

Recycled Lives

By Bryan Wade

Chapter One

Two hours out of Berlin the high speed convoy left the autobahn. Turning east it sped along the narrow country lane with headlights blazing. In the far distance, a tall SS officer dressed in a black uniform scanned the horizon with high powered binoculars. The thin, white duelling scar on his right cheek wrinkled as a brief smile crossed his lips. Three hundred meters out, the convoy's leading outriders raced past camouflaged machine gun bunkers; ahead, the estate's huge gates swung open.

Behind the high perimeter wall and imposing gates, was a heavily wooded area that concealed a secluded valley with a winding river and oxbow lake. On the steep northern side of the valley a magnificent sixteenth century chateau clung precariously, like a giant limpet, to a huge rocky outcrop.

In the early days of the Second World War, when battles appeared to be won with relative ease, the Fuhrer's exotic hideaway was the destination for those in favour.

On gala nights the rich and famous rubbed shoulders with the real power brokers.

But now in these very desperate times, the beleaguered chancellor had summoned his four closest advisers from the Reich's top echelon, to discuss his final strategy. Adolf Hitler's delusional mind now believed he held the vital key to world domination.

Thirty minutes after the conclusion of the gathering, all that remained in the spacious, oak panelled dining room was the aromatic fragrance of expensive Cuban cigars, and a cold, stony silence that hung like a thick, heavy cloak, between the two remaining men. Once, they had stood shoulder to shoulder on the direction and ideology of their newly emerging world, but after today's revelation the two men were now separated by far more than the physical distance between them.

Martin's bewildered mind agonised over the magnitude of the disclosures, while his commander-in-chief, the most despised and hated man in Europe, pondered aimlessly over maps and plans that lay strewn across the far end of the large, oak dining table, totally oblivious to the huge void that had grown between him and the man standing by the big, open fire.

The emotionally drained figure of Martin Bormann stared blankly into the glowing remains of the log fire, feeling totally detached from reality, even to the extent of doubting his own

sanity. Bormann spread his arms out across the beautifully carved Jacobean mantelshelf as the toe of his highly polished jackboot edged the charred remains of a top-secret file into the dwindling fire.

Martin's glazed eyes stared vacantly into the distance, far past the glowing embers. Even the sudden burst of sparks racing hurriedly into the blackness of the chimney, made little or no impression on the numbness that now engulfed his whole being. He was lost in the deep, secret passageways of his tired, bewildered mind; an intricate maze of seemingly endless thoughts and memories, of wonderful, earlier times now totally overshadowed by vivid images of bloodshed, agony and death.

In an effort to eradicate the blackness and pain those images wrought, his concussed mind battled to conjure up lighter moments, those heady days of past victories which were eagerly followed by triumphant celebrations, many of which had taken place in this very room.

Then it had reverberated with laughter, singing and loud, outrageous stories, filling every corner of the chateau's splendid dining room, which had been spectacularly illuminated by hundreds of candles that had transformed the old oak panelling, giving the room a rich, soft ambience, turning those grand occasions into glittering spectacles that had a dream-like feel and quality.

A majestic room full of vibrant people - elegant, sophisticated ladies in flowing gowns and dazzling diamonds, proud military men in crisp new uniforms, standing tall with their heads held high.

Oh! The mood then had been so very different amongst Martin's fellow officers - confident, cavalier, defiant, coupled with an outrageous arrogance, fuelled by the Fuhrer's spectacular success throughout Europe. Here the chosen few had assembled to listen intently to their leader's extravagant plans for their future, presented so simply, so precisely. It had seemed utterly inevitable. Riches, power and world domination had reinforced their dreams for the super-race. With their growing military success, it had been widely expected to be only a matter of months before their glorious destiny would be achieved.

But everything had turned drastically wrong for the Fuhrer and the Third Reich. Within only a few months, the unthinkable had happened. Allied forces were now only weeks away from overwhelming the capital of the Fatherland, the Fuhrer's acclaimed centre of the new world order, their beautiful Berlin.

The constant negative pressure from all sides had worn down Martin's mind and body to a point he found hard to endure. Only days ago he had contemplated committing suicide and the thought of that desperate conclusion made his whole being sigh inwardly. He now felt more akin to a trapped, exhausted animal watching a growing number of vicious predators circling, and reconciling itself to the fact that death was close at hand.

