

## THANK YOU

I thank my family. First of all, to my daughters Pierrette, Shuggey and Idalia, who were my first critics of the novel and who always encouraged me to move forward with my dream. Also, to my beloved wife, Luz Idalia, who, from the birth of the idea supported me unconditionally in the execution of my goal and whose desire was to see me realized as a writer, since she already knew the passion for writing that burns in my being.

I do not wish to leave out of this note those people who introduced me to the world of literature during my school years. To my mother Silvia, whose constant example formed me in the taste and custom of the good habit of reading. On the other hand, and in a mandatory way, in the literature class of my beloved school, where the analysis of each work led us to be part of the story and to live each word, each paragraph and each chapter as characters of the same, this and more taught us the world of literature; I refer to my friend, generations professor Santiago Toffé. Thank you, chicken! With love and respect for always.

## PROLOGUE

You, you are here presented a work narrated in the first person, with the necessary and ample rawness to be able to understand the internal voice of the main character, by whom you will be able to experience diverse emotions as your reading progresses, and of whom you will be a witness. All this will allow you to develop your own criteria, not to judge, but to share with others, because your collective experience will be multiplied.

The use of colloquial, rude and regional language is carefully tailored. A perfected combination to immerse you in murky waters and then come out with a new lesson learned. The need to attach a vocabulary at the end of the work which includes the words that you very possibly do not know has been considered.

If we have to classify the work, it should be noted that it brings together the peculiarities of a short novel, easy to digest and with a content that will contribute something positive to your cognitive and social development.

Taking into consideration the environment of the work, it will be prudent and just to understand that, in every family there is a victim or a victimizer, any of the roles could be you. No one is exempt, no one should throw the first stone, because the roulette wheel spins and spins endlessly.

Green Light, Paisa! is oriented to unveil a socio-cultural reality of which we are all part, but rarely address for fear of being punish as antisocial -or worse- a political enemy. It is an issue that took shape and freely strengthened after the year 2014.

This story, is not intended to be accusatory, much less to implicate anyone, except effect you and your actions after reading.

Among the recurring themes offered by this work are: crime, corruption, prejudice, forgiveness and change. A perhaps morbid cocktail, similar to what we read daily in the local newspapers, only, without sensationalism or sensationalism, much less polarizing.

As one of the pillar themes, prejudice is a natural act of the human being, necessary to make decisions, to choose. We cannot see through the window with the eyes of others, because we live in different contexts. The book given one the opportunity to get to know the lives of several characters whose reality can be emotionally charged.

Two other very distinctive elements of this story are forgiveness and change. As human beings, it is difficult for us to grant forgiveness and sometimes we are filled with pride at the possibility of asking for it. Now, imagine the people who are behind bars paying their sentence, their progress is more difficult than those of us on the other side. The need for something more sublime then arises, the change, which does not usually give confidence to anyone.

As readers, we will have our position in the contextual issue of this work. It will be fair to warn that, in order to elucidate the book's purpose we proceed voluntarily, without expectation and without predisposition of its content.

What you are about to read is not just another story of convicted citizens, much less will you find a Protestant argument. What you will perceive broadly is the convergence of two worlds: that of those behind bars and those outside. Two parallel human worlds, where we all have the same opportunity to be free, forever, if that is our heart's desire.

Jairo Mejía Rodríguez  
Editorial Director

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¡GREEN LIGHT, PAISA!  
\*\*\* SIGFRIDO ZÚNIGA \*\*\*

Chapter 1  
HE WHO IS BORN FOR THE TAMALE

It'd be a morning like any other in my land. Spring time, rainy afternoons accompanied by a warm but brilliant sun. One of those days when the body asks for nothing more than a swim in the river, and the usual burrita, typical of my housemate, Zoilita, and for dessert, a bag full of Yuscarán mangoes, well formed and squeezed to the very peel. But destiny had a twist in store for me, one of those that only adroit cats can dodge, juggling strangely, in such a way that they always land on their four feet. As you will soon realize, the sinus would be my case.

I remember very well that the night before we had arranged with my aunt Tancho to go with her the next morning to buy veal.

«At about 6:30 we'll see each other,» she told me as she said goodbye.

<Good!> as I went by her house.

I knew the veal, I had already seen it in Don Chema's ranch. The veal was very nice, it was just a matter of getting a good price and we had it made. That profit would give me enough to buy the refrigerator I had wanted so much for my Zoilita, or at least help me with the store to get some low quotas.

When I got to the inn, I opened the gate and shouted, <Here I am, Auntie!>

I didn't want to go in and miss the story of my cousin Javier, who was at the entrance, about his infatuation with Julita, who was from back home and had just arrived in the capital to look for a job as a maid. Javier said he already meet her on the way. The truth is that I never knew how that turned out.

My aunt soon came out and we started walking towards the bus stop that would take us close to Don Chema's property. The longest we would have to walk was about two blocks.

On the way, my aunt told me that Don Chema was very astute with the business, that he knew everything and that he would not let the beef sell at a very high price. We agreed that she would make the deal and that I would stay out of the way, only speaking when she asked me about the price. And so it was.

When we arrived at Don Chema's, he welcomed us with a smile, a cup of coffee and a couple of donuts.

«They are from Danlí,» he told us.

Then he led us to the small ranch and showed us the veal he wanted to sell.

«What do you think?»

«It's beautiful,» answered my aunt. «That's why I had my eye on it. How much are you going to let me have it for, Chema?»

Without more, neither for what, Don Chema grabbed his chin.

«For you to take it right now! Give me seven and that's it.»

«I'll give you three! And we don't talk more.»

«No, man! You'd better tell me daddy, and I'll give it to you as a present,» he replied mockingly. «You're taking a piece of veal, the least it weighs is about 500 pounds. Put the pen to it.»

That's when I went into action. My aunt stared at me.

«What do you say, child? How do you see this? Can we learn something from your big ear?»

<I think so. Well... the price Don Chema is asking is very high and the price you want to pay him is very low. The value of this heifer is really five thousand pesos. It is a good payment and can yield us something, no more and no less.>

«What do you say, Chema, shall we leave it at five as the nephew says?»

«So then, it's late! Throw me that money, I'm going to the bank to pay the loan.»

That's how we did business that day, everything was going smoothly, I could not imagine the turn my life would take hours later.

I went back to the weigh chamber for the rest of the day. Some friends arrived and invited me to party after work, I told them that I would be at the court of the colony at 5:00 p.m., that I was committed to that schedule. At 4:30 I closed and went home to change for the filly. We played betting and it wasn't so bad at the end of the night. I made 50 pesos easy.

When I got to the front door, I ran into my younger brother.

«What happened?» He asked me, «Will you have a chance for a few drinks?»

<I can't! You already know that they're waiting for me at the court.>

<Look, I really need to talk to you. I'm desperate, I've got enough problems. I don't know what to do.> I looked deeply into his eyes. I could feel that what he was telling me was true, I could not refuse to talk to him and give him some advice. I told myself that the filly could wait.

<All right! But close by. Just one and we'll go.>

«All right. Just one.»

Near the house was Doña Elsa's tobacconist shop, better known as "Aunt Elsa" in the underworld. It was so close, almost two houses away from mine, but when we got there it was already closing, He was on my way out to run an errand.

<I can't stay today, boys. I have to run an errand. Sorry!>

<Well, let's go to Tino's. There's a chute there also,> I said to my brother.

We took the road to Tino's, I said to my brother. <Just thinking about the grilled chops makes my mouth water.> I've always have my beers with a mouthful of chops. And Tino's were famous in the area. We arrived and sat down. Soon, we were served by Tino.

«What do you guys want?»

<Bring us a couple of ice-cold beers and the usual chops. You know how we like it.>

«Very well! I'll be right with you.»

My brother started venting. I felt he really needed me. The more he talked, the more I felt the urgency to help him, and one by one the beers began to parade. I really don't know how many we had that evening. Soon, we were hugging and crying our sorrows together. Melancholy invaded our being. In truth, I never expected that he would find himself in such a terrible situation.

«It's closing time boys!» Tino told us. «It's already late.»

My brother could not stand up, he had suffered a motorcycle accident that had left him almost paraplegic. He was walking with difficulty in good condition, thus walking inebriated was a difficult feat to achieve, so I put him on my shoulder.

<Hang in there,> I said. <Hold on to me and let's walk!> Our steps were totally zigzag. We were both influenced by the alcohol, more him than me. I put him on my back and we started walking. We passed by the grocery store near the house.

«Let's have the last one!»

<No man, you're crazy! You can't even walk,> I told him.

«Please, brother! Understand me, I don't want to be alone.» We drank two more. Those made me even more dizzy. We kept talking for about two more hours. I looked at the clock and it was already past eleven o'clock at night.

<Let's go! Let's go NOW, OK?!>

I left him lying down at his house and continued on my way home. I had been out all day and arriving in this condition, I knew I would have problems with my wife, with my Zoilita. I arrived home safely. But there were consequences.

«You've just bee with the other one! You're a pig. I don't know how I put up with you. You don't even respect me anymore, and by the way, you coming here is a joke.»

<Calm down, pillow! I've been with my brother, at Tino's. If you want, ask him. That's where I'm coming from.>

«I don't believe you. You're lying, you're full of lies. You make them up out of thin air. I don't believe you anymore, I'm fed up!»

<Well. -You don't believe me? I'm going to sleep at Pedro's.>

That was the last thing I told her and I started my long walk to the Villadela neighborhood.

I didn't get very far. As I was going over the "Las Brisas" bridge, my eyes began to close. I was so sleepy that I could not continue. I could not control my eyelids, they were on automatic. I stopped to wait for a cab, but at that hour it was difficult. My eyes were closing, I couldn't stay alert. I decided to lie down on the grass for a while, to sober up. "About two hours," I said to myself, but I really don't know how much time passed. The grass felt so good, I went to sleep instantly. Big mistake! When I woke up, some men were beating me.

«He's the one, he's the one!» I heard them say. I didn't know what was happening, why I was being beaten or who these men were.

<What's wrong? What's wrong?> I mumbled.

«He's the one, he's the one! They are killing us and we don't do anything,» said one of them.

«Let's kill them too.»

I didn't know what they were talking about! They pulled me by my feet to the pavement. There, I realized they were policemen. They started to beat me amongst all of them. I didn't know why they were doing it.

«Let's kill him, let's kill him! You killed the chief of the patrol. Let's kill him!»

<I don't know anything! You're supposed to be investigators, investigate! If you think I am guilty, then you have to take me in and investigate first.>

Then one of them approached the patrol leader.

«What do we do? Do we kill him?» The chief looked out into the middle of the street.

«We can't here. The trees have ears and eyes.»

At that moment I thought, <I am not afraid of being killed, but my children, what will they think? That it was true what the police said about me ... that the cops killed a common criminal? They are going to say many things about me that are not true.> I looked up to heaven and asked God to help me, to let the truth be known, He knew that I had not done what they were accusing me of. Everything was a lie. Then another patrol car passed by and stopped to talk.

I grasped for air. The most likely thing was that they were going to apply the escape law against me, the other patrol car went about 150 meters and stopped, the trap was set. I had already seen on TV how they do this. I said to myself, <I am not going to escape.> They put two policemen in front of me and two behind me, but about half a block away from each other, and I was not handcuffed. Everything indicated that this was their plan. I started walking alone. A short distance away, I realized that the policemen from the other patrol car were crouched on the ground, with their rifles ready, intending to pursue and shoot me. So, I decided to get into a patrol car to wait for the policemen to arrive. I stayed there until the first one appeared, «Why did you kill him?»

I was intimidated and exalted, <I don't know what you're talking about. I didn't do anything.> This enraged him. He demanded that I lie down in the patrol car, put his boot in my face and began to take out everything I was carrying.

«There you are, you dog! Get down!»

I stayed there. Then the car began to advance, two policemen sat down on the edge of the car. I said to myself, <If I'm going down, let's fight. I'm going to throw myself at the two policemen and run away.> But then I thought, <I didn't do anything, God willing ...> I stayed still. I could only hear my words echoing in my mind, <God forbid,> I thought. They were going to kill me in the mountains, the preferred place for the hit men to take their victims, but no, I saw that they took the other path and I felt relieved.

Arriving at the Police Station, the woman who was in charge gave them a scolding in front of me.

«I have already told you not to go around bringing people in without proof. It's always the same crap with you.» She tried to explain to them who I was, that they were our clients at work, that I wasn't a delinquent.

«Wash there! Take off that blood!» they said.

I went to wash, but my shirt remained stained. Besides, my wounds were still dripping from the hard beating they had given me. <Can you leave me alone, in a cellblock?> I asked.

«All right! Let him alone for the time being. If more keep coming, then no way.»

I made this request because I had already heard about the famous snake (cellblock chief). As I entered, the older ones were stripping someone of the little that was left after the police search. He was practically naked and I didn't want that to happen to me. By that time, my drunkenness had completely subsided. I put myself in the corner of the cell, I didn't want to talk to anyone, I could only think about how I had fallen into this, I couldn't understand. Every now and then a policeman came to spy on me.

«Aha! So this is the one who's been killing our comrades.» Come here, you! I want to get a good look at you. Come closer! It was like that all night long. I didn't go out the door, and one of those times the police officer asked me to open the door of the cell. He came up to my face and aggressively threatened me loudly. I stared at him.

<I said, "Don't hit me again!>

He left without saying a word. He didn't come back in. I don't know what his face looked like when I told him.

As the night went by, they began to put more people in the cell. Some already experienced in these matters, the cellblock chief wanted to strip everyone of their belongings. Since I had arrived first, I told them not to do this, and since they did not know why I was there, they respected my demands and left the arrivals alone.

When they realized that in the periphery they had captured the real murderer of the police chief, they began to wonder what to do.

«It will be OK, Just wait!» said one officer to another.

He went to fetch a boy I had seen when I arrived. He was in the doorway with a leg shooting. They took him to where I was in the cellblock.

«Do you know this one?» they asked him.

«No, I don't know him!»

«And you, do you know this one?» they asked me.

<No! I don't know who it is.>

Now, the point was that they wanted to link me to this guy who was wounded, to keep me locked up. They wanted to cover up the mistake they had made with me since human rights lawsuits were the order of the day, I guess they were worried about that. Due to investigations that took too long, one suffered almost the same as if they had actually committed the crime.

The next day, I was taken to court, then to the Police Investigation Department. I hadn't eaten a bite in 24 hours, I felt like I was going to faint. We were tied hand and foot, as if we were the most dangerous criminals, yet nothing had been proven. They asked me the same questions repeatedly, I repeated again and again what had happened, but no one believed me. I was taken along with other inmates. Everyone asked me questions and I explained everything. All agree that the same thing always happens, they take innocent people in achieve distraction and protect their jobs.

They offered me food, but I had lost my appetite.

I think I was rather stuffed. Someone gave me a liquid that claimed to be uric acid, which was good for the stomach. I took it to see if it would help me at all.

The next day, we were again transferred to the courthouse. The boy with the leg wound who they wanted to link to me was already there. They asked me to sign a blank piece of paper. I told them no.

«It's for your lawyer,» the policeman told me. «If it's not this lawyer, then you're not going to get one.»

They haven't even let me see my family, so how am I going to believe they want to give me a lawyer. They kept me incommunicado and that is not allowed. By then, my family already knew where I was, they had investigated on their own. They brought me food and clean clothes, I shared my food with the other inmates in the cellblock. When I left there was my wife at the entrance. When she saw me, she stood up.

«Don't worry, love. This will pass»

The tears in her eyes broke me and I also shed mine.

«Don't worry, this will pass, without proof they can't do anything.»

When I returned to the cellblock, the boy with the wounded leg approached me.

«What did you say about me?»

What am I going to say? I don't even know him. I will always tell the truth. <I've never seen you before.>

«Alright!»

I didn't know who he really was, but as time went by I realized how dangerous this guy was and the organization he represented.

On the third day, I was transferred to the Central Penitentiary, the one in "La Bolsa" neighborhood. I began to meet people from the underworld. Then I saw that there were people from all social strata; including doctors, graduates, along with others. The rich paid for doing nothing, they did everything with money, they got whatever they could at the expense of those who had nothing or had little. I found new friends there, many of them with command and respect in the underworld, and as friends, they were loyal and sincere.

I remember the first time I heard the expression "General of generals".

<What is that? Some military chief who commands in this penal center?>

«No. He is nothing more or less than the power behind the shadow in the world of the inmates.»

I soon realized that in here, the prisoner is the one in charge, he has his own rules and a well-defined code of honor. The most impressive thing is that it is respected. If you stole outside, that's fine. But in there, you are not going to steal, because it will cost you your life. Before you set foot in the Central Penitentiary, the inmates knew who you were, what you had done and everything else. One entered to be respected or respect. If you had committed homicide, they respected you, because you were supposedly capable of anything. I entered with the nickname of the one who killed the chief of police. That was major respect. Although I always denied it, nobody believed me. They knew everything in the press, especially the tabloids, which delivered the 'news' that sold the most but not necessarily true. That's how they treated you, according to what the newspaper said. How lucky I was!

I made friends with great people, people who commanded respect. There are friends of violence and friends of friendship. The friends of violence already knew each other from the outside; when it was time to do something, then a friend did it, if they didn't do it, they didn't correspond, and they became toads; toads are all those who betray even their friends, inside is to see, hear and keep quiet. We are only a living file, without the right to murmur, without the right to give an opinion, just a number among many others, and all in the same conditions. I wanted to cry, my soul was bleeding.

## Chapter 2

### THANK YOU FATHER!

It was my first night 'fishing', one I would never forget. I didn't know what might happen. I had heard so many cellblock stories that I didn't know what to expect. I thought I would go crazy in that environment. I didn't sleep a wink all night, any noise made me alert, every shadow came to life, I felt abandoned, exposed and hopeless, the world was my enemy, all I could think about was how I was going to get even. From now on, everything I did would lead me to a situation between life and death.

<Watch out!- That would be the number one rule in my life from now on, I had to play my cards just right. The cellblock would be my home for I don't know how long. As much as I felt like crying, I could not show any weakness, not here, not at this moment in my life.

The next day I was still in the same mood, I was fighting with the world and you don't forget that overnight. We were up early, at five o'clock we had to be on our feet, lined up for the morning roll call, each cellblock manager had to give an account of us. There the day began, with nothing to do and a lot to reflect on.

I decided to start making my first chess moves, I had to look for alliances with the powerful. At least that's what done in the movies, but I had no idea how. I felt like a caged beast. It is sad to lose one's freedom. But what made me most desperate was that my word was not worth a damn — nothing. Even though I spoke the truth, nobody believed me. [For some, we all pay.]

My wife, when she came to visit me, brought endless problems. The worst thing was that I could do nothing about it. My own family was taking advantage of my wife and children. The feeling of empty incapacity was indescribable. Vulnerability and helplessness overwhelmed me, aching inside and unable to do anything about it. Suddenly, a character passed in front of our cell.

<Who is that?>

«Who?» a cellmate responded.

<That guy with the food, over there.>

«Ah! They call him Cadera-de-vaca (Cow's hip). You've already figured out why,» he retorted with a malicious smile.

<Where are the guards taking him?>

«I think he's going to the punishment cell.»

As if it wasn't enough to be locked up in that jungle, for them to punish him yet more, putting him I don't know where.

