. Is your desire weak? Or is your desire strong? You have to want to change your life."[19]

Santiago seemed to bristle at the message; he started to squirm.

"And keeping a good attitude is easier than getting one," the pastor added. "You have to stay positive, but how will you do it?" He got prescriptive: "You have to read inspirational books that motivate you. You have to read the Word of God every day. You have to go to church. You have to meet people at church. You have to find a way to be motivated. You have to find people who will minister to your soul." The laundry list continued: "God has the power and authority to get ahead, and God is the one we need to get ahead."

Santiago began to look indignant.

"We're going to kneel," the pastor announced. "We are going to ask the Lord to help us. If you want to raise your hands to heaven, you can do so. If you want to repeat the words that I say, you can do so."

Santiago refused.

"Lord Jesus, today, this afternoon, I put my life in your hands," the pastor wailed. "I ask you, Lord, to forgive me. I have sinned against you, and I have done evil in your eyes. Today I put my life in your hands, and I ask you with all my heart, with all my strength, to help me." The pastor continued, "I give you my addictions, and I ask you to help me."

He then began to sob: "Have compassion and mercy on me. Forgive me. I have misbehaved with my mother. I have misbehaved with my father. I have misbehaved with my children. Forgive me, in the name of Jesus. Thank you, Lord, I know you're going to do a miracle in my life. I know there is rejoicing in heaven for every sinner who repents. In the name of Jesus, I receive my salvation. Thank you, Lord, amen!" Santiago shook his head, knowing that this would be his world for months to come.

Later that week, I sat down with this pastor. He told me about his own battles decades earlier with drinking and drugs, and then explained, "This is a year of liberation. The Lord has put the power of liberation in each of

our hearts, and so hundreds of people are going to be released from slavery this year. They are going to be set free."

I asked what kind of slavery he might mean.

"I am talking about spiritual slavery," he said. "I am talking about people locked up in spiritual prisons. These are prisons made of drugs, alcohol, and delinquency. It's a prison made of vices."

But what about the center itself, I asked, isn't that also a kind of prison?

The pastor plowed past my question, again speaking directly into my digital recorder to yet another imagined audience. "The Lord is preparing his children. He is preparing their souls. He will give them liberty by freeing these sinners from their chains. The Lord is going to raise each of these sinners up. He is going to make each of them taller, spiritually speaking, and allow them to return to their families."

What is your responsibility? I asked the pastor.

He paused. "My role is to tell them that they must change."

TWELVE

Pedro issued a notebook to each captive once he entered the center. Sometimes it was a few sheets of paper, other times captives would share a notepad; a lucky few got an entire book all to themselves. This is because Pedro demanded that each of the men take notes when he or any other pastor preached. It was a fairly specific request, with Pedro insisting that captives catalogue every reference to scripture. The intention was for them to learn the Bible, chapter and verse. When a pastor gave a sermon, the captives would jot down each biblical reference and then afterwards, when there was nothing else to do, they would search the Bible for the full verse, copying it out word-for-word with pencil and paper.

Alejandro ascended to become the star student in this regard. His notebook was nothing short of pristine—a compendium of verses couched in disciplined penmanship that I came to admire. Never rushed in manner, Alejandro printed Bible verses neatly and with consistency; his *d*'s, *p*'s, and *o*'s often popped with a kind of optimism. The color of the script regularly changed too, with verses alternating between red, black, and blue ink. And still, the quality of the letters themselves bordered on the calligraphic.

Alejandro was also diligent about content. I would routinely find him amid a small group of men, flipping through a Bible and then copying the

verse into his notebook. He paid great attention to even the slightest of details—spelling and the proper use of accents always mattered. He also shuttled between different translations and versions of the Bible, as the center always had several lying around the main room. Debates would erupt between Alejandro and the men about which verse had appeared in the sermon earlier that day, indexing a surprisingly high level of interest in getting the assignment right.

But Pedro never collected the notebooks. He had his huntsmen page through them from time to time, but Tomás and Bautista were never really in a position to assess biblical proficiency. They were less familiar with the good book than most of the captives and were at best functionally literate. Alejandro, on the other hand, seemed deeply committed to the practice, lining notebook after notebook with what would ultimately become Bibles transcribed out of order. One page in Alejandro's notebooks read:

> Matthew 24:36—"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."
>
> 2 Corinthians 11:14—"And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light."
>
> 2 Corinthians 11:16—"I repeat: Let no one take me for a fool. But if you do, then tolerate me just as you would a fool, so that I may do a little boasting."
>
> John 3:8—"The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."
>
> John 11:1—"Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha."

His notebook served as a model to the other men, about how to engage the sermons in ways that transformed stretches of captivity into open-ended Bible study. Alejandro and the other captives' notebooks evidenced a plodding kind of Pentecostalism that remained ever-committed to the word of God and one's ability to position the soul towards higher ground, but rarely did any kind of hermeneutical effort follow these citations. Pedro never asked the men to apply scripture to their own lives.

Alejandro could be excused, then, when amid his sea of scripture there appeared a half-written note to his aunt. She never visited and for the most had part cut all ties with him. She had proven unable to deal with her nephew's long battle with drugs and alcohol and knew that sustained contact would also mean having to pay for his captivity. Pedro was constantly on the lookout to monetize Alejandro's time spent inside the center, and so his aunt's inattentiveness made his note ever more wishful.

Bookended by a pair of verses, Alejandro's mind must have wandered beyond the confines of his own captivity when he wrote the following:

> Matthew 7:13—"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it."
>
> Aunt, forgive me for all the bad things that I have done. I am full of bitter thoughts. I once walked with a heavy heart through darkness, not understanding why God sent me to this country. I had to leave everything that I loved: my family, my wife and . . .
>
> Matthew 7:14—"But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

The note ended as hastily as it began—a frustratingly small window into Alejandro's inner world. It was in many ways a precursor to the letter that he would write to the National Police, as he cast about for someone who might be able to help him.

What else did Alejandro want to write to his aunt? The question could also be posed: What else did Alejandro want to write to himself? For he knew that his aunt would probably never read the letter. Perhaps he addressed the letter to her in an effort to work through his own feelings of being held captive by not simply the pastor but also by his own sin.[20]

The center produced no shortage of such letters. Captives often used their notebooks to pen messages to loved ones, holding the notebooks close to their chest while they slept and stashing them in knapsacks during the day. They became prized possessions in the rather austere center. The notebooks allowed men to extend themselves (even if only by way of imagination) beyond the walls of the center, and they contained notes to mothers and fathers; sisters and brothers; children and lovers. These scraps of paper were sometimes passed to visitors when no one else was watching, begging

loved ones to bring basic necessities such as food, medicine, and toiletries. The notes could also be desperate pleas for freedom:

> Hi Mom—This is Javier, and I am sending you this letter to ask you to please come and get me out of here. I am better, thanks be to God. The thing is that they punish me here and they beat me and I do not want to suffer any more. Please help me. Only you can help me. I want to escape. Come quickly. I promise to change the way that I am. Please come and get me out because I want to continue living. I beg you. Mama, come here after you get this letter or you might lose me forever. I love you very much and I am waiting for you here. Love, Javier

Across the years, captives pressed an untold number of these letters into my hands without Pedro's knowledge, hoping that I might be able to deliver their message. Often making rather specific requests, the letters demonstrated how the epistle as a genre ensnares its addressee with the responsibility to reply. With every letter, I had to accept or decline a captive's request to engage not simply with his family but also with his life history—with the very politics of his captivity.[21]

> Dear Mom—The reason for this letter is to tell you that I want to get out of here. I beg you. I cannot stand it anymore. Please, mom, understand me because I understand you and I am sorry for bothering you with this letter but I cannot take it here anymore. Goodbye and God bless you. Yours, Tomás

> Mother—When am I getting out of here? You can tell me when you come to visit me on Wednesday or if you do not want to bother visiting me you can just send the answer with the man who is doing me the favor of giving you this letter. I love you. Your son, Andrew

I once found a letter on the sidewalk just outside of Pedro's center. Thrown from the second floor through a crack in one of the windows, it reads as if it were placed inside a bottle and then tossed out to sea:

> My name is Carlos Rigoberto Gonzalez M. They brought me here on the eleventh of November. They took me from my parents' house while I was sleeping. Today is August 13th and I have been locked up inside this

> center for 9 months and 2 days. As much as I beg my parents to take me home, they say no.

One can read these letters not just as appeals for mercy but also as clandestine efforts at escape, written in the hope that an anonymous passerby would read the note and feel generous enough to call for help. That would be the work of luck, which these captives often held out for. Their letters were a practice of hopeful endurance as months stretched on.[22]

Of course, not all captives used their notebooks for such ends. During the slower moments, when afternoons felt like days, captives would lend me their notebooks, allowing their notes to structure our conversations about the Bible and salvation. But it quickly became clear as I thumbed through these books that many of these men would break from their assignments copying down biblical versus to drum up fantastic ledgers buried between pieces of scripture. They fashioned their own wish lists:

> Psalm 18:41—They cried for help, but there was no one to save them—to the Lord, but he did not answer

> 5 pounds of beans, 5 pounds of rice, 5 pounds of sugar, 5 pounds of salt, soap to clean clothes, soap for the bath, soap chips, Clorox, cooking oil, toothpaste.

> Proverbs 28:27—Those who give to the poor will lack nothing, but those who close their eyes to them receive many curses

Others would write their own scripture, folding their deepest desires inside of their notebooks and then hiding them as chapter and verse:

> John 12:32—And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

> Apocalypse 4:1—Positive words. Positiveness. Fun. Hard work. Realness. Honesty. Perception. Passionate. Knowledge. Wisdom. Happy. Love. Friendship. Sisterhood. Partnership. Obey, respect, Self-sufficient. Power of Will. Braveness. Joy. Serenity. True love. Red lips. Commitment. Pleasure.

> Psalm 41:1—I swear to God I fucking miss you my little beauty. I miss you so much. No joke! Jesus Christ if I could have a moment with you. My God. I fucking adore you.

> 2 Peter 1:19—We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

Most of the captives also drew in their notebooks, with each effort contributing to an expansive archive of images that shuttled between the surreal and the salvific. Santiago, for one, drew ghoulish ink drawings of hooded skeletons on the backs of horses racing through the night, sometimes with a spear in hand. These figures had almond-shaped eye sockets, drawn so compulsively that the paper rutted and bowed under the weight of the pen and its ink. Santiago would also sketch cityscapes and skylines, even rough drawings of what seemed to be weather patterns and thunderstorms. His notebook included anthropomorphized forests; trees had eyes, noses, and mouths, and thickets of branches that melded into some sort of trap. Flora appeared to be laughing with sinister intent as it struggled to pull its roots from the ground. Trees walked in the same way that someone might try to step out of quicksand: with high knees and snagged feet. They seemed to be on the run but were held back by their own form, quite literally rooted in place. Another drawing proved slightly less opaque. It featured an army of stick figures jumping out of a crack pipe towards a door marked "exit." Underneath, Santiago labeled the escapees with a single descriptor: "slaves."[23]

Many drawings by captives compressed multiple Christian metaphors. There were illustrations of hands folded in prayer atop roses in full bloom, all splayed across an empty cross. Muddled in composition but clear in intent, these images invoked the resurrection of Christ, if only to inspire the revival of the user. "I love you, Jesus," one drawing announced.

