

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!*"

Chapter 2

Axel and the Asshole

Present Day

Ivars Dace wipes his brow with a white silk handkerchief for the third time. He stuffs the silk back into the breast pocket of his suit jacket. I doubt it will stay there long.

Axel: "You nervous, Dace?"

Dace: "You unnerve me, Mr. Axel." He pulls out the damn puff again and wipes non-existent sweat from his forehead. I lean back in my chair. Put my feet up on the desk and grin. It's the type of grin that betrays little friendship. "It's either Mr. Webb, Axel, or hey-you, not Mr. Axel. Got it?"

He pays no attention to my smart-ass comment. Instead, he reaches into his jacket pocket. The sudden movement causes me to quickly remove my feet from my desk and stretch for the top drawer, home to my pals, Smith and Wesson. I stop. He drops a white envelope on my desk, causing a fan of hundred-dollar bills to spill out. I caress the cash like it's a lover's inner thigh.

Dace: "Now who's nervous, Mr. Axel?"

I ignore him. Ivars Dace is a seedy little man with a Peter Lorre accent and a nervous, obsequious manner. He is a servile, nasty little prick, but the stack of hundred-dollar bills laid out on my desk demands attention, something I rarely muster without some incentive.

I am an impatient person. Perhaps that's why I have few friends and a phonebook full of enemies. Confronting people about their hidden vices and recently revealed misdeeds does not get you nominated for Mister Likability. I have a tendency to be abrupt, especially with characters I don't like, people like Ivars Dace.

Like most clients that find their way into my inner sanctum, he has secrets. He is not what he pretends to be. The item he wants me to track down is a diamond, a fucking large pink sucker weighing in at one-hundred-and-thirty-three carats.

Dace: "If I may, Mr. Axel, just as a warning." Do you believe this? The little *putz* is threatening me. "Mr. Axel, if you try to keep the prize, sell it, or perhaps hang it around the neck of that pretty creature that decorates your front office, well, then I would have to kill you. Do you understand, Mr. Axel, kill you dead?"

Axel: "Sure, I get it. I keep the gem; you kill me or at least try. It's been tried before. If you want, you can check that out for yourself. All you have to do is visit the Mount Pleasant Cemetery."

Dace: "That isn't very funny, Mr. Axel. I am a serious man with serious associates. They would be quite unhappy to find me dead."

Axel: "Serious associates: interesting." I figured the little creep had backers. He doesn't have the wit, or the balls, to do this on his own. He's merely the frontman. "Well then, I guess we are both on notice."

Dace: "So, we do understand each other."

Axel: "Okay, Dace, I get it. You lost something, and you want it back. Maybe you did lose it, maybe you never had it, or maybe it belongs to someone else. Not my business. You're afraid I'll keep it, but that's not my style. Rocks that size are always more trouble than they're worth. You got some dough, and you're prepared to part with it. And that's just fine with me."

Dace: "Excellent!"

Axel: "So you think this stone is in the city. Why here? Why not Antwerp or Israel?"

Dace: "The Fat Man is here, and the Fat Man wants it. He swears it's the Savola Diamond; he knows where it's hidden. He claims it's a family heirloom. Now he wants to cut it into smaller stones and sell them off. He needs the money."

Axel: "This Fat Man, have a name? And an address would help."

Dace: "The Fat Man has many names. I can't tell you what he calls himself now. When I knew him, he called himself Amadeus Savola. Says he's some kind of Italian Count. I understand he's frequently seen having supper at a steak house downtown called, The Flapper's Club."

Axel: "Well, that's a place to start. I always enjoy a good steak." I pause. "Understand, the envelope is only a downpayment. It doesn't include my expenses."

Dace: "Indeed, Mr. Axel, indeed, plus expenses and a substantial bonus when you find it."

Axel: "You called it the Savola Diamond. What's that all about?"

Dace: "I wouldn't know. It's what the Fat Man calls it. It's just a marketing gimmick to jack up the price. It's not important."

Axel: "I doubt that very much. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a rock to find."