

EXT. NOVITIATE - RURAL MEXICO - NIGHT

Black boots of a DOZEN SOLDIERS silently kick up dust as they shuffle towards the gate of the novitiate. Enclosed by a rod-iron fence, the novitiate is composed of four small buildings, side by side, and a chapel.

SUPER: El Llano, Mexico. August 4th, 1914.

Eucalyptus trees sway, silently, in the background as the TROOP LEADER (42) sits tall on a chestnut horse, clad in the uniform of the Mexican Revolutionary Army.

They move in two short columns with sloppy tactic, either from poor training or they don't expect a fight. The POINTMAN, mustached and on edge, moves forth and opens the unlocked gate.

The troop enters the courtyard and heads towards the closest building. M1903 rifles are COCKED as they approach the door.

The leader dismounts, the pointman opens the door, slowly, making no noise, before gliding inside. All except two follow inside.

INT. NOVITIATE - COMMON AREA - CONTINUOUS

The soldiers find themselves inside a small sitting room, with a hallway off to one side. The troop leader waves his hand. Four soldiers head down the hallway. They quietly enter a --

BEDROOM

Where a MAN lays fast asleep in his bed. The soldier raises his weapon.

INT. SECOND BUILDING - BEDROOM - SAME

TWO GUNSHOTS cause MIGUEL PRO (23) to wake and sit up suddenly in his bed. MUFFLED VOICES mark the presence of unfriendly soldiers.

CRACK, CRACK! More gunshots!

Miguel SWALLOWS, hard, then wastes no time getting out of bed silently, donning shoes and a dusty brown coat.

HALLWAY

Miguel sticks his head out the door; he looks left, looks right. He's alone. He tiptoes down the hallway to the --

NEXT ROOM

Where PULIDO (27) lie fast asleep. Miguel's hand creeps over Pulido's mouth just as -- POP! POP! -- closer this time. Pulido wakes up with a jump, and looks at his friend.

Miguel places a finger over his lips.

MUFFLED VOICES creep closer.

EXT. NOVITIATE - NIGHT

The squad of soldiers come out of the first building, cross the courtyard, and enter the second quietly. At the exact same time, Miguel and Pulido exit out the door on the opposite side of the building.

The two soldiers left posted outside, backs to the doorway, remain oblivious.

Beyond, from the other buildings, A HALF-DOZEN MORE SEMINARIANS AND PRIESTS silently pour out. They head in a coordinated direction without words, away from the street, towards the far end of the novitiate.

They help each other climb the fence before gliding elegantly into the canal, and out the other side.

EXT. CORNFIELD - NIGHT

As the novices climb out of the far side of the canal, they spread out through the rows of dead, brittle corn. Miguel and Pulido stay together, CRUNCHING cornstalks under their feet as they run towards the distant mountains.

SHOUTING ERUPTS from the guards posted outside, seen from a distance pointing towards the fleeing novices.

CRASHES and SMASHES are heard from the increasingly-distant novitiate. GLASS BREAKS. One of the buildings of the novitiate goes up in flames as if it was doused in gasoline.

Miguel and Pulido look at each other, then double their pace.

The soldiers make no attempt to quell their voices now, the jig is up.

ORDERS ARE BARKED back and forth as our soaking heroes plunge deeper into the corn. One by one, the rest of the buildings go up in flames.

Orange light grows steadily and gleams off of the canal water, dancing through the cornfield as the soldiers pursue, rifles raised above their heads as they plunge in the canal.

Smoke from the chapel billows into the air.

Cornstalks CRASH AND BREAK, whipping in their faces as Miguel and Pulido sprint, faster and faster.

More SHOUTING from behind, then, CRACK! WHIZZ! A bullet flies overhead.

CLING! The sound of a magazine being ejected from the 20th century weaponry pierces the air. BANG, BANG!

The run faster and faster, BREAKING cornstalks, nearly tripping, whipped in the face, arms pumping, until --

Miguel suddenly STOPS.

A few yards later, Pulido stops and looks back. He fires Miguel a crazed look accompanied by furious beckoning -- 'what are you doing?!'

Miguel sprints back the other direction, towards the soldiers! Pulido, defeated and scared, pursues.

AREAL VIEW: Miguel runs through the maze of corn TOWARDS the aggressors with Pulido behind him.

PULIDO POV: Miguel, barely visible sprinting through the decimated corn DARTS into a gap in the thick corn in a new direction.

Pulido pursues, and Miguel always runs just barely in view, until the corn is too thick to move through. We lose sight, and the trail goes cold. Pulido finds himself alone.

He stops, HUFFING and PUFFING.

CRASHING through the cornfield behind him reminds us of the danger he faces. Here, in some of the thickest part of the cornfield, he gets on all fours and crawls underneath one of the clumps of long-ago-broken cornstalks, and lays down.

