[Snap Judgment]

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Today, on Snap Judgment, we're putting in miles, traveling overseas during the swinging 60s. The storyteller, Richard Hatch, was but 12 years old, and head over heels for the cool girl at the local American school. I'll let Richard take it from here.

**Richard:** I was 12 years old, living in a foreign land. There were a hundred in my seventh-grade class, about a hundred of us. And we were the sons and daughters of military men, diplomats, and a few private industry folks, but mostly diplomats and military.

Jill was the new girl in school. She just was so different from everybody else. Long brown hair, big brown eyes. Hands down, just stunning. If you want an idea of what Jill was like, let me tell you this one thing. Chewing gum in those days, you had five sticks in one stack, and they were all wrapped with aluminum foil. She would take the aluminum foil and wrap it tight. And then, she'd stick it in her comb. This is in class, this is in school. When things get dull and boring, she'd go over, and very secretly, she'd stick both ends of that aluminum foil into the power socket. And you'd hear this tremendous [explosive sounds] boom, and a big white smoke would go up. And she'd scoot back to her desk and would really spook the teachers. And then, those of us who were competing for her affection would, "It was me." "No, no, it was me." We'd always take the fall for her. That's what the kind of person-- just crazy and fun.

Now, it was really important for us to communicate with each other. The only way that we could do it was to write notes to each other. And so, teachers would not know who we are if they intercepted the notes. We decided that we would all pick our own secret codenames. Jill's codename was Fortuna. And I said, "Jill, why'd you pick Fortuna?" She'd been in boarding school, she'd lived throughout Europe. So, I said, "Fortuna? What's Fortuna? She's, "Oh, Richard, you're such a bore." She'd kick into this English accent. And she says, "Don't you know Fortuna is the goddess of fortune and fate and good luck?" I said, "Ah, okay. That makes a lot of sense." She was a goddess in my eyes. So, great.

I decided that my codename would be Danger 9b. Okay, that's a good one. Jill came up--

**Regina:** Danger 9b, how did you come up with that one?

**Richard:** I was not cool. [singing *If I Only Had the Nerve* by Judy Garland] Life is sad, believe me Missy, without the vim and verve. Sixth grade, the musical *The Wizard of Oz*, and I got cast as the Cowardly Lion. [in a singing tone] I could show my prowess, be a lion, not a mouse, if I only had the nerve.

[applause]

I had a rival and his name was Mitch. Mitch's code name was Diablo. Which I thought [chuckles] was so, so appropriate. He had the looks. He had the charm, and he could cite poetry. It was tough competition. Jill, I think, she was gravitating to him. So, he was the one I knew I had to beat.

[indistinct conversations]

We went to a dance at her house on time. And The Beatles had just come out big. I wanted to dance with Jill. So, I arranged to have a song called a *P.S. I love you*. It's a slow song. We could dance together in the old style. That was the plan. Ah, that would be so nice, swinging back and forth. A nice home, it was all carpeted. And all of a sudden, whoever's in charge of the record player, puts on *Twist and Shout*. Jill, I don't know what she learned, she could really move. Mom couldn't teach me how to do that stuff. So, you do your best, but I'm just devastated and you can't have a conversation because the song is the rowdiest one on the whole record.

The tables have turned and Diablo has probably struck again. It had to have been him that put on *Twist and Shout* because he knew it was my dance. My plans are totally tattered. I have no idea what the next step is going to be. I got to come up with something that is going to turn the tables on Mitch, give me a little bit more of an advantage because up to this point, so many things were not working out. Now, her best friend would give me advice. She said, "Well, you're going to have to go big, do something to get her attention.

The Beatles had another song called *Listen, Do You Want to Know a Secret?* And I'm thinking, "That's it. I'm going to tell her my greatest secret. And it has to be something spectacular." Trouble is, I got to come up with a secret. [chuckles] Come up with something. So, I made a time for Jill and I just to meet and to walk one evening. My biggest fear would have been, is she going to believe this?

That night when we walked together was the first time we were together alone. It's quiet. It had been raining. It was in the fall, so it was a little on the cold side. The streets were shining. You know, that smell of just after rain? It's just so refreshing. She had this little black furry hat, this black turtleneck sweater. She had a sense of style and sophistication. I reached down and I grabbed her hand and she just held on tight. The electricity holding her hand was, I don't know what it did to me, it was something new. Okay, I'm going to do this. As we're walking, I said, "Okay, Jill, I'm ready to tell you my secret. Me and my whole family, we're all spies for the US government." And she stops and looks at me, and I said, "I need your help on a couple of assignments." She stares at me, and then she kisses me.

Powwow, pop, zing zang. I'm all in now. Whoa. Although this was my first kiss, it became very apparent that it was not her first kiss, because she was really good at it. I thought I've got to do everything I can to keep this going. So, I said, "Jill, we've got to stake out the Russian embassy tonight. That's the assignment." Now my idea of a stakeout is just look around, don't be too suspicious. Just might stroll by, don't blow your cover. Don't do anything stupid. Don't say anything. Don't backtrack. Nothing. You're committed. So, act cool. This is it. I was still trying to recover from her reaction being so positive, far beyond my dreams.