<What is it like there?> I asked curiously.

«I don't know. You'll have to ask the coordinator about that. I've never been there, the only thing I know is that whoever goes in there walks out like a really fat pig. They say that there are two unlovable thugs there, who don't bother with making threats. Oops! They enjoy the protection of someone big within the penitentiary. So, they do what they want, and nobody tells them anything. But I don't think they are going to do any harm to Cadera-de-vaca because he is well known here and has powerful friends. They say that the "General of generals" thinks a lot of him.»

It seemed like he was lying. <How can that be?> I asked him slowly.

«Yeah! Those two guys over there, they like to rape men. No one has dared to kill them for fear of reprisal, because as I told you, they are well connected to someone big, someone who has a lot of power in the prisons,» he kept silent for a moment. «What's worse, papi, is that they never go out of there. It's like their bunker.»

<Why is that?>

«Why?- he laughed, -Do you want to give them a visit?» He continued with a loud laugh, «If you want, I'll introduce you to them. One of them is "Paceño" and the other is called "Yamaranguila". They are a violent people, it is better to stay away from them.»

Over time, I became aware of their modus operandi.

When they knew that someone new was going into the punishment cell, that night they would keep an eye on him between the two of them. They'd cover his mouth and threaten them with

knives and say if they make noise or resist, then they're already a sack of potatoes. They'd take a pita and tie the hands and feet, so that both could abuse them until they were satiated animals. Any man who entered the punishment cell went through this ordeal, and came out mentally disturbed, with psychological and physical damage, because these brutes were monstrously endowed for deeply damaging their victims.

This cell, had become a world of homosexuality. The ravaged men felt confused, some even thought that what had transpired was their own fault, because they were unaware of the mental problem these two perverts suffered from. Worse still, when the other inmates learned that someone had been sent there, they would mock them in front of everyone else. They would start calling out the names of the two maniacs for them to hear and thus shatter their constitution, for their honor was in shatters. It was psychological warfare.

So it was with Cadera-de-vaca. That same night he was attacked by Yamaranguila and Paceño. The rape was so violent that the next morning, as soon as the sun came up, 'Cadera de vaca' was screaming from his cell for someone to please help him. His desperate cries could be heard in almost every barracks on that side. His cries were of pain and desperation.

«Guards, guards! Get me out of here! I'm badly wounded. Help me, please! Help me!» A succession of frightening pictures flashed through my mind. He must have been stabbed, his guts must have spilled out. <What could have happened?> I wondered.

«Poor Cadera-de-vaca,» they all said. Who knows what those perverts did to him. The whole prison was enraged. They could no longer let this situation go on without doing something. Any one of us could be next and it had to stop, no matter who was protecting them. Something had to be done, soon. 'Cadera de vaca' couldn't walk. Guards passed in front of our cellblock with infirmary stretcher in hand. Soon we saw with our own eyes the outrage, the savagery that these furious fiends had committed against 'Cadera de vaca'. He could not lie on his back. They brought him face down on the stretcher and completely naked. The most shocking thing was to see how this man -although a criminal- had suffered the worst humiliation from these horrid hellcats. Groaning in pain as he passed in front of us, his eyes were fixed on me, I could see the suffering alive in his gaze. Most terrible, was the shame reflected in his innermost being, I could almost feel in my flesh his nightmare - savagery of the thickest caliber.

«We have to do something! We have to do something,» 'Mano Cuica' said. «This must not stand!»

Mano Cuica (Crippled hand) was there because he was a pickpocket specialist. They didn't call him that because he had a crippled hand, but because, when he put his hand in the victim's pockets, he placed it in such a way that it looked crippled. His touch was almost imperceptible, because in there he practiced with his cronies to perfect his art. «Enter and leave like the wind» he'd say. It turned out that Mano Cuica was a close friend of Cadera-de-vaca. They knew each other from the outside. As I understood, they trusted each other and sort of teamed up for certain jobs. I wondered to myself what these assignments might be. But I remembered that you didn't ask questions here, just listened to what they have to say and that's it.

«I am going to see the "General of generals",» he said aloud. His intention was to make the man of power in the shadows, the "General of generals", aware of what had happened. He himself could not make any request, because Cadera-de-vaca was still alive. If he had died, the story would be different, he could seek justice. But being alive, only Cadera-de-vaca could ask for a reckoning. We spent the whole day in expectation of whether he was going to live or die. We wondered what would happen to him next, if he would be taken to an outside hospital or if he would be caged here.

Our concerns were soon dispelled. Around six o'clock in the evening, 'Cadera de vaca' returned to the cellblock walking slowly with panda like legs. His face still reflected his shame and pain. He went in to lay down. Everything was in slow motion. Sideways, he went into his cell. Those of us who approached him did not say a word, just a touch on his back was enough to let him know that we supported him, that we were with him. He knew what we wanted to convey. Sometimes words are superfluous, especially when they are spoken without feeling. Silence filled the cellblock, an air of rage, impotence and revenge hung in the air.

Some three hours later at nine o'clock, the guards arrived. Everything was silent. It seemed that 'Cadera de vaca' had already made plans with the guards, so that they would take him out at that hour in order to visit the "General of Generals". Only those of us who shared the cellblock with him would be aware of this.

Besides, he knew we were on his side. «This ends today!» he said quietly before leaving. Then he left. Hours later, when he returned, he proceeded to tell us what had happened, detail by detail.

«I went to the "General of Generals", knelt down before him and said, 'My father, are you going to let them do this to me? You are with the humble, with those who daily lives cost them dearly. The others are protected by the power of money. Outside they take everything from us, but here, at least behind these walls, we are all equal.' The "General of generals" answered, 'Don't worry Cadera-de-vaca, this is the last thing these sick people do. Whether they link me or not link me to what is going to happen, this just ends here. I'm stopping in thirty.'

'Thank you, my Father. I leave quietly in calm.' Immediately, the "General of generals" sent for his people. When they were all assembled, he told them, 'Brothers, we have a mission. This is for yesterday.'»

Two hours after he told us what had happened, on the other side, where the punishment cell was, the screams of death began to be heard. Nobody, to this day, knows how they got the keys to the doors that led to the punishment cell. The detail is that they arrived that same night to claim revenge.

They called it, «settling the score.» They arrived with the mission of making mincemeat of the two sick creatures, especially Yamaranguila, because he used the same thinking to commit his rapes. «Here, your sister is not going to help you!» they told him. «When you are seen again, it will be in a garbage bag filled with all your little pieces.» What was happening no one was stopping. Prison is faster than the internet when it comes to information.

Paceño had to die too, because he had witnessed all the things that Yamaranguila had done and participated in many of them, thinking that they would remain unpunished forever, Paceño found the right place to unload his madness, it was certain that he had mental problems, after slicing Yamaranguila to pieces, the work continued with Paceño. «Because you have participated together with Yamaranguila and have a very loose of the tongue, payment is now due.» They proceeded to chop him up into small pieces and put him in a big black garbage bag. When the shouting died down, Cadera-de-vaca pronounced «Today, yes ... Today, yes! justice has been served. Thank you Father!»

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Months later, when I became friends with one of the prison forts, his trust became such that we ate off the same plate. One day he confessed something to me.

«I don't know,» he told me. «That night when we stung the sick in the punishment cell, it had been a long time since I had killed. When I pierced him with my knife, I felt euphoric, as if I needed to see the red run. The smell of blood gave me strange feelings, so much so that when we finished, I licked my bloody knife and it felt delicious. It was a weird feeling, I had never felt it before. Besides, those two had it coming. The reckoning was a win-win for all. Me, I would have tortured them for a couple of days, before stinging them.»

I realized that my friend was a real psychopath. It seemed unbelievable to me that he was like that, because as a friend he was amazing. He was kind, good-humored and very helpful. I don't know at what point in his life he lost his way, where he had thrown away the compass between good and bad, it seemed incredible to me to reconcile the friendly man with the soulless hitman, since, for him, killing a person was nothing, just a job, a business. In his town, San Fermin, criminality was a way of life, nobody worked, one got a lot of money with practically no effort.

What I can say is that when these guys are friends, they are real friends, true amigos. When something was going to happen in the Central Penitentiary, what they called a "hit", they would warn me not to go near a certain area at a certain time because there was going to be a "hit" and it was better that nothing happened to me and that I should avoid getting involved in anything. They

trusted me and knew that I would never tell on anyone. Besides, I knew what could happen to me, since my friend was related to the "General of Generals", who I realized later had been in the military. In fact, all of them, the powerful ones, had been trained with army officers. All of them had been in the military, those without military training were rare.

The structure used in the prison is similar to that of the military, there is a general coordinator, who is above all the coordinators, who, in turn, have their sub-coordinators or second coordinators. These people are the ones who decide what tasks will be carried out during the day; if the Central Penitentiary is to be swept, everyone sweeps; if it is to be painted, it is painted. Unless a "poster" is going to be made, the order is given by the general coordinator, but if it is something more delicate, then the "General of General" gives the last word.

Although, the one who was held responsible was the general coordinator, because the "General of generals", as I said before, was the power behind the scenes. He had been in prison for so many years and had been the general coordinator that he earned the trust and respect of everyone. For that reason, his word was an order that was followed, not questioned. His experience had taught him that it was better to be in power behind the power. He also had direct access to the prison director, as he was valuable because he controlled the prisoners. In addition, the Central Penitentiary was full of business and, these had to be controlled as well.

I also met a character who called himself Montezuma, who, being an inmate, served as a liaison between the "General of Generals" and the director of the prison; these characters were of great help to the director, because it is difficult to control a large population of criminals in a prison. Most were people with long sentences or even life imprisonment, with vast experience and generally wanted to lead a life in peace and order. They won and the director won. Their time of rebellion was behind them. It seemed to me that this was a good arrangement. No one could insinuate that he was going to kill so-and-so just for the sake of killing him, because whoever did not ask permission was executed. One had to ask for authorization and present his request according to the prisoner's code along with a valid reasons for same. This was the place where I had arrived, I had to urgently start the self-therapy.

As the prison was made of adobe bricks, I began to imagine that I was in a small town in my country, with adobe houses and that I was waiting in the corridor of the house for my family to come and visit me. I formed armor to cover my mind. I told myself that what was happening was not happening to me, but to someone else, that I was forgetting everything unpleasant in my life, but the fury would not go away, the fury of being there, even though I was innocent, made me feel that the world was indebted to me.

My colleagues told me that my eyes were cloudy, that I hardly spoke and that I had become a dangerous person. My mind was so bad that I spent the day calculating how to escape. Montezuma would take us to pull the sodas from the delivery wagons and put them in the sales booths. There, I saw my chance. There was an entrance that led to the street of the neighborhood "La olla", but then, I was assaulted by thoughts of my family. If I left, I would have to be on the run forever, so I wouldn't be with my family anyway. My family was the most important thing for me.

In prison, there were meetings of Christian groups, but I didn't want to go near them, because they were always quarreling. Besides, I had never read the Bible and if I had not done so outside, it wasn't going to happen in here. I remember that what they most discussed among themselves was which was the true day of worship, Saturday or Sunday. I kept wondering which of the two would triumph in the end. But even with these thoughts, I had no desire to become a Christian, I was so disappointed in life that I felt abandoned by God. I didn't deserve to be there, I told myself. I definitely didn't deserve to be there. It had rained on my parade: in prison, with no money and my family suffering. Everything was against me.

I even thought that selling drugs could be my salvation to get money. There was a big market for it. Some received it, others distributed it, others only charged for it. It was an elaborate world within another world. The ceiling coves were large. They stored contraband in the timbers and beams, and then covered them with glue and sawdust so that nothing was noticed during inspections. The mules, or women who smuggled the drugs, hid them wrapped in various condoms.

They would insert one into their vagina and the other in their anus. The deliveries were too thick and doing this too often ruined these mules as women, so then that's all they did. They would do anything for their incarcerated men and. They had to give a name for the visit, but they would get themselves a few separate men on their own, men who had no family to visit them, much less a woman to have relations with. They lived happily with the mules and the mules lived happily with their husbands.

I quickly learned that living one day in this hell was a triumph, it was like winning a lottery and since I didn't want to get high to escape from reality, I made my imagination take me far away, as far away as possible, if only for the moment. I wanted to be far away from there. Imagination is powerful. It has no limits, we can restrict it ourselves, otherwise, imagination is infinite and, when we let it fly free, it can lift us to the highest and make us feel great and powerful, but, above all, free as the wind. There is also the opposite, if we let it sink us, it can make us descend to the grave, or take us on a journey of no return. But I had chosen to fly as high as possible. Nothing and no one could enslave or imprison my thoughts. I would never allow that, my physical body was vulnerable, but enslavement of my thought life ... no way, my imagination, never. I dreamed.

## Chapter 3

### THE WIZARD LAWYERS

I had never had contact with drugs in the world outside the prison. So, for me, this was a novelty. I didn't understand how that smoke could transport them to distant places, or imaginably escape from that incubator of violence, to places of peace and tranquility. I was full of questions, I had no choice but to ask my inseparable cellmates, perhaps here was my door to freedom.

<Explain to me, what is it like, how does it work?>

«Look, each cigarette costs 10 Lempiras. Don't think it's cheap to get high, and more or less the effect lasts 30 to 40 minutes. Everything I see, hear or feel makes me laugh, even being here in this hole makes me laugh. I see everything in slow motion and with a deep meaning, a special meaning, more than usual. So, at least, every hour I have to take a hit to keep on partying, I can't fall into discouragement. The discouragement is horrible, desperate, and then I have to spend a lot of money, because the hunger is like that of a ravenous animal. You consume and consume and you don't get enough. You eat and eat and you don't get full. The worst thing is to return to reality, to this shitty place where we are. I don't want to feel like I'm a prisoner, I feel like I'm worth less than a cockroach, helpless and without will.»

<And does the dope feel good when you are in the doldrums?>

«Forget about it. It feels delicious.»

<That can't be! If rice seems like paste, then you throw it on the ceiling and it sticks for days. How can that feel good?>

«Just like I told you. Everything feels delicious, like a lollipop.»

<Where do you get so much money?>

«Why do you think that I'm perpetually washing clothes and working for other people every day?>

<Why?>

«Because I have to support my vice. This helps me to survive every day. Like someone going for a walk, you go - make a turn and find a laugh. Every day follows with another one. That's how I get by. If it weren't for this, I don't know what would happen, I think I would be in the madhouse by now.»

<And how many do you smoke a day?>

«Lets do an accounting; in the morning I almost never smoke because I'm doing the little jobs. So, from noon to the end of the day is when I get into a depressed emotional state. I start to freak out, until it's time to go to bed. We are talking about more or less 6 to 7 hours. Are you following me?>

<Yea. So that's about 12 cigars minimum, right? That, multiplied by 10, is 120 pesos a day. It's a lot of money you're pissing away. Imagine if you saved it, how much you'd have in a year. Quite a bit of cash!>

He immediately started to do the calculations. «Yes, you're right. I waste at least 3000 Lempiras a month on drugs. If I saved up, I'd have money here in prison.» He thought for a while, as if he was in the clouds, silenced.

«Sometimes San Quintín takes us and we have bad trips.»

<What's that like?>

«Well, it depends on the quality or your mood, sometimes we are visited by the pale.»

<Death?> I asked with astonishment.

«No, man! Don't be a kid. Pale is when instead of feeling pleasure, the opposite happens. You get dizzy and start vomiting until everything comes out, it's horrible. They call it "the paling" because the color of your face turns white as paper and you call Hugo a hundred times.»

<Hugo?>

«I'm not telling you this is anything for the weak minded ... to vomit slime. That's calling Hugo.»

<Think about it. My method is better, I/= don't need to spend what little I get, I don't get sick and I can do it whenever I want and as much as I want. Imagination is powerful and it doesn't cost anything.>

«Yes, you are right. But, I don't have time to go around imagining fantasias. Besides, I don't know how to imagine or invent things with my mind, I don't know how to do it. Those are women's fantasias who are full of smoke in the head. Inventing, as if it were easy. You already do it!»

What I did know was that drugs were a round business. There was a lot of money to be made, because almost everyone consumed one thing or another. I don't deny that it crossed my mind to solve my financial problems by this means, but my education prevented me from doing so. My mother had not taught me to earn easy money, but by the sweat of my brow. I don't know, if I had been raised by someone else, who knows where I would be today.

Whoever enters this business, does not leave; if he leaves, it can be seen by airplanes passing by or in the newspaper the next day.

Here in this country, we poor people have no right to make mistakes. If we mess up, we suffer immediate consequences. Then we have to pay for our own and others' misdoings. What happened to me was a classic example of the injustice that goes unpunished in this little paradise called Honduras. Those who hold the pan by the handle need not worry, because they know that the boiling oil is not going to touch them, they simply blame it on someone who indispensable but well paid, or they end up buying justice and that's it. The great ones, when they error, always have a way out.

This is what my inseparable cellmate used to say, <With a ticket the monkey dances and to the sound you play.> He was quite right, because innumerable times I saw with my own eyes how the shoddy lawyers awakened illusions in many fellow inmates: <no one is guilty> and <everyone is about to get out>. The first was driven by the inmates themselves, this awakened in them the possibility of creating a false reputation in the prison environment and therefore in the courts, as if, by repeating it, they would have a magical reaction or some influence when the verdict was given. The second was lethal, because it was the modus vivendi of many dishonest and ambitious lawyers. Feeding on the illusions of freedom of the prisoners, they aroused false expectations of triumph in the trials. The words <your case is almost solved> and <I need more money to hand out to the court or the police> were reinforcing ploys, a siren song for the ears of the desperate. Although it should have been seen as a lie, it always worked, time after time. The gullible fell like fish in a dry river. I knew that, in a few days, I would be hearing again the cry for relief by the unwary, or better said, the deluded. <I'm going to kill him when I see him again.> Always the same exasperation, <I don't know how I believed that faker. He is more rogue than me and should be the one in jail here. But, I'll fuck him, I'll fuck him.> All day long it was the same blather, they sounded like parrots on a stick.

Call after unanswered call made the one who had delivered the information even more furious. Days and weeks went by without hearing anything from the wizard lawyer. Until one day, after a long time of absence, he appeared out of nowhere, sent for his client and with a smile, as if nothing had happened, he brought him good and bad news. <Look, things are difficult, but I'm going to explain it clearly, you will have the last word.> The rouse started again with the the theme song, <I stumbled again and with the same stone> by Julio Iglesias. Upon returning to the cellblock, the pawn was calm and full of white lies again. That was the play. But what could those of us who were inside do? Nothing! Just believe what the lawyers told us and try to swallow that mouthful dry. Naturally, when a wizard got tired, another would appear on his own little mountain wrapped in his new spell.

On one of the first days in court, I noticed that one of the convicts had been released due to lost files. They had been misplaced and all the evidence against him had disappeared. <Here's the answer,> I thought. We will do the same with my files. To my surprise, when I talked to my legal representative (that's what they like to be called), he told me that it was very difficult and also very, very expensive. Something that I could not pay, which I was very clear about. He repeatedly tried to trick me, but to no avail. So I gave up the idea for my cause, but I passed the tip to another cellmate.

<Hey Deadbeat. When do you go to court?>

«I have to appear on Wednesday,» Caremuerto said.