At very short notice the council's select few had been summoned to the chateau to hear the Fuhrer's latest plans. Once again these had turned out to be utterly outrageous, confirming to Martin beyond any shadow of a doubt that at least two members of the inner group were utterly insane. He'd heard rumours that Josef Mengele and others were involved in strange human experiments, but to escape from their enemies using this outlandish idea was too bizarre. In his mind it bordered on the far edges of insanity.

The familiar clicked salute of SS jackboots drew Martin's gaze away from the fire to the other end of the oak panelled room, where a row of officers now stood motionless. Even in these very troubled times, the Fuhrer's elite guard was still fanatically loyal to its leader. This was in stark contrast to most of Hitler's closest advisers, including some members of the ruling council. They were now talking openly about fleeing to distant hideaways with their ill-gotten gains.

Martin lit his last remaining cigarette. The strong, rich smoke filled his lungs as he drew heavily on the French Gauloises tobacco. Turning slowly he placed his arm on the carved stone mantelshelf as a light dizziness floated across his senses. Quickly retrieving the cigarette from his mouth he tossed it forcefully into the back of the fire.

'Bloody habit' he muttered to himself as he pushed his hands deep into the pockets of his grey jodhpurs. Martin watched the frail figure of his commander-in-chief. He had paused momentarily as the wail of distant sirens signalled yet another bombing raid by the relentless Allied air force.

With head bowed, Hitler's whole being seemed to shrink inwardly as the last remnants of his driving force momentarily left him. Then with a sustained effort he pulled back from the void to regain a little of his composure as he began pinning the Fatherland's highest military honour to the black shirts of SS officers, before turning his attention to the young lieutenant who held the small medal display case. To Martin the Fuhrer's voice sounded old and strained.

"Your dagger lieutenant!" he commanded, holding out an unsteady hand.

The officer quickly retrieved the shiny, nine-inch dagger from the top of his jackboot, the brightly polished blade glinting in the candlelight as he passed it to his commander-in-chief, whose voice now began to regain a little of its old passion.

"Gentlemen you are the best of the best, therefore I award you a warrior's highest honour, for your bravery, and for the vital mission you must carry out in the days to come."

He paused as he turned to look towards Martin, his voice gaining more of its old charisma. "You have all sworn to follow my orders without question?"

The officers once again clicked their heels in perfect unison, as their commander-in-chief scrutinised their faces. "As you are all aware the war is not going well for us, in fact it is going very badly..." he paused briefly and looked down at the floor. When he continued his voice was slower and more pronounced.

"When our darkest hour comes, and it will come very soon now, I can assure you that for us, death will not be the end. We will have lost the battle but not the war, and as the Allied forces celebrate their victories, we will be in another place awaiting another time to claim our rightful destiny."

The frail figure now took on an air of majestic defiance; he stood tall with the arrogant demeanour of a man who held ultimate power. Martin watched the transformation with a mental numbness. Was this simply a man who had lost his mind?

“I ask you again..., are you willing to follow me to death and beyond?” Hitler snarled.

The click of the polished, heeled jackboots signalled his followers’ utmost obedience and this time the trace of a smile curled the corners of the Fuhrer’s thin, dry lips, as he glanced in Martin’s direction.

“Very well gentlemen, so be it. Let what happens in this room tonight be embedded deeply into our Aryan souls, for when we return to this mortal place, we will be proud to know our true comrades.”

With the sharp blade he made a small incision in his left wrist then held out his arm. “Come, who will bond with their leader?” Hitler commanded defiantly, as a trickle of blood oozed through his pale, white skin.

Without hesitation each soldier went through the bizarre bonding ritual with a patriotic fervour, while Martin watched in disbelief.

The Chancellor lowered his voice as he spoke to the soldier at the end of the line. “Take out your revolver and place it to your head!”

The soldier showed no sign of emotion as he stood with the gun firmly held against his temple.

“When I count to three, you will pull the trigger.”

A trickle of perspiration ran down the side of the soldier’s face, but his steel-blue eyes never moved from his commander-in-chief. Time suddenly seemed to drag, but a split second later Hitler stepped close to the soldier and whispered a command. The young man’s eyes momentarily glanced at his lieutenant, as Hitler stepped back and began to count.

“One, two,”

As Hitler turned from the line of soldiers, Martin could see the Fuhrer’s eyes were inflamed with a raging madness.

“Three!”

Instantly the soldier swung his gun away from his head and towards the lieutenant before firing.

