

The Axel Files: Florence's Floozy

By Jerry Bader

Who Will Find The Savola Diamond,
And Who Will Die Trying?

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ISBN Paperback: 978-1-988647-79-1

Hard Cover: 978-1-988647-80-7

Ebook: 978-1-988647-78-4

Chapter 1

Dace's Doll

Hotel Geneve, Mexico City, 1941

Otto Dace enters the café in the lobby of the Hotel Geneve. His seven-year-old son, Heinz Victor, and his five-year-old daughter, Florence Katrina, cling to him. The little girl is uneasy. She grips her father's hand as tight as she can. The trip from Zurich to Buenos Aires to Mexico City was long, scary, and uncomfortable. The children longed to return to their home in Switzerland, but that wasn't an option.

Otto finds seats in the lobby café. He tries to comfort the children by ordering American-style ice cream sodas: butterscotch for Heinz and chocolate for Florence. But no amount of ice cream can calm Otto's nerves. He isn't used to the anxiety: not because of the war; not because of his wife's recent passing; and not because he fled his superficially neutral homeland. What makes Otto Dace nervous is the extraordinary pink gemstone sewn into the lining of his trench coat. He doesn't dare take-off the overcoat despite the oppressive summer heat.

The *Nebel des Krieges* created the opportunity to escape Europe with the *Conte's* prized possession. Only time will tell if he'll get away with this *vertrauensbruch*. He felt bad about betraying the *Conte*, but the war changed everything. *Es ist jeder für sich*: it's everyone for themselves. Who knew if the *Conte* would even survive the conflict. Otto had his own priorities and an obligation to his children. He had to secure their future.

Otto waits for his contact while Heinz and Florence try to enjoy their ice cream treats. He is supposed to meet a Nun in the hotel café. She will provide documents that will get him and the children into Canada. In return, Otto will supply intelligence to the *Sinarquistas* contact in Toronto, who will pass it on to the German embassy in Mexico City. The Nun is a member of the *Unión Nacional Sinarquista*, the Nazi-leaning, Catholic extremist political party and an acolyte of Hellmuth Oskar Schleiter, a German agent and member of the Nazi Party.

The Nun appears carrying a brown envelope in one hand and a colourful fabric doll in the other. Otto stands to greet her. He can see she is young with what would be a pretty appearance if it wasn't for the long red scar that runs down the right side of her face. She joins Dace and the children. She hands Dace the envelope. "Everything you need is in the packet: visas, funds, and the name and address of your contact in Toronto."

She holds up the doll. "Your daughter must be frightened. This might help." She hands the doll to Florence.

Otto: "Nothing for the boy?"

The Nun shakes her head. "He's a boy. Why would he want a doll?"

Heinz grabs the doll from his sister. He thrusts it up towards the Nun's face. "*Flittchen!*" He throws it on the ground. Florence runs to retrieve it.

Otto: "The children need sleep. They've had a long and tiresome journey."

The Nun scowls at the little boy. "A beating would be more useful." She gets up and walks away.

That evening Otto sits at his hotel room desk with a small sewing kit and his trench coat in front of him. Florence stands beside him, clutching her new prized possession; she loves her present and her Papa. Otto takes a knife from his pocket. Florence watches while Heinz sulks on the bed. Otto slits the lining of his coat and removes a brown leather pouch. He opens the bag and takes out the pink diamond. He holds it up so Florence can see it.

Florence: "*Wunderschön!*"

Otto smiles. "Yes, my dear, very pretty."

Heinz jumps up and runs to the desk. He grabs the diamond from his father. "*Es ist meins!*"

Otto takes the jewel from his son. "*Nein!*"

The boy shuffles back to the bed to sulk some more. Otto takes the doll from his daughter. He slices open the back to create a gap; he can see the tears well up in his daughter's eyes. Heinz smiles as he watches his sister's distress. Otto kisses Florence on the forehead. He takes the diamond and puts it back in the leather pouch; he stuffs the bag into the hole he made in the back of the toy. Otto sews up the back of the doll, sealing the diamond inside. He hands the repaired toy back to Florence. She throws her arms around her father and kisses him.

Otto: "Be very careful with the doll. Hold on to it tight. Never let it out of your sight." The little girl nods up and down as dramatically as she can.

Heinz snarls, "*Flittchen!*"