<I need to talk to you about something serious. Something that can get you out of here sooner than later. Come on, let's go to the yard! We can't touch this here, the walls can hear.>

We walked to the little court.

<Look, the other time I was in court, I heard this and that. If you have the ticket to do it, I think that it's the fastest way out.

<I'll talk to my lawyer today. In fact, I'll call him right now.» Caremuerto moved a few meters away from me and began to discuss the situation with his lawyer, after a while he hung up.

«Ready! If it goes as you say, I won't forget about you when I'm outside. You're doing me a solid.»

<Thank you! You know my situation, I'm here as a killer and I have no one to help me. So, I'll thank you.>

<No, my brother. Don't worry, I'll help you with anything. You can count on that. As soon as I get out, I'll see how I can fix something and I'll get it to you. You know me, my word is good.»

<Right-on! I know I can trust you.> He shook my hand and we walked to the hammock workshop. I had a lot of work to do in that workshop that day.

As if on cue, that Wednesday Caremuerto showed up at the courthouse. Everything had disappeared, the box with the evidence and all the files had vanished as if by magic.

The magician was no longer called Mandrake, his name was now José C. Valle, or as we say in the neighborhood, <alludes to the national hero of the 100 lempiras bill.> He never failed.

<I come to say goodbye. Tomorrow, I leave early,» he told me a few days later.

<I'm glad. Don't forget what we agreed.>

«How can I forget? You know I consider you a friend. The only thing is, I don't know what's going to become of my life.»

<Look, Caremuerto, If you get back with the same friends, everything we did will be for nothing. In a few days or months you'll be back here in prison with us. Think about it, it's not worth living life in and out of this hell. Get a job and start an honest business. Get your life together, you have time.>

Caremuerto was in a dilemma. He felt he had to return to his hometown of San Fermín. The gang was his day-to-day job, just like any business or profession. Besides, it was well paid and brought with it a lot of respect. That was what he had done since he was fifteen years old, he didn't know how to do anything else, or maybe, deep down inside, he didn't want to do anything else. When I had realized that he was also from San Fermín, I thought, <This town produces thugs in clusters.> Almost everyone I had met up to that point came from San Fermín. What a bad-ass little town, but they were men of one united mind. As my grandmother, who was the wife of a famous hill general in Lepaterique, used to say: "A rooted darling man".

«Partners until death!» he whispered as he said goodbye with a big hug.

<See you, brother! I hope you make the right decisions. Take care of yourself.>

The next day Caremuerto left the PN (National Prison). He was free at last. He just didn't know how he was going to live from now on.

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It was almost a year since Caremuerto had left, when we received the news that, in a confrontation with police officers, he had been executed. He was smuggling cattle to Nicaragua and someone shot him. Of his gang, only two survived. Caremuerto, however, had fulfilled his pact with me as a man, at the right time, he gave me a little help, it fell into my hands like May waters.

I was very hurt by the death of my cellmate. The inmates used to joke that when they killed him, the expression on his face did not change, because he already had the face of a living dead man. We laughed, but with a lot of respect. He had been a leader among us, above all, a good friend

in difficult times. Everyone appreciated him, his enemies even respected him, and the authorities sometimes consulted him about internal matters.

Who knows why Caremuerto did not want to straighten out his life. He had the chance. He could have chosen another path. Sometimes human beings want what is easier, what does not cost, what is at hand, that is where many times we make wrong decisions, because generally, what does not cost and is easier, leads us to crime. We are hard-headed, sometimes. We need to touch the iron to get burned. It is not enough that grandma says, <You are going to get burned.> No, that is not enough. Like Thomas, we want to see that if by plunging our finger into the wound it bleeds. Or maybe it is because the saying is true, <The fox changes its skin, but not its habits.> Although I don't believe that now.

I never used that trick again with another fellow prisoner, I didn't dare, it was too delicate to do so. Besides, the trust I came to have with Caremuerto was unique. It would be difficult to place my trust in another. Caremuerto was a man of his word. I still remember his laughter in the cellblock or in the workshop, contagious, loud and pleasant. Even there, in the middle of the jungle, they felt real, unfeigned. And for an instant, he made us all forget where we were in hell.

## Chapter 4

### PREPARING THE GROUND

For some time now, rumors had been heard that the construction of the new prison was in its final stage. This new home for those who had fallen out of love with life represented a great challenge for the minds of the leaders of the Central Penitentiary. Great questions arose, unknowns that had no clear or immediate answers, everyone said that only time would show them the truth, the fate of each inmate would depend on it, all these speculations made the inmates, or rather the leaders, put their beards to soak. However, as my grandmother used to say: "Here, the hairiest man walks with braids".

Will we remain in power? Will there be a change of General of generals? Will we be organized as now, by sub-coordinators? What new methods will be implemented in the new prison called PN? Who will be transferred there, who will stay here? In spite of all these doubts, everyone agreed on one thing, we had to be one step ahead of the authorities. We should have a proposal prepared for the transfer of the inmates to the new prison and for its internal administration. In that meeting, the idea arose that everyone should take a vote and decide whether the leaders should go to the new facilities in Támara, or stay here.

Before the vote was taken, one of the coordinators with the most weight, or rather, the most guts, Plush, asked to speak. He was respected, not because of the time he had been locked up, but because of his courage as a man, he said he was not afraid of anything or anyone. Everyone knew that he was a man of his word, what he said, he backed up with his actions.

«Before we vote, I want to remind you where we are at this time. Here in the capital city, everything is closer at hand. Here it is easier to manage our business. However I can already see some people sucking their mustaches. Be careful not to give them a drink with a finger. Think well before you vote. And right now I'll give you my vote, I'm staying!»

One by one they expressed their vote, all the leaders wanted to stay in the Central Penitentiary, they did not want to leave the capital city under any circumstances, they knew that, if they left, they would lose control of their investments. Besides, the distance, although it was not so great, would prevent them from being on the ball in business. They could not risk it under any circumstances, there was too much money at stake. The decision was unanimous, fifteen to zero.

<It's decided, start preparing the plan to present it to the director,> ordered the "General of generals".

To best assure that their presentation had no negative repercussions, the ringleaders decided to have someone pose as an independent pawn to negotiate with the director. If things got ugly in the transfer or in the negotiation, he would take the blame for everything, so that everyone else would be protected.

What the ringleaders did not know was that the pawn was going to betray them. However he did not realize how extensive the reach of the ringleaders' arm was. He became aware of his mistake all too soon. A mistake that would cost him his life.

The technique of using a pawn was well developed among the inmates. The one who accepted to play the role knew what he had to face. He could potentially come out triumphantly and amass power; or he could pave the way to his death - digging his own grave. It was very risky. But in the end, what there to lose? They were already living in hell, so how much worse could it get?

Everything was taken into account. If anything went wrong, whatever the deal - drugs, murder or contraband, he knew he could not rat anyone out, he could not give any names, he had to frame himself or die. So, knowing this, Frente Hermosa accepted the challenge. As they say there, <In a war foretold, no one dies.>

Frente Hermosa came out longer than they could imagine. Until now he had only been the silent pawn for Plush, he knew them all and those he didn't, he wrote them down on ice.

When he was called to give reports, he would only say: <It's all arranged. The director agrees with what we've requested and unless new orders come from above then everything is as in

the bank. Don't worry, we'll do well, you'll see. The prison in Tamara is already full, the director already has the list of those who are leaving, there is no mistake. None of you are going there.> A total triumph!

When the transfer bus arrived Tuesday morning, the list was complete, but with the names of all the ringleaders and their war cronies. Beginning with the "General of generals", they paraded one by one into the bus, all tied with chains on their hands and feet. An astonished face was burned into each one of them. They all thought that the higher-ups had put in a good word for them. In fact, I was going too. There were about seventy prisoners on that bus. All of us looked each other in the eye wondering what happened. It was the unknown that was having havoc in every head. <Where is Frente Hermosa?>, I asked myself. All the module chiefs, their lieutenants and retainues were on that bus. The other inmates who were watching the transfer could not believe their eyes. The powerful were being taken away. What would become of them now. Who would put his hand in the fire to save their rights?

However, as the saying goes, <Some go to the noise while others go to the beach.> Others were playing their mustaches, and they saw themselves running the prison along with the remaining inmates. However, they knew it would be a fight to the death for power, since there were many suitors for the bride.

To appease the matter somewhat, Frente Hermosa sent a note with one of the guards who accompanied the prisoners to Tamara. It explained that everything had gotten out of hand. I a surprise move the upper level powers-that-be determined that all prisoners who were involved in bank robberies, kidnappings, drug trafficking, murder or rape would be transferred to the new PN without fail. This more or less placated the disturbing thoughts of the ringleaders.

This first trip was important for maintaining control of the PN, since once the guild was decapitated, it would be easier to make the following transfers, and so it was. The bus made several trips that day, little by little, the motive behind the transfers was taking shape.

Although I was not in jail for any of the crimes mentioned in Frente Hermosa's note, I knew that I was there by affinity, since I was a pawn for one of the prison's module chiefs. He had liked me and used me as an advisor in his decisions. So, for me, it was no surprise to be with him in the new PN.

As soon as we arrived in Támara, they lined us up in the internal soccer field, removed our chains and made us go directly to the punishment island, which was located in one of the buildings called modules. Punishment island was a prison inside the prison, the beds were made of cement, it had no windows, the access gate was made of iron covered with sheets. There was a defined and measured time everything. I felt claustrophobic in the Central Penitentiary, it was worse here. We had a specified time for everything; for eating, going to the bathroom, sunbathing, and so on. I felt like I went from crushing to pulverizing. But it got worse. That first night was terrible, we barely got two hours of sleep. Every now and then, we heard screams that woke us up during the silence of the night, <Sons of bitches, traitors. You're going to see who's in charge.> No one could sleep, the blow had been so effective and accurate, and the worst thing was that they never saw it coming. The next morning, the inevitable happened, a new meeting was necessary. They had to analyze what had happened and determine what actions were later required.

<I don't know if you all will agree with me, but I think Frente Hermosa gave us all the shaft," the "General of Generals" said first.

Everyone said at that moment that they did not have much confidence in him, but their loyalty to Plush helped them to accept his appointment.

<And you, why are you here?> a ringleader asked me.

<I'm a murder and attempted murder suspect.>

<Then you shouldn't be here.> He remained thoughtful for a moment. «You mean, they gave you a report contrary to what it should be. That's right, all of you were given false reports by the director. The one who sent all of us here to the PN is none other than Frente Hermosa.»

<How do you know?>

<I know what I'm telling you. Chick it out.>

«Yes,» said Peluche. «I believe this one because he is faithful. Let's find out why they sent us here and let's get out of the chopped corn. Leave that to me. I'll let you know in the afternoon.» he immediately called a guard.

«Tell the boss I need to talk to him today in the afternoon. Go and let me know.»

Ten minutes later the guard came back with the answer. «He said he wouldn't be here in the afternoon. So if you want, you should see him right now.»

«All right. Open up!»

Peluche was determined to discover what had happened. Momentarily, he was released from punishment island. Before leaving he approached us and said, «We'll find out today how this matter stands.»

Some accepted that there had been a big hand from above, others said that they just wanted to take away their power and others thought that the grasshopper had turned out to be more cocky than the teacher. Each one explained the reason for his opinion, but what bothered them the most was that there were no secrets in the Central Penitentiary. Everything was known in one way or another, especially to them who managed an espionage network that would make the FBI die of envy. Everything was calculated with the smallest of details had taken into consideration. So they wondered what had happened, how something so gigantic had escaped their ears.

After lunch, Peluche arrived. We knew he was bringing news, it showed on his face. He entered the punishment cell eye-balling me hard. «I was right,» he said verifying the truth. «Frente Hermosa sold us all out.» At that moment you could hear a pin drop. «But don't worry, it's all settled. Tomorrow, Frente Hermosa will be here with us, it's a promise.»

I approached Peluche at the first opportunity. «If you want, leave it to me, I'll take care of it.»

He stared at me, as if to say, «You've finally uncovered yourself.» Out loud I heard, «Great! You have a red light.»

I knew this would win even more than just the friendship of Peluche. And in truth I was doing it because I disliked Frente Hermosa. I couldn't stand that guy, he was the kind of person who would sell his own mother to get what he wanted. For me, loyalty was earned in another way, not like that, never like that.

In reality, I didn't know what I was getting myself into. In my mind, I was asking for the right to give Frente Hermosa an arduous beating, however, in the mind of Peluche, I was asking for permission to wipe him off the face of the earth, i.e., give him obliteration. That was the red light he was referring to. I was still innocent about it. I would soon realize the seriousness of the matter.

The next day, Peluche went out to verify the request. He returned with joy on his face. «Gentlemen, the package has arrived!»

Immediately, the chatter among us began:

«So, that toad has arrived. Now he's going to know who we are.»

«Every pig gets its December, but many don't expect Christmas,» said Siete Niguas.

Yea, that's right, everyone asserted.

«Just a moment,» interrupted Peluche. «I have thoroughly considered the matter and I know what I'm going to do with him. Leave it to me.» He looked at me, as if to say, «This piggy already has a butcher.»

«How did you manage to bring him here? If we may ask,» they queried.

«Well, he who kills with iron dies with iron. I made him a file,» answered Peluche.

The avalanche of laughter from the group was uncontrollable, you could hear the laughter all the way to the main gate, it seemed that they were finally happy with the events. At about half past three in the afternoon, Peluche approached my cement bed.

«Let's go pick up the package, it's time. It's ready for delivery.»

We went out as if we were at home, the iron gates opened as if by magic, the guards looked at us with the utmost naturalness and we hurried our pace, before the wind that was in our favor changed. We arrived at the processing II Pavilion, we approached the main barred gate and Peluche addressed the person in charge of the place, «We came for the package, you know what to do. Go

on, bring it to me!» Moments later, security was pushing and kicking our package to where we were.

Frente Hermosa's body was shaking so much, you could see him shivering inside his loose clothes. He was an educated guy, from a very good family, very intelligent, but he liked the mandrake, that's why he was there.

He didn't have the flight of the vultures that were confined there. He didn't even reach their ankles in terms of malice, although his cunning was well recognized.

He did not know with whom he had gone dancing, for this time, it was his turn to dance with the ugliest. Now, seeing us face to face, he knew that what awaited him was death, he had no escape, like a goat going to the slaughterhouse, he only had to bow his head.

To our astonishment, when he got closer, he fell to the ground.

«My father, forgive me!»

«There's no such thing as your daddy here!», scolded Peluche. «Today you're going because you're going.»

With tears on his face and his body trembling, he repeated the same phrase. «My father, forgive me!»

Adding, «I am going to pay you everything I owe, tomorrow I will satisfy the bill. Please forgive me.»

Peluche, «I've already give this the red light. And now, how do I change that? Besides, you took sixty thousand pesos rom Oso, from his own house. How are you going to pay all that?»

«Don't worry father, tomorrow I can have all that money here, I haven't spent anything. I have it all there, still.»

«Look, this is the only thing that can save you; bring me the forty that you owe me, plus the sixty that you combed from Oso, plus about twenty for what you put us all through. But give it all to me, and I'll pass it on to the others. Did you understand?»

«Yes, father! Tomorrow I'll have all that here.

«For today, listen well. For today, I'm going to suspend the red light. If you fail me, consider yourself dead tomorrow. Now get lost, make the calls you need today. I'll be back at this time tomorrow.»

Up to that point I had only a taste of what I had gotten myself into by telling Peluche that I was willing to fix Frente Hermosa. I was thankful for the way things turned out. If what happened hadn't happened, I don't know what I would have done. If I killed him, I was going against my principles. I don't know if I could have lived with that guilt for the rest of my life. But I would have been gained regard with all the ringleaders. If I didn't kill him, they would have someone else to do the job. Frente Hermosa would be dead anyway and I'd lose all standing with the ringleaders - especially with Peluche. Plus my life would be in danger from then on.

I do not really know what decision I would have taken, once I had the machete my hand for the execution of the toad. Today I still wonder what direction my life would have taken that day. Some would say I was lucky, but today I know that luck has nothing to do with it.

While we were returning to punishment island, Peluche began to explain to me why he had forgiven Frente Hermosa. «Did you see how the poor thing was shivering - trembling terribly?»

Obviously Peluche had a feelings of sympathy for Frente Hermosa. After all he had been a faithful servant for many years, so it was difficult to OK an execution. Besides, there was money involved, best not to let all that dough go. «It would costs me a lot to kill him,» he clarified. «I'd lose too much good money. But if you asked me -even if I lose- I'll let you have it. Just say the word and you still have a red light. The bill can be handled later, although it'd be less. I don't mind getting it all back especially when I thought I had already lost everything. Frente Hermosa convinced me to leave him alive.

I said to myself, <You're crazy, don't even think about a red light.> Feeling a knot in my throat I replied out loud, «No! I think you made the best decision. Sometimes you have to lose a bit to win. It was for the best.» To get this topic out of our minds I asked, <What is the deal with Oso and sixty?

«Well, this guy heard Oso say that he had made sixty bucks in a little job he had done and that his wife kept them in the house. Frente Hermosa was very attentive, he left one day, I don't know how, with permission to go to Oso's house. Telling the woman that Oso wanted her to give him the sixty that he had earned and it was needed in jail urgently. The woman, without thinking twice, gave Frente Hermosa the sixty.»

<Aha! But tell me something, how did you know it was him?>

«Easy. Oso's wife came the following weekend and told him. Besides, she described Frente Hermosa as he is. There was no getting around it. So, Frente Hermosa agreed to pay the sum to Oso little by little, since he said it was spent for an emergency.» Continuing, «I can tell you Oso didn't fold it because he was with me, otherwise who knows.»

<So this is the second time he escaped from lapelona?>

«Yes. It's like he's got more lives than an Eveready.»

«Well. Don't worry about the ringleaders, I'm going to explain to them what happened. I know they will understand me. So, be calm as Camilo.»

<Excellent. Besides, you knew that Frente is only a few days away from going up in smoke.>

«Yes, it's not far off. Fags are lucky, aren't they?»

From that day on, wherever Peluche went to the PN, I went as well. Everything was returning to normal in our lives, but what nobody knew was that sooner rather than later, the PN was going to be altered by an event that was taking place on the streets and in the prisons. As always, the criminals in ties are scheming how to break free. Nothing was going to be the same after this, not even the country.

## Chapter 5

### DEMARABUNTA ERA

I don't know how Peluche managed to convince the module chiefs to remove Frente Hermosa from the firing wall. What I do know is that the other leaders never again mentioned the subject of his betrayal. It did however become famous within the prison's business history for two reasons; first, due to the caliber of those affected, and second, the secrecy of the operation.

My incidents with Peluche did not end there, as our friendship grew stronger every day, especially after I scored the impressive goal of uncovering the pot with Frente Hermosa inside. So, I became his advisor in many areas, however, there was one that I could never influence: skirts. This one is very, very delicate in these infernal territories. It calls to mind what happened with Señorita Conchita, better known as AK-47.

Conchita had a brother who had been imprisoned in the PN when he was just 19 years old. Experience: none; malice: zero; naivety: one hundred. He had no idea the kind of world he was entering into. If outside he was a cocky guy, here inside, fame only served to get you into trouble and possibly the coffin.

Here, it was not only about showing off, but also about proving that he had a good hard-on. Well, when the cock arrived, he realized that he didn't play with anything bloated in here, either he was or he was. Quickly they welcomed him. The snakes soon arrived and the vultures quickly realized that a calf had fallen into the rodeo.