Standing next to the Fuhrer, the surprised lieutenant had no time to react before the small bullet entered his head just above the right eye. A crimson mist of blood sprayed from the back of his skull, covering the leather chair behind him. The officer’s limp body fell backwards to the floor, his hands still gripping the small case.

Hitler’s thin, dry lips fashioned a faint sinister smirk as he looked down at the lifeless body. Martin turned to face the fire with the sound of gunshot still ringing in his ears, and the frantic pounding of his heart increasing with every second that passed, accompanied by the same rhythmic throbbing deep inside his head.

He swallowed hard against the tension that gripped his throat as the whole room seemed to hold its breath, awaiting the next mindless command from the Fuhrer's twisted mind.

Martin's mind raced through ways of stopping this growing nightmare. Should he take out his gun and shoot his deranged commander, then kill the young Doctor Muller and put an end to the whole crazy plan that the ailing leader had presented? This ludicrous idea had Joseph Mengele's fingerprints all over it, and Martin disliked him intensely. No, now he thought about him, there was a man he truly hated. The terrible stories of atrocities towards prisoners Mengele had experimented on were too horrible and bizarre to even contemplate. This evil man they called the 'Angel of Death' was a human without heart or soul.

Thoughts tumbled out of control through Martin's mind. He knew he would never leave the building alive. One shot would kill his deranged leader, but that would be quickly followed by several aimed at him. Then who would stop Muller and Mengele?

Martin made a sudden grab for the stone mantelshelf as his head spun dizzily; this was quickly followed by a sharp pain in his chest and an unexpected weakness in his legs. Slumped against the mantel he gulped repeatedly for air, his throbbing heart pounding deep in his chest. After a few moments the knife-like pain began to fade, he looked at his gaunt reflection in the large, ornate mirror that hung over the fireplace.

His receding dark hair was brushed back close to his head. The once youthful, chubby appearance had now been replaced by a pale, hollow look he didn't like. Even in the dim light of the room his face looked old and tired. Could this be the first signs of death that stared back at him so coldly and unforgivingly?

At only forty five years old his bright eyes and youthful looks had abandoned him in as many months. Standing five feet eight inches tall he didn't classify himself as tall or thick set. He was stocky, but over the last year he'd become much leaner; his wife had told him only a few weeks ago that he hadn't looked well for some time. But what could one expect?

They were under a huge amount of pressure, eating and sleeping only when time permitted. Martin leaned forward, holding the mantelshelf with both hands, as the dizziness wafted over him again.

"No, not now," he muttered under his breath. Martin's mind suddenly reacted to his spontaneous response. 'Why did I say that?' he replied to himself. Was he losing his mind? No one was standing nearby, but the sound he'd acknowledged had been so close. He focused his mind for a moment. In fact the sound had been very close. Martin peered into the mirror; he was definitely alone by the fire. The small hairs on the back of his neck stood erect as a cold shiver darted down his spine.

Could he have replied to something he'd heard in his head?

He stood motionless for a long moment staring at himself, his spiked hearing only registering the beating of his heart. Inner voices he wondered. Martin brushed the idea off as he picked up the white envelopes from the mantelshelf, and walked towards the chancellor, but the dizziness overwhelmed him once more.

Rhythmically he gasped for air as the picture in his head suddenly turned black and white, then it began to fade as though he was about to faint.

Martin quickly grabbed the back of a leather chair for support, as the blackness took a greater hold. His eyes struggled to focus. Was he going to faint, or had he been poisoned?

He shook his head to try and bring some normality back to his quickly disappearing world. Then came a wave of nausea followed by a strange, pulling sensation, a peculiar inner tugging somewhere deep inside his head.

He fought to concentrate his mind, hoping this might enable him to formulate some coherent words over the foreign babbling sound that was going on in his head. Martin tightly gripped hold of the chair and closed his eyes..., a few seconds later he realised there was something strangely familiar about the noise he was hearing. After two deep breaths he urged his legs to walk forward as he spoke.

“Führer, your written instructions for the officers,” he said handing over the paperwork. Turning quickly away Martin forced himself forward, just managing to find brief support from the back of a dining chair before slumping onto the closest leather sofa. The chancellor’s voice only half registered in his troubled mind.

“Gentlemen, you may relax!” the Führer commanded.

The three remaining soldiers stood at ease, with hands behind their backs, as the Führer continued.