Other sketches trafficked in carceral imaginaries, of work camps and chain gangs. They tended to equate the time a captive spent inside the center with the emptiness of breaking rocks into pebbles. Lined with biblical passages, these sketches explored the absurdity of life inside the center alongside the optimism of renewal. "Is not my word like fire," asks an artist by way of Jeremiah 23:29, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock into pieces?" From the boulder fly pieces of alcohol, crack cocaine, liquor, LSD, cigarettes, and marijuana.

And then there was Michael the Archangel. His image often appeared inside Pedro's center, and one very memorable rendition hung in the morgue. A young man from the capital named Miguel depicted the angel with a muscular form, a wide set of wings, and flowing hair. Obviously

midbattle, his sword pointed downward as if about to be thrust into a beast that sat just out of frame. The message was never lost on these men, as the angel is said to have commanded God's armies against Satan's forces in the Book of Revelation, hurling Satan and his angel to earth (12:7–9). Pastors such as Pedro often framed time spent inside a center as a battle between good and evil, with the very life of the user at stake.[24]

Miguel's drawings typically dripped with religious imagery. In one epic drawing, Jesus's bleeding heart breaks the chains of slavery while flying doves announce that man can be "free on the inside." All the while Christ stands crestfallen, too ashamed to face the materiality of mass incarceration. As with most of these montages, the artist represents himself somewhere in the piece. This one placed him in the bottom right corner of the page. Miguel depicted himself behind bars, in the shadows, and framed by scripture that he had invented: "One comes to understand through pain (Psalm 36:15)." The psalm actually doesn't say this; in the Bible, it reads: "Let their sword enter into their own hearts, and let their bow be broken."

"I didn't know that when I got out of jail in Guatemala," Miguel told me one day, "that I was chained up by cocaine. Because all I thought about when I was in jail was that I wanted to be free." Rolling a colored pencil between his fingers, he continued: "But I didn't think about my spirit, my soul . . . that I was chained up spiritually. Basically I got out of jail and came back to jail, again. And now that I'm in rehab, it's like I'm locked up again."[25]

Captives tried to render themselves legible through these drawings. Santiago's efforts were defiant, at least at first—a series of insults paired with scenes of escape—but they softened once he realized that no one was really watching. Left alone before God, his drawings eventually explored the more forgiving themes of solitude, loneliness, and remorse. He pieced together one image several months after his capture. It was of a child, maybe even a toddler, in overalls and a striped shirt. He may have set out to draw Chucky, the title character of the *Child's Play* horror film series. But rather than a murderous doll coming to life, Santiago depicted the toy sitting down, with shoulders slumped—as if it had been given a time out. The drawing seemed to be waiting for someone to set him free. An image frozen in time, the doll also lay in wait.

During the first week of Santiago's captivity, I asked to read his notebook. I had seen him studying in the corner with a Bible in his lap. He appeared to have taken notes during an earlier sermon and looked to be in the middle of his homework, diligently searching and writing down verse after biblical verse. His eagerness to engage the assignment seemed at odds with his initial

feelings of resentment for having been hunted in the first place. Maybe, I thought, he was now keen to show the pastor his willingness to submit.

As he handed me his notebook, I carefully surveyed its cover, and then opened to the first page. Instead of finding biblical verses like I had expected, Santiago had written his name in tiny script on both sides of the first sheet, from top to bottom. The entire page was plastered with "Santiago." I counted the name 432 times on the first page alone. This was a solid block of script sculpted with a single word. The name was also written with an unnerving degree of consistency, the size and shape of each letter meticulously, almost mechanically, recreated with each movement of his pencil. The spaces between each of the words also proved steady. Without wanting to read too deeply into the effort, I found myself driven to contemplate its significance, and so I sat there silently trying to appreciate his work, fixing my eyes on the effort in the hopes of decoding its meaning. It looked something like this:

> Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago
> Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago
> Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago
> Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago
> Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago
> Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago
> Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago
> Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago
> Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago
> Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago
> Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago
> Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago
> Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago Santiago

Struck by his patience and even by the artistic potential of such a statement, and also egged on by the indeterminacy of the afternoon, I found myself floating towards some rather dreamy theorizations. My notebook from that day had some half-baked scribbles about subjectivity in the age of mechanical reproduction, an allusion to the philosopher Jacques Derrida's work on the signature, and even the performative nature of handwriting. With this in mind, I asked Santiago what it all meant. He took a moment to consider his intention and then decoded the letters for me. "Oh," he said in an offhand way, "it just means, 'Fuck this.'"

THIRTEEN

The true tyranny of captivity lies in the sheer unpredictability of events. Given fortuitous circumstances, some families would yank their loved ones out of the center at a moment's notice. Upon an order from Pedro, Alejandro would suddenly interrupt a sermon to pull a lucky captive from the general population, delivering the surprising news that it was time for him to leave. A person could find himself slugging through yet another testimony one moment and then packing his belongings the very next. The exit never took more than a few minutes. Any captive could be plucked from the crowd at any moment, not unlike the rapture.

This is because families could change their mind about captivity—for a price. After locking up their loved one during the heat of an argument, amid the very worst conditions, a family could then pay the pastor to have him released after only a few months in the center. This early release program had quickly become a second layer of income for Pedro, prompting the pastor to write these conditions into his contracts, such as the one Maria signed. The stakes of this political economy were serious. For if the hunt was central to the center and its business model, then the early release of captives also bolstered the center's bottom line. The contract elaborated this through two terms:

> E. If I should stop treatment before the prescribed term I promise to pay the costs of room and board and waive any responsibility of this center in case of my death by natural causes and/or any other cause, including the use of alcohol or drugs or the abstention of either . . . I fully understand the circumstances under which I have arrived and the logical consequences of my intoxication. Because of this I will not hold the center accountable.
>
> G. If I stop treatment before the previously specified length of time I promise to pay the fees associated with that lost time and what other costs that occur during my stay at a rate of Q55 per day. This covers the price of food, board, medicine, and miscellaneous purchases.

Given the unpredictability of captivity, Pedro's catch and release program proved to be lucrative. It also made the work of waiting a deeply fraught enterprise. In a clinical rehabilitation setting, one hitched to liberal notions of development, expansive apparatuses chart the progress of patients as they move from one therapeutic stage to another. Waiting is itself

progressive. Programs like the famed Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous lay claim to an agentive, forward-moving plan of action, with each step building towards a full recovery. Given enough time, the logic goes, patients will progress. There are caveats, of course. Rehabilitation can be studded by holdups, delays, and setbacks. But even so, those conceits imply a progressive notion of time, however much progress is routinely held up, delayed, and set back.[26]

Conversely, waiting inside of Pedro's center never felt like moving onwards or upwards. Instead, Pedro's center aspired toward articulating a captive's before and after, which itself evidenced a commitment to the miraculous. Santiago could be held captive for months on end, with no signs of ever leaving, while the captive sitting next to him could suddenly walk out the door—often without rhyme or reason.

Pedro never preached about progress. When pressed, he would stick to the fundamentals of his faith. "I bring sinners here to wait for God," he said. "I bring them here to wait for a miracle." He insisted that he had no real power to help any of these men. His role was different. He hunted sinners so that the Lord could heal them. "All I can do," he said, "is pull them from the streets just long enough for God to save them." Pedro even downplayed the power of prayer, instead relying on the possibility of a miracle, of the grace of God to suddenly and without warning touch the heart of a sinner. "It's a miracle," he would say. "It's a miracle when these guys change. It's a miracle when they don't smoke crack or when they stop drinking." He had personally experienced this miracle. "I was in the streets," he told me "I was dying in the streets and God saved me."

Pedro's center operated through a paradigm of radical rupture and rebirth. The net effect was that Pedro never asked his captives to work harder but rather to wait longer. "They need to wait," Pedro insisted. "They need to wait until God is ready for them."

Christians have been known to wait. Following the death of Jesus, the earliest Christians waited for Christ to usher in a new order.[27] They oriented themselves toward a mindset of watching and waiting for Christ's imminent return, while at the same time evaluating their lives on the basis of Christ's first coming. This was a radical eschatology that contemporary Pentecostalism often assumes, with the end of the world not simply *near* but *here*. This makes the religion's relationship to history rather uncertain. The question becomes: What might progress look like at the end of times? Pedro's commitment to captivity provided one answer, as users were warehoused under the Pentecostal possibility of someday changing.[28]

"One of the hardest parts of this place is not knowing," Santiago admitted to me. "I don't know when I'm going to get out of here. Maybe seven months but maybe sooner." Santiago looked dispirited. "Or maybe I'll be here for even longer." The possibility of ever leaving Pedro's center largely amounted to a matter of waiting, which often proved terrifying. "I just don't know what is going to get me out of here," Santiago once confessed to me with tears in his eyes.

But the process of release was never clear, not even to me after years of fieldwork. "They don't get out of here until I say that they can get out of here," Pedro told me. "I need to talk to their families. They need to want the person back. But most of all, I need to see a change in the person. I need to see that they've changed. The way they talk. The way they dress. The way they pray. It all needs to change before they can go." Pedro then calmly laid out the consequences: "Or they fail and end up back here. Or worse, they end up dead." In Pedro's estimation, he had set far too many captives free far too soon. "Too many of them have died in the streets," he said, "not from overdose but from violence. They've been stabbed or shot. I don't want any of these guys to die in the streets." Given all the risks, very few families wanted these men out of the center.

Anxiety peaked among the captives when it was no longer obvious how exactly to perform the kind of change Pedro sought. Santiago seemed to have already given up. "I'm supposed to show the pastor that I'm better," he sniffed, "but how am I supposed to do that in here? Sitting through those sermons, next to all those guys?" All Santiago wanted to do was leave.

FOURTEEN

Alejandro also wanted out, and so he took matters into his own hands. As Santiago settled into the center, quietly tucking himself into a corner of the room, Alejandro began to hatch his own plan for escape. It took the form of a letter, one addressed to Guatemala's National Police, and it fell directly into my hands.