The first visit he had from his family was decisive for Peluche and Conchita to get to know each other. After a long conversation with her brother and some inquiries, Conchita knew what he had to do to keep her brother alive and kicking. Money was quite scarce in the family and what they had was not enough for them.

«So you're the famous Peluche?» she asked flirtatiously.

Peluche, scanned her from head to toe. What a mirage! She was a monument of twenty-three years old. Her brown hair shone in the sun's rays, her light brown skin, smooth as a tender child's buttocks. Her bullfighter's waist and her Miss Honduras-style holsters gave her the air of a Mayan princess. He was ecstatic and could not take his eyes off that sculptural figure. His imagination savored it thousands of times.

«What did you say?»

«You're you the one they call Peluche, aren't you?»

«Yes, that's me, Miss. -How can I help you?»

«I'm Eddy's sister. My name is Concepción, but they call me Conchita,» as she stood up and introduced herself. «I know that the situation here for a boy like him can be very difficult, so I made my inquiries over there and they told me that you are the person I should talk to.»

Standing up also, he bluntly replied, «Yes, my lady. You have come to the right place. Let's go to my cell so we can talk in more privacy. Would you like that?»

From that day on, "Conchita", who little by little earned the nickname "AK-47", because she never failed, became famous as Peluche's number one, the second in command in the PN. Her brother was protected as long as Peluche was in charge, Eddy was what we called untouchable, because whoever tried anything would surely be killed. Eddy was in good hands. Besides, the kid was cool, a little crazy with that rap music, but hey, nobody is perfect, much less there in hell.

The whole espionage network that the "General of Generals" had set up was managed by Peluche, so when AK-47 arrived and peeked through the gate, the first cab would fly out to signal the arrival of the first lady of the PN. All this, of course, for two reasons: first, because Peluche managed several fronts, he could not leave the base; and second, to safeguard the integrity of his dear Conchita.

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It turns out that one day after several months had already passed since Eddy's dick went in. Nobody knows how or why, but Conchita arrived in the module of the Peluche. Intelligence had failed and there was no time to alert the rooster. Conchita calmly climbed the stairs, greeting everyone she meet.

She entered her prince charming's abode and opened the curtain of the bunk bed and advanced in full telluric motion, nobody wanted to enter to see what was happening, they knew that they had failed the capital city and -knowing Conchita- things could get ugly. Besides, as the saying goes, «Between husband and wife, not even a daemon should go in, because it comes out scorched.»

Just then, she took out a small knife and tried to cut Peluche and the his darling. With lightning speed, she was disarmed by Peluche who then threw her out of the module.

«Wait for me outside,» ,He said in a loud voice.

«What for? I'm leaving.»

«Wait for me! I'm telling you, period.»

He called for TheSpine, «Careful, don't let me down. They've already shit in the milk pot by letting her in. Now, don't be like the duck.»

«All right, my capital city!»

His other woman did not even flinch with the incident, because she already knew Peluche reputation with women. Applying the saying of her grandmother who said, «Whoever likes pork rinds, only sighs when he sees the pig go by.» she just got dressed and went out like Joanna through her house.

«See you next Thursday,» she said in a loud voice for the whole PN to hear.

Peluche didn't answer. He was ready to be taken back by whoever had brought him. And although he was very much in love, he knew that he should not put his life at risk, especially not in the hands of a woman.

When he went downstairs, there was Conchita waiting for him, with tears in her eyes.

How could you do this to me? You're going to pay for it, and with a lot of money.

«Look, my little love. You knew what I was like from the moment you met me. Besides, you have to understand that we're alone here. Men like me, we have daily needs that we can't avoid, it's impossible for you to come every day, so I have to have someone to relieve me when you're not here. Do you understand me? Only you matter to me, the others are spare tires. When you need them, you have no choice but to use them.»

«Look, Peluche, I already told you, nobody does this to me. This doesn't stay as is. Don't think you're invincible, you'll see.»

We all thought that these words were only out of spite. But no, Conchita was determined to keep her promise. When Peluche found out, he forbade her to go to the modules, she couldn't even get within a cannon shot of the bunker.

At that time, we had read about a famous case in the newspapers, of a guy who worked with Leyde driving a delivery truck. He had gotten into trouble with the police for not stopping when they told him to. The patrol car chased him and when they caught him he was half drunk. He gave all the police officers such a hard time, they had to ask for reinforcements to subdue him. The guy was acidic with his fists and the cops had to put up with it until several of them were able to throw him to the ground and get even.

It turns out that this guy, whose name was Mario, was confined in our bunker, and without hesitation Conchita, who was already known by all in the PN, came to visit him... «Chicken that eats eggs ...» She went in whenever possible, and soon had him eating out of her hand. This news reached the antenna of Peluche.

«What do you think?» he asked me.

I wondered, <This smells burnt to me. Let's investigate.>

«We'll have to play this with utmost finesse.>

«What we're going to do is this; I am going to get permission for you to visit the bunker. Once you're there, make friends with this Mario guy, and see what they intend to do. Apparently,

chose well, since he seems to have more balls than an iguana that just gave birth.» Then adding, «That's fine. Take everything for granted, blonde.»

The next day, I was on a mission in the bunker. Little by little, I became better and better friends with Mario. On the days when AK-47 arrived, I disappeared from the scene, I didn't even show my face. Moreover, I had told Mario that I was called by another nickname so I couldn't be compromised too easily.

«Do you know Peluche?» Mario finally asked.

<Yes, I know him. Dangerous man, that one.>

«Not so much so. If I ever find him in the wrong place, I'll pulverize him.»

<Look Mario, don't be an idiot man. Why are you sweating other people's hot flashes? This fight is all about skirts, yes or no? You don't know the man, and the man doesn't know you. That's how things should be - cool down. Relax, it could go bad for you. Peluche is in charge of the PN, you're fucking with the tiger's beard.

«I'm not afraid of anyone. I'll knock him out with my bare fist, if he gives me the chance. Either he goes or I go. The thing is, for me, it's all the same whether I live or die.»

<Take a good look at yourself. I'm your friend and I want to give you the best advice. That little woman of yours is using you, she won't even pay for a box to bury you in.>

«I don't know the guy, but I don't like him, I'll even break him for free. I'm just waiting for him to get into a little brawl and I'll go on top of him. You know that in riots nobody pays anyone's death.»

<Yes, I know that. But consider this, if you die or Peluche dies, the only one who really wins is her, only her. If you die, she goes and gets another daddy, she falls in love with him and tries again. If Peluche dies, she no longer needs you and takes a hike the next day. I assure you. Do you think that out there you'll get a filly like that? You're crazy man, she's just using you. Better if you get out of this hell alive. Don't be a chump. Peluche is very good with his fists and his brains are all rubber.> Mario kept thinking and analyzing what I had told him.

«Can you talk to Peluche?»

<Of course I can, my blood. Let's see, what do you want?>

«Tell Peluche to be calm, that I'm not farting for that woman.»

<That's fine. Good thinking. Better to eat a chicken between the two of you than nothing at all. I'll tell him today.>

«I'm going to enjoy her as long as I can.»

I told Peluche Mario's words, just as he'd said them.

«Do you believe him?» he asked me hesitantly.

<Of course. You know I'm not wrong about these things.>

«I hope not. Have you heard the rumors that are going around?»

<Yes. It seems that this jail is going to become a real mess. Look, you should be used to this by now. You know that the jail is sometimes quiet, but there are days when you can breathe death. Especially when there are rumors of a riot or a settling of scores, those days you can smell blood. One can almost feel the machete entering the flesh. Those are heavy days, the air is so thick you can hardly cut it with your breath. In riots, you don't ask permission to kill, you just kill, no debt, no pay. You look worried. What's wrong?> I asked.

«I'm worried about the gangs. I don't know what's going to happen. According to the newspapers, they cannot even deal with them in the San Pedro prison. Not only there. It seems they brought 260 leaders of 18 to the battalion and they couldn't even control them there. It seems these guys are unbearable.»

<Well, I'd pay to see that,> I exclaimed.

«According to the rumors, they'll be arriving tomorrow in army buses. Do you know what these bad boys call us?»

<No. What?>

«They call us "paisas" - don't know why.»

<I imagine it's because most of the prisoners who are here are from the interior of the country.>

«That may be. It doesn't bother me that they call us that. I'm not from outside the country, am I?» he said with great honor.

Just as the internal intelligence said, the next day, which was a day without visits, the famous gangs arrived in army buses. From then on, life in the PN would change forever.

They began to get off the bus. we immediately saw their peculiar clothes, their tattoos, their signs and their discipline. They were all bounded and tied to each other. Their belongings were also taken off the buses. This was a sight to behold.

Everyone was divided out into our existing modules. Several gang members were put in each module. Our module received four of them. They arrived like Martín Callado, they didn't break a plate. But, sooner rather than later, that was going to change. When the normal PN population (or people of the same origin as we were now called) saw that the aid that before was destined for them, was now directed only to the gangs, they felt jealous. They also saw that the cellblocks were equipped with all the toys, fans, radios, televisions, VHS, etc. In addition, they received martial arts classes, and practiced with machetes and real swords, while the paisas, practiced only with their hands or with pieces of broomsticks.

This was not right, why this discrimination, what saint did the gangs have that the paisas did not have? These and other things were bothering the minds of the coordinators. They knew they had to do something, but who would lead them? At this point, each coordinator was looking out for his or her own module; they were not yet united, much less organized to confront this invasion.

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It had been a while since the gangs had arrived at the prison. I decided to go see the "General of Generals."

<When do you plan to react?> I asked.

«I don't know what you mean.»

<The gangs. This could get out of hand. Did you know?>

«I've already thought about that, you're right. We have to do something now. Get Peluche for me -right now.»

I ran to the module where Peluche was. With a sign I indicated that the "General" wanted to see him urgently. So, we walked at a fast pace.

«Peluche what did you think?» asked the "General of generals".

«About what?»

«About the gangs. They're going to eat our gains. Have you not figured that out yet?»

«Yes!» he answered. Then looking at me he gave the order, "Let's get the coordinators together. Get the coordinators together, all of them, make sure not one of them is missing. Did you understand?»

<It's too late, man!> But they all came and when they arrived before the "General of generals", Peluche" spoke. «You know we are losing ground with the gangs. Whoever does not see it, is either blind or already sympathizes with these groups.»

Everyone agreed, «what shall we do?» was the million dollar question.

«Well, here are the rules of the game. We are going to send a message to every cellblock, for them to read it out loud. Either they stick to our demands or we will gut them. The message is this: From this day forward, you are no longer gang members here. You are common prisoners, just like us. No weapons, you are going to dress like us, no meetings, you cannot beat or kill any paisa. If you do, you will all pay for the one wrong doer. We are going to massacre you. You will be strictly monitored, if you fail, you'll abide by the consequences.

«Do we all agree, yes or no?»

«We all agree,» they declared. No one votes against.

That day, the message was taken to each module, to each PN cellblock. The gangs met to decide what they were going to do. In the end, either they accepted or they died at the hands of the paisas. Intelligently, they accepted! But they also had their plans. Every day, things were getting more tense, the atmosphere could be cut to ribbons. The gangs were constantly watched and they didn't like it. But they were in the minority, so what could they do? One day, one of the gangs got out of hand, got into a fight with a paisa and in the end they ended up dismembering him between all of them. That was the wake-up call, and the director immediately removed all the gangs from each module and put them in the island, or punishment cell. He knew that if he left them in the cellblocks, their blood would be on his hands.

There, all together, they began to regroup again, they were safe, separated from the paisas, now they could start their counterattack. The strategy they began to use was very well designed and planned. They were going to recruit men in the modules, to have infiltrators in the enemy lines, these new converts would be their spearhead in the battle, they would work looking for new recruits and thus, little by little, the PN would become completely gang territory.

Those who were able to go out were the ones who took the slogan to the modules, where they could find fertile ground for their purpose. Day by day they were gaining followers, who immediately identified themselves with the gangs and got tattoos on their bodies. Thus they multiplied, slowly but surely.

«What do you think of this?» Peluche asked.

<What I say is that soon we're all going to be 18. Imagine, the whole jail 18.»

He burst out laughing, «What an outrage! What do we do now?»

<Separate them. He who is, is, and he who is not, is not! That's the way it is. He who wants to be a gang member, let him go to the island; he who doesn't must shed anything that identifies himself with a gang and become like us, paisa. That's the only way to stay on this side. Their tattoos have to be erased as well. How, I don't know. We put another tattoo on him, or we pour acid on him or we tear off his skin, there are no half measures, either he is with us or against us, let them decide. We cannot continue sleeping with the enemy. Whoever does not obey the order, we give them the green light, paisa. If he still resists, then once and for all, red light. This is determined today.>

The order was sent to all the modules, and one 18 approached the cellblock whimpering, «My Father, my Father.»

«What do you want?» responded Peluche uncomfortably.

«You know. I want to remove my tattoo and I don't have money.»

«Now you're really screwed, aren't you? Before, you were just a fussy budget. Take the bill! Take off that double chin.»

«Thanks, Father. Until Tomorrow.»

That was how that day went, everyone decided the destiny they wanted to follow. Now, there were only two sides, the gangs and the paisas. Who would be in charge? The war was declared, there was no turning back.

## Chapter 6

### PAYDAY ... LATE, BUT IT ARRIVES

When those who renounced their gang were separated, they called an emergency meeting and formed a group of more than 50 members. They marched to the area controlled by the gangs and with machetes in hand, they shouted, «Now we are no longer with the gang, now we are paisas and belong to Peluche. And the gangsters nearly shit themselves!

Peluche told me after realizing the incident, «Who sent these assholes to do such a barbarity? From now on, my head has a price on it. They deserve to be killed all of them!»

<Yes. I understand. But the truth is that everyone already knowa who the capital city is in here. Sooner or later the boiling pot is going to be uncovered, so don't worry. Be attentive! That's it.>

«I know, it's just better to keep a low profile. Well, anyway, let's get on with it!»

From that day on, Peluche never walked alone, he was always accompanied by at least three heavies, and these guys clicked with him. One was called Rambo.

How do you think he earned that nickname? Well, they say that this guy was very fond of Rambo movies and had all the knives used in those flicks. Of course, he didn't refuse plunging iron into anyone. Moreover he was more faithful than a hunting dog; a thug by profession and delighted by bloodshed. Was there any doubt that we were living in hell? There was a practice station for those of us who were fighting with the world and its society. Rambo liked to spar with me barehanded. Our hands were like machetes, and that's how we practiced. He used to say, «Teach me how to fight.» Sometimes they would send us together to unload the cart of fresh produce that arrived. We liked that for two reasons: one, because we would make tokens for each other, and the other because we would breathe a little bit of air without the pollution of death.

«It's easy to escape from unloading this load of fresh produce,» he always told me.

«Carefully observe. When the delivery car arrives, we just call our nearby friends over. Once we've made one or two trips, we slip away. Easy!»

<If it is that easy then explain something to me, why hasn't anyone done it?>

«Yes indeed. But you know that the monkey dances for cash. So get your share and I'll get mine. These police officers' eyes shine when you throw them a bill.»

<No! You're crazy. I already got most of my jail time in. Now that I'm almost done, how can you think I'm going to get into such a mess?>

«Look, lamb-chop. Life is full of opportunities. If not this one, when?»

<If you want to, you make your own cock, I'll always be a good boy. Cayetano is a good boy.>

«Well, kid, you know that you can go at the drop of a hat if you want.»

<Forget about that, now!> Even though I was sure that I would serve my entire sentence, that idea never stopped fluttering around in my head. However, by escaping I was implying that I was that criminal who had been locked up for real reasons and that didn't seem good to me, not at all.

By that time, I had already received several invitations to study the word of God, because in the prison there were several churches of different denominations, which fought among themselves to win parishioners, so one could choose where the service was better. There were always gifts and help for the churches.

I didn't know which one I was going to attend. Actually, when I was free, the need to congregate never crossed my mind, I knew many people who did it, but it never crossed my mind that one day I would find myself deciding which church I wanted to attend. I never thought about it, I never even thought about God, much less about congregating, I had no need, I had everything I wanted, my family, a job, food on the table, health and my little pennies to have a good time from time to time. So what more could I want?

On some occasions I had the feeling of being empty. That was for faggots. Being a full-fledged macho man I'd overcome that feeling one way or another. And if not, then I just had to live with it. I confess that I was only postponing the inevitable, as my grandmother used to say, «Every pig has its Christmas.»

In my head, many doubts were nesting, there were questions that I had been thinking about since school. I remember a schoolmate. Nati would come to school and want to read me a Bible verse. She was a Pentecostal. I always listened without caring what church she belonged to.

«Have you ever read the Bible?» she asked me.

<No. Well not actually read for real. At least I don't think I ever have. Why are you asking me?>

«Do you have any questions you want to know?»

<Yes. I want you to tell me, how did the Indians come to America?>

«I don't know. I'll ask the pastor and tomorrow I'll tell you.»

<All right, tomorrow we'll read. I'll see you.>

<At least she was sincere,> I thought. <Let's see what she comes up with tomorrow.> I left the school thinking about that and other questions I had. Truth be told, they were things I always wanted to understand, but it seemed that no one had the answers.

I remember all too well Nati's reaction the next day. It was incredibly surprising, she saw me and ran away. She immediately turned around and never looked back.

<Nati, what's wrong with you?> I caught up with her and asked.

«My pastor told me to stay away from you, that you were the devil, that you wanted to confuse me with those questions and that you were only going to make me doubt the gospel. That I had better not speak to you ever again.»

<Well. If that's what you want, no problem. What I think is that your pastor didn't have the answer and preferred to tell you that rather than tell you that he didn't know. But well, let's leave it at that. But think about what I asked you. Remember that your pastor is a person just like us, with limitations and struggles. Not everything he says he actually believes. You have to investigate for yourself to see what is true. Thank you, Nati! And please excuse me if I got you in trouble.>

That was the episode I went through at school with Nati and the gospel. But now, my urge to know the truth was burning inside me, it was a need that I soon had to satisfy, my hunger for knowledge was biting me, and very hard.

One day, a friend came to my cell. According to him, he came to evangelize me. He began to talk to me about the gospel, but in a way that was more questions than answers. He asked me questions that I did not know, but he did not answer them either. Then he began to tell me about his life, about how his life was in his town, how his parents had raised him in righteousness and how he had gotten to where he was by making wrong decisions, starting with friendships. Then he actually wound-up making a confession. He came clean with me and told me about the most intimate part of his being. How here he was struggling between what he was and what he should be. He knew that at some point his life had taken a wrong turn and he thought there was no turning back. He didn't really know anything about mercy and forgiveness. That was killing him internally. Plus, on top of all that, his family had turned their backs on him.

<Look. I believe that there is no point in our life from which we cannot return,> I commented.

«Do you really believe that?»

<Yes. Think about those men called the apostles, I think they were just like us, men with difficulties, with temptations, with struggles, I don't think any of them did not stumble at some point, they were locked up in prisons too. I don't know much about that. But what I am telling you, I sincerely believe.>

«So, do you think there is still a chance for me?»