“The instructions I am about to give you must be carried out in ten days’ time.” He began distributing the manila envelopes to each officer. “The people listed in your orders are to be killed; the method to be used must be two shots to the head.” He paused for a moment. “You may open your orders gentlemen.”

Envelopes bearing black swastikas fell to the floor as each soldier looked at his hand-written instructions. Quickly folding them, all but one placed them in their shirt pockets.

“Any questions gentlemen?”

The officer still holding his orders took one step forward and clicked his heels before he spoke.

“I’m to shoot you, Führer, Frau Braun and Herr Bormann?”

His eyes momentarily found Martin’s pale, drawn face. “Then I must burn all three bodies?”

He stood silently looking at his leader, who now nodded reassuringly as he spoke.

“Carry out your orders to the letter and we will win this war. Don’t, and we will lose for an eternity.”

The officer looked down at his orders for a moment before folding the crisp white paper.

Unbeknown to the small group, Martin was now having serious problems with his breathing. His heart was pounding erratically and he'd become very cold even though he'd managed to move to a large sofa near the fire. Battling for every breath, he tried to stay in touch with the sound of the Fuhrer's voice, but a strange English speaking sound in his head was overpowering everything, as it came closer and more urgent.

"Try to control your breathing," it urged.

Undoing the top button of his shirt Martin struggled against the strange pulling sensation in his head, as he strained to hear what his leader was saying.

"Your instructions give you my authorization to execute these people; you must not waver from your task," the chancellor commanded, before turning to the officer still holding his orders.

"When the time comes, be strong. If you are ordered to abort your mission, do not hesitate for a moment. Remember this night and carry out your orders in full."

He paused and looked at his men.

"Gentlemen: We can cheat death. Carry out your mission with a clear heart."

Martin's attention was abruptly wrenched away from the Fuhrer's voice by an enormous wave of nausea that overwhelmed his senses. His hand clung to the arm of the sofa with the sudden realisation that he was somehow falling. It was as though an aircraft had hit a huge air pocket and dropped several thousand feet, and his stomach was now jammed into his throat. But he wasn't flying! An icy chill gripped his spine as every sense screamed for normality to return, and the foreign English voice percolated through the rushing noise in his ears.

"Breathe slowly, breathe deeply," it instructed anxiously.

Martin struggled to focus as he glanced across the fading room. There were no English soldiers here. Then laughter came from the direction of the SS officers. Was he dying? Had they poisoned him? Were they making fun of his vain struggle to hang onto life?

The falling sensation suddenly accelerated. His body stiffened against an invisible force as he dropped like a stone into the pitch blackness of death.

Martin felt drained, exhausted beyond belief as he tried unsuccessfully to sit up. In the terrified turmoil of his own mind he was now paralysed, falling headlong into the arms of death, as the anxious voice persisted.

"You must relax Allan, try and slow your breathing," the familiar English voice instructed.

Entombed in blackness Martin could sense a close human presence. He could smell and feel the warmth of the Englishman's breath close to his face.

"Allan, Allan, relax and slow your breathing," he repeated.

"For God's sake what the hell do you think I'm trying to do?"

Martin wanted to scream, “And who the hell is Allan?”

But his teeth were clenched so tightly he could only manage a grunt, as the voice once more filled his head.

“Breathe deeply, relax, and begin to retrace your steps.”

Every word the Englishman spoke resonated with anxiety, which made Martin wonder. That’s when he noticed something.

It was a dim light in the distance that was rushing towards him. That sudden realisation changed his orientation, which in turn gave some relief to his strained senses. He wasn’t falling at all. He was travelling towards the light. As the light came nearer he realised it was a picture of his wedding day, but as this thought registered the image vanished and was replaced by another light, which in turn became a picture of him at college.

It was instantly replaced by another, then another, each a snapshot of Martin at a progressively younger age.

“Relax and retrace your steps Allan,” the anxious voice coaxed.

Martin realised he was relaxed. The tension had gone. He felt very calm, in stark contrast to the now familiar voice, which was starting to irritate him, and there was that name again.

The more settled Martin became the faster the images materialised. A scene of his mother holding a new-born baby was quickly followed by an uncomfortable tightness across his chest and a sense that he couldn’t breathe, as though he was trapped in a confined space. This sensation passed so quickly that it was gone almost before he noticed. It was followed by a flash of blinding white light before the blackness returned.

He sensed he drew a breath, but the huge stabbing pain in his heart brought forth the image of a man crumpled on the floor holding his chest.

