A Girl Next Door

Mary Jane Staples

Chapter 1

July, 1956.

The rock and roll movement, born, the public were informed, of the young people's enthusiasm for free expression in music, was reaching a peak of popularity in America and Britain. It has to be said, however, that the singer Liberace, with his jewel-encrusted get-ups, his photogenic piano and his equally photogenic minty-fresh choppers, still commanded a faithful following among older people.

America had something else going on in addition to rock and roll, something that was capturing the interest of all its citizens, young and old, as well as the rest of the world. A programme for exploring space. Heading their scientific team was a rocket genius, Wernher von Braun, the German who had built Hitler's flying bombs. Of course, some people, despite their interest, laughed at the idea of a spacecraft that could reach the moon, thousands and thousands of miles from Earth. And even if it could be managed, who was going to do what with it?

'Don't look at me, I'm up to my ears working on our property company's overheads,' said Sammy Adams, well-known businessman of Camberwell, south-east London.

'Try me,' said his son Daniel, an adventurous type.

'Try you not, honey,' said his American wife Patsy. 'I want you at home. Your granny and grandpa are coming to Sunday tea.'

'How about Edith Hammerglow down the road?' suggested Daniel's cousin, Bobby Somers, to his French wife Helene. 'She's always talking about an urge for faraway places.'

'That woman?' said Helene. 'She'd fall off her broomstick before she reached the rain clouds.'

'Who's going to give her first aid if she lands in our back garden?' asked Bobby.

'Ah, what an idiot,' said Helene, 'but you are still a nice man.'

That kind of dialogue was representative of the fact that in the UK nobody very much gave serious consideration to the possibility of placing a man on the moon.

Far more prominence was given to an event in the Middle East. General Nasser, dictator of Egypt, had summarily nationalized the Suez Canal, much to the anger and dismay of Sir Anthony Eden, Britain's Prime Minister. He was having to consider whether or not he could allow free passage of the Canal to be controlled by

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Egypt. Since its inception, the Canal had been Britain's lifeline to the Middle East and the Far East, and what was presently left of its Empire in those regions. There were rumblings in 10 Downing Street.

Of interest to the Adams family was the news that in America the police and the FBI were conducting a nationwide manhunt for a young German Jew, Wilhelm Kleibert, who was wanted for the murder of an immigrant Ukrainian doctor, one Paul Rokovsky.

The murder had touched the life of Mrs Felicity Adams who, blinded during a German air raid on London, had been due to consult Dr Rokovsky in New York. An outstanding ophthalmic surgeon, he had restored the sight of several blinded American soldiers of the Second World War. Only a short time before Felicity and her husband were due to take the flight to New York, Kleibert had shot Dr Rokovsky dead.

During interrogation, Kleibert claimed that Rokovsky was actually a German medical practitioner responsible for hideous experiments on inmates of the notorious Auschwitz concentration camp. Kleibert himself had been an inmate, along with his brother and sister, twins. He had survived, his brother and sister had died as a consequence of experimental operations. His escape from police custody had been engineered by two FBI men who held written orders to take him to FBI headquarters. They turned out to be impostors, the orders a forgery.

That had been two months ago. The murder had taken place in December 1954, the trial constantly put back due to the delaying tactics of the defence and the complications of investigations that were mainly concerned with discovering whether or not the murdered man, Dr Paul Rokovsky, really did have a murky history. The defence claimed they had witnesses, concentration camp survivors, to prove he did, that he was actually Dr Gerhard Fischer, a German known to have worked at Auschwitz under Dr Mengele, for whom a hunt was also going on. Both were classified as major war criminals.

The FBI believed the impostors to be agents of Mossad, the Israeli security force, and that they intended to return to Israel in company with Kleibert. Airports and seaports were all being watched.

That murder crushed Felicity's hope of a successful operation.

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