<If there wasn't, then there wouldn't be for anyone, not even for those on the outside!>

«Yea. Some of those outside are worse than us, only they haven't been encountered yet. But if there is hope for them, as you say, there is for everyone.»

<Of course, my friend! We must never lose hope.>

«Yes, man!» he exclaimed with joy. «I think I was right to come and visit you. Besides, you are have standing with the powers-that-be. It's good to be seen with you.»

<Not at all. It's good to be seen with the Bible and nothing else.>

«Well. I'm leaving because they're about to call the roll and you know what this jail is like.»

I still don't really understand what happened that afternoon, what I do know is that Mariano has never been the same since that time, his life changed completely, I never heard him complain about our situation, or say that life had no solution. I he has surpassed me in that way on many occasions. His optimism was injecting me with new energy every day, I began to have new perspectives, the sun seemed to shine more radiantly. Something was brewing in my heart. Soon I would know.

## Chapter 7

### CALLED BY A DREAM

My chest was tight, it felt like someone heavy was sitting on it, I started to think, <But am I asleep or not, is this a dream or is someone really on top of me? I'm going to calm down,> I thought. <Stay calm and see what happens.>

A black darkness invaded my vision completely. Suddenly, in the middle of that fog, a bright beam of light full of sticky matter touched me. <What is this?> I thought. I felt hatred from the beam of light, I didn't know why, I just felt it. Suddenly the ceiling opened and another beam of light appeared, it was round. <This is God,> I thought. <I am so bad that he is coming to destroy me. Yes, he is coming to burn me.> I felt it was necessary for me to enter the beam, the light was so intense that it forced me to open my eyes, there were stalks of energy bouncing against the beam. I felt protected in there. <Am I dead? When I was alive, I didn't do what I should have done, now dead I can no longer do anything.>

What will happen to me? I will pray and ask for forgiveness. Yes, that's what I must do.

I felt like my body was going up in an elevator. I kept praying, the light was getting brighter and brighter, I opened my eyes and saw a circle, in front of the circle a throne. I looked at the king sitting on it, his hair and beard were white.

«What do you want?» I was asked.

<I want to stay.> I looked over and saw a desk with many drawers. One of them opened and named Genesis. From it came sheets of paper floating in the air forming a circle.

«Put each one in its place,» I was told.

I took them in my hands, lowered them towards the file, but at the same time I read them and understood everything that was written on them, I did this until I finished with all the sheets that floated, I put each one of them in the file. I thought, <I have the secret of the universe.> I felt powerful.

«What do you want now?» I was again asked.

<I want to go back and tell everything I have learned.>

«So be it!»

At that moment, I woke up. I had tears in my eyes, the tightness in my chest was over, I tried to remember everything I had learned in the dream, but it was difficult. I was thirsty, very thirsty. It was not long before dawn. I could no longer fall asleep. I remained ecstatic in my bed until I saw the first rays of sunlight sneaking through the bars of the cell. A feeling of happiness and fulfillment overwhelmed me. I didn't know how to explain it. I had never felt this way before, at least that I could remember, until then. <I'm going to wait until the light is better to get a better look,> I thought. <I want to take the Bible and find what I saw in my dream, I know that when I read it I will recognize it easily. The truth is there, I must share it with everyone, I must teach it, whatever it takes.>

I found it hard to believe what was going through my mind. <If I am not religious,> I thought, <what is this happening to me? What are these dramatic plans I am making?> When it was light enough, I asked a cellmate to lend me his Bible for a moment. He was surprised.

«What flea bit you?»

I grabbed the Bible, began to look up in Genesis what I had learned in the dream. I read slowly, I didn't want to miss any detail. I reflected on what I was reading. I didn't even realize that I was no longer remembering the dream. What I was reading was just so beautiful that I let myself be carried away by the text and my imagination. It was fabulous what I was finding in the Word.

I returned the Bible to my companion at about nine o'clock. I thanked him and flew off to see about buying one for myself. I did things without thinking, or at least without analyzing. I let my mind be guided by something outside of me and did what my conscience dictated. Besides, I was not doing anything wrong. The thirst for the truth had been awakened in me and I would not rest until I found it.

I was able to get directions to a cellblock where there was someone who wanted to sell a study Bible. I was overjoyed when I bought it, they sold to me at a high price, but I didn't mind being cold for a few days.

I longed to study and to know the truth. Yes, to know the truth had become my longing. I stopped caring about my situation in prison, who was in charge and who was not. However I was always involved in the decisions, or at least I was asked for my opinion. It was inevitable, since Peluche was my cellmate. He would remain my friend, even if he did not like the "evangelists", as he called them. With me he made an exception to the rule. I studied every night, I plunged into the Word fully. Even though I didn't have a guide to do it, I would get into it and keep going. Some of my cellmates began to say that they also wanted to study the Bible. We did it in a crazy way, without planning, but we didn't give up studying. One day, Martinez appeared and told us to wait for him to study at night. I only knew him by name and that he attended a Christian group there at the jail, but nothing else.

Friends would come and tell me when churches were coming to the jail. They knew the itinerary to be followed and which ones would give away soap and toothpaste. And which ones would bring a Bible. Which ones offered breakfast - everything. I was not satisfied with that procedure. I always thought that the churches were there to bring us the Word and the rest was secondary. Although I was lacking many things in the cellblock. I did not look at attending church as a business. I wasn't very interested in any extras they handed out, but help in seeking the truth, that was the real banquet, the truth.

I didn't want to be changing churches, I wanted to find one where the truth was preached, just as it was in the Bible, without changes or alterations, without adding or taking away, simple and clear like the Word.

Martinez came looking for me one day in the morning. It was about ten o'clock, he found me washing clothes.

«Finish-up there and it came with me. I want to introduce you to someone who can help you a lot in your search for the truth. Hurry up! I'll be right back. But be careful! I'll be right back for you.»

<All right, my friend. -I'll be waiting for you. I'll be here.> I washed as fast as I could. My heart was pounding inside me, it was like a locomotive at full steam. <Will I finally find what I've been looking for? Will this be the day that will change my life?> I asked myself. I couldn't believe it, it seemed like a dream. Half an hour later, Martinez arrived.

«We're leaving. Are you ready?»

<Let's go!> I grabbed my Bible and flew out of the room like a dancing puppet in a ballroom.

<Where are we going?> I asked.

«We're going to see Sabio. You'll meet him.»

The walk seemed long. I was anxious to get there soon. So many times I had traveled that road with the mere grouper and having other objectives in mind. Then it felt so short. Today my goal was different. My future life would depend on the decisions I would make from then on. I was going to a meeting with my destiny. My heart would not stop pounding, I felt a lump in my throat and butterflies in my stomach. The feeling was indescribable, I just wanted to get there and see what Martinez had promised me, the truth. We finally arrived at Sabio's domain.

«Here he is!», Martinez said. «This the boy I told you about.»

«Aha! And what do you want to know?» he asked as he shook my hand. I stared at him.

<Is there any status among the angels?>

«Oh, no! You haven't learned to crawl and you already want to fly. First, learn what is earthly and then what is heavenly. You have to go with patience and good manners. No one enters the spiritual university without having gone through kindergarten, then grade school, then high school. Only then will you be fit enter the University.» «Have you studied anything about the Word? Let's see, tell me, what do you know so far?» He didn't give me a chance to answer, «Give him some magazines,» he instructed Martinez. «Let him study and then we'll talk.»

I looked at the title of the magazine he gave me, "El Centinela". I had never seen it before, but well, I was going to read it.

«Wait for me outside,» Martinez instructed. «Wait for me outside.»

When I went out into the corridor, I could hear him telling Sabio, in a scolding way, «You are treating badly those you want to evangelize.»

<It's better not come back here,> I thought to myself.

I decided to leave. During the afternoon, I went to the basketball court, found a little shade and began to read. I devoured that magazine. Each word was special, as if it had been written just for me. My spiritual eyes began to open to the light, I felt as if I had been blind all my life. What was this that I was reading, how had I not seen it from this point of view, why was everything clear now? I thought about the magazine and the men who had written it, were they inspired by God in doing so, how did they know these things, what Bible were they studying, would it be the same as mine, how come I had not seen it before?

The next day, Martinez appeared again. «How are you doing?»

<Fine!> I responded. <That was some awesome material that you gave me,> I'm thrilled.

«Do you know Jimmy Hews? He belonged to the Sicilian mafia. One day, he was alone in his house. He was tired of the life of violence he was leading, he was about to commit suicide, but the gun he had always used did not go off when he pulled the trigger. At that moment, his mother decided to call him on the phone, she told him how much she loved him and how much she missed him, that she wanted to see him. Jimmy reacted to the call and began to think about the act he was about to commit. He promised his mother that he would visit her soon.»

<So, what happened?> I was very curious.

«Well. Let's let Jimmy answer it himself. He's going to be in the PN very soon. We'll go see him together.»

<That's great! What church is he with?>

«It's not an evangelical church, it's Christian Business Men. It's going to be very good. People from all denominations go there, we can go too.»

<All right, I'll br look forward to it. See you later!>

At the meeting, before Jimmy Hews' lecture began, the members of his association were laying hands on all of us.

When it was my turn, I felt a little dizzy, a little weak, but nothing else happened. I had never had that experience, so I decided that, when I got to the cellblock, I would see what the Bible had to said about it.

I raised my hand, the man focused on me. «What do you want to know?»

<What is the true Sabbath?>

«Sunday. We all keep Sunday, only Adventists keep Saturday.»

<Then why do I find in the Bible, that ever since Genesis the Sabbath was kept? There were no Adventists then.

«Wait. We will answer your question later.»

<And with regard to death, what is your point of view?>

«Wait! We will answer your questions later.»

<My friend, to all the questions I have asked him about the Bible, he has only been able to answer me with a "wait for it",> I said to Martinez. <I really don't think this guy is a good evangelist, because he doesn't know anything about the Bible," I told Martinez.

«Yes, I think you're right,» Martinez replied. «Let's get out of here as soon as possible, this man seems to know little about the subject, he only wants to give us milk and I know you want solid food. Let's go!»

We got up and soon we were on our way. I was disappointed, I expected to find many answers to my questions and I felt disappointed, many stayed listening, I don't know why, but Martinez and I took off like a rocket, flying.

«Come on, let's go to the kiosk. That's where the Adventists meet, they don't attend these meetings, it seems they are forbidden or they don't agree with the evangelical churches. That's why

they call them Protestants, they're known to stick completely to the Bible, some call them the legalist because of that.»

<Let's go! We don't lose anything by going. Anyway, after this fiasco, anything's a gain. Come on, Martinez! Do you know where they are?

«Yea man, they gather behind the little field.»

When we arrived, there were about eight to ten listeners, the preacher was about to arrive, so we waited a few minutes for him. After he arrived, he started talking about Bible prophecy. The whole subject was pure prophecy. I had never heard anyone speak like that, so profound and convincing. The best part was that he proved everything from the Bible. I was dumbfounded, I had always been interested in Nostradamus and prophecy, but this was something special, something that went well beyond my previous thinking.

«Well, tomorrow we will continue with the subject, for today we have covered enough material to investigate. Go to your rooms and study the subject in depth. Any confusion will be clarified tomorrow,» he told us, after two hours of lectures.

The next day when I arrived at the kiosk, the preacher started another topic. I didn't have the courage to ask why we didn't finish the previous day's topic, so I played dumb and went with the flow. I would soon realize that this was the preacher's style, he did it with the intention that we ourselves would find the truth in the Bible. His words left us stung, which forced us to go to the Word to discover and convince ourselves with our own eyes. If there were questions, they were handled personally with him, and almost never in the kiosk with the group.

"«If I finish the topics, no one would come back» he used to say. So he would send us to study on our own. The truth is that he was right, after receiving the first three subjects, I was more itching to know and know the truth, but what struck me the most, was that everything was endorsed by the Bible. «It explains itself,» he said. «In the Word itself is the answer to all our questions, but we have to search, we have to study and persevere. Let's not be like the others, where Vincent goes, all the people go. If they study, no one will be able to fool them. If they don't study, any parakeet will wrap them up and they will bow their heads, repeating what the teacher of the day says.»

His favorite phrase was «Knowledge is power.» Little by little I understood the meaning of this phrase. It got to a point where I didn't know who to choose, Jimmy or the preacher at the kiosk. But I became more interested in the prophecy and his method of study. <Here I stay,» I said to myself. <Here I stay.»

One time when I was reading the Word, a verse came into my mind unintentionally. That is a verse captivated my thoughts. It is found in the book of the prophet Isaiah, it says the following, «To the law and to the testimony, if they say not according to it, it is because it has not dawned on them.» From this came the realization that the church I was looking for should obey the Word of God. Otherwise they were still in darkness. At that time, at the jail, the high school classes opened, the teachers arrived to give classes every day, they left us with a lot of homework which took me a lot of time. I had to define my priorities. I always remembered the dream I had that night, especially what the King had asked me, «What do you want?» and I had answered, <To know the truth and teach it to others.> From there I set out to define my priority, what did I want, the truth or high school? I decided for the truth, I abandoned my studies at school. Soon I dedicated myself body and soul to discovering the gospel. I remember that I was always hiding behind my classmates when I was in the kiosk, the reason was simple. The preacher liked to ask questions and I was afraid of answering wrong. When someone else answered wrong, nobody made fun or anything like that, but I did not want to go through that embarrassment, even though I knew it was better that way if I wanted to achieve knowledge and spiritual growth.

I remember the day Elias arrived. He was in a worse state than I. At least I questioned the human traditions imposed by the reigning churches. He had no idea where he stood. He knew there was a superior being, which he learned when he attended AA, otherwise he was in diapers. I remember his greatest confusion centered on the law and obedience. He could not reconcile the two to a point where one did not affect the other. I explained it to him in a simple way and everything became clear to him, I could see the joy on his face when he finally untangled that confusing knot. I

remember when Elias got out of prison. He sought out a church, attended with his whole family and became a deacon. A great man, sincere in his walk.

My coming to the church opened doors that I never imagined I would cross. And my dedication to search out the truth never wavered. It was inevitable that I continued to advise Peluche. He remained as the prison's boss. In addition he reached out to me when I bought chicken for the Central Penitentiary, «I come here as a person who charges a "peso" per order. I want to ask you something that has been on my mind for days. «What should I do with about the San Pedro Sula gang Padilla?»

<Well. Tell me the whole story.>

<Look. It goes down like this. You know who the Copanecos are, don't you? Well, it seems that between the Copanecos and Padilla there is a war going on outside. The Padilla blew up a madman. They sprayed the car that he was in but didn't realize that he was one of the Copanecos. So it was investigated and they found out that those who had given the green light were members of Padilla. Today I have the two gangs here and I can't allow them to eliminate each other because it would weaken my strength against the gangs. There are very good soldiers on both sides and I don't want to risk losing ground. You know how this works.»

<I know how this works. Let me analyze the situation. But from the outset, I can tell you that the best thing you can do is to sit down the leaders face to face and reach an agreement, before they start killing each other.>

<All right brother, tomorrow I'll wait for you in the yard, we can't talk about this in the barbecue, the walls have ears and eyes, so pay attention.»

The next morning Leonardo, Pedro, Despacito and myself were at the kiosk early waiting for Preacher. Despacito was walking around with a book in his hand that I had never seen before.

<What with that book, partner?>

<Preacher lent it to me.»

<Have you already read it?>

<Yes,» He told me twice. «But I didn't understand a word of it. It's a bit complicated and difficult to understand.»

<Show me what it's all about.>

He held out his small hand and gave me the book, I turned it over to read the title out loud, «Profile of the Coming Crisis.»

<Well, yes, but I didn't understand it,» he stammered. «Could it be that I'm not one of the chosen ones?»

<Why do you say that?>

<It's that the Bible itself says, that He gives understanding to His elect, and will keep the wicked in darkness, and I didn't understand. Well, that's why I'm saying it.»

<So what, you're going to lend it to me?>

<Of course. But let's tell Preacher first OK?>

<Well sure we'll tell him when he arrives.>

«Cool!.»

So we were there until ten o'clock in the morning, studying the prophecies of Daniel, the two thousand three hundred evenings and mornings. It was complicated, but extremely interesting, we asked questions that made us look for the answer in the Word. That way no one could allege that we had been deceived, since we had uncovered it ourselves. Knowledge is multiplied in that way.

I later went to the meeting I had in the yard with Peluche. When I arrived he was already waiting for me. «You know, I have to make an appointment just to talk with you. You're worse than the president,» he said to me mockingly.

<No man. Peluche you know I was at the kiosk with the brothers, studying.>

<I know, I know. It's just that now I hardly see you and I need to have someone I trust to talk to about things. You know, we can't even trust our own shadow in here. Well, what conclusion have you come up with?>

<Look, I talked to the "General of Generals" about what you told me yesterday. He told me it was the right thing to do. We've got to sit those two bastards down face to face and set them straight. At least while they are under your command, they're not going to mess around. Let them settle their business after they're free and clear.>

«Do you have any other option?»

<No, no. That seems to me the most logical. At least for now!>

«Yes. You're right, partner, that's good for now. Send Rogelio to find them for me, I want to see them tomorrow at the kiosks at 9 o'clock. They be there and only accompanied friendlies. Got it?»

<Yes, it's crystal clear. Well, I'm leaving now. I have to go read,> I showed him the book I was carrying.

«What is it called?» he asked looking at it suspiciously. «Do you really believe what it says here, is there someone who knows the end from the beginning?»

<You said it, there is such a being, it's God. Only he knows the end from the beginning.>

«If everything is already defined, then who has already made one's destiny? If we are already predestined, why worry if we cannot change the end?»

<Precisely, our destiny could be, if we wish, the one that God offers us. However, we can choose between the one our Creator has prepared for us and the others; it is a matter of choice. Each decision leads us to a destiny.>

«Well, whatever. I already know what mine is and there is no turning back. Tomorrow we have to be ready for whatever comes, I want you by my side at the meeting. Do you understand me?»

<All right Peluche, I'll be there. But I want to tell you something before I go. You too can change your life if you make the right decisions, regardless of your past. Well, I'll see you tomorrow!>

He looked at me with satisfaction in his face and eyes like a scapegoat, «Then maybe there's a chance for me too?» But then the irrational man came to the surface. Cut the crap with me. I'm already on my own.»

I walked back to the kiosk, I knew I was going to be alone at that time, so I could read calmly and without anyone disturbing my concentration. I already felt anxious to start devouring the book, I knew it had a lot of new material. My request in the dream was being answered, as time went by, I was filled with more truth.

I arrived at the kiosk, a soft breeze combed the place. I looked for a little shade and found one that was just right. I took the book, like someone serving himself an emperor's delicacy. I settled down, opened the book and began to read. I couldn't believe that it felt so good to be imprisoned there in the middle of hell. What a strange feeling! I continued with my reading, but I thought to myself, <I feel good even being imprisoned here, is this the peace the gospel speaks of?> My mind could not digest my condition, yet it was real. I felt peace in that hell.

To make a long story of the book short, I read it three times. Even the second time I still didn't fully grasp the picture. I prayed and asked for discernment. The third time was the charm, the light went on in me. I began to comprehend real issues and share them with anyone who approached me. By then I was already number three in the little church in the jail, a fragile and protestant church. The first was Preacher, the second in command was Brainy, I was the third. I couldn't believe it, who would have thought? When I entered the jail for the first time, that here in this nest of rattlesnakes I would be born again. Who? Nobody. Not even me! But there is a God in heaven who sees our heart, not with the eye of man, but with the eye of love. I figured out then why I felt good there in that hell. My friend, I tell you, I felt loved.