The pain made Martin cry out, but it was gone in a second as he recognised the man’s face. A multitude of images passed through his mind from adult to childhood, followed by another blinding bright light, then darkness, before more images flashed through his mind, relaxing him to the point of sleep.

“Allan, when I count to three, you will awake and feel fully refreshed,” the nervous voice coaxed.

“One..... Two.....”

Martin couldn’t concentrate. He felt warm and comfortable but extremely tired.

“Allan, when I count to three, and click my fingers you will awake refreshed,” the familiar voice repeated.

After all the traumatic turmoil, he was happy to lie there in the stillness, wherever he was. He realised he was extremely comfortable and all his senses told him so.

The irritating voice said something. There was a faint clicking noise, before the familiar voice repeated what he'd said, but Martin was too busy concentrating on a strange, grey whirlpool that was just visible in front of him. Suddenly Martin felt his pursuer's closeness as the now familiar male voice became louder and more annoying, which confused him.

"Allan! Allan, on the count of bloody three, God damn you!" the voice commanded with greater urgency.

"Come on buddy....., on the count of three. Ok, when I snap my fingers....., ready, one, two, three!"

Because he'd started to pay attention to the irritating voice, the confusion flooded back into his mind.

Then came a sudden and deafening thunderclap that exploded somewhere deep in his brain, the aftershock resonating throughout his entire body. Suddenly snatched by the swirling whirlpool he was dragged down into the vortex, images passing through his mind at breakneck speed as his mind went into freefall.

Then it was gone. The brief discomfort was replaced by softness and tranquillity; all anxiety, noise and pain abruptly vanished, as though it hadn't really happened at all. He thought for a moment. In the soft, relaxed silence of his mind he felt rested, lying peacefully with his eyes closed, stillness and calm filling his whole being. It was as if he was floating in a beautiful, white light of nothingness. All was right with him and all was right with the world.

But thinking about the tranquillity began to make it evaporate. He tried to hold onto the feeling, but the harder he tried the more it slipped through his fingers like soft, dry sand, only to be replaced by anxiety again. That rushing, beating noise in his head was replaced by a huge thumping noise in his chest. With that simple thought, the remaining beauty vanished abruptly as someone began to shake him vigorously. His startled eyes opened to find his best friend and flatmate peering down at him.

"Christ Allan, are you Ok?" John babbled.

Looking up from the comfort of the couch Allan stared into his friend's pale, white face.

"You bastard, you bastard, you frightened the shit out of me," he shouted as he walked off towards the kitchen. "I thought you were pissing about when I couldn't get you back."

He paused for a second while he opened a bottle of beer; swilling most of its contents in one go. He stood in the kitchen doorway trying to calm himself, swiftly knocking back the rest of the beer. "That's the last time I'm hypnotising anybody."

He turned to look at Allan, who was still on the couch looking up at the ceiling with his hand covering his heart.

“Did you hear what I'm saying, you frickin' jerk? Never again...., my mother told me when I first went to college. ‘Don't drink beer cause you'll end up looking like your father. Always wear a rubber or you'll end up as broke as your father.’ Oh! And the other one was, ‘Don't mess about with a Ouija board, cause the bogey man will come and get you!’ She sure as hell didn't warn me about hypnosis.”

John lay back in his chair as Allan turned onto his side to face his slowly relaxing friend.

“So what happened?” Allan asked calmly.

The look he got back was a classic mix of bewilderment and astonishment, the one that says ‘who is this asshole kidding?’

“What happened, what happened?” John paused for breath. “You're telling me you don't remember anything about what happened?”

Allan smiled at his excited friend. “No. Not a thing.”

John just stared for a moment, thinking how he could tell his best mate what he'd heard. Suddenly he spun round, remembering the tape player on the table.

“Shit! The recorder! I forgot the frigging tape recorder.”

Allan's excited buddy looked through the small plastic window. It was still running. John hit the stop key, pushed the rewind button for a few seconds, then hit ‘play’. Hearing his own voice he smiled and turned to his friend.

“So John, are you going to tell me what happened?”

“At least I have the tape recording as proof, but before I tell you, you must promise you won't ask me to do this again. I could get thrown out of my job for practising the black arts or whatever the hell they call it.” He laughed and pointed his finger at Allan, who just rolled his eyes at his request.

“No....., I'm not kidding shit head. You have to promise.”

John slumped back into the chair and folded his arms.