On June 2, 2016, Alejandro and I sat side by side as a visiting pastor preached about the love of God. "You have to know that God loves you," the pastor announced. "He loves you and he wants the best for your life. He wants you to get ahead." Alejandro suddenly got my attention by nudging me in the side. "No matter if you're using crack cocaine or marijuana or

whatever," the pastor added, "and it can even be the vice of sex, of prostitution. It doesn't matter. God has compassion for you. He loves you." Alejandro then pushed the letter into my hand. "God is going to help you, but you have to ask him for help. Tell him that you have problems. Tell him your limitations. Speak to God because God can change you. Only the Lord can change you." The pastor straightened himself out, standing slightly taller than before to punctuate his next point. During which, in the matter of a moment, Alejandro got as close as he could to me.

"Get me the fuck out of here," he said.

Later, after the sermon but still on the second floor of the center, Alejandro explained: "You need to go to the police with the letter. Let me tell you what it says." He looked over his shoulder to see if the coast was clear. "It says that my name is Alejandro, and that I was born on such and such a date. It then says that my mind is clear and that I am aware that I do not want to be here." He told me all of this as the letter sat in my pants pocket.

Over the years, this had easily happened over a hundred times. Captives would approach me, maintain eye contact, and then place a piece of paper into the palm of my hand. They would also quietly tuck notes into my pockets during sermons or push a piece a paper into my bag, always mentioning later that they wanted to me to deliver a message to a friend or a family member. Often it was just a phone number that I needed to call, and all I had to do was to pass along as simple of a message as "please bring fresh clothes." In this sense, nothing about this exchange with Alejandro seemed unusual. For all I could tell, it was yet another moment in my fieldwork in which I would connect captives to their families, either by phone or with a visit.

But then Alejandro grabbed my shoulder. He squeezed my arm in some effort at creating intimacy while also conveying urgency, adding: "And you know that I don't want to be here." Something had obviously changed in him. Although he never wanted to be inside the center, it was not always obvious that this disinterest outpaced the despair he often discovered in the streets. For all of the abuse, humiliation, and near complete lack of freedom that he endured inside the center, Alejandro knew that he lived relatively well because of Pedro. He benefited not only from the food and shelter but also from a sense of self that he cultivated through hunting. Rarely able to hold down a job and forever struggling with his own dependencies, Alejandro could at times appear grateful for the center, but something had changed.

"The letter says," Alejandro continued, "that on a date in April, I was picked up by the pastor and by two of the main guys here. They held me,

beat me, and threw me in their truck. And on the way here, I told them that I do not want to be at the center, that I don't want to come here, that I don't need this place. It's all in the letter."

Alejandro took another quick look over his shoulder to see if Pedro was coming. "Look," he said, "the bottom line is that I don't want to be in this place and that I don't need this ministry. I don't need this help. I say in the letter that the pastor is very mean and rough. And then I describe the kinds of punishments that we get. We have to clean. We have to do exercises. We get no food. We get thrown into the morgue, and you know that the worst thing about all of this is that I have to tie people up."

This last part seemed to weigh on Alejandro the most. "If I leave to go pick people up, the pastor always tells me to pick them up rough-style," Alejandro explained. "He tells me to hit them." Over the past few months, Alejandro had become the center's main enforcer. He had always hunted, but now he had been tasked with disciplining the general population, which included tying people up with ropes. The hunts had also gotten more physical. Sometimes Alejandro would dominate the captive just enough to complete the task, to bring him back to the center, but increasingly he would play with his prey, working out his frustrations on the people he hunted.

Alejandro saw the long game. He thought past the most immediate of horizons towards life outside of the center. "The thing is," he said, "I have to pay the consequences for that stuff. For hitting people and tying them up. There are people in the streets who are mad at me." Alejandro looked scared. "I want to get out of here and I want to stop doing this stuff. I want to stop hunting." But he was trapped.

So why don't you just take off running the next time you go out for a hunt? I asked.

"I've done that so many times," he said, "and the pastor just finds me and brings me back. I need to send a message that I want out. Like I want to get out of here right now, and I don't want to come back."

Alejandro's letter would certainly send a message. Writing to the National Police, if they took the letter seriously, would trigger a raid of Pedro's center, effectively bottoming out the pastor's business.

I had sensed that Alejandro was frustrated, but I never anticipated that he wanted to escalate his plight to the National Police; and through me, no less. Again, I had become accustomed to delivering letters to loved ones. For years, I would travel throughout the city delivering notes to mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers. This created rapport between me and my interlocutors and allowed me to connect with their families—to hear the

other side of the story. To speak with only Santiago about his captivity was to engage a story of Dickensian gloom, but then to hear the despair of his mother was to learn of a more robust struggle over freedom.

One time, in fact, not too long after his capture, Santiago sat in the back of the former family room as a visiting pastor delivered a sermon on the saving grace of Jesus Christ. "How many people here feel blessed to be alive?" the pastor preached. "Amen," the pastor answered—to himself, by himself. "Because life is a blessing." The pastor stood firmly behind the lectern. "And so I ask you, what is your intention?"

I then felt a piece of paper pushed into my pocket. "What is your purpose in life?" the pastor asked again. I turned to see Santiago settling back into his corner. "My purpose," the pastor continued, "is to tell you that Jesus has come to give all of us hope."

I fished the note from my pocket as the pastor extolled the struggles between hope and heaven and quickly realized that it was a letter written by Santiago. He had penned an apology to his family.

"Oh, you can tell," Pedro once told me. "When a person changes, there is a change in his physical status. His hygiene starts to change. He starts to fix himself, to change himself, to improve himself." We were sitting inside his office. "There are those who don't want to change. Their hearts are hard, but a fixed person is obedient. He follows the rules."

Later in the day, with that conversation with Pedro echoing in my ears, I opened Santiago's letter. It was addressed to his mother, brother, and sister.

"How are you?" it began. "I'm feeling better now that I am inside the center. I have begun to handle myself differently." The letter modeled the sincerity that Pedro had described, a sincerity that seemed to mark the beginning of real change. "I'm really happy because I'm not on drugs," the letter continued, "and I'm not drunk. This place has given me some time to think. I'm better now." Santiago's note worked hard to externalize things that would always be hidden on the inside: sincerity of faith, true conversion, maybe even radical change.

"The exterior reflects the interior," I remembered Pedro once telling me, infusing otherness with disorder and salvation with rectitude. "Did you know that? A person who is right with God is going to show it in his face. They are going to comport themselves differently."

"I hope," Santiago continued, "that you can forgive me for everything and for all the stuff I took from the house. Forgive me. Please. I'm really sorry."

"But there are people who just don't care," Pedro had said. "They come here and they act the same way inside the center as they do outside it, but

the most important is the interior of the person. And if we can fix what's going on inside a person, then we can set that person free." Pedro quickly qualified his conditions of release. "Spiritually speaking," he said. "We can set that person free, spiritually speaking."

With physical liberation seemingly out of reach, Santiago's letter seemed an honest first step toward spiritual freedom. Regret, concession, and repentance—it all fit the genre. Santiago seemed to be doing things with words.[29] But then he suddenly slipped in slow motion, tumbling over himself.

"When you come," Santiago asked immediately after apologizing, without even a line break to mark a new thought, "could you bring some sugar and some bread?" The request was modest, but it also felt shallow. It was too soon, considering how much and for how long he had made his family suffer. Social theorists have long argued that the apology is a process through which a person symbolically splits into two parts: "the part that is guilty of an offense and the part that dissociates itself from the delict and affirms a belief in the offended rule."[30] Santiago seemed incapable of splitting himself into two parts. The ask also made him seem completely unaware. His requests rolled on.

"Could you also bring beans, coffee, soup, milk, ham, fried chicken and some French fries?" His apology suddenly became a grocery list: "and some juice, cookies, sardines, mayonnaise, a few of those muffins that you brought last time, ten pieces of fruit, and a cup of chicken broth?" At a certain point, the apology faded from sight entirely. One could even be forgiven for missing it. "Could you bring five pounds of rice. Five pounds of beans. A liter of Coca-Cola." Every item requested evidenced an interior in need of further rehabilitation: "Also could you get me some deodorant and some toothpaste, some floss, some soap to wash my pants, five tubes of glue, two razors, two tablets of aspirin, and two tablets of cold and flu medicine."

To Santiago's credit, the center's food was terrible. The men were chronically underfed, and Santiago had already lost considerable weight. But his letter as an effort at escape had obviously missed its mark. Santiago had misplaced his apology.

"But there are people who just don't care," Pedro repeated, as if having read Santiago's letter. "The way they comport themselves in the streets is the way they comport themselves here."

I remember arriving at Maria's home, where Santiago's brother eventually read the letter. He shook his head. It obviously upset him. With what seemed to be sincerity, Santiago's brother announced through gritted teeth,

"He'll stay there for another year. For another year." He turned to me to ask: "What do you think about that?"

A year sounded extreme, I remember saying. I also thought about how this conversation could not happen for a captive such as Alejandro, if only because he had no family to visit him or loved ones for me to engage. Nobody had ever signed a contract on his behalf, visited him inside the center, or paid Pedro for another month of his captivity. All Alejandro had was me and a postwar state that had proven to be as negligent as his aunt.

I knew that delivering his letter to the police would prompt a raid, and this made the missive a bold move. It would most certainly drag more than fifty families into his struggle, each with their own story of abuse and heartache. "Santiago stole the light bulbs right out the sockets," Maria once told me.

It was in such moments of moral adjudication that I most felt part of predation's pastoralism. I was poised to help Alejandro escape but unsure about whether his release should come at the expense of everyone else's suffering. It was a terribly uncomfortable position to be in because of the dead ends I knew we would find. Regardless, I felt compelled to act, if only because Alejandro had no one else to ask. Alejandro, a grown man with all of his faculties, was being held captive inside this center in ways that chafed against my own liberal assumptions about freedom and self-determination. While Maria assumed authority of Santiago, and while most other captives had families keeping them inside the center, no one in the city (except Pedro) gave much thought to Alejandro's life. And Pedro's interest in Alejandro had become so entangled with his bottom line that it was difficult to take his decisions seriously. Alejandro had been abducted and put to work, all against his will.

So what's the plan? I asked.

"You give this letter to the police," Alejandro said. "They'll come to the center, and they'll raid the place. Then they'll ask, 'who doesn't want to be here?' And I'll step forward."

Have you ever seen this happen? I asked.

"No," he said, "but I've heard that it's been done before."

ESCAPE

Free yourself, like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, like a bird from the snare of the fowler.

—PROVERBS 6:5

FIFTEEN

Alejandro had been restless for months, often pulling me aside to build his case. In between sermons, with Pedro downstairs, we would sit and talk in a relatively unoccupied corner of the main room. He always asked me to turn on my digital recorder.