## Chapter 8

### RESCUE 911

Preacher approached me «I was told by a little bird that today's topic was a good one.»

<I thought it was good. We cleared up a lot of doubts and the brethren went back to their daily chores satisfied. Besides, I am using your method.>

«Yes? What's that?» He asked surprised.

<Well. First I look up the subject in the Bible until I find and analyze all the possible references. Then I compare with the conclusions of the book you lent me, I put the idea together and present it directly from the word. The brothers go back to their cellblocks to confirm with the Bible what we had just studied. If they have doubts, they bring the questions to my cellblock. We analyze everything according to the Bible. Corrections and conclusions are made the next day with the whole group. It sounds like cassava, but it is a good method. Anyway, the brothers are already getting the hang of it.

«Very good. The method does not fail. You grow because it forces you to prepare yourself well. What subject are you looking at now?»

<We just finished Revelation 11. The brothers were very happy because they finally understood that chapter.>

«Do you go in order or do you choose the topics at random?»

<No. We study by topic. It's easier for them that way>

«Yes, I suppose it is.»

By that time Preacher relied completely on me. I gave the topics and reported the events to him. Preacher come to the kiosk only when there was something special. So normally Cerebrito and I took care of everything. One day, while I was preparing the theme, Venado appeared in my cellblock. Venado was the fastest envoy in the jail. He just received an order and flew to deliver it, but the best thing was that he belonged to Peluche's group that kept him safe in the PN. At least as long as Peluch" was boss.

<Venado! What's happening?>, I greeted.

«Peluche wants to see you about something urgent.»

<Well, let me put my pants on. I'll be right out. Wait for me outside.>

We walked quickly to the yard, where Peluche was waiting for me.

«What's up?» he queried.

<Oh nothing. What can I do for you?>

«Look, partner. I'm arranging a meeting with the "General of Generals" and all the module captains. I want to get rid of the gangs completely, I don't want them to keep fucking up my life. But I need you to help me plan it. I know you have good ideas, you have always helped me get ahead in here. You're the only I trust. We're thick as thieves, partner, thick as thieves.»

<Look Peluche, you know what I'm up to now, I don't want to get into that kind of mess, that's already history for me. I appreciate you like nobody else. But you're asking me to go back to my past. The Bible says that only the dog returns to its vomit and dogs won't go to eternity. Besides, I can't and won't. You need to let me go free on this one, I pass!>

«Look, it will be the last one I ask of you. After this, the house will be clean.»

<No, man! Don't ask me that. Understand that I don't want to, even if it's just advice. The brain pays as well as the arm. I'll still be guilty even if I just advise you.>

«Very well, partner. I know you do it from your heart, otherwise I'd give you the green light right now. But you're my little bread, you always will be.»

<Thank you for understanding me, Peluche. Thank you!>

When I returned to my cellblock, I felt that things would never be the same with Peluche. I knew that although he had accepted me, deep inside he was hurt. Understand, I was being transformed day by day. My life in prison passed between the kiosk and my cellblock, between books and studies, every day we grew closer and closer, the little church was growing in hell.

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One day, a pastor from another church arrived. «They've told me about your sermons», he said.

<And what did they tell you?>

<That you handle the Word very well, that no one in our church knows as much as you do, and that no one else teaches what you teach. Tell me, how do you know so much?>

<Look here,> I pointed to the books on my bedside. <There is the source of wisdom. If you want, I'll lend you some to read, and if you don't understand, we can get together to validate our points of view, according to the Bible, whenever you want. Do you agree?>

From that day on, the pastor ate with the Bible and worked with the Bible. He had great manual skills, he made hammocks, carved, sewed, but embroidery was his specialty. After some time, his understanding and trust reached such a point that he would ask for my approval.

<Look, brother. I want to preach this Sabbath thing in my church. How do you see it?>

<Well. Do you think they're ready to change their habit?>

«Yes. -I think I can at least give it a try.»

<Well, give it a try. But remember, the other pastors have forbidden their members to talk to us, not to ask us any questions, and even to avoid our greetings.>

<Is it because there are things that even they cannot answer?>

<The gospel is not for fighting, but for sharing the good news. That is precisely it's called new, because every day we learn something new. It is not possible to feed a 12 year old child only with breast milk, as we grow up, so does the feeding, it changes. Don't you agree?>

«Yes, I think your analysis is logical. Well I'm going to jump into that water whatever it costs. I'll tell you about it tomorrow. See you!»

<Remember that change is personal. Churches don't change, it's the people who change. Isn't it better to work individually with each member?>

«No. We cannot cover the sun with a finger, this truth is brighter than the sun. You have to know, the truth is like the dawn, its light increases as the morning progresses. If not, it has not dawned on them.»

<Well, I'm just giving you my opinion.>

The pastor left and two friends who were attending another church came in.

<It's good to see you!> I greeted them.

«Yes. How are you? Can we talk to you?>

<Sure. What can we do for you?>

«We have questions that our pastors don't know how to answer, and when they do, they do it with verses that have nothing to do with the question.»

Aha! And who sent them? The boys told me that here the study of the Word is deeper. And well, they would like to participate.

Look. We are going to send for Preacher because the other churches are angry with us. They say we are stealing their sheep. That's not our intention, so we'd better have Preacher help. Wait, we'll send for him right away. When the Preacher arrived, he greeted us, «So, what am I good for? Speak or forever hold your peace.»

<Look, we have a complicated situation. The brothers want to come and receive instruction with us at the kiosk, but you know that the other churches are complaining that we are stealing their sheep. And I don't know what to say to them.

«Do you not believe that the Lord has sent us here to the PN for this work? Or do you believe in good and bad luck? Of course not, there is no such thing! We have been chosen for this moment in history and for this place, to announce the good news. Have you never read, «Beautiful are the feet of those who proclaim peace, the good news of the Lord? And if the other churches retaliate. So what? What else can they do to us in here, they are not going to kill us, so welcome brothers!>

<I think it is necessary to prepare a topic, where we touch on what the Word says about the church militant and the church triumphant, this will give us the reason for what we are doing here in this place.> We looked at each other for a moment in silence. <God is with us, don't worry. There will be only one flock and one shepherd,> I added.

I waited the rest of the afternoon for the shepherd to show up and tell me how he had been doing, but he never came. Then dinner time, or rather, the time for grease, was approaching. I got up from the kiosk and went to the cellblock to get ready for dinner. <What could have happened?>, I thought. The next morning, the shepherd still didn't show up. So I decided to go look for him, and found him lying in his cellblock, sad and blue, as the song says.

<What's wrong with you, my friend?> I questioned him passively.

<I am very stubborn with the Word, I would have listened to his advice.>

<Tell me, what happened?>

<I was not even half way through when the other pastor got up and snatched the pulpit away from me, pulled me aside and told the brothers to excuse me, that this bad behavior was because I was hanging around with the Protestants too much. I had no choice but to step aside, there was no point in fighting there in front of everyone.>

<You were right, my friend. The reality is that, from that seed you watered, some of it will bear fruit, that's for sure.>

<Well, that's something. But the worst thing is that they gave me discipline for three months. I cannot preach for three months, nor can I go back to study with you.> At that moment Leonardo entered the cell.

<I've been looking for you,> he turned to me.

<Aha! So?>

<I went to evangelize to two 'sentenced 2' gang members. When I was leaving, Soroguara told me that if I came back, they would peel me. Right there, they gave me the green light.>

<Well, let's go tomorrow. I will accompany you. Look, don't think I'm not shaking in my boots, but if we show now that we are afraid to preach the Word in times of tribulation then we'll never find a place to hide were there are no bogeymen.> I commented to Leonardo as we returned to the cellblock.

<Yes, you're right,> he agreed. <We are at war. If something happens to you, then let it happen to me too.> We strode with determined haste.

The next day, at about eight o'clock we went to the Soroguara's barracks. I asked them, <Do you have two gang-boys here? Bring them to me to evangelize, and please get me two chairs.

Immediately Soroguara arrived. They came in and looked at me from the side and made a gesture of greeting by raising their heads. They knew me and I knew them. We continued with the evangelization, although the gang-boys were nervous.

<Don't worry. God is with us. Soroguara is in the third echelon of Peluche. They had to respect me because I was his main advisor and I was above them. The same way they went in, they came out.

The green light had already been given because of the two gang-boys from before. And Soroguara wanted to make them suffer. That's why they were opposed to our evangelizing them, their days were numbered there with them. But, just as the cat plays with the mouse, so they were doing with the two boys from the gang. Besides, they were the ones in charge in 'sentenced 2', they had to enforce the green light, otherwise they would lose strength, and that often meant death. In spite of everything, they could do nothing against their boss Peluche.

The other issue was that they were not going to let them be baptized, how could they be saved, because in reality, what we were seeing was dead men walking. The only option was baptism by profession of faith, that was the only way out, because they were not going to allow them to take away the green light. This riot came from Soroguara. These young men of approximately twenty to twenty-two years old, by order, had killed Soroguara's cousin back in the village. For them it was time for revenge, an eye for an eye plus an ear. We had to act fast, because it was unpredictable when the cat would get tired of playing with its prey.

We were coming every day to 'sentenced 2', where the boys were learning more and more every day and were eager to be baptized. That was their goal, they knew that only a miracle could save them. They decided one day to ask for protection from the prison director, and their request was immediately granted. They were transferred to the ion's cage, or punishment cell. Anything was better than being there in that constant torture. A few days later, I realized that Soroguara had hired the Exterminator, they planned everything to the last detail to do the peeling. So one of those days, the "Exterminator misbehaved with the guards, and just as they'd planned it, Exterminator was put in the punishment cell. Exterminator was a square inmate, which meant he was never going to get out of jail, never. Very early in the morning, the news arrived at the newsstand. Exterminator had thrown a grenade into the boys' cell, they didn't have the slightest chance to escape, nor to be baptized, only God knows what would happen to them on the final day. I felt sad and at the same time shocked, I did not understand at that moment why they were allowed to end up like that.

What is certain is that there in heaven, many of us will have surprises, we will find some who we thought would not make it there and others will be absent, who we thought should be there. I thought, <Who am I to say who is saved and who is lost?>

## Chapter 9

### THE COVENANT: FIVE MINUTES

Now the time was flying by, we needed every minute of daylight for the activities with the brothers. Additionally many of us had jobs to do to earn a little money, so we made the most of the time. Life at the prison continued its course.

However, everyone said that they felt the steps of a big animal, that something was lurking in the corridors, because it was unusually calm. I and a few others knew that the paisas were preparing for their final attack, as a result, once again the smell of death was in the air.

Because he was in love, one of Peluche's bodyguards went to 'Procesados 2' to cheat on a friend's sister, who was from his town. To make matters worse, on the road he was met by three gang members who were on business, when they saw each other and without a word, they took out their swords and began to fight to the death. The gangs had made a hole in the walls of the island where they were confined. The intention of going out to negotiate with outsiders, mainly to buy drugs from Scorpion, who always traded with them. As life would have it, at that moment Peluche's bodyguard ran into them, and to make sure he didn't tell about the hole in the wall, they wanted to peel him right there and then.

With lightning speed, news reached Peluche that his bodyguard was being riddled with bullets. Without further ado, he pulled out his machete.

«I'm leaving! But I don't want anyone to follow me. I'll handle this on my own.»

«I'm going with him, even if he gets mad at me.» said one of those who was there in the cellblock as soon as Peluche was gone.

And like a fire in a dry brush, the word spread. Soon there were more than two hundred with knives and machetes behind Peluche, ready for war. From the gangs, many more came out of the hole to defend their friends and their territory, the thing is that the Trojan war broke out in 'Processed 2', I stayed far away watching. That business was no longer with me, I was already at peace with myself, with men and with God. By some miracle there were no deaths that day. The police arrived quickly and stopped everything at gunpoint. But the die was cast, this would be the incident they were waiting for to unleash the beast.

In that battle Chiqui (as he was later called) became famous as the one-armed swordsman. With a small knife he defended himself against a machete, they say that he was able to overcome with skill and agility the machete blows and that as he advanced he was cornering the gang, getting closer and closer. Because his short weapon made it easier to fight up close and it was difficult to wield a machete so close. The one-armed swordsman escaped unharmed, while his opponents bore the scars of war on their hands and stomach.

The hospital was filled with wounded, there were not enough beds for everyone, so many were lying in the corridors spilling their lives. They separated the paisas and the gangs into two areas. They did not want to risk something worse inside the hospital, they posted four guards day and night while they recovered. The only one who was punished for this action was Peluche. They considered him responsible for the mutiny. So Mulato was left in charge, while Peluche was kept in solitary confinement and later transferred to Cholutexas. They also covered the hole in the island's wall. But the veins of hatred, remained more open than ever. Without Peluche in the PN, things were going to get out of control, even in 'Sentenced 2' respect for people of the same origin was lost, the gangs were gaining more and more ground every day and it seemed that the PN authorities were comfortable with this situation.

There were other situations that helped to trigger the pact agreement. The day came when the "General of Generals" called a meeting of the heads of each module to formulate the plan of how to make the two hundred and sixty gang leaders disappear. The meeting was intense, each chief expounded the reasons why it was necessary to take action. The consensus was that, if this was not stopped at that precise moment, the whole jail would belong to the gangs. They could glimpse in the future, the threat they would face, if they were not stopped in their conquest of the jail. They did not

realize that their appreciations were prophetic, that this problem, went beyond their wildest imaginations. It was actually a threat with national significance, as time later proved. These leaders came to revolutionize the modus operandi of the gangs in Honduras. Previously, gang activity was limited to street fights among themselves. Things without much importance outside their radius of action. Now they were introduced into the world of drug trafficking, smuggling, bank robberies, contract killings and finally to the legal business of double facade. That's how they saw it and that's how it turned out.

The vote was unanimous, immediate red light. A commission was formed to go see the director of the PN, they had only one request, that they be granted five minutes to exterminate the gangs on the island. While this meeting was taking place, the other leaders were preparing to organize the people of the same origin in such a way that when the commission returned with the permission, they were already armed and ready to attack at that precise moment. The commission left immediately.

As I said, there were several situations for which the milk was spilled, in the first place, obviously the attack of the gangs against the paisa, where Peluche was punished, in second place, the specialized attention the gangs received in the prison. To cite an example, they hired martial arts instructors to teach them self-defense, where they practiced with real weapons - not sticks but machetes and daggers. They also received donations from the United States with first class articles, where people of the same origin did not even smell the tamales. To the ears of the paisa, this rung of discrimination and a plot.

«It would seem,» said the bosses «that they were preparing for a war.» The third event that triggered the pact was the following: one of the paisas had been stealthily recruited by the gang. He had not been visited by his family for a long time, so they were unaware of his conversion. In time, his mother and sister came to visit him. They were taken to the cellblock. When the aforementioned appeared he exclaimed with disdain, «I don't know why these whores come to visit me. I am already dead for you, my true family is now another one. Let's see, send for Chicha, let him come right away, I have a little present for him. He had not finished speaking when Chicha appeared.

«What Pepsi?» he said.

«Look, here are these two whores. They were looking for a man. His younger sister looked at her mother with eyes of incredulity and fear, her mother also could not believe what her ears had just heard. The one for whom she was willing to do anything, the one she still loved with all her soul, despite having strayed from the right path, was now handing them over to the wolf pack to be gang raped and devoured.

One by one, they lined up for both women. They say that the lines were getting lost in the corridors because they were so long. Time stopped for those women, especially for the sister, who was a minor and still a virgin. They were living the worst nightmare of any human being, the outrage of their dignity. But what hurt them most was not the abuse of their body, but the betrayal of a loved one, of a son, of a brother. When they finally managed to leave that torture, they walked very slowly hand in hand down the long corridor leading to the exit gate, their torn clothes and their bloodied and violated bodies were seen by the entire paisa population and also their families who had arrived that day to visit. It was a Dantesque picture, an infernal painting that managed to inflame even more the already feelings of hatred that the gangs were harvesting every day in the prison. Every inmate, no matter how heartless he was, could not conceive that the act of revenge of a son towards his mother and sister, would reach these extremes. It was simply not mentally computable. These four events became the short fuse that blew up the prison establishment. No wonder, these events painted with colorful and defined shades the idiosyncrasy of the gangs and their dire consequences, even for a population with low levels of social imbalance.

There began to be suspicious happenings from the kiosk where we were studying the Word. Something was going to happen, the air became thicker, the noise died down. The intrigue was unleashed and soon we were being warned of what was about to happen. Mulato went with cohorts to talk to the director.

«If they are going to give us 5 minutes to finish with the gangs, whoever wants to fight should take out his machete, and whoever doesn't, cuckoo! We don't want candles in this funeral.»

The meeting with the director lasted a long time, in the PN you could cut the air with a razor, the thirst for blood was increasing more and more, the paisa population had waited with longing for this event, today was the day to settle accounts, the covens full of machetes were uncovered and distributed to everyone who did not have one, it would be a real massacre, two hundred and sixty against more than two thousand, they had everything to lose. The fate of the gangs in the PN was sealed, it was only a matter of minutes.

Finally an agreement was reached, the director of prisons gave the go-ahead, five minutes, it was going to be handled as a riot, because in prison riots no one pays. The dead left with the government. After five minutes, the police would come in and everything would end as agreed upon.

The commission returned. «Comrades, they gave us the 5 minutes. Let's act quickly, this vengeance was due yesterday.»

I could not believe what I was hearing. «Look, be careful. It seems to me that they are preparing an ambush. These police officers are too attentive to the gangs, they seem to be in love with them, they're very doting with them.»

The word spread like summer fire, «Five minutes is all we have. Fly!»

When the green light was received in the modules, men armed with machetes began to come out as when a honeycomb of wasps is awakened, each face reflected the thirst for blood, the hatred long repressed and, above all, the sweet satisfaction of a revenge with the smell of victory. Their blood boiled inside them, I imagined scenes of the end of times, like the ones I had read in the prophetic books that we studied daily with the brothers, what we were witnessing was a collective hysteria with tinges of massacre, I thought, it will be something similar when the winds of persecution of the chosen people are unleashed. Very possible.

I do not know if in other circumstances I would have participated, for I have always been a man of peace. But being in the midst of that contagious epidemic of death, anyone finds courage and releases the tension accumulated in prison over time. However, today for today, I was no longer the same man who crossed the threshold of hell for the first time. The metamorphosis and the carnal lobotomy performed by the Holy Spirit had made me a new creature. I was a new being whose joy was now in serving my God and in rescuing fallen humanity. Looking at that swarm of killer bees, I was finally convinced of the need to snatch souls from the clutches of the enemy and to go even deeper in the knowledge of the truth.

The bulk of the legion surrounded the island. A surge of paisas began to jump the walls. It was there when what no one expected happened, the director of prisons also had his own agenda, one whose purpose was as distant from the agenda of people of the same origin, as fire from water, one whose only purpose was to become a national hero before his superiors and before the Honduran nation. He was to be the savior of the prison, the man whose military maneuver had managed to contain the largest riot in national history. In short, a letter of recommendation of great weight and value in his military and political career was anticipated, but that in the end, would only bring him death.