“I promise I won't ask you to do it again,” Allan replied, then started to laugh. “My God, I sound like you and Andrea, when you're begging her for sex.”

Tears started rolling down his cheeks as he looked at his friend's glum, stony face. After a few moments he pulled himself together.

“Ok I'm sorry, I promise not to ask you to hypnotize me again, cross my heart and hope to die.”

Allan hardly got the last word out before he burst into laughter again, so much so that he rolled off the couch onto the floor. After a while he picked himself up, walked over and sat

down at the small dining table, trying to hold back another belly laugh as he turned the small player towards himself.

“Are you quite done now?” John asked, as Allan pressed the rewind button. “Ok, let’s listen to what happened shall we?”

After a few moments the tape player clicked then stopped. Allan put his finger on the play button but was stopped by John.

“Listen..., I think I should tell you a few things before you hear what’s on the tape.”

Allan shrugged his shoulders, laughing. “Why, what’s the big deal?” he asked as John walked off into the kitchen.

“Do you want a beer?” he yelled.

“Sure, why not.”

Taking a seat at the table John passed the beer to his friend.

“Right, listen. The first time we tried this it was quite straightforward. I took you back to when you were six or seven and some of the things you said and did were quite funny. Well, this time everything went like clockwork, you were back to six years old where you were playing with your dog, etc, etc.” John paused and took a swig of beer, before he went on.

“This time I started to condition you so we could go back further, so there I am saying things like, ‘relax Allan, can you feel the warmth of the sun, it’s very safe and you’re very comfortable.’

“Then I started saying, right ok, now relax a little more, I want you to start drifting back in time, and I asked if you were comfortable with that. You answered in a very childish kind of voice that you were, so I asked how old you were. You said ‘four and a half’, so I said, ‘well if you’re comfortable let’s just keep drifting slowly back’.” He stopped and this time took a long drink before he continued.

“That’s when the bloody phone rang.”

“So what happened?”

“Well I was scared that the phone might wake you up, or something like that and you’d be stuck at four and a half years’ old! Hey, how the hell do I know? It’s only the second time I’ve ever done this. Then I started thinking, how the hell would I explain this to your mum and dad.

‘Oh! Sorry Mrs. Jones, Allan’s now got the mental age of a four year old.’”

John thought for a moment. “Thinking about it, they would probably thank me for the improvement.”

“Oh! Very funny! So come on what happened next?”

“Anyway I jumped up to grab the phone. It was only Andrea going on about some bloody skirt or dress that wasn’t right, usual women’s stuff that has no logic to it.

So anyhow, I was only gone a couple of minutes and when I got back I said, ‘Ok Allan, let’s rest here, now tell me what you see’..... and all the other crap.”

This time John finished off his beer in the bottle and then laughed, before he continued.

“Bloody hell mate, I could have dropped dead on the spot, I tell you straight, because you started speaking in German, fluent German, I kid you not. I sat here for a couple of minutes trying to get my head round what was happening.” John’s voice trembled with excitement.

Allan stared back at him with his mouth open in amazement.

“But I don’t do German!”

John ignored the remark as he continued with his train of thought.

“Then I remembered something I’d read in a book a few months ago about people who reckoned they were reincarnated Roman gladiators or some load of garbage like that.”

“Me speak German?” Allan laughed and shook his head. “John you’re pulling my plonker,” he replied before sampling his cold beer.

John shrugged his shoulders. “Well I used to think it was crap, till you started ‘sprechen zi deusching’ all over the place.”

Allan was just going to say something but was cut off by his flatmate. “Just shut up or I’ll lose my train of thought, Ok, so.....” John stared blankly at Allan for a moment. “Oh! Shit, where the hell was I?”

Allan waited as John raced through the jumbled thoughts of his cluttered mind, before his voice regained its excitement.

“That’s it. Then I said very calmly, ‘Allan, I want you to translate everything you say and hear’. Well, what happened next is going to blow your mind.”

He reached over and grabbed Allan’s beer, then smiled before taking a quick swig.

“You see, you started to describe where you were and who you were talking to. To cut a long story short buddy, in a former life you were Adolf Hitler’s right hand man.”

With that John pushed the ‘play’ button.

Twenty minutes later John got up from the couch and turned off the tape player. Allan sat silently staring at the floor as he tried to make some sense of what he had just heard.

“Are you ok? Allan?” John questioned, as his flat mate sat shaking his head in disbelief.