"The last time they picked me up," he said, "they were really mean. The pastor grabbed me and told me that I wasn't going to go anywhere." We sat together on the floor, our backs against a wall. Captives mingled. "But I told him that I don't want to be here," he explained, "that I don't want to be in this place."

He had not always been clear about this last point, expressing the contradictory feelings that often come with captivity. One day he would be grateful for the roof over his head and the relative power he held over other men, while the next day would bring waves of frustration for not being able to chart the course of his own life.

Alejandro liked to talk to me about this ambivalence, routinely confiding in me that he wanted out of the center but that he never really knew what life outside might look like. These were intimate conversations—slow, meandering, and at times playful. They were never rushed; there was literally nowhere to go. And so something akin to trust (maybe even friendship) eventually formed between the two of us. It took years, but it happened.

These discussions were one reason why Alejandro began to confide in me about his plans to escape the center. Alejandro had been the aggressor more times than he could remember, but our talks began to linger on his own experience of being hunted. "And even here, at the center," he told me, "I tried to get out and they came over and hit me again." Soon after his most recent capture, Alejandro had apparently made a dash for the front door, but they shut him down. "Pedro told me, 'You think you're so tough in here, but what are you going to do in the streets?' "

Alejandro once made an argument that stuck with me, that highlighted just how much Pedro had intervened in his life. "But I told the pastor," he said, "that it's none of his business what I do in the streets. It's none of his business. Who is he to tell me what to do with my life in the streets? I don't want to be in here. I don't want to be a part of his ministry. I don't want any of this." Alejandro spoke as plainly as he could: "I want to leave. I want to get a job. I want to make money."

So what did the pastor say? I asked. We were on the second floor of the center, our heads resting against concrete.

Alejandro gave me the short answer: "The pastor said that he wants me here."

Later that day, Pedro and I spoke in his office. I asked him point blank: Why do you care about what Alejandro does in the streets?

Pedro huffed in frustration, as he was always annoyed when I asked what seemed to him to be a basic question. Working toward his answer, he opened his Bible and began to read Matthew 18:12–14. "What do you think?" the passage asks. "If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off?" He paused for a moment to have me consider the question, only to read on before I could offer an answer: "And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish."

I pressed him further: But is Alejandro one of your sheep? Is he yours to lose?

Pedro looked exasperated. "Alejandro is not one of my sheep," he explained in a way that demonstrated a practiced patience. "He is one of God's sheep, and I am the pastor. I am God's pastor, and I am Alejandro's pastor. I serve God as shepherd. I tend to all those lost sheep upstairs." Pedro closed his Bible. "Look," he said, "this is how I see it. All those other pastors with their churches, with their worship services and prayer sessions, they serve God by shepherding his sheep. But they shepherd the obedient sheep." I remembered the hundreds of services that I had been to in Guatemala City, with families swaying to the music and clapping in unison. One could easily take for granted the simple fact that all of those Christians traveled to church on their own accord. No one dragged them there. They walked with their own two feet.

Pedro then explained his mission more explicitly: "But I shepherd black sheep. I shepherd lost sheep. If a man owns a hundred sheep and he loses one of them, my mission is to find that lost sheep. My whole life is about finding lost sheep."[1]

Pedro's pastoral fantasies of hunting and holding captive lost sheep certainly departed from the liberal conceptions of human rights and freedoms that had floated around Guatemala since the 1980s. I reminded Pedro what he already knew—that the United Nations 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights works from the postwar premise that all human beings are born free (Article 1), that no one should be a slave (Article 4), that no one should be degraded (Article 5), that no one should be subject to arbitrary arrest (Article 9), that everyone has the right to freedom (Article 13),

and that everyone has the right to work (Article 23). Since two historic truth commissions published massive reports in the late 1990s about the country's genocidal civil war, human rights have been common knowledge in Guatemala. Each of these commissions cast a long shadow into postwar Guatemala about the inherent dignity of the human being, making my impromptu lecture less of a pedantic sidebar than a somewhat unnecessary reminder of information that Pedro knew as well as any other Guatemalan.[2] But I wanted to see what he would say.

"Men wrote those words," Pedro responded, "but I answer to God." Although flippant in his demeanor, it was clear that Pedro pledged allegiance to a sovereign that stood outside (or possibly beside) the normative rule of law. Often railing against human rights activists while citing the theological clarity of his position, Pedro was quick to shoot toward an alternative universal. He also believed in an autonomous liberal subject, but his more utilitarian approach took into account society and family members when assessing the rights and responsibilities of individuals. The promise of Christ's return and the subsequent salvation of the faithful organized Pedro's life and his daily efforts to track down as many lost sheep as he could.[3]

Alejandro still questioned the sincerity of Pedro's intentions. A few weeks before handing me the letter, Alejandro became increasingly vocal in his criticism of the center. "From what I've heard," he said, "the pastor basically does not want me to go anywhere. He told Tomás and Bautista that 'I'm not going to let Alejandro go. Alejandro has to do his time. He's got to do his seven months.' "

This seemed standard, I told Alejandro. I had seen enough contracts to know as much.

"But yesterday," he said, "they let some guy out. Someone came and got him out. Just because the guy paid." Alejandro sounded upset. "Some guy showed up, talked to the pastor, and then paid him some cash. And the captive had only been here two months." It seemed unjust to me. "You see?" he said. "It's a bunch of crap. They let another guy go after not even a month here, and most of the guys who go out to the market or for the hunts, they don't even come back. They run off. That's what ends up happening. They just leave."

This constant turnover compelled Pedro to seek out long-term captives, as the center needed a certain amount of stability to stay afloat, and it was obvious that this interest in stability allowed Pedro to extract tremendous amounts of labor from men like Alejandro.

"What don't I do here?" Alejandro wondered. "I help with the cleaning. I got my crew working every single day. We clean the floors three times a

day. We move the people from one side of the room to the other. I mean, that's my thing." Alejandro continued, "I also make sure that the bathrooms are clean. I make sure that everyone's taken a shower. You know?"

Displacing the brunt of this labor onto captives helped Pedro maintain his bottom line, and more importantly, it was the principal means by which captives were rehabilitated. Pedro referred to this work as occupational therapy, for it gave captives the only opportunity they had to prove to that they could handle life outside of the center.[4] But Alejandro then started to take note of all the work that Pedro no longer let him do: "Before he used to let me go to the markets and to hunt for him. We'd pray and then go out for a hunt. But he's not letting me do that stuff these days because he knows how I am." By this, Alejandro meant that Pedro knew how badly he now wanted to escape, that, in the words of the pastor, Alejandro was no longer sincere. He could no longer be trusted. "Because I don't want to be here," Alejandro said, "I've been kidnapped. And I have no say in the matter. I asked him the other day, and he says, 'Yeah, I'll let you go . . . with a big kick in the ass.' "[5]

In fact, before giving me the letter for the National Police, Alejandro disclosed to me that Pedro and his huntsmen "were all eating the other day, and the pastor was like 'Alejandro, do me a favor and tell your friend Kevin to get me some shoes. Tell him to get me some Nikes.' " Alejandro acted like he was offended on my behalf, as if the request was ignorant, but he then began to test the waters with me. Alejandro was obviously exploring every possible means of escape.

"It's different," Alejandro had apparently told the pastor, "when we go to the markets and ask people for food for the house, it's so that everyone can eat, but I can't just ask Kevin for shoes." He then explained that the food felt charitable because it fed the house, but the shoes seemed so specific to the pastor's desires that the very idea seemed to be offensive. He then added, "Then some other guy, I think it was Bautista, tells the pastor, 'Hey, why don't you tell Kevin to get you the shoes in exchange for letting Alejandro out.' And the pastor just looked at me with a look that was like: 'Don't put that idea in my mind.' " Alejandro feigned offense: "And so he's trying to get you to buy him some shoes for my freedom. That's crazy!" He then put his hand to his head to approximate something like disbelief, but Alejandro kept a close eye on my reaction.

It was crazy, I thought, to propose exchanging a pair of shoes for someone's freedom. At that moment with Alejandro, as we sat on the second floor of that center—in the middle of the city, behind three locked doors—I suddenly wondered how my fieldwork had brought me to this juncture. A

number of reasons quickly came to mind, the most obvious being Alejandro's lack of family. At the same time, he had also begun to think with me about the morality of captivity and was actively shaping how I understood the industry as a whole.

During his time in captivity, Alejandro began to develop what could only be described as an abolitionist theology from all those Bible verses that he had collected in his notebook. He pieced together his insights into an argument against the very theology that informed his confinement.[6] I found it compelling.

"I just don't see the basis of religion with all that attitude," Alejandro once said. "If you're going to give someone the opportunity to make his life better, fine, but don't hold them hostage and make them do things that they don't want to do. That's what I don't understand." Alejandro then made some concessions: "Yes, I do live better than the other guys here when I hunt. When he lets me hunt, I get two plates of food, sometimes three plates, but I got to pay the consequences." And the consequences were real. The very people whom Alejandro had hunted, tied up, and thrown in the back of a truck now lay in wait for him to leave the center. In this sense, the entire industry had effectively bound Alejandro up within a set of social relationships that seemed impossible to disentangle. His resentment against Pedro had begun to bubble over.

"You know," he said, "when the pastor is preaching, I'm just like, how can you be preaching these words and expect me to do the complete opposite? Especially when it is according to your will?" He then made a theological argument. "The word of God," he said, "doesn't state that I have to serve my pastor. It states that I have to serve Jesus Christ according to his word and his will." Alejandro started to preach to me: "Jesus said that he didn't come to be served but that he came to serve. So what am I doing? I'm serving the pastor and all of his personal needs. He has people to wash his shoes, to wash his clothes, and to make his food. He has people to do everything for him. But I don't see why. If we're all users and addicts then why are we fulfilling all the personal needs of this one pastor?"

I had no idea what to say.

SIXTEEN

I took Alejandro's questions as well as his letter to the National Police. Inside a big, beautiful building located in the center of the city, I stood in

line with citizens preparing to report crimes and file grievances. With tall ceilings and florescent lighting, the building was a supremely bureaucratic structure with long corridors studded with modular office spaces; its designers had obviously labored to replicate the aesthetics of North American corporatism. To travel from the margins of the city to the center of it, to speak with the state about the plight of one man felt so official, so formal, as I found myself swept up into lines that led to desks manned by office workers who then directed me to other lines and desks as well as more office workers. There was nothing intuitive about this building, nor about my relatively simple task: to tell someone of authority that a pastor was holding a man hostage for his use of drugs. The efficacy of appealing to the state was not assured. In a country in desperate need of judicial reform—where only three percent of homicides result in a conviction—what were the chances that Alejandro, a drug user held captive by Christians, would get a fair shake?