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A few days after this event, analyzing what happened in a meeting of module chiefs, someone said, «Look, comrades, I have already analyzed the matter, let's see if you follow me.»

«Talk,» they said.

«The first question: Why do you think the director took so long to give us the answer? Second question: How can you believe that they could get to the island faster than us, if they are in Tepas and we are here? Third question: Why, after betraying us, would he ask us what we were doing with the gangs? Analyze and tell me your conclusions.»

As the spearheads jumped over the wall, the first shot rang out. Then a burst of gunfire that put everyone's beans on strike, they looked at each other with a surprised face, they thought they were blanks. When they made the second attempt to jump over the wall, another burst of shots whizzed over their heads. This time they looked at the wall and concluded from the wall's bullet holes that they were live rounds. They were waiting for them, they were going to machine-gun anyone who dared to cross that wall. In front of the wall, there was a platoon of the national army with their combat weapons, waiting for the mutineers. It was their turn to dance with the ugly one, they immediately received the order to retreat back to the modules and once again to open fire with the machetes of war. As they retreated, one could hear the murmurings and complaints in a loud voice, almost in a stifled shout, made to the director. «You lied to us, you deceived us. You don't lie to men like that. You'll see, what you have done to us has its consequences. Take care! From now on you're a dead man.» It seemed untrue, Yet his analysis was right-on. Deceiving a mere mortal does not have serious consequences, or at least they are not life-threatening, but deceiving more than two thousand convicts, men without fear and knee-jerk reactions, is not a joke. You are practically cutting the wood to build the box, opening the ditch in the ground and shooting yourself in the head, all at the same time. But yes, after much thought, that conclusion was right on the mark.

The famous director delayed the time of the meeting in order to give his military chief time to call the nearest battalion and have a platoon sent to the PN as soon as possible, so that when the mutineers entered, they would already be in position, that is, when the go-ahead was given, the platoon and the chief were about to arrive, there was no other explanation for what happened more logical than this. This is how the betrayal was gestated, this is how it gave birth, years later, to death.

Half an hour after the incident, heavily guarded, the director arrived at the courtyard, in front of the modules where most of the chiefs were and took his megaphone. «I know that the chiefs and leaders of the PN are listening to me here. I know that the order for this riot came from here. I know that drugs are being trafficked here, their women bring them in on every visit. Now, tell me, what do you want me to do with the gangs, take them to another prison? To Amapala? To the Mosquitia? Where? Tell me.»

Voices could be heard from above, but no faces could be seen. «Get the paisas off the island of Casa Blanca! -Traitor! You tricked us! I told them: "You tricked us!»

«I took the maras to the island of Casa Blanca.»

«You tricked us, Judas!» Voices could be heard, but it was not possible to distinguish who was speaking. The front row only served as a screen for those in the back, who were the ones in the back, and they were the ones who spoke the loudest. «Men don't get fooled like that. Just wait!»

«All right! I'm going to put them in right now.»

The director signaled with his right hand, gave the order and immediately began the operation of eviction of the people of the same origin from the white house island. In the same way, he ordered the introduction of the gangs to the same place, only with a difference, to these he applied the round the world. He forced them to lie down on the ground and in that position to roll without stopping until they reached the door of the white house island, others went on their knees as if paying a promise, the humiliation of the gangs became so great that even though he had saved them from the massacre, they also began to murmur against the director and to pronounce a death sentence against him. Two years later, approximately, the director was executed in the San Isidro market while he was shopping for his house. Every day more deportees arrived from the United States, but these, as they were entering the penal center, were placed in modules well separated from each other, the older ones told them about the famous pact in which their leadership was almost exterminated, with this it was enough for them to be sedate, no strange clothes, no recruitment, nothing at all. Everyone who was on that side of the jail had to walk normally. We had them under surveillance. The first thing demanded was no meetings among themselves. If we look at you with menace then you been gevin the green light. In a cell of thirty or forty, three or four were not going to put up resistance, they were at the mercy of the paisas. If they left their place, they had no strength to defend themselves. At that time, Peluche returned from solitary, but they put

him in charge of the Casa Blanca. In the modules were the heaviest inmates, on the island the gangs. From there, the empire of Peluche rose again, only this time he had an extra, he also managed the business of the booth in that place, where he made a lot of money and in a legal way. That was the atmosphere in those days in the jail, everything under control. The brothers who visited us from Tepas began to arrive more often, my desire was fulfilled more and more every day, it was time for deep reforms in my life. It was time to have my own pact.

## Chapter 10

### THE PRIMITIVE

Our leader, Preacher, was about to be released from prison, he was overjoyed. He never got used to this world of intrigue and death. So the years he spent locked up really got deep into him. He had been born in the church, his formation was completely Christian. His mother was a tireless leader in the winning of souls and his father respected for being a man of integrity. They were his stellar examples. Where was it that this man lost his way? He had everything going for him. But like the mystery of the fall of the angel Lucifer, only he knew his Achilles heel. I often thought about that paradox, if knowledge is power, how is it that our leader, with all the knowledge he had, could not stand firm. I remembered the words of the last meeting we had had with those of the church in Tegus. «Knowledge without practice is vain and practice without knowledge is sterile.» It is like rowing without having the skill, you simply do not advance, and knowing how to row without taking to the water is worse. So I think that's what happened to my leader, he knew what he had to do and simply didn't do it, maybe the same thing could happen to me as well.

We were almost at the end of the study prior to the baptism, the long awaited day would soon arrive. And Preacher announced, «I want to make it clear that I am still in charge of this group. If I have not been with you lately it's because I was taking care of my departure paperwork. I have designated Cat to replace me when I am not here. However it has come to my attention that the group is already divided into two camps, one with Cat and the other with brother Suavecito. Although this division has been peaceful and is due to the type of teaching that is given, even so, we have to remain united, only in this way we will be strong against the attacks of the enemy.»

I still remember very well the illustration he used to give us the lesson for that day: In a valley, there were four bulls, all were champions, big and strong. They were fighting bulls, accustomed to the bullring. Because of their bravery, they had been spared and left to live at ease in the plains. They also knew about teamwork and their responsibilities to each other. One day, the lion came down from the mountain and was preparing to attack one of the bulls. Sensing the danger, they gathered in the center of the plain and with their backs to each other, they covered the four angles of possible attack. With no chance of surprise the lion tried to attack for a long time, but each time the bulls' strategy prevailed. However on one of those days that no one expects, the lion came to talk to the biggest bull from afar. «Don't come any closer, or I'll call my friends.»

«Don't worry. I have not come to eat you, but to greet you, because I know that you are the leader of this herd and your greatness gives you away. I also know that you are the most experienced and you will understand the reason for my visit.»

«You have spoken the truth. I am the largest and most experienced of the herd, so I will hear the reason for your visit.» bragged the big bull.

The lion retorted, «I admire your wisdom so I will come straight to the point. If it weren't for you, I would have eaten those three long ago, you are their strength, you are the only thing that keeps me from eating them.»

«Continue,» said the bull.

«I propose the following. The day I attack, instead of joining them, leave them alone, stand aside, don't defend them. Then I will be able to devour them one by one. In exchange, you will be free to go wherever you want, for the favor you have done me. Do we agree, Mr. Bull?»

The next day, the older bull requested a meeting. When the four of them were in session, he said, «I am tired of this little game of covering your backs. If it weren't for me, you would be just bones. So, from now on, everyone defends his own skin.»

When the day of the attack arrived, the lion launched his majestic roar from the hill in order to warn the older bull, who immediately moved away from the other three to observe, according to him, the end of his companions. What a surprise he got, when he saw that the lion, instead of heading for the herd of three, went directly to him, alone and unprotected. His vanity and pride was his down-fall. No one should think too much of himself. But that is how we thought of our group,

that we were the strong, the powerful, the invincible in the word. What a lesson we learned from that story. We decided to integrate the group again and invite all the brothers to our studies on prophecy. This undoubtedly united the group in such a way that we had fabulous experiences. We reached the point that the pain of one was the pain of all, the joy of some was the joy of all, we shared our dreams, longings, hopes and stumbles.

The perpetual theme being: when one goes out to congregate this, that, and the other will be done. We were new men, wild animals transformed by the power of love; men in stature, youths in character. We imagined that this must have been what the early church founded by Jesus must have been like, men with passions and weaknesses surrendered to the transforming power of God's Spirit.

We soon received a visit from a Guatemalan pastor. He taught us that we should work in soul winning, that we had become the feet, arms and mouth of the Lord in the PN, we should each work in our trades, raise funds and with these we could buy personal hygiene products, which were so lacking in the population, to share them with the most needy in the jail. In this way, we could reach our companions who were lost for lack of light in their lives. What a wonderful idea!

With permission from the administration we could enter the cellblocks, hand out the hygiene bags and preach the good news. The Guatemalan pastor also told us that in the church there were all kinds of people, the prophetic, the helpful, the generous, the evangelists, etc. And that we were like the fingers of the hand, different in function, but at the end of the same hand, with only one goal, to announce the gospel. At that time Preacher called me alone for a meeting. This was rare but I always decided to go. I more or less knew where the tiger was coming from. I arrived and sat down.

«Do you know who the leader of this PN group is?» he asked.

<Yes, of course I do. It is you. But let's do something, I'll let you speak first, then I'll speak, let's do it without causing interruptions. Do you agree?>

«Okay. What I came to tell you is that, I have seen that they are not abiding by the agreement we had reached. You now seem to have dominion over them and my people are consulted with you for your approval. Right?»

<This situation has come about because they know more about the Word now. And they see that you have disappeared. Your presence with the group is sporadic, and when you do come on the Sabbath, you start talking about business, which is a bad example coming from a leader. We have deepened our study of the Sabbath, we are not only convinced, but transformed.>

«What do I do to gain trust again?»

<Well, acknowledge to everyone that you have done wrong and apologize for what happened. Do you agree?>

<When you are gone, Cat will be the leader. If he fails, then I will take over, we will continue to study prophecy in our free time and we will organize evangelism inside the jail, with the earnings from our sales.>

«Very good. We were in complete agreement,» Preacher confirmed.

The next day, he arrived at the kiosk and as we agreed, he made the long-awaited apology. The group was filled with joy. Once again the Spirit of God was at work in his Church. Some cried that day, it was not easy to see a beast bowed down before love, stripping off pride and "I", recognizing and repairing his mistakes. Unfortunately, this stage of our leader did not last long. Days later he was involved in carnal affairs and his time was spent in efforts to get out of jail as soon as possible. It is something paradoxical, when one is told that he will soon be free, the senses are dulled and one does not think of anything else but the precious freedom.

Cat, I think out of jealousy, began to question my leadership in the study of prophecy. His point of view was that I was living in adultery with my wife since we had not been married, neither by the church nor by law. To a certain extent he was quite right, but the jail was an exception to the normal rule. First because they did not allow us to get married while jailed and second if we were to wait until we got out, then we could to make the our decision at that point.

I waited to talk to Preacher about the matter, who told me to talk to the Tegus church leaders when they came. I did so. I explained my situation and the answer I received was the answer my heart longed for. I could continue as a leader. Even more, they would allow me to be baptized with

the condition that upon leaving the jail I'd arrange my papers for the wedding with my beloved partner at home. How good I felt, a miraculous answer. I felt every day that passed that I was a spoiled child of the Lord. I didn't deserve it, but precisely because of that, they call it grace. We went to the election of the new leader. I was elected almost unanimously. Cat got angry and separated from the group. When we passed by where the other churches were meeting, we saw him doing things that were contrary to the scriptures. He knew it, but that is how the dragon acts, he cauterizes our conscience to the voice of the Spirit and keeps us from thinking about the final bill that our actions will accrue. He forces us to do things that even if we do not want to do them, we still do them, even knowing the truth and the consequences. He never reveals to us the result of these decisions, dissolved homes, derailed children, diseases, abuses, and finally death.

Three of us set out to visit Cat at his cellblock. We found him reading the prophetic books, when he saw us, he immediately tucked them under the pillow, but in this case the eye was faster than the hand.

<How are you, brother?> we said.

«Very well. What brings you to these parts?»

<We came to ask you to return to the church. There is no reason to stay away from the truth, you can disagree with the brothers, but never with God. Do you feel good doing what you do in the church you attend now?> we questioned him.

«No, brethren. No. To tell you the truth, I feel very bad, I was born in that church, but now that the veil has fallen from my mind and my understanding, I no longer feel good worshiping wrongly. The Word tells me that I must worship in spirit and truth and not with my emotions.»

<So what does my brother desire?>

«You know the struggle that goes on inside the human being, it is not easy. My pride usually wins and I end up staying where I don't want to be. I am asking you for some time. I will return to the fold, but I need to lick my wounds first.»

<My brother, your wounds heal in the spiritual hospital and with the doctor of doctors. We will wait for you tomorrow, don't fail.>

We said goodbye with a prayer and a big hug. Our eyes met without a word, but we understood that the wounds had healed. Wonderful love! Cat would return to the fold.

One day, while I was at the kiosk Preacher arrived and grabbed me in the middle of teaching Revelation 11. He did this on purpose, because on previous occasions, when I arrived at the beginning of the study, I would sit down and give way to him.

<Where do you get this information from?>

<From the book you lent me, 'Profile of the Coming Crisis',> I replied quickly.

«But I read that book and I did not find this relationship between Moses, Elijah, the law and prophecy. Precisely what Revelation 12 talks about, which are the two characteristics of the last church that will exist on this planet, before the second coming of the King. However, the symbolism does exist and it is real, I can see it clearly today.»

<Yes, I had to read the book three times and ask for the Spirit's discernment before I fully understood it.>

«Yes. How is it that you know so much?»

<It's not that I know so much. What happens is that our church has the two characteristics of Revelation that I told you about before. It is precisely the Spirit of prophecy that clarifies to me everything that I cannot understand when I read the word directly. It is explained to me in a simple way and refers me to the greater light, the Bible, to support the truth that I could not previously see.>

«How interesting!» commented a companion.

<Yes. This truth, if you make it your own, becomes something that you not only know, but that you live day by day. You will then not only be convinced, but also converted. Once converted, your preaching will empowered with the Spirit, power to transform lives.>

<Lend me that book,» pleaded Puma.

<Sure, here it is!>

From that day on, the Puma was never the same. His transformation was visible and real, when he left the prison he was a different man from the one who had entered through the main gate.

«Brother, today my life begins! I look forward to seeing the glorious day of the second coming,» were his last words before he left. He hugged me and went out. In his face there was something different, I knew it because I also felt that inner joy, something difficult to explain, but real.

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The day arrived! We finished the basic study of preparation for baptism, we borrowed the baptismal font from another congregation for the event. At the end of the event at least thirty people would give their lives to Christ. A commission formed to clean the font and prepare it for that Saturday. We were filled with a feeling of fear combined with happiness, we wanted to be ready for the next challenge, to walk in holiness. I asked Preacher again about my situation. He told me that I had no problem, that our situation was an exception and to go ahead with our decision.

The night before, I felt anxious, I was thinking who was going to write my name in the Book of Life. It seemed unbelievable to me that the dream I had that night was becoming a reality. I began to analyze the word "brother", a rare word but full of meaning and beauty.

Could it be that from now on I would become part of the family of the Creator of the universe? The Bible answered me with a resounding yes, that's how it should be. What a fabulous step!

A radiant sun dawned, everything was commotion, some ran there, others ran here, towels, flip-flops, bibles, we wondered what we were going to feel when we got out of the water, would we receive the anointing, there were several questions that fluttered in our heads. When we were told that the Tepas people had arrived, we ran to the longed-for meeting.

After the sermon we were called to receive the baptismal vow. In total there were thirty-nine of us who had made the decision. The vow was read, each of us raised our hands to indicate our agreement. When we finished, the brothers embraced us and prepared us to go down into the waters. I pinched myself and thought, <Will this be a dream? "It seemed like a dream, to enter the waters to purify our being and become followers of the Master of Galilee, the Anointed One, the Lord of Lords. Will we be up to the challenge?> Then I remembered what I had learned, it was not with my strength, not with my intelligence, and certainly not with my possessions, only the Spirit in me would make me a victor. As we emerged one by one from the baptismal font, our eyes filled with tears, but these were disguised by the water that glistened on our faces as the sun reflected off them. We embraced each other. Joy, gladness, triumph and brotherhood were reflected on every face. We were visibly broken. Never before in the PN had we seen this demonstration of brotherly love between men, it was not normal, but we did not care what they thought, the victory was ours and our Savior's. I felt light as a feather.

They said to me, «That pile is overflowing with sin.» On every face there was joy, tears and conviction. I will never forget that day as long as I live. The whole day was a party, the other inmates who met us were infected by our spirit and we could see how smiles were drawn on the most sterile faces of the prison, I understood that no one can resist the power of love, no one. What a power!

That night I went to bed still enraptured by divine grace, I reviewed every detail of that day, the sun, the blue sky, the shining water, the face of each brother, their hugs, their comments, above all that feeling of well-being and peace that we experienced. We had begun a journey of life in hell and today we had touched heaven.

«I leave the world and follow Christ,» was the praise the brothers sang as we paraded to the baptismal font. We were physically imprisoned, but free in spirit. I felt like I was standing on top of the world and shouting my happiness. I knew I would earn the scorn of my family. But that didn't matter, there He was with me. That was the most important thing. When the next day dawned, we did not wait for the appointed time to meet at the kiosk, we ate and left, one by one we arrived.

Again the smiles, the hugs, the fellowship and the joy. «We are new men,» they all said. We must continue the struggle every day, we must grow in knowledge, wisdom and love. With that fervor, we resumed the study that had been left unfinished from the previous theme. «New men,» those words echoed in my mind for many days. New men!

## Chapter 11

### SWEET SWEET FREEDOM

I could not believe what I was living, I felt my life like in a dream, but awake. When I entered this subhuman world, I remember well, as if it were yesterday. I was at odds with the world and with God, I did not want to know anything, nothing mattered to me, living was only an event that I could not avoid. I remembered the story of Joseph, from spoiled child to slave, from slave to administrator, from administrator to prisoner, from prisoner to Pharaoh's second in command. Of course, mine was different, but to a certain extent, similar. Not the same, but the same. Even though I did not know about this wonderful being (yet Joseph did), I felt as loved as he did. Yes, here in hell itself as it sometimes was. It's crazy, there is no logic, it's nonsense, but real. I was the living proof of such a miracle, a miracle that would take me to great heights with great triumphs, equally to enormous battles, with painful growth. I had been purified in the crucible of trials and emerged victorious. I had learned that it was no longer I who was doing the major fighting, it was He in me. Wonderful Father!

Why do human beings have to go through this stage? It is illogical that we do not see it coming. Then we were left saying, «If only I had embraced it by faith, there was no need to suffer such consequences.» I remember my grandmother saying, «In this world there are only two types of human beings, those who learn from the mistakes of others and the others, those who make the mistakes.»

Of all those in our module who had been baptized or who were already Christians, only I had not been humiliated by the uncircumcised. I remember that day, I had drunk quite a lot of water, my thirst was outlandish and seemed not to be quenched by anything. I got up from my bed about ten o'clock at night and went out to the john to urinate. There, in the middle of the darkness, the figurines of pagan gods were hiding. Then suddenly, they came out to meet and confronted me.

«Have a drink and a cigar with us!» they urged me with their twisted proposals.