“This has to be a joke! Allan replied. “This has to be some sort of sick joke you bastard. You are joking aren’t you? What a shit trick to play!”

“Hey now you come to mention it, what a great idea...., get someone in here while you were out cold, and make up the tape.” John laughed as he placed his hand on his heart. He spoke very solemnly: “I wish I could tell you it was all a joke, but this was all you buddy.” Allan’s flatmate pointed at the tape recorder.

Both guys sat for a few moments looking anywhere but at each other, before John got up and walked back to the kitchen.

“Hey man!” he shouted. “We have just collected some very heavy information, when you think about it. This whole thing blows the fuck out of what I thought life was all about.” He poked his head round the door. “Do you want a coffee or another beer?”

“No beer, I need to keep my head straight,” Allan replied.

A few minutes later John returned with two coffees and half a packet of biscuits.

“Allan...., do I really beg for sex?”

Shaking his head Allan smiled as he replied “Yes, and it’s so degrading.”

John sat silently for a moment looking down at his coffee as though he was finding it hard to locate a suitable response.

“I think I might try and get my leg over tonight, I’ve got a bit of tightness across my chest that needs relieving.”

They both laughed.

“Look Allan, I know this is no consolation but I feel as badly as you about all this. I mean I’m training to be a shrink, right? I don’t believe in God, and I thought when you died that was it, you know, when you’re dead you’re dead, end of story.” He took a sip of his coffee.

Allan sat silently staring at the wall, his bewildered mind going over the strange revelations.

“Look at what I’m saying,” John said, trying to draw his friend into talking about it. “If you were in another life, I’d have to change my whole outlook. If we live many times, where do we go in-between lives? You must assume there is a God, then you have to ask yourself...., why the hell are we here?” he paused for a moment. “And who was I in my last life?”

That last comment spurred Allan to join the one-man debate.

“Well, from the history books we know what I was, a mass murderer!”

“Hey come on, don’t get bloody morbid, you bum.

Look, if our lives are some sort of plan or test, then that was a test, and this life is a totally new one,” John argued.

“Yeah right, but who’s writing the rules?”

John thought for a moment, trying to draw on his training.

“Ok! So if you look at this from the perspective that someone is planning everything, that means we are just playing a role, right, like an actor, and you’re part of a giant production, right?” Allan nodded his head waiting for John to continue.

“So by definition it would appear that you did what you had to do, because of other people or actors playing their parts. We’re just a small bit of the jigsaw puzzle of life.”

He lay back and folded his arms with a smug grin on his face.

Allan smiled as he replied “I suppose you want paying for this consultation?”

John laughed and pointed at the tape. “No, but look at it another way, your subconscious could have made all that crap up.”

“Right, but I don’t speak German do I? Well, I didn’t think I did,” Allan said as John wandered back to the kitchen. “John, this information mustn’t go any further than the two of us.”

There was no reply.

“Do you hear what I’m saying? I think we should keep this to ourselves.”

The silence continued as Allan picked up his coffee mug and headed towards the kitchen, only to meet John coming the other way, his short curly hair now flattened tightly down to his head with water, a neat parting to one side and a small piece of black paper stuck under his nose as a makeshift moustache. With his right arm held straight out in front him in a mock salute, he goose-stepped out of the kitchen, a march that would have done credit to any Monty Python sketch, but the German accent was way off the mark.

“V’e must proclaim to ze world, ve are now back in bizness.”

That did it for Allan. He laughed so hard his eyes streamed with tears.

It must have been a couple of hours later when the phone rang.

“Hello this is Allan,” he said picking up the wailing handset.

“Hi Allan, how are you?” the voice asked.

“Andrea my darling!” Lowering his voice he continued. “I dream about you constantly, every night we’re apart is agony.”

There was a short pause. “I think you should start taking the medication again Allan, I really do,” she replied.

“Is that it? I proclaim my undying love, and you just cast me aside.” Allan sobbed, as she sniggered at the other end of the phone.

“Look Allan...., start taking the tablets in very large doses, or I’ll tell Becky what’s going on.”

She let him plead for a while then hit him again. “Look you gutless bum, do you want to talk to your woman, cos she’s here, I just called to see where my gorgeous man has got to,” she said in a pushy tone.

“Oh! You mean John? He was picked up by some gorgeous black chick. They’ve gone to the country for a dirty weekend.”

There was silence at the other end of the phone.

