

Don Milagro story ends with suspense

Father Sanchez gets lost in a madman's house, tries to escape something unknown

The finale

By Mark Baldrige

"Ah," said Don Milagro, touching the bruise on his forehead, "Home is where the heart is, no?" They were seated before the fire. Don Milagro was toweling his hair dry, wrapped in a fresh cloth robe. The old priest was left to drip dry by the fire. It did not occur to him to be insulted by this. It didn't occur to him to be anything but curious about the mad Milagro and his dreams, fascinated even.

He questioned the younger man but received no straight answers.

"My father, my real father was phosphorus," he seemed to be saying.

"Phosphorus?"

"Yes," nodding slowly, "light-bringing, you know the Latin?"

A servant appeared, "You called, Don Milagro?"

The priest had noticed nothing, no call to servants.

"Yes, set up the viewing room. And bring more chocolate for the good Father here."

The priest stifled a yawn.

"Oh, I've been remiss, you're tired! You must stay here the night, I'll arrange it. And in the morning my carriage will help you home!

The least I can do for the priest who brings me last rites, eh?" And here he laughed loudly.

"I do not think so, Don Milagro," the priest was not eager to sleep in the house of a mad man. He sensed something terrible behind this strange behavior.

"We are spirit, pure spirit you know," the young man was saying, "the body is but the soft outer edge, as it were, of a spiritual entity — invisible and powerful," he spoke of power as if licking his lips.

"Look into the fire," he said, pointing, "look!"

Father Sanchez followed his gesture. The flames leapt up. As always they made grotesque shapes.

"The body is temporal, existing in time — trapped like an ant in amber. But the soul! The soul moves backward and forward, at oblique angles, free!"

The shapes in the flames took on almost human form, dancing bodies intertwined, an orgy of flame.

Father Sanchez felt drowsy, warm.

"Look at your hands," came the voice, soft for the first time, of the Don Milagro.

The old man looked at his hands. Before his eyes they smoothed over, as if the skin were filling up, the

wrinkles and spots fading, the yellow nails becoming clear and white as horn.

"You could go back. Revisit the world of memory, now so painfully intense for you. You could —"

"What? Be young again?" Even his own voice seemed far away now.

Milagro's voice came slithering toward him.

Suddenly the old man jumped, upsetting a cup of hot chocolate. "I'm on fire!" And indeed he was; his pants smoldered where they'd come too close to the flames.

Don Milagro upturned a vase over his lap — cool water and flowers fell into it.

The priest leapt to his feet. "What a way to treat a priest!" He danced in rage. "Call upon me in the middle of the night, drench me and then set me on fire. You are a madman, Milagro, and this is a madhouse!"

He stalked out the door. Immediately he became lost in the hallways and side rooms of the great house.

He turned, tried to retrace his steps. The house seemed abandoned. Milagro was nowhere to be found.

After more than five minutes spent trying to decide if he'd been

going in circles, he called out, bleating like a sheep, "I'll be happy to leave in my huff if you'll direct me to the door now."

Almost as if this was a signal, the lights went out beyond the half-open doors at the end of the corridor.

He stood irresolute. Then a light began to flicker inside that room — a strange mechanical black and white flicker accompanied by ticking like a complicated bomb.

The old man stumbled toward the door. Inside were plush seats, a miniature theater and something like he'd never seen before: people projected on a screen!

"What is it?" he croaked. "A movie," came a voice from somewhere in the silent ticking twilight.

The priest recognized this from descriptions; he had never seen anything like it.

"A movie, delightful!"

"You like it?"

"It's charming! I'd thought it would be... in color. And the sounds and smells are missing, of course. It's nothing like I thought it would be," and he turned toward the dim outline of the younger man. "Now, if you'll direct me to my bicycle —"

"Isn't it fascinating? Don't you think?"

"What, the movie?" he turned

back to face the screen. His shadow now fell large upon it.

"Yes, rather. But I thought it would be more like memory. I can remember things that actually happened in the distant past, tell myself stories," the priest seemed to be dreaming, far away. "But I recall the scent and smell, the flavor of the thing. This is clearly just a projection, isn't it? Transparencies before a light? Lenses, shadows."

Milagro stood, lurched to his feet. "You don't find it mesmerizing, seductive? CAN'T TEAR YOUR EYES FROM IT?"

And he stumbled over a chair in the dark, clutched at the padre's clothes.

They were propelled out the door and into the light.

Father Sanchez saw with horror that the young man had aged a decade — his hair going white, his features pale.

With claws tangled in the priest's clothes he shrieked, "Have you no imagination, man?" and fell in a heap at the old man's feet.

Father Sanchez knew then that he had narrowly escaped something, but what exactly?

He stood a long time in thought.

Before he hunted down the exit and his bicycle and carefully made his way home in the still dripping night he did what he had come for: whispered the words that might accompany Milagro to heaven, if he was going any such place.

Don't get mad. Get promoted.

THE TEMP

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Student deals with racism, eyes opened by UNL experience

When I first stepped foot on UNL's campus in August of 1990, I stepped into a world far different from my own. This world was full of hate for blacks — this world didn't care about me or my people.

I graduated from high school in Omaha. I never really thought of my life in Omaha as sheltered — I used to tell others that their lives were sheltered.

My roommate and I used to drive to Omaha almost every weekend when we were freshmen. We knew we were in Omaha when we saw a black motorist drive past us on the interstate.

Entering Omaha transformed us — we glowed — we hung with friends — we escaped much racism.

Although racism did exist in Omaha, I was surrounded by my family and black friends most of the time. And while drowning in the aroma of blackness, I was far away from the harsh reality of how racist our nation really was.

My roommate and I came back to that reality quickly.

Upon seeing the University of Nebraska-Lincoln interstate sign Sunday afternoons driving back from Omaha, we were awakened from our dreams.

After a few months of the racism

here, we couldn't take it anymore. We called home and told our parents and grandparents that we were coming back to Omaha — to stay.

I tried to prepare myself for the disappointment I knew my parents and grandparents would have. But they had no qualms and they understood. At that time I hadn't even considered that they understood because they went through the same thing — only worse.

I went to the University of Nebraska at Omaha to enroll for next semester classes. I was happy. I was excited. I couldn't wait to get out of Lincoln for good.

But it wasn't that easy. Upon finding out about my roommate and myself's preparation to leave, Jimmi Smith, director of the Multi-Cultural Affairs Office, talked to us and kind of pumped UNL up. He didn't lie to us. He told us that we would face racism no matter where we went.

And since my roommate and I were both journalism majors, Jimmi told us that it would be beneficial for us to remain. So we stayed. I knew UNO didn't have a journalism college, but I felt that if I had to go there to escape this racism, then

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