

PADRE

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OVER BLACK.

Water dripping. The scraping of a brush gliding across coarse hair. A distant organ tunes the hymn *'Ecce Sacerdos Magnus'*.

FADE IN:

INT. STABLES - SUNRISE

Steam ascends in soft curls as foam lathers over the flank of a WHITE MULE. A HERDER (40s) works steadily, his hands moving across the wet coat.

Beside him, IVAN (12) watches. His face is marked by vitiligo. Their eyes meet - boy and mule - both tired, both afraid.

The herder looks at Ivan. He reaches over and places the boy's hand on the mule's flank beneath his own. The mule presses back against them, solid and warm. The organ music swells then dies. Its ears twitch.

HERDER
(resigned)
Bring the saddle, son.

The boy moves unwillingly, dragging a military saddle across the stable. The mule's nostrils flare at its approach.

A purple-edged caparison settles on its back. The animal brays, hooves scraping stone. As Ivan buckles the straps, a sunbeam catches a silver emblem on the saddle - a YOKE CROSSED BY ARROWS. The mule kicks, rejecting its burden.

Ivan throws his arms around its neck.

INT. METROPOLITAN SEMINARY, LOBBY - DAY

A grand marble affair. From behind - a SEMINARIAN kneels in prayer. Drumrolls and distant crowd voices echo through the hollow space. His fingers tap on a missal, distracted.

The mule's heart-wrenching brays join the cacophony. The seminarian sets the missal down, stands and moves to a window. He opens it; his hands are strong, unspoiled.

Outside, the herder and Iván struggle with the heavily adorned mule, which digs in its hooves, refusing to climb into a military truck.

Iván turns to the seminarian without seeing him, distraught, eyes holding back tears.

The seminarian fills a pipe and lights it, his face still unseen. Something in his demeanour is as reluctant as the mule's.

The herder shoves the mule and shouts to Ivan to get in the truck. Through the smoke, the vehicle disappears towards an avenue cordoned off by CIVIL GUARDS. A rolling of drums becomes thunder around us, followed by...

EXT. ZARAGOZA, SPAIN, 1964 - DAY

The cheers of a huge crowd: a tide of red-and-yellow flags. Sweat-sheened faces press against the Civil Guards - their shiny tricorns forming an unbroken wall along the avenue.

CAPTION: Based on true events

Through the avenue, soldiers, clergy, and civil authorities all march in perfect matrimony - A grand procession leading to Zaragoza's cathedral.

EXT. METROPOLITAN SEMINARY - DAY

A group of PRIESTS line the steps like crows on a wire. We follow the Seminarian from behind as he pushes through them. Their chatter grows clearer as the seminarian approaches.

PRIEST 1 (O.S.)

All will remain the same... forever
and ever, Amen.

A white smudge appears in the procession below: the mule. ARCHBISHOP CANTERO (70), resplendent in lavish bishop's vestments, is waving from the mule's back. The herder holds the reins.

FATHER BORAU (O.S.)

Jesus entering Jerusalem...

PRIEST 1 (O.S.)

At least he didn't demand a triumphal
arch.

PRIEST 2 (O.S.)

Because they've gone out of fashion.

The crowd surges to touch Cantero's hands. He discreetly wipes his palm on his robes.

PRIEST 1 (O.S.)

Behold, his saintly hands.

FATHER BORAU (O.S.)
You mean his iron fists.

The seminarian stops to study the mule's progress. Confetti clings to its wet muzzle. Every step is a lost battle.

PRIEST 2 (O.S.)
Fists or hands, whatever. May they confirm Gallocanta soon and get him out of our sight.

The seminarian moves on and joins the speakers. One turns:
FATHER BORAU (27), tall with an easy smile.

FATHER BORAU
Alas! Wirberto! Decided to join the spectacle?

For the first time, we see the Seminarian's face: this is WIRBERTO DELSO (29). His robust, bull-like build contrasts with his delicate glasses. He wears no clerical collar.

Wirberto nods curtly, his eyes fixed on the parading bishop as he steps beside Borau.

Cantero's gold spurs dig into the mule's flank. Its legs tremble, but the herder holds the reins firm. The animal advances.

A few metres on, fresh confetti and flowers rain from balconies, clinging to the mule's eyes like blood spatter.

And then, its legs buckle. Cantero's smile vanishes as he clutches the reins. The military band stops mid-note.

The crowd shouts. The mule kneels in surrender, Cantero hanging like a broken crucifix.

Wirberto sees Ivan burst onto the avenue, mirroring his animal's desperation. Guards give chase as he shouts for his mule.

The herder caresses the mule until it rises. Applause erupts as Cantero straightens, raising his arm in victory. Conquest of the beast. The band resumes.

Borau studies Wirberto gravely.

FATHER BORAU (CONT'D)
Do you still believe Cantero will implement the Vatican's reforms?

Wirberto doesn't answer, watching Iván being caught.

FATHER BORAU (CONT'D)

Wirberto?

WIRBERTO

Hm? Yes. Someone must. And soon.

A guard strikes Ivan, HARD. They drag him away, his feet carving trails in dust as his cries drown in the crowd.

Wirberto lurches forward, hand outstretched. The priests restrain him.

FATHER BORAU

Are you alright?

WIRBERTO

They're hurting that boy! They are taking him!

FATHER BORAU

What boy?

Borau scans the crowd, but only Wirberto still sees:

Iván's terrified face suspended in air, his vitiligo marks stark in harsh sunlight, eyes pleading for help.

FATHER BORAU (CONT'D)

(joking, to Priest 2)

Will Cantero make this one a bishop... Or defrock him before he's even ordained?

PRIEST 2

At this rate, they'll send him to Gallocanta... to dig potatoes.

Bishop Cantero rides past the priests and salutes. His gaze lingers on Wirberto. This moment freezes and becomes...

INT. ZARAGOZA CATHEDRAL, CANTERO'S OFFICE - DAY

A photograph on the wall. Dated 1964.

Wirberto (37) sits before the photograph, his eyes locked on he image. His simple robe is a stark contrast to the office's suffocating opulence.

A pendulum clock marks the time with merciless precision. Wirberto tugs at his clerical collar, searching for air.

CAPTION: Eight years later, 1972