His HEAVY BREATH is deafening. Across the path, in a very similar position, is Miguel looking back at him. He raises a finger to his lips -- 'shhh' -- as FOOTSTEPS creep closer.

Miguel and Pulido watch. The scene glows a haunting orange from the flames in the distance.

Two sets of boots, paired with muzzles, slow from a run to a stalk. CRUNCH, CRUNCH under their feet, dripping canal water.

They edge closer. Miguel and Pulido's follow them with their eyes -- until they stand directly in between the terrified novices. They stop breathing as the boots and muzzles come within arm's reach.

Here, the soldiers stop. Miguel and Pulido look across to one another with hollow faces. Miguel closes his eyes.

The flint of a lighter FLICKS. It FLICKS again.

SOLDIER (O.S.)
Wet -- wait a second --

One of the muzzles disappears from sight -- BANG! Miguel and Pulido FLINCH.

SOLDIER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Here.

The hot muzzle reappears. The two men press cigarettes against it. Smoke drifts in front of the hidden novices.

The two soldiers stand smoking for 20, no, 30 seconds, until two cigarettes fall to the ground and are stomped out. The soldiers move back the way they came.

Pulido breathes again. Miguel keeps his eyes closed.

SMASH CUT TO:

MORNING

Pulido fell asleep, right there, head in the dirt. The wind blows thick with smoke as Pulido comes to his senses and looks around. He looks across the path, Miguel is missing. He pushes dead stalks of corn off of himself as he stands.

In the distance the rubble is barely visible.

EXT. NOVITIATE - DAY

Four downtrodden seminarians wander among the rubble. Miguel, covered in dirt and soot, digs a body-length hole outside of the desecrated chapel. He's nearly waist-deep in the dirt.

Pulido approaches, smoking a cigarette, and sits at the edge of the hole beside him.

Miguel stops, and they brood over the scene a long while.

MIGUEL

God has not forgotten the man to
whom He sends suffering and trials.

Pulido looks over to the SIX BODIES, including a priest,
which lay face-up with their arms folded over their chests.

PULIDO

Tell them.

Pulido offers the cigarette to Miguel. He takes it and sits
beside his friend.

Pulido stands and grabs the shovel.

LATER

Smoke drifts past six lumps of dirt, each with a makeshift
cross, which mark the graves of dead men.

INT. PRO HOME - DAY

JOSEFA carries a wooden bowl full of piping hot rolls through
the house and sets them on the table in front of Miguel. The
whole family is here: DON (52), ANNA MARIA (17), EDMUNDO
(14), HUMBERTO (12), and ROBERTO (9).

MIGUEL

Cocol? Mama, this is too much!

Josefa gives him a sad smile and caresses his face.

Don reaches his dark, calloused hand out to take one of the
rolls, and breaks it. He hands the halves to the youngest --
one to Roberto and one to Humberto.

DON

Where will you go?

MIGUEL

There's a train that leaves
tomorrow to Los Gatos.

ANNA MARIA

Los Gatos?

MIGUEL

In Yankee Land! Pulido and I will continue our studies with the Jesuits. And after that, who knows? We are refugees. We could end up anywhere in the world.

A beat. Don gives a LOW WHISTLE.

DON

They'll never let you back into Mexico. Persecution of the clergy is only getting fiercer.

ROBERTO

I will go with you!

HUMBERTO

And me!

JOSEFA

Hush!

HUMBERTO

But I want to be a priest, like Miguel!

MIGUEL

Such courage! I'll not leave you behind, of course!

JOSEFA

They are children!

A wide smile crosses their faces. He beckons them over and they come.

MIGUEL

Whenever mama bakes the cocol, this is me, see?

They look at their half-eaten half-rolls, not convinced.

DON

Prepare for bed, boys.

ROBERTO/HUMBERTO

Yes, papa.

JOSEFA

You too, Edmundo. Maria.

(to Miguel)

And your stomach? What of your medical care?

The kids scamper off all to various parts of the house.

MIGUEL

It's always better with the Cocol
mama. Really.

DON

(getting up)
Ha! Just like when you were a boy.

MIGUEL

When God causes you to suffer much,
it is a sign that He has great
designs in store!

The words are no consolation for a mother's heart -- Josefa looks down at the table, struggling to hold back her emotions. Miguel takes her hand. Don departs towards the kitchen.

She touches his face fondly.

JOSEFA

My Cocol.

MIGUEL

I'll be safe.

JOSEFA

I know.

MIGUEL

I'll write every day.

She smiles.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

And soon I'll come home to you --

Don returns with an unmarked bottle and three shot glasses.

DON

(pouring shots)
As a priest!

MIGUEL

Then you will call me papa!

They each take up a glass. Don raises his high into the air.

DON

To Miguel!

Viva!