<No, thanks! You know I don't do that.>

«Nothing's going to happen to you, dad. Go on! Have a little drink, have one!»

<No man, don't bother. You know me, I've given up all that. What's wrong with you?>

«Look, have you heard about He-man's sword?»

<Yes. I looked at it when it was being made, but it had no edge.>

«Yes. -Look at it, it's not sharp yet, but it does have a point. Do you feel it?» they asked me.

«Can you feel it?»

<Yes, I saw it. It's still blunt.>

«Feel it!» Several times it stung my belly. «Feel it! Look, doesn't it go through the skin?»

<Yes! I told you I've already tried it. Don't bother.>

«No. -But look, it's a good goad. Right?»

I turned around and went to Baal's older brother, he followed me. I looked at his brother and he understood me. «Hey man. Stop fucking with your brother, don't bother him anymore.»

But he kept on poking me in the guts, more and more. I knew he wanted to intimidate me. He had done it with other brothers, who, not wanting to fight, preferred to take his smoke or drink. I felt I couldn't do that, not because of my machismo, but because of my conviction. I began to mark the time between one goad and another. Then I agreed, but took the sword from him. He jumped back and I jumped behind him. He took a dagger from his waist, nervously dropped it on the ground and could not pick it up. Then, I grabbed He-man's sword.

<Look, don't go around bothering the brothers at night, but thank God that we are now brothers in Christ, because if we were not, I would have killed you today. Take your sword. Go to bed and put it away.

«Now do you see?» said the older brother. «You don't learn. Stop that double talk, man, it's going to kill you, one way or another, sooner or later, it's going to kill you.»

He went into his bunker and kept pulling himself. That same night, a short time after the incident, he was sworn in at the cellblock. When they talked to him, he couldn't even speak, the crack had made him idiotic. Again, the older brother saved him, as he was his coordinator and advocate.

The next morning, he came to where I was washing my clothes and apologized to me.

<Don't worry about me,> I said. <You already know me, but someone else is biting you and you won't even notice. I advise you to give up those vices, they are worse than this prison, because they take away your freedom without your knowing it. I knew well, that although the earth was barren, the Word never returned empty. Sooner or later, it has an effect on the lives of those who heard it. What could be more proof than myself, a hardened atheist?

A one in a million personality comes mind who moved everyone in the jail. It is difficult to find someone in hell who was so loved by the majority of the prison population. Due to his way of being (even though he was there for murder) everyone liked him. He was called Prestamista. Be it with money or other business, everyone who came to him left happy. The key was that he never failed to help anyone. He was everybody's partner, in everything, so nobody was unhappy.

One evening, five of them who had met with Prestamista were playing cards in the cellblock. There was no problem doing this, because Prestamista was the coordinator of that area. But, when there is money involved, there are no friends. If it is like that outside, imagine what it's like in hell. That night the Prestamista beat them all. There is always one or the other who does not like to lose. When a loser wanted to stand up like an enraged cock, Prestamista put him on hold; not only because of the money, but because there was a law to respect. Coordinators respected each other and were respected. When they left, they were being taken away by whoever brought them there. In his rage, the trouble maker said that he said Prestamista and those who threw him out would paid with their death. He moreover craved the box where Prestamista kept the bills for his business, which was quite a lot. Prestamista was so well liked and respected that he never imagined that a peanut like this loser, was sentencing him. Damn the man who trusts another man.

Word spread quickly. Prestamista never believed that anyone would lend himself to helping with the loser's revenge. He thought that he was too well liked among the PN population and if anything came up, he would be warned by his business network. Little did he know that, as the popular adage goes, "To the sound of the banknote the monkey dances." And this monkey had no soul. In hell, there is always someone willing to sacrifice themselves for a peso. Besides, they knew about the loot that was kept in the famous box and among the mattresses of Prestamista.

It was a skillfully kept secret. Nobody except the protagonists themselves knew of the coup they had prepared for Prestamista. The voracity of this band was so great that they skipped the jail's command protocol. Even Peluche did not smell the tamales that were already boiling. Peluche was well armed, yet it was only a matter of waiting for the right moment and Prestamista was going to fall, and ugly. I don't remember what they called the hit-man who did the job, but what I do know is that he was well placed. He didn't mind going over Peluche and his entourage. The love of money led him inexorably to his death, as he and his three cohorts were eventually brought to justice in their cellblocks.

Prestamista" used to get up at night and go to the bathroom at least once. They carefully studied his habits and decided that this was the most opportune time. He was alone, and in the dark, all cats are brown. I remember it was an October night. I know because we had arranged with Prestamista to celebrate my birthday and his early release from prison as he was then making arrangements to get out of jail. With great detail and bragging, the principle hit-man told the facts to those in his cellblock. He seemed to be reliving his moment of euphoria. The four of them waited for Prestamista in the bathrooms. Like tigers crouched in the undergrowth, with greed more than patience, they awaited their prey. They were all armed with sharpened daggers, ready for the cutting. Thirsting for blood raised their adrenaline to an unmanageable level. There would be no escape, their altered senses could taste in advance the feast of human sacrifice. This job had had its Christmas. They let him go into the bathroom. Inside there were two waiting in front of him, and when he wanted to turn back, there were already two more behind him. They turned off the light

and wrapped a sheet around his face to stifle the lamb's screams. While one halted him, the other three let all their repression fall on the victim. Fifty-seven stab wounds from the abdomen up, his screams drowned in blood. Overconfidence, once again, had taken its toll. The loser, when the oath came, pleaded guilty.

The next morning, the whole prison lamented his death, the man was really loved, there was no one, except for the perpetrators, who did not regret his passing, But in hell, being loved and having a ticket, are not courtesy passes for life, they are adjectives of death, when trust is involved. When they took the loser to the punishment cell, I stood up and examined him carefully.

<No. No, Peluche. This loser couldn't possibly have fucked Prestamista. Just look at him, if he's still got his baby teeth. No, nobody's going to fool me, there's a hairy hand somewhere here.>

«Yes, you are right. This kid is not yet old enough to turn over Prestamista, but we are going to find out everything. It seems to me that this tamale was wrapped in several leaves.»

That same day Peluche gave the green light to the perpetrators of that deed. Authorization that the enemies of the major assassin and his companions were going to take advantage of later on. In prison, everything is known, even more so when the transgressors have no respect for the laws of the prisoner. The saying that the fish dies by its mouth is true. They defied Peluche's green light. Instead of seeking forgiveness, they sang it to the four winds, in a defiant tone. Big mistake as usual

In my last days in prison, I spent a lot of time processing my papers. I realized that it was easier to get in than to get out of hell, so much bureaucracy, too much bureaucracy, so much paperwork. Anyway, it had to be done and the faster the better.

Soon the longed-for day would come, the day I would go out to sleep at home, there with my family, even if it was only for a day, it was something wonderful, later I understood why one is released little by little. Prison penetrates so much of our being, that we feel like fish out of water when we go out to the street, it is a very strange sensation, very strange, we do not know how to react to freedom, we simply do not know. The church was growing in membership every day. We were happy with the brethren, because this meant that, although we were born small, our testimony in hell was in accordance with the scriptures, our studies were substantial. Moreover, they were based entirely on the Bible, on the whole Bible, not a solitary verse here or there, but on the whole Bible. We had found this maxim in our study, «The Bible explains itself, what it says at the beginning it maintains throughout the whole scripture, there is no isolated doctrine, the truth is integral and complete.»

This is why, I believe that the other churches did not allow their members to even approach us to ask for clarification, and we were not going to force anyone to accept the eternal gospel. So, whoever wanted the water of life, had to walk to the spring to quench his thirst. It may seem incongruous, for when the veil falls from our eyes, the first sensation we experience after our personal joy is that of sharing the discovery of this treasure with those we believe are still in darkness. But in prison, we had to repress that desire, we could not be controversial. Especially now that the fellowship of churches within the PN were better organized. They held highest authority before the leadership with enough authority to block even our existence. Moreover those who complained that we were taking away their parishioners became the majority. We had it bad, but when has "the truth" ever had it easy on this planet? Never, that was our consolation.

The inquiries that were made revealed that Cleaner had pulled the Prestamista killing. He and his cronies were sentenced, the red light already had a name and surname. Cleaner had earned his nickname during one of the riots that took place in the prison. There were guys of the worst kind who, using their wiles and strength, robbed the most humble members of the penitentiary stratum. They would turn to the coordinators for help, who in turn would turn to the prison captain, who in turn would turn to the "General of Generals". The latter in total agreement with the war council passed sentence. Thus, it was how the Cleaner, at the beginning of the riot, took personal charge of sanitizing the prison, not one was left standing, all those sentenced to red light received what they deserved. The task of cleaning the Cleaner was difficult because he was an expert at sensing the atmosphere, They always wanted to ambush him, but he kept alert to everything. Besides, it had to be done by several people, because they were afraid to confront him alone. There had been several

attempts on his life, but he had escaped them all. The penultimate one had been made in the stands of the sentenced prisoners.

They realized that he was looking for the red light to be lifted, they told him to come before the great ones with humility, but mainly he should not be armed before the council. They were going to show him the place where the council was going to wait for him. He had to arrive at the indicated time, because it was not easy to gather them together. The mousetrap was set. Two machete-wielding men were waiting for him upstairs. As he went up to the meeting, they met him, and he went downstairs like a burnt puppy, where he found two more armed with machetes. As best he could, he used his arms to ward off the machete blows, curving his hand in such a way that the blade did not reach him in full. So he defended himself like a cat on his belly, until he got close to the door and managed to flee with few wounds on his body. That feat was known by everyone in the jail, so his fame as a good fighter grew even more. The big guys decided to ask the authorities to transfer him to Casa Blanca. While there, they put scouts on him, guys to watch his every move. The day of the hunt was near, the deer had to pass the shooting point. They calculated that the best place for the kill was the bathroom, because every day he got up before everyone else and bathed completely naked there. That was the moment they were looking for, everything was carefully planned, this time there were not going to be four hunters, they were going to throw the whole herd at him, the whole cellblock had to participate in the hunt. To be exact, that day he was surrounded by thirty-nine. They stung him to such an extent that he had to be taken out in several plastic bags. Thus ended the story of Cleaner.

Teaching: «Better a live dog than a dead lion». One day, they came to my abode to tell me that the longed-for day had arrived, that I should pack my backpack, I was going free. There were several of us on the list. Early at seven o'clock in the morning, I had everything arranged. I went down to the gate to wait to be called. They told us that the only thing missing was the director's signature on the paperwork. We looked at each other. We gave each other encouragement. There was a kind of joy that no one wanted to release to the public because nothing might not happen. What if our release did not materialize? The whole jail was aware of our departure, we had our backpacks with us, the paperwork was ready, but without the director's signature, it was worthless. Three o'clock in the afternoon, we were still hanging like laundry on the cyclone mesh, waiting for the signature. Little by little, discouragement took hold of us, just thinking about the parade back to our cellblocks was too much for any of us. But thanks to the Eternal One, the order came, we could go to the second gate. There would be the second station on our way to freedom, here we would remain for some time. We noticed that there was a guard walking behind the director, with our papers in his hand, looking for his signature. The director, with arrogance and disdain, only looked at them from afar. It was six o'clock in the evening, it seemed that we would stay one more night in the prison. The guard kept beseeching the director, he just didn't feel like signing and no one could force him, a feeling of helplessness and smallness came over us, this could not be. How could anyone, at his whim, play with the destiny of another human being like that?

I remembered the Word: «A leaf does not fall to the ground, without His permission.» It was not the director who had the upper hand. To the mortal eye, it may seem so, but when we see with spiritual eyes, we see that which does not exist. The spiritually ignorant may think that it is he who makes the decision to withhold the signature, we know that this delay is allowed by Him for a purpose... what is it? That answer I was not allowed to know, just accept it. Calm returned to my spirit. <Don't worry. The director is going to sign when He wills it. The universe is in His hands whether we believe it or not, that an indisputable reality.>

«So it is,» they replied. «We must be patient and wait. We will come out when the time is right. We settled at the gate.»

<If we don't leave today, I'm sleeping right here. I'm not going back to that cellblock to sleep,> I said.

«We too are staying here,» said the others. Then the rest of agreed, «We're remaining here.» He signed it! But it's already seven o'clock, so what are we going to do?

<I'm not stay here a minute longer, even if I have to walk, I'll get to Tegus.> I expressed euphoric.

We could no longer sleep inside the prison because we were free men.

<Let them take us all out,> I said to the guard. <We are leaving regardless.>

They advised the director of our situation, I think he understood. At eight o'clock in the evening, they began to call our names one by one. When they opened the door, we looked anxiously towards the street. Our gaze seemed to bend between the edges of the iron door. «Who will come to meet me, will there be someone waiting for us?» I mentally prepared myself for the pedaling. A friend had promised to come and get me that day, but at that hour it was almost impossible that he would still be there.

Finally, my name rang in my ears. It was sweet as honey to my senses. I advanced to the check-in room, was handed my temporary ID card and the door was opened, and as I put my two feet on the free ground, I suddenly felt dizzy as if I wanted to faint. I was so excited that it caused strange symptoms in my body. My feet felt heavy, my head was big, I was half deaf, I started to walk without direction and through the middle of the street. Suddenly, I saw my family coming to meet me. They were all waiting for us. It seemed like a dream, we started to cry, my body was shaking and trembling inside from so many mixed emotions. They hugged me, touched me, stroked my hair. I felt luminous. It was if we were not prepared for that moment, it felt like we were awake inside a dream.

After so much hugging, squeezing and crying, we started walking towards my friend's car. They told me that they had sent notices to several guards to tell us that they were outside waiting. What did it matter, we were free, physically and spiritually, what a special feeling. When I got into the back of the pickup and the car started to drive, as I was on the edge, I felt panic. It had been so long since I had been in a car, I immediately got down on the floor where I felt safer.

The freedom effect that every inmate who leaves prison for the first time suffers was much talked about in the prison environment. But I, to tell the truth, I thought they were exaggerations, but I was suffering it in my own flesh now. Fear takes over our being in various ways, we feel insecure even in bed when we are sleeping, when we cross the street or when someone looks us in the eye, it seems that they know we are ex-convicts. This panic lasted about a month for me. During the time it took me to get home, I enjoyed the wind that combed my face, the stars and the moon that illuminated the sky, the smiles of my four children who were in the car with me. Inside the cabin, I could see my wife with her cousin and my friend laughing freely; every once in a while, she would turn her face towards me and with her sweet gaze she told me how much she loved me.

Those forty-five minutes seemed eternal. When we reached the top and passed the post, I sensed that we were closer. Suddenly, like someone turning on a light in the dark, I looked at the urban birth of the capital. What a spectacle! My eyes suddenly lit up, I had dreamed about it a thousand times, because the image of the capital at night was imprinted in my mind since I was a child. I enjoyed it to the fullest, all the way down from the entrance to Tepas. I regained my courage I had lost that first night I spent in hell. Yes, I began to thank my Creator for such a sublime moment. It was completely indescribable. It was clear in my mind that my confinement in hell had saved my life, «What a paradox!» I thought. «To overcome hell.»

There was an assignment that Peluche had given me the day I said goodbye to him. I remember well what he said to me, I will never forget it. «Look Christian. When you are outside, if someday you have the opportunity to do something for those of us who are inside, just do one thing.»

<What's that?> I asked as I gazed into his gray eyes.

«Tell the world that even though we are in here because of mistakes we made or bad decisions, we are still human beings like them. Falling into prison is not a five-star vacation hotel with everything included, which is what many journalists publish. When they say that the prisoner is not afraid of falling back into this hell, because it is like going to a hotel for free. Tell them not to forget about us, that the Word says to visit the convict. «I was in prison and you visited me.» So he

said. I was stunned, I had never heard Peluche in all those years recite a portion of the Bible. I knew there was something in him that was not yet lost.

«Because of this yellow journalism, we lose our privileges in here, fewer visiting days, less training, they turn off the lights earlier, they limit conjugal visits, as if it were not enough to be locked up here like an animal. I know we deserve it, that's why I pay my sentence, but we are men of flesh and blood, even if many only look at the turtle shell we wear, which is necessary for survival. We deserve respect as human beings, although some have lost that qualifier upon entering here, but it is about rehabilitating the inmate, incorporating him into society, not corralling him, with no way out. There would be fewer escapes, fewer assaults, fewer deaths, more respect for visitors. We would take care of putting order in here ourselves. I know we are not easy, nor are we tame sheep, but if you were able to show with your life that we can change, there is still hope for all of us, there must be will.» He hugged me tightly. «Don't forget! Take this message to the world.»

<Of course. Remember that change begins with you, not with the one next to you, but with you.>

«How I wish I had your conviction.»

<See you! Life gives us surprises.> It was the last time I looked at him, God had used him in hell to take care of one of his children. Unbelievable but true.

I had plans for the first Saturday. To go and visit the church. I thought it would be a church full of brotherly love, warm, devoted and alive, the fire of the spirit would be something common among the disciples and that my arrival there, would be a reason for celebration and joy among all. That first Saturday, however, proved that I was so wrong. The experience was catastrophic, I found the same church that the beginning of Revelation describes. The final church, an odyssey, blind, naked and arrogant. Yet I remembered that we were living the days of which the prophecy spoke, the last prophetic period of the church in the world. So it should be, those who arrived at the prison formed a small group that worked in the final days, segregating the wheat from the tares until the very end.

This further confirmed my faith. <How much treasure in His Word,> I thought. Would this stop me? Would it diminish my love for my Creator? Would I abandon ship? No! Never. My goal was set, my gaze was fixed, my conversion complete. Nothing could separate me from the love of my Creator, I had been formed in the crucible of trial, I had been converted in hell. The words of the "General of generals" resounded in my mind, «Green light, paisa!» Yes, green light to be truly free. At last, completely free in Christ!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sigfrido A. Zúniga, was born on October 18, 1958, in the city of Tegucigalpa, Francisco Morazán. He studied Mechanical Engineering at the Federal University of Rio Grande (FURG), state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. His passion for cooking led him to graduate as a chef in 2021, so now he is part of the Honduran Association of Gastronomy and Professional Chefs (AHGCP). Later, between 2022-2023, he received a diploma in Theology at the Adventist University of Monte Morelos, Nuevo Leon, Mexico.

He is a lover of the arts, especially music and literature. His passion for literature emerged at an early age, during his high school years. In addition to the narrative genre, he has also ventured into poetry, of which he will soon make himself known. His life motto is: "Everything can be improved."

## MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR

My father, Freddie Zúniga, who sleeps the sleep of the just, always emphasized in us the need to have an attitude of gratitude towards life and its colors, whether pleasant or not. This philosophy of life, allowed us to always see the positive side of everything, making our experience of existence on a small daily scale a state of joy and satisfaction that has no equal. Thank you, Dad! Life can change us in a second, and this attitude of always seeing the glass half full with gratitude is the basis for facing any situation, no matter how difficult it may be. Life is not easy, especially when we are victims of situations beyond our control. However, we must not lose sight of our focus on gratitude and our willingness to do our part to transform the challenges that life presents us with. After the dark night, the sun will always rise to dispel the darkness. It is my hope that this work will awaken this feeling in every reader, and that they can make the Sun of Righteousness their steady anchor in the storm and their captain who will always lead them to safe harbor.