Years of fieldwork inside the centers and with law enforcement officials made this byzantine system seem somewhat familiar. Over the course of hours, I eventually shuttled from police officer to clerk to judge to lawyer and then back to judge. I told each person the same story—Alejandro has no family, the pastor kidnapped him, Alejandro wants out, but the pastor refuses to release him. I presented his letter to each of them. They all confirmed that the center itself was not an illegal enterprise, per se, so long as each person inside had been signed over to the pastor by a family member. I then stressed that Alejandro has no family here in Guatemala, and so it was clear that the pastor did not have the legal authority to hold him captive. Each of the authorities I spoke with confirmed that the letter provided enough cause to knock on the center's front door. Alongside my own testimony, it suggested a possible kidnapping, especially since Alejandro was alone.

"It's your decision," one official explained. "We can call a judge right now, and we can go to the center with you. We'll enter the center and ask the director for the names of every person that he's holding. And then we'll find out if everyone is there on their own free will." The official then explained that "everyone who wants to leave can then leave."

Every abolitionist instinct in me immediately committed to this plan. For years, I had argued with families in favor of releasing their loved ones sooner than planned, pointing out that their captivity was not providing them with the life skills necessary to avoid drugs. I had also battled with pastors, including Pedro, about the illiberal contours of extrajudicial

incarceration. As I had explained to Pedro on numerous occasions, there are fundamental problems with the fact that the center has no formal intake process, no system of checks and balances or government oversight for new people arriving at the center. Never did I see a medical doctor, social worker, or lawyer participate. And the same was true with outtake. The process is murky at best, and families often bribed pastors for the early release of loved ones.

My concerns had also settled concretely on the perils of captivity itself. The vast majority of these centers, Pedro's included, were overcrowded spaces organized around improvisational therapeutics that often proved dangerous. Four locked doors separated those inside Pedro's morgue from their freedom. Of all the concerns raised by human rights and public health officials about the dangers of compulsory rehabilitation, one especially haunted me: What would happen in the event of a fire? How would these men claw themselves out of the center? It was not an unimaginable scenario. The men cooked with an open flame on the roof of the center. Hot embers often stumbled out of the oven and smoldered in the open air. It never took much effort to imagine how this would unfold—a stray ember might ignite a rag that then would catch an errant piece of furniture on fire. The entire roof would be set ablaze, with nearly sixty men scrambling under the flames. This very tragedy actually came to fruition at a different center in the spring of 2017, with at least forty teenagers burned alive.[7] Of all the horrific scenarios that these centers can provoke, it was fire that frightened me the most, causing me to recommit to basic human rights, the idea that imprisonment of any kind runs counter to upholding the elemental human dignity of individuals. I often muttered such bold pronouncements to myself as I mapped out my own personal escape plan should the building ever catch fire.

The prospect of setting Alejandro free, of kicking down the center's front door with a judge and police officer in tow, not only reconfirmed my most basic beliefs about justice, it also sent a jolt of adrenaline through my entire body.[8]

But the surge of emotion quickly faded, forcing me to remember that abolitionists can make for irresponsible anthropologists. The discipline has long accumulated an eviscerating set of critiques against the interventionist impulses of seemingly well-intentioned anthropologists.[9] The decision to help so often hurts. More than a decade of fieldwork inside these centers had taught me that the promise of freedom is often a trap. Centers will bait and gouge families on a monthly basis, locking up loved ones with a promise of freedom that is always just beyond reach. The entire industry rests on

the possibility of truly escaping drugs and, in turn, the centers, but that very same industry structures itself around the inevitability of return.[10]

Michel Foucault argues that prisons produce prisoners instead of reformed citizens, and one can extend this insight to the centers.[11] By always forgiving the sinner again (and again and again), they produce sinners that forever need to be born again (and again and again).[12] This is one reason why the National Police so rarely raid these centers. Not only does this shadow carceral system benefit the state by effectively lifting thousands of chronically unemployable men off the streets, but families also need these centers to keep their loved ones alive. In fact, the person who kept coming to mind as I waffled on whether to greenlight the police raid was not Alejandro, with his desperate plea for freedom, but rather Santiago's mother, Maria, who knew better than anyone that Pedro's center was keeping her son alive. If the judge and a police officer addressed the captives, asking each individual whether he wanted to be held inside Pedro's center, Santiago would be the first to ask for immediate release. This would certainly mean returning to the very social networks that once got him shot while also forcing Maria to pay for another hunt.[13]

To focus only on Alejandro in making my decision would be to address a single instance of abuse and manipulation. At the same time, to tell his story at the expense of Santiago's—as well as the fifty-four other users held captive inside of Pedro's center—would be to ignore the severity of Guatemala City: the gangs, the drugs, and the violence. To kick down that door at Alejandro's request, I reasoned, would put dozens of lives at risk, Santiago's included.[14]

And yet the possibility of not acting—of doing nothing—was also no longer an option. While I had more than enough material to write a book, disappearing into the city felt unconscionable, morally unimaginable. I was in way too deep. Extended ethnography enables researchers to make otherwise unattainable observations, but it also tethers them to people and places that make both practical and moral demands.

Suddenly frozen in my tracks but also free falling into exceedingly uncomfortable territory, I told the judge that I would need to consider the decision in far more detail.[15]

SEVENTEEN

Alejandro was not the first captive to attempt an escape. Few users have chosen to enter a center of their own accord, and the vast majority of men

spend their days inside scheming up ways to get out. Knowing this, pastors spent a considerable amount of their own time anticipating these plans, relying on very basic security measures.

"As long as the house is locked down," Pedro explained while we toured the center, "then I feel pretty confident." It was one of our earliest conversations. I didn't know Pedro well yet, but I knew the industry. I had been on dozens of similar tours up to that point, and so I found myself feeding Pedro standard questions that gave him the opportunity to explain his operation. I remember him pulling against some bars that capped a window to demonstrate the sturdiness of the construction. "The bars need to be anchored well," he explained, "and the doors need to be strong. I told you this before, but the doors need to be heavy and they need to be bolted down. They should be able to handle six or seven really hard stomps."

He toed one of the doors a little, drumming its surface to appreciate the echo. "Before opening the center," he recalled, "I needed to think about it from the sinner's perspective. I needed to walk through the house with their eyes to see if there was any possible way of getting out." He pointed toward the southern-facing windows inside the main room as we walked. "I didn't have bars on that window for a long time," Pedro admitted, "and I didn't have bars on it because we're on the second floor. Who is going to jump out of a second floor window?" The answer now seemed obvious to Pedro. "I'm pretty sure Alejandro jumped out that window once," he said, "but we hunted him down. We found him just a few blocks away, passed out in the streets." Pedro moved closer to the windows. "Anyway," he said, "this window became a problem. It was dangerous for the guys because they'd jump out, and it was bad for me because then I'd have to go find them."[16]

Pedro added bars. "But even with the bars," he said, "these guys would write notes to people walking by. They'd have little messages and phone numbers and just throw them at the people on the streets." This created problems with the neighbors. The sight of detained drug users hanging out of an elevated prison pitching desperate pleas to strangers upset an otherwise quiet street. So he covered the windows with a translucent sheet of plastic.[17]

Pedro then brought me back to his front office. I pulled up a stool and he sat down behind his desk. He opened one of his drawers and pulled out three objects.

"I keep these as reminders," he said. One was a metal clothes hanger that had been manipulated into something resembling a screwdriver. The straight edge had been filed to a point while a mash of metal formed what

appeared to be a handle. Another was a metal spoon whose shallow oval had been sharpened to a point while a full spool of tape fattened the base into something that someone could actually hold. The third item was a long metal string bookended by two pieces of wood. The string seemed sharp to the touch, which is why the wood was so important. Someone could pull back on both handles without ever having to touch the metal. The first two objects had obviously been made for stabbing and the third for choking.

"I found all of these on the second floor," Pedro said, "and we search the place all the time. We flip the mattresses and strip everyone down to their underwear. We find weapons like these in their pockets or hidden in the walls. None of those guys can be trusted. None of them."

I asked why he kept these three particular weapons. He picked up the screwdriver and told me a story.[18]

"I was away at the store one day," he said, "and so Roberto was in charge of just checking in with the guys. He unlocks this door." Pedro motioned toward the heavy door that separated the front office from the rest of the center. "And everything was fine," Pedro said. "But then he climbs the stairs to the second floor, unlocks that door, and sticks his head inside." As he went on, Pedro rolled the weapon in his hands. "One of the guys sneaks up behind Roberto, grabs him around the neck, and stabbed him." Pedro exclaimed, "This son of a bitch pushes this thing into my son's back up until the handle." Pedro showed me the weapon again—the blade measured about three inches. "And so my son drops to the floor. He's stunned. He's not hurt very badly, thank God, but he doesn't know what to do. And while this is happening, that guy runs out the door and down the stairs." Pedro then turned to that same heavy door that separated his front office from the rest of the center. "The problem is that Roberto had locked this door and the front door. There were still two doors between him and the streets."

So what happened? I asked.

"He gets to this heavy door and starts trying to kick it down. But he can't and so he was trapped inside the center."

And Roberto? I asked Pedro.

"He was still on the floor," Pedro said. "He was bleeding and thinking the worst. He didn't know if he had been cut badly. He didn't know anything."

As Pedro spoke, I wanted to stop him to ask him questions about this failed escape. So many details didn't quite line up. The men seemed to know that Pedro was gone. At the very least, the assailant waited until Pedro was out running errands. He knew, as we all did, that Roberto carried far less

weight inside the center than his father and that he lacked Pedro's decisive thinking. So it was no surprise that Roberto was the target, but then the story got difficult to decipher. The captive stabbed Roberto in the back just after he unlocked the first of three doors and then made a foolhardy attempt to muscle his way through the next two doors, which he knew were locked. Meanwhile, Roberto still had the keys for those doors in his pockets.

Weapon still in hand, Pedro continued: "Roberto is on the ground and this son of a bitch is trapped in between the general population and the front office. Because he doesn't have the keys to open the second door."

So what happened next? I pressed.

"Tomás and Bautista cornered the man. They wrestled him down and they tied him up. They used the straitjacket and threw him in the morgue. They kicked the shit out of him, but [overall] they took it easy on him. They didn't break anything and they didn't use the bat on him." Pedro seemed to be painting the punishment as a moment of Christian compassion. "I got back, took Roberto to the hospital, and kept that guy inside the morgue for two weeks. Tied up, with the straitjacket on."

