

battle against friction, nudging the tired pointer into an unnatural contortion until it snapped forward into the next category: Mexican—more specifically the Vegas family of Morenci, Arizona—a family of four, living in a small, adobe house that was located in the foothills just outside of town?

Simón had nothing against Mexicans. He would have been just as shocked to find himself trapped in a tall, blond, Swedish frame or the thin, agile torso of a Kenyan long-distance runner. But this particular body explained the presence of so many things that had contributed directly to the distorted, contorted nature of the spirit that was encased inside of it. In a Norwegian body he would never have spent his childhood picking grapes and digging for cucumbers in the San Joaquin valley. As a Swede he would never have labored beneath the vines in Napa or Sonoma.

Simón shrugged again. Perhaps fortune had not been so unkind to him. After all, hot and red *chuletas de puerco* or a steaming bowl of *menudo* for Sunday breakfast were a hell of a lot better than boiled potatoes, haggis or cloudy jars of gray *lutefisk*. Where else could he possibly live but in the brown body of a Mexican? The only other viable possibility would have been the body of a Persian magician. The very next slot—and the very last category on the wheel of fortune had been the Garfourpour family, an extended lineage of conjurers and illusionists whose tiny carnival wintered every year in Turkey and has put on shows in every small village in Iran for almost a century.

Arrayed on the table in front of the Mexican were five or six hardbound books. Each volume had been carefully opened to a chosen page. To his left was a tall stack of vinyl records. Under the table, sequestered within a leather briefcase, was a strange looking machine. He reached down and carefully turned two of its controls. The lights on the device began winking sequentially. Then all five lights lit up simultaneously. As he did so, the lights in the entire prison dimmed for a full five seconds.

Simón squeezed his eyes tightly shut and pressed

the palms of his hands against them in an attempt to quell the maddening shiver of his eye lids. He clenched his teeth and forced his lips together until he had temporarily stifled the manic, never ending string of seemingly unconnected syllables that had recently started leaking from his psyche—after an absence of almost two years. They had started up again the day his wife had announced that she was pregnant. His lips were becoming colorless from the exertion.

He placed his right elbow gently against the copper toggle switch that would connect the output of a small amplifier directly to the prison transmitters. Showtime was at noon sharp and he felt fidgety and frustrated—strapped for time because he had less than three minutes to get to his destination at Sing Sing prison in New York, fly down to Florida, then back to the West Coast in time for the grand premier of a radio show that was already doomed to failure.

In another instant the chair-bound man was soaring without wings through the air above the main prison yard.

“Julius Rosenberg, the man who supposedly stole the secrets of the atomic bomb,” whispered Simón to himself, “probably died before the blue current burned its way through the core of his body. He expired in just a few seconds. On the other hand, his wife Ethel took three full-power jolts and over fifteen minutes to die. The stench and smoke from her living, baking corpse billowed through the execution chamber and drove out the gagging priest and the coughing, red-eyed executioner. And Ethel Rosenberg was probably innocent of the charges.”

In another micro-second Simón Magus Vegas was shooting through the clouds and soaring high above San Francisco Bay while simultaneously flashing backward in time to the nineteenth day of June in the year 1953. He turned eastward and streaked across country at almost the speed of light, arriving in Ossining, New York just as the sun was setting.

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JAMES COLLUM

Carousel II,
Before the Maddening Crowds, 2011
hand-coated platinum over pigment print, 12 x 12 in.



courtesy: Susan Spiritus Gallery