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]