Although Pedro could be reactive and come off as calculating, he seemed to harbor little contempt for the man who stabbed his son. "These guys don't know what they're doing," he said, gesturing toward the second floor of his center. "They think that they want to get out of here. They really feel it. Sometimes they scratch at the walls and pull at the bars. They want out of here, but then what?" Pedro put down the weapon and placed all three back in his desk drawer. "Maybe they stay sober for a week. Maybe a month? But then they fall back into sin and end up back here. They don't want to be here. I get that, but the streets are shit. The streets keep sending them back to me. My only job is to make sure that I catch them."[19]

I later asked Alejandro about the attack and why the rest of the captives didn't collectively organize an escape. Why had this guy acted alone?

"He wasn't acting alone," Alejandro said. "No way was he acting alone." He began to fill in some of the gaps. "Some of the guys were monitoring the front door. The pastor goes to the store every Saturday at about the same time, and you can hear him leave from up here on the second floor. And some other guys had made the knife. One guy stole the hanger and another guy knew how to make it. He'd been in prison before and knew how to make the thing." A roster of accomplices suddenly emerged. "And a few guys were supposed to get the keys off of Roberto and then open the next two doors. There were lots of guys in on that move. It was a big plan." Alejandro had apparently known all about it.

So why was this one guy left racing down the stairs all alone? Why did the rest of the captives let him just pound against the second door and not offer help?

"Because people lost their nerve," he said. "They didn't want to get into trouble with Pedro. They all know that they're going to end up back here. They all know that Pedro's going to get them again at some point."

Stories like these do circulate. At Jorge's center, Emilio, one of Pedro's huntsmen, had been in charge of laundry with another captive, which gave them access to the roof and front door, two obvious avenues for escape. As they gained Jorge's trust, the other captive convinced Emilio that they should escape the next time they found themselves in the front office with Jorge's clean laundry. There were always moments when the front door was open and people were distracted. They could just run. Though he knew simply making a break for the door would not give either of them enough of a head start, Emilio agreed, not wanting to be inside Jorge's center any longer than he needed to be. He then came up with his own plan. While standing with the man in Jorge's front office one day, he noticed the front door was ajar. Emilio subtly signaled to his co-conspirator to run, which he did. Emilio let the man get a small head start and then alerted the rest of the front office to the escape. As planned, every last person took off running in his direction. With everyone else distracted by the impromptu hunt, Emilio stepped out of the office and jogged in the opposite direction.

To some extent, Pedro was right about the nature of substance abuse. After Emilio successfully escaped, he ended up back at Jorge's a few weeks later. With nowhere to go and nothing to do, and without any real skills to manage his drug dependency, Emilio fell back into familiar circles. Jorge had him hunted a little less than a month later and then had Emilio hunting for him soon thereafter.[20]

Ultimately, within the dialectic of the hunter and the hunted, it is always possible for roles to be reversed, with the hunter suddenly finding himself hunted. Caught off-guard in a brief moment of near chaos, Roberto found himself at the mercy of the men his father held captive. It would have taken very little coordination or effort for those captives to throw Roberto into the morgue, straitjacket and all, and then quietly walk out of the center single file.

After telling me Roberto's story, Pedro spoke about a possibly more powerful sense of reversal: the sinner being saved. "This is what the center is about," he said, "letting these guys escape a life of sin, a life of drugs and drinking; it lets people start over. I want them to start over." Pedro's sermons

about his own suffering at the hands of cocaine and heroin also buttressed the most powerful story of reversal known to this community: Christ's victory over death. He continued, "These sinners need to realize that I want them to escape this center, and I want them to get out of this place and stay out of this place, but not with weapons or with deception, but with prayer, meditation, and forgiveness. They need to be forgiven for what they've done to their families and they need to forgive themselves. Otherwise they're just going to run in the streets. They're going to try to escape their past through drugs." Pedro, at least as far as he was concerned, provided his captives with a clear plan for escape, but none of it involved jumping out of windows.[21]

Santiago entered the center cynical about his ability to escape. He knew that he didn't have the kind of charisma to lead a revolt, nor could he muscle his way past Tomás and Alejandro to make a break for the front door. Maria was not going to pay the pastor to release her son earlier than his contracted stay. With no real options, Santiago submitted.

To get out he needed to become a changed man, or at least act like one.

"The pastor and my mom are both looking for me to change," Santiago said, "to find Jesus and ask for forgiveness. It means that I need to act a certain way and be a certain way."

So will you actually change? I asked.

"I really don't think I can," he said, "but I'm going to work really hard to convince the pastor that I have." It seemed like a difficult act to keep up, and so I said so.

"You have a better idea?" he shot back at me.

I did not.

EIGHTEEN

The chase is central to Pentecostal theology, and not just in a literal sense. Each individual is expected to be in active pursuit of an ideal, aspirational soul. Inside the centers, the catchall term for this practice is called theological therapy. Theological therapy is an improvisational approach that, despite its name, has neither theological nor psychological systematicity, meaning that it doesn't have a historical legacy or disciplinary boundaries. Although it is used in almost every center in Guatemala, it lacks any common point of reference other than the Bible and can vary remarkably from center to center. Everyone seems to be making it up.[22]

"No," Pedro admitted, "it's not really an approach or a tradition or anything. The phrase just means that we all call on God for help." At its most fundamental, theological therapy sticks to a series of working assumptions. The first is that captivity will lead to conversion and that holding a user against his will for months on end will lead to rehabilitation. Captivity pulls the user off the streets, out of sin, and puts him in front of God. This presumption is decidedly pastoral, and when pushed, Pedro justified his work biblically. He cited 1 Peter 2:25, "You were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."[23]

While most mainstream approaches to drug rehabilitation, whether faith- or evidence-based, focus on incremental advances organized around a set of steps or stages, theological therapy assumes that a user can change, or convert, in an instant. Put differently, centers like Pedro's understand rehabilitation as a single, coherent event—a miracle. One does not get better or worse but is lost or found. "I've seen men change in a moment," Pedro said as he snapped his fingers. "The spirit entered their hearts and they just changed."

At the heart of this understanding of rehabilitation is the idea of redemption, that a user can only walk away from drugs through the saving grace of Jesus Christ.[24] Without heartfelt repentance and God's unconditional forgiveness, the user will always return to drugs. This assumption is especially pernicious as recidivism suggests that a user never sincerely confessed and, thus, never really changed. "Some of these guys are stubborn," Pedro said, "and so you have to keep bringing them back. You need to keep dragging them back here."

This faith in miracles justifies theological therapy's final assumption: that substance abuse is a sin and not a disease. While talk of pathologies and genetic predispositions do echo across some centers, theological therapy places both the etiology of drug use and the burden of change on the individual Christian. No one else is to blame for drug use but the user himself.

Taken together, these assumptions add up to a therapy whose principal aim is to drag the sinner in front of God to facilitate a miracle, which can take a single day or several years; only God knows. But the pastor's primary responsibility is, in theory, to hold users long enough for this miracle to happen. Theological therapy simply relies on the pastor to provide God with a captive audience. "Theological therapy," Pedro said, "really just says that God will save the sinner, and this means that I need to keep him here until he is saved." He then sheepishly admitted, "It's really just about waiting and keeping these guys occupied until the miracle happens." Yet theological

therapy also demands that the sinner hunt down his own sins, transforming self-rehabilitation into a kind of existential manhunt. "I drag these guys here," Pedro reflected. "But it's each of their responsibility to drag themselves to God."

Maria, for one, placed a tremendous amount of faith in theological therapy, hoping that after Santiago was captured, he would be guided toward God.

"He'll learn more about God inside the center," she said, "and the pastor will make sure that he prays to God every day." She sat on a chair, in her home. Santiago had only been inside the center for a few months, and Maria looked relaxed, and even spoke optimistically about the possibility of Santiago's salvation. She was sleeping well and visiting Santiago less often; I was convinced that these points were related. "He can use this time to find God," she said. "He can make the decision to change his life. Only he can make the decision, and with God's help he can start living a good Christian life." Even though Pedro's monthly fees made it almost impossible for Maria to keep a roof over her head, she was sustained by the promise of change. She was also encouraged by her new quality of life.

While users wait for divine intervention, a fairly random collection of reading material helps initiate them into the everyday dimensions of theological therapy. Many of the texts found in centers are secondhand, left by the itinerant pastors who move in and out of different centers across the city. Some come from captives themselves, as people arrive with books they later leave behind. Photocopied articles and missionary fliers also circulate throughout the general population. No two centers in Guatemala City ever share a core set of texts.

However improvisational, these texts play a significant role, as they are the only resources available to help users make sense of their situation. No other outside stimuli is ever allowed, including newspapers and televisions. Although never intended for their ultimate destination, these materials follow a long tradition of popular Christian writing by prompting the reader to "know thyself"—that is, to know one's own appetites, desires, and sins. They advocate a certain level of introspection. But in the context of these centers, Pedro's especially, these books take on a predatory quality, aiming to turn each captive in on himself.

Santiago entered the general population with a copy of Héctor Alvarado's *Escape for Your Life*, a self-published moral manual.[25] Alvarado is a Guatemalan pastor of modest success, with a reach that extends into southern

Mexico. The fifty-six men inside Pedro's center, however, paid little notice to his reputation. Instead, what grabbed their attention was Alvarado's dictum, the one that drives his book. He writes, in the introduction, that "man is the sum total of all his decisions. You are who you choose to be."

The message echoed a familiar Christian attitude toward positive thinking, which places responsibility for living a Christian life in the hands of the individual. A person's struggle over sin, Alvarado insists, comes down to individual decisions propelled by rational choice. This bootstrapping kind of morality asks the Christian to ensure that his or her "inner speech" is positive, to journal for hours over the decisions that he or she makes every day, and to review the actions that he or she takes every six hours. It's a hypervigilant, nearly compulsive ethics of living.[26]

In Alvarado's formulation, the sinner is effectively pitted against himself. "You have an enemy to overcome," he writes, "and that enemy is you." His vision of the Christian condition divides every human into two halves. The human, he writes, has been "created as a duality, with good and bad residing in each of us. Our task consists of controlling, with the help of God, the bad and developing the good that flows not only for our benefit but for the benefit of others." Setting the Christian against himself, *Escape for Your Life* frames the intimate relationship of self to self as a prolonged chase scene, with the appropriate images.

The cover of the book depicts a scared young schoolgirl hiding behind a tree. At the top, the title of the book, "Escape For Your Life," is written in flames. In the introduction, Alvarado lays out his ethics of intentionality: "if you say 'I am just like this,' what you are really saying is that 'I have chosen to be like this.' Instead of saying 'I have always been like this,' you should say 'I have always chosen to be like this.'" He then adds, "The intention here is to change the way you live your life, the way you think, and, by consequence, the way you act." To escape a life of sin, the Christian must escape himself—because the enemy that hunts the Christian, that puts him on the run, is the Christian himself. Conversely, the Christian must also hunt the part of himself that is evil. Works like Alvarado's shift the site of the hunt from the streets to the soul.