I had no inkling of what was coming. We certainly knew that the Russians were our enemies. They tried to put nuclear missiles into Cuba. The Russian Embassy was not far. There was a gate, and then there was a call button right next to the gate. We're strolling by. And, again, my idea of the stakeout was to keep it simple, and just don't spend much time there. But she goes over and she pushes the call button. Nobody answers the call button, the gate opens. She says, "Come on. Let's have some fun." [echoes]

It doesn't occur to me till we're walking into the grounds, this is the Russian Embassy. I was reeling from the whole idea of her having kissed me, but also reeling from the fact that the gate even opened and that she's pulling me inside. And the biggest thing about it is, my dad was a spy for the US government. They recruited him into counterintelligence. I quickly figured out counterintelligence was spy stuff. Now, I don't remember him ever having to say, "Don't say anything." But it was just natural, if someone asked me what your dad did, I said, "Ah, he does business stuff." I had a presence of mind enough to know that you don't talk about those things. So, all this has hit me, "Wait a minute. My dad's a spy, and I'm walking on the enemy ground. What are we doing? What are we going to come up with?"

When I see the soldier coming down the steps with this intimidating uniform, and an intimidating firearm, that got me nervous. He was this big guy. But Jill takes it in stride, Jill, calmly starts talking to him. He said something in Russian to us. She says, "We are seeking the British Embassy." He only spoke Russian, he had no idea what either one of us were saying. So, he ushers us up into this little waiting room into the embassy. I don't know what the consequences, what can they do? Do they just kick us out? Do they actually take us in and use us for some kind of prisoner exchange? Holding hands is the least of my thoughts at this point. I'm thinking about survival.

This man eventually comes, some kind of diplomatic, and he spoke English and he says, "Children, [chuckles] what are you doing here? Can I help you?" And she says, "Da, spasibo," which is Russian, yes, thank you. And then, she goes on in English saying, "Do you have any brochures or pictures?" In those days, you could not visit Russia. No tourists were allowed getting information, which was pretty tricky. She describes that she's doing a school project. He did produce some brochures. They were all in Russian. But by this time, I was thinking Jill probably could read them. [laughs] Who knew?

At the end of that, as we're walking out of the embassy, it was time to get her home. So, it's such a stupor. I don't remember how I got home from her house. But when I finally did arrive, there was my dad waiting for me. Little did I know, my dad got the word from his operatives, from his contacts that his son and his girlfriend were in the Soviet compound. "What are they doing there?" I thought that my father would be very upset that I've may be blown his cover. That if the word got out in the community that he was involved in espionage, that could put him in jeopardy. It clearly dawned on me, you can't tell him. You can't tell him that you told Jill that the whole family are spies. You can't do it.

There's my dad saying, "What were you thinking?" I said, "What?" And I didn't tell him that I said I was a spy. I just said, "Oh, well, Jill had this homework assignment. I was helping her with her homework." I was grounded for a while, pretty much confined to barracks, [chuckles] was the term. Frankly, that separation from Jill, I think, only heightened her excitement about, "Well, this guy's got something to give." Being grounded was probably the best thing, because I didn't have to follow up with anything for a couple of weeks. And so, there was this mystery still about, "Wow, what's next?"

After a while, things fade. I didn't have a badge, and I didn't have cool stuff. So, it wasn't enough to keep her total interest because other guys kept popping up. My dad was being transferred back to the States. It was time to leave at the end of the school year. By that time, Diablo had had won over Fortuna, and Danger 9b was leaving the scene. What could I do? I was ready to give up and admit defeat, but there's nothing I could do, except write letters from thousand miles away. I was hoping that I could keep the contest going. But how do you chase a butterfly? I'm not sure that I could have ever kept up with her. And I just lost track of her. So, that's over 50 years.

When this all happened, I decided, if I'm talking about her, I better get her permission. I better try to find her. I found her quite quickly. No one was answering the phone for several days. And then finally, a man answers the phone. I quickly tell him, "This isn't a crank call. I'm an old friend of Jill would love to talk to her." I was so excited about talking to Jill after 50 years. I just thought that all those emotions would flood back and she would say, "Oh, Rick, I remember." She picks up the phone, and she did not. That was crushing. But she was a lovely lady, and we reminisced and she said, "Boy, I'm glad I had such a big effect on you, but I don't remember that at all." That's okay. Makes for a good story.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Thank you. Thank you to Richard Hatch aka Danger 9b for sharing your story with Snap. Rick is back in the US of A. And while we have it on good authority that he hasn't got into any spy capers of late, he is putting the finishing touches on a [unintelligible 00:16:17] memoir about his travels abroad. To find out more, head on over to our website, *snapjudgment.org.* Original score by Dirk Schwarzhoff. It was produced by Regina Bediako.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** See that? We did it again. Because in Snap time, things fly by. That's why Snap is the magic ingredient to making things you don't like go away. Waiting at the doctor's office, doing the dishes, having to make small talk to your neighbor friend. Don't worry about what friend's talking about, just slip your earphones in and listen to Snap, download the journey. If you're going to up your game for your wardrobe because it's summertime, get yourself one of those Snap Judgment t-shirts because that goes with everything. Yours available right now at *snapjudgment.org.*

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And this is not the news. No way is this the news. In fact, you too could be a dangerous sixth grader. And you would still, still not be as far away from the news as this is, but this is PRX.

*[Transcript provided by SpeechDocs Podcast Transcription]*