Weeks into his captivity, Santiago gradually began to approach the book with less cynicism. At first, he barely entertained it, often doodling on its back cover. "In the end God does not need to listen to anyone," Alvarado writes. "Escape for your life. Nobody can do it for you. You have the ability and the responsibility to do it." Santiago eventually read these

lines carefully, and his captivity suddenly seemed to make sense. "Will you make your own life productive," Alvarado asks, "or will you allow others to make decisions for you?"

Santiago, who once raced for hours around an open-air market to avoid captors, was now being told that he was still on the run. This time, he was learning that it wasn't huntsmen he was running from, or even the neighborhood kids who had shot him, but from himself—and that he had always been running from himself. It was a surprisingly convincing message. Through the conceptual bifurcation of the self, theological therapy proved eerily successful at grafting large-scale battles, such as the war on drugs, onto the soul of a single person. The effect was the awareness that making a change would mean making a break. "I sabotage myself," Santiago admitted late one night. I had stayed at the center well past sunset to hang out with the captives as they prepared the second floor for a night of sleep. "I trick myself into doing shit," he said. "I think I can handle a little weed or a few drinks, and then crack ends up grabbing hold of me for a few days or even a week." While still angry about his captivity, Santiago conceded fault for his drug dependency and had grown frustrated with everything, including himself. He seemed susceptible to theological therapy. "I can't stop smoking. I steal shit so I can smoke more," he confessed. "I make my mom mad. She's so fucking mad at me right now, and I'm the one to blame. No one is making me smoke or steal or whatever. I'm doing this to myself."

Alvarado's style of writing is exceedingly clear, leaving little room for multiple interpretations. Drawing on his own past sins, which range from masturbation to drug use, Alvarado argues that sin hunts the sinner and that it is every Christian's duty to escape its trappings. "In you is the power to avoid and prevent," he writes, "the power to repair, the power to modify and change. But it is not God that is going to change you. It is you who can change with God's help." His robust, deeply heroic staging of sin as a solitary social relationship conveniently aligns with the interests of Pedro's resource-strapped center and that of the anemic postwar state. Without paid staff or even sufficient living conditions, without a welfare system or even a functional formal economy to reenter, the idea of radical change was the best option. It asked little of anyone but the captive himself.

After only a few months of captivity, this call to arms was resonating with Santiago. "I want to get the fuck out of here," he had always said, but suddenly his "here" had shifted from the physical space of the center to a more abstract headspace of failed morality. The space to take flight from

was the space of sin—his soul. "If your life is in danger," Alvarado continues, "then it is time to escape. If you consider your life to be bad, then it is time to escape. If your life is good, then it is time to escape to a better life." Santiago desperately wanted a better life. "In you resides the highest power of the universe," Alvarado insists. "It is the power of choice." Pedro would often double down on Alvarado's message. "They need to make the choice," he would proclaim. "I bring them here against their will, but then they get to choose to leave."

Santiago sometimes struggled to articulate what hunting his sins would look like in practice, but Alvarado's proposal excited him—especially its cry for the individual to be active in changing his life. He began to seek what Alvarado's text advocated. "It is about taking control of my desires," Santiago waxed late at night, with us now pressed up against a wall as other men mopped the floor. "It's about making some decisions about my life and not blaming anyone for anything. It's about telling my desires to stop and making sure I pray every day to keep my desires out of my mind." The only problem was that Alvarado's practical advice on how to do this felt awfully flat. It included "not letting yourself be curious about the world of drugs," not looking "to drugs for a solution to your problem," not becoming "friends with people who encourage you to do drugs," and "maintain[ing] a solid relationship with God." These are his only directives, and they indicate one of theological therapy's most troubling conceits: The power of transformation is placed in the hands of the sinner and yet is also dependent upon the grace of God. This means that users like Santiago have little ability to contribute to their own salvation.

Sitting with Pedro in his front office, I asked him what autopredation looked like in practice. "I don't know," he admitted. He stood up to stretch his legs. "I don't know what it looks like," he repeated, "but I do know what I look for. Because I can't really know what's inside any of these guys. I don't know who is really being sincere and who is just fooling me." He leaned against his desk, adding, "I know when someone has changed. These guys start to look different. They start to clean up and take care of themselves. They stand taller." Even after more than a decade of running a center for drug rehabilitation, Pedro could not describe how to get from the problem to the solution. Perhaps in a scramble to find some coordinates, 'theological therapy' became a kind of shorthand for the mysterious transformation that occurred once God granted a user enough grace to hunt his own sins. "Because when I see this change starting to take place," Pedro reasoned, "then I can really start putting the guy to work."

NINETEEN

Pedro insisted that captives engage with the center. Each captive was expected to perform his sincerity of living a good Christian life by providing for the pastor, which meant going to work. Pedro's entire enterprise ran on conscripted labor. Captives did the cooking and the cleaning as well as provided each other with security and therapy. Those with formal electrical and mechanical training were even responsible for technical duties, like electrical and automotive work.

Placing work at the center of recovery made passivity both a problem and an opportunity. With so many captives coming and going, entering and leaving, Pedro quickly forgot about Santiago, who had a tendency to shrink into a corner with his hood pulled over his eyes. Pedro, in fact, would come to know very little about him over the course of his stay because neither Pedro nor any of his huntsmen ever really had any contact with him. Santiago rarely spoke to anyone, never really engaged with the sermons, and always shied away from contact with Pedro. When pressed by Maria about any improvements by her son, Pedro could not defer to a patient file or a progress chart because neither existed. Instead, he called upon his memory, in which he would always draw a blank. He had nearly no experience with Santiago. These gaps were one reason why he told Maria that her son needed more time—to change his life, he had to begin asserting himself inside the center. "I really don't know half of the guys here," Pedro once told me. "They come and go so quickly, and a lot of them just keep their heads down."

Alejandro was shrewdly aware of how to hustle his way through the center. "The trick with this place is that you need to prove yourself to the pastor," he told me during yet another empty moment inside the center. We lounged on the floor, feeling the cold concrete on our backs, our feet up against a wall. This gave our conversation the air of a therapy session. Alejandro reflected aloud about life in captivity: "The pastor needs to know that you can work and that you can be trusted." His plan for success always included an early start to the day. "When I end up in a center and once I'm sober," he said, "I wake up a little earlier than all the other guys." Alejandro framed the decision as a mix of self-care and strategy, yet it seemed to benefit Pedro the most.

"I like to be busy. I like to work," he said. "So I wake up an hour early, like at 4:00 a.m. I'll do some exercises, like push-ups and running in place, and then shower up before morning prayers." Alejandro always got a fresh

start, both to clear his mind and to send a message to Pedro and the other captives. "There's always a guy who watches the general population during the night," Alejandro said. "He has to stay awake to make sure that no one tries to escape or attack someone while they're sleeping. He keeps a record book of all the stuff that happens." He paused. "Like when someone gets up to go to the bathroom," he explained, "the guy has to write down whether he took a shit or not." I expressed disbelief, and Alejandro called over Bautista to show me the notebook. There, written in pencil, was a long list of names accompanied by the exact time of their bowel movements. "Otherwise, there's really nothing to write down," Bautista said.

Alejandro continued. "And so I get up an hour earlier than everyone else," he said, "I work out and I bathe. This way the guard will always tell the pastor about it. Because it's the only thing that he sees at night. He'll pass along to the pastor that the new guy is a worker. That he's ready to make a change." Alejandro would then set a fairly aggressive pace for the rest of the day. "I never sleep during the day," he said. "You see these guys here. They don't have anything to do except sit through those sermons and just lay around." He sounded frustrated. "Some of them sleep like twenty hours a day. They just float in and out of sleep. I can't do that. If I sleep during the day, then I can't sleep at night. I need to go to bed tired, especially if I'm sleeping on the floor."

The optics of Alejandro being always on the move did help his image, as did his insistence on working. "What am I going to do?" he asked me. "I'm up early and I'm not sleeping during the day. I'll participate in the sermons and pay attention, but what I'm always trying to do is get out of those sermons by working. Even if I'm not part of the team that cleans, I still support them. I also help hand out the food during meals. I'm always showing people that I have skills, that I can be trusted. That I'm a worker." This was all part of a well-considered plan that had been crafted over years of captivity. "Because the sooner I can prove that I can work, the sooner the pastor pulls me from the general population." Alejandro knew that his hustle would never grant him a full release; Pedro seemed committed to having him inside the center indefinitely, but Alejandro was always trying to improve his living conditions inside the center. He never wanted to be on the second floor with the general population, listening to sermons and getting pressed up against a wall while someone mopped the floors. He wanted to end up in the kitchen and, eventually, to be tapped to go out on hunts.[27]

The kitchen was the perfect job for Alejandro. "Breakfast is easy," he said during another conversation. "We don't cook breakfast. We get some

bread or tortillas. That's no problem, but lunch is a lot of work." He started to map out the logistics of cooking for almost sixty men. "The great thing about cooking is that you need to start early in the day," he said, "You need to start chopping vegetables and boiling water around eight in the morning." This schedule allowed Alejandro to leave the general population soon after breakfast, just as morning sermons began. "When I'm in the kitchen, I don't have to worry about any of that testimony bullshit or listen to visiting pastors. I don't have to sit still or thumb through a Bible." As ambitious as Alejandro was with his own study of the Bible, he resented the tediousness of the center's daily schedule. He might not have been able to free himself entirely from the house, but somehow existing outside of the center's routine delivered Alejandro a sense of purpose, of control.

In the kitchen, Alejandro called his own shots, which allowed him a degree of authority over the few captives who helped him. "We cook the same thing every day," he said, "and it's not like I have a lot to work with, but it's a whole lot better than having to be caged up all day." A big part of Alejandro's interest in the kitchen was the space itself. While Pedro's private family kitchen was on the first floor, the second kitchen was on the roof. The former had a propane stove and refrigerator, the latter a wood-burning stove and a big black cauldron. The roof shared roughly the same floorplan as the center's second floor, but instead of more than fifty captives jockeying for position, there were only three or four captives cooking in the open air. "It's so much better in the kitchen," Alejandro said. "You can see the city. You get the fresh breezes, and it's so much quieter." In contrast to the second floor, with its boarded-up windows, "You almost feel free up there," Alejandro once told me.[28]

But the roof came with temptations. There were the cooking utensils, which could be converted into weapons. At first, Alejandro got patted down every time he returned to the second floor. "But at some point," he said, "the pastor and his men stopped searching me for stuff. They started to trust me and every day they searched me a little less." The neighborhood also included a long row of houses, and the roof of Pedro's neighbor's house was only a few meters away. In the past, people had taken running leaps to try to land on the next roof. "But if you fall," Alejandro warned as we looked over the edge, "then you're going to break your legs." It was a three-meter fall to the ground. "You can escape from up here, for sure," Alejandro said. "But it's not easy, and once you're up here, it's actually pretty hard to leave. I can eat as much food as I want. No one is watching me. I have plenty of space and it's peaceful up here. The guys who help me are pretty good. And then there's the market."

Trust accrues with each captive, like a system of credit and debt.[29] Once Alejandro worked his way into the kitchen and had proven that he wanted to neither steal a knife nor jump to another roof, Pedro would let him go to the markets in the morning to beg for food. "I'm the one cooking," he said, "so it's better if I go to the market."

Donning business cards and badges with the center's information on them, Alejandro and three other captives would make a Christian plea to marketgoers in the hopes of winning the center a slightly better lunch.

I asked why he didn't simply run away.

"It would be pretty easy to take off running," he said, "guys do that all the time. But the market is so close to the center that it's usually hard to really escape. The guys just go back to the center, get the truck, and then start tracking you down." Alejandro mapped out the probability of getting away. "It's just hard to gain enough ground on the guys when you're on foot. Maybe you could hop a bus in time, but the pastor will get you. No doubt. He'd find you and then beat the shit out of you."

Alejandro knew the dismal prospects of escape, but that didn't mean he never tried to flee. In one heroic run, Alejandro was in the kitchen when he had a realization. He simply could not spend another night inside, on the floor, next to another user. "Sometimes I get to a point," he said, "that I just can't be inside anymore. Even if I'm in the kitchen and on the roof, I'm still on the floor at night, pressed up against some guy. I'm getting yelled at for having to take a piss in the middle of the night. Sometimes I don't want to be a fucking slave." So he made a move.

Having been inside the center for three months, he took a knife from the kitchen and put it to the throat of a visiting pastor. "I grabbed his arm and pinned it behind his back. He was an old man so it wasn't that hard. And then I put the knife up to his throat. So I'm pulling him into my body, with the knife poking him in the neck." Alejandro walked out the front door, his hostage providing him safe passage through each of the center's locked doors. "It was all pretty smooth, I wasn't working with anyone. I hadn't even really planned it too much. I just snapped. I just needed to get out of the center." Yet those last ten meters to freedom tripped him up. Terrible timing placed a hunting party at the front door just as Alejandro was making his break.

"Tomás and Emilio saw me coming out the front door, and I didn't really see them. Because I had my back to them." The pastor, out on errands, was nowhere to be seen, and so Tomás and Emilio acted fast, tackling Alejandro to the ground and safely separating him from the visiting pastor.

What happened next? I pressed.

"They beat the shit out of me," he said.

Alejandro routinely rose and fell within the ranks of the center, making it to the kitchen and the coveted hunts, but then usually slipping back to the very bottom with an attempted escape.

"When they catch me and bring me back," Alejandro said, "it starts all over again."

This includes the early morning workouts, modeling attentiveness at sermons, and giving personal testimonies.

"I've done this a few times with this pastor," Alejandro said. "I've worked really hard and then fucked up somehow." I asked Pedro why he trusted Alejandro, even when his track record suggested he shouldn't.

"This is the point," he said. "You have to trust that people can change. That they can find their inner strength and make the decision to take charge of their lives." Pedro also seemed at a loss for talent. "Plus," he said, "I know Alejandro. I know how hard he can work and I've started to know when he's about to screw up. I can start to see some of the signs."

I asked Pedro to give me examples.

"He'll start talking less," Pedro said, "he'll start thinking more, being really quiet. Like he's planning something."

Couldn't he just be in prayer? I asked.

"No," Pedro said from experience, "prayer looks different than this. Prayer is peaceful. This is a deceptive look. It's a scared look. When Alejandro is not at peace, I know that he's starting to make plans to escape." Pedro could read Alejandro so well that he would reduce his privileges once he suspected something. He would keep Alejandro out of the kitchen, bar him from going to the market, and never let him out on a hunt. Rescinding these privileges forced Alejandro to work harder to prove himself again.

It was a delicate game; Pedro needed to tease Alejandro with enough freedom to make him work, but not give him so much that it would invite an escape. "The problem is that I need Alejandro," the pastor admitted. "I need him to keep this center running."

By the time Alejandro handed me his letter, he had tested the pastor's patience one too many times. Pedro was suspicious. Alejandro had successfully been working in the kitchen and visiting the markets every day. He had also been hunting with the rest of the crew most nights. All seemed to be going well, but Alejandro had his eye on leaving and had let this slip to Bautista.

"He asked me about a friend of mine that works in the market," Bautista later told me, "and whether he could get him a job unloading trucks." Bautista shook his head, adding: "I knew that he was up to something."

"Yeah," Alejandro admitted to me, "I was making plans. I was trying to figure out what I would do once I got out. Because I don't have family here. I don't have anyone to help me out once I leave. So I want to make sure that I have some work." He added, "I need Q30 [$5 USD] to pay for a hotel and then Q15 [$2.50 USD] to feed myself. I can make Q50 [$8 USD] the first day that I'm out of this center, but I need a plan. I need to know that I can start working immediately or I'm going to be back on the streets." Bautista apparently told the pastor about Alejandro's query, and Pedro read it as part of some larger plan. Because he relied so much on Alejandro, he immediately pulled Alejandro from the kitchen.

"That was fucked up," Alejandro said, "because then I had to listen to all those testimonies and sermons and sit with all those people." Pedro then stopped letting Alejandro go to the market. "So I lost any chance of getting a job," Alejandro reasoned. He was even replaced on nightly hunts. "The new guy is not as good as me," he insisted. "The pastor will figure that out." But Pedro seemed steadfast in keeping Alejandro inside his center, hoping he would commit himself anew to rising through the ranks: from the kitchen to the market to the hunting fields.

"He's not leaving this place," Pedro told me. "Alejandro is here, and he's going to stay here."

It seemed that Pedro had pushed Alejandro a little too hard this time. Every previous effort at escape had been a duel between Alejandro and Pedro, a private affair. Alejandro's letter, on the other hand, now expanded the frame to include everyone inside the center as well as me and the police. It was a bold and desperate attempt at escape that put multiple people at risk.

TWENTY

"I'm telling you," Alejandro said, "I want to get out of here. I don't care anymore. The pastor can't keep me locked up here. It's not right. It's not legal. And it's not Christian. Take this letter and go to the police. They'll come here and let us all go."

Having lived most of his life in the United States, Alejandro had few relatives in Central America. The only two people that he ever spoke about were his aunt in Guatemala City and his ex-wife in the United States. His aunt proved to be completely unresponsive. She often refused to answer his phone calls and they would erupt into arguments when she did. She lived in a respectable, middle-class community on the other side of the city and wanted nothing to do with her nephew. I first approached her with Alejandro's letter, but she refused to get involved. She insisted this was a matter between Alejandro and the pastor.

Alejandro also spoke of a close friend named Manuel, whom he called his cousin. I had met Manuel inside a factory-turned-rehab five years earlier, where a different pastor was holding him and Alejandro against their will for alcohol and cocaine use. The two sobered up together and worked their way out—by getting up early, never sleeping during the day, and eventually getting the chance to collect food from markets, which was when they escaped.

"Once we were out the door," Manuel remembered, "we just kept walking away." While Manuel got back to work, kept his drinking under control, and moved into a house with his wife and child, Alejandro could not do the same. He went back to the streets, worked day jobs in the market, and bounced between hotel rooms.

The realities of life inside the center made it nearly impossible for Alejandro to sustain lasting relationships. Drugs and alcohol did not help, and the practicalities of constantly entering and exiting centers caught up to him as well. Alejandro would disappear for months on end, only to reappear after escaping yet again. Though gregarious and well liked, his acquaintances rarely became trusted friends, largely because his presence never proved to be permanent. He was a good person to drink or smoke with, but Alejandro had trouble establishing intimacy. He did not know anyone well enough to stay with them while he got back on his feet.[30]

Alejandro's hunting had also made him enemies, which turned city streets into a minefield. Although some could forgive the fact that he had tied them up and dragged them to the center, others could not. "I get it," Alejandro said. "I'm cool with it because I do it all the time. The guys who hunted me were just doing their job. So I don't hold a grudge, but some guys do. They really don't like me."

Once, in a different center across town, I met someone whom Alejandro had hunted. "Fuck that guy," he said. "He didn't have to be so rough with me. He didn't have to punch me or tie me up. I would've gone to the center

without all of that shit." A good ten years older than Alejandro, this captive remembered him with real anger. "Tell that motherfucker that I'm looking for him," he said. "Tell that fucker that I'm going to kick his ass."

In the end, this confluence of pressures and neglect made Alejandro absolutely alone in Guatemala. He was never lonely, per se, but he was most certainly alone. Pedro knew this and exploited it. He was aware that Alejandro needed him as much as he needed Alejandro, and the pastor often acted as if he had the upper hand, which he usually did.[31]

"If he leaves," Pedro said, "he'll be back here in a week. He can't last out on the streets for more than a week without crawling back here."

A few days after he handed me the letter, I asked Alejandro what he would do if he left the center.

"I told you," he said, "I have a plan." He explained it to me again: "I know a guy at the market, and he'll let me work for him. I'll unload trucks for him and that will give me enough money to find a place to sleep. That will keep me off the streets until I can find some better work, like with a construction crew or something. I'll also need to get my papers." Alejandro had lost his government-issued identification card when the pastor last picked him up. "The papers will let me apply for a [formal] job," he said, "so I don't have to work in the markets or do construction." Alejandro imagined himself waiting tables, something with a steady paycheck and regular hours. "Then I'll be able to afford an apartment," he said. "I can buy a stove and maybe get some furniture."

The plan seemed completely reasonable to me. Given Alejandro's work ethic inside the center, with his early morning workouts and ever-mounting levels of responsibilities, his strategy seemed doable, perhaps even modest. "And my ex-wife in the States," he added. "She'll send me a few hundred dollars to get me started. She's done it before."

I pointed out that she rarely answered his phone calls and instructed me—the last time I contacted her on his behalf—to leave her out of his life.

"She's upset," he said. "But when she knows that I'm on the streets, she'll come through."

In light of the letter and the hundreds of conversations Alejandro and I had had over the previous five years, the possible success of this plan put me in an awkward position. For years, I had observed family members and pastors gauge a captive's sincerity while the person strived to demonstrate to both parties that he had changed. Sincerity always existed for me as an object of study, something I observed others performing and interpreting. As an anthropologist, the fact that sincerity was the means by which so