“Ok. He left here about an hour ago on his way over to you. Hey, ask my woman to pick up the Guinness on the way over, and tell her I’m hot for her too.”

The guttural belly laugh that came back was bordering on obscene.

“Yeah right Al, get a life, she’s told me all about your trick with the jelly and whipped cream.” She paused. “Oh! There’s the doorbell. It looks like my man has arrived, love you, talk soon!”

Then she was gone.

Fifteen minutes later as Allan emerged from the shower, the phone rang in the kitchen. Sliding across the tiled floor his wet feet just managed to keep him right side up as he slammed heavily into the worktop. His rather melancholy mood had changed for the better. The thought of having his girlfriend tucked up in his bed had moved his mind well away from the results of the hypnotic travels he’d had earlier. But what happened next was so far removed from reality he just slipped slowly to the floor clutching his head in his hands in stunned shock.

Within an hour he’d arrived at Andrea’s flat and was in the thick of it. Becky clung to his neck sobbing uncontrollably, her pale, white face now scarred with long lines of black mascara that were being transferred to Allan’s ashen face and white shirt. Becky had been distraught on the phone but when he’d arrived at Andrea’s apartment, she had fallen apart. Two police officers were talking to the doctor who had just given Andrea a strong sedative before putting her to bed.

A paramedic wearing a green day-glow jacket stood in the kitchen drinking coffee as he talked to a slender, black woman in a dark blue suit. After a few moments she walked into the living room and headed towards Allan and Becky.

That’s when Allan noticed the badge clipped to her breast pocket. Her voice was matter of fact, but had a kind, warm, understanding tone to it, as she introduced herself.

“I’m Detective Grace. Are you a member of the family?”

Allan shook his head. “No, I’m John’s flatmate.”

“Oh! I see you must be.....” She looked down at the notepad.

“Allan Jones?”

He nodded as she continued.

“Does John have any family in the area?”

“He only has a sister. She lives in Holland.”

“Do you have her phone number or address?”

Allan shook his head. “How the hell did all this happen?”

The detective studied Allan’s face for several seconds and then jotted something down in her notepad before turning to Becky, who was still draped around Allan’s neck.

“Becky I need to talk to Allan for a moment,” she whispered gently, unwrapping the distraught woman’s arms from around her boyfriend.

“Have a seat here and I’ll bring Allan back in a few minutes.”

Becky didn’t respond as she slumped almost lifelessly into the chair.

“Doc, could you have another look at Becky? You may need to give her something as well.” She nodded in the direction of Becky’s chair, before indicating to Allan to follow her.

The paramedic was sitting at the kitchen table typing notes into a small laptop computer; he looked up as the detective spoke.

“Daniel Morris, this is Allan Jones, the deceased’s flatmate.”

Allan shook hands and exchanged a brief smile as he sat down opposite the man.

“Sorry about your friend,” Daniel said.

“What the hell happened?” Allan replied.

The medic shrugged his shoulders and looked up at the detective. She was leaning against a kitchen cupboard and raised her eyebrows, signalling ‘be my guest’.

Daniel closed the computer and placed it in a satchel as he spoke, his soft voice softening the harshness of his New York accent, allowing a little of the Irish lilt to percolate through.

“I was the first medic on the scene, to be truthful Allan, it was one of those accidents that, well, makes you wonder how it could have happened,” pausing he took a sip of his coffee.

“If your friend had been ten seconds earlier or later, he’d be sitting here.”

Allan shook his head. "I don't understand."

"The accident happened a block from here. Your friend walked out of the subway entrance, and was run down by a cab that had mounted the sidewalk."

Allan covered his pale face with his hands. "What the hell was the driver doing?"

The medic shook his head and looked in the officer's direction.

"That's what the police are trying to figure out, because the driver did a runner and the vehicle was stolen two hours before the accident."

Allan turned to the policewoman.

"Did anyone see the driver?"

She shrugged, "It was raining hard..., and our information is sketchy. From what we can gather, the cab had been parked up but suddenly raced across the intersection and hit John as he walked out of the subway," the officer paused for a second,

"As I said, it was raining hard, if his jacket hood had been up, he wouldn't have seen the vehicle until it was too late."

There were several seconds of silence before Allan spoke.

"John borrowed my Yank's jacket, because it was raining."

The officer looked at him thoughtfully for a moment. "Lucky you weren't in it sir".

Allan felt numb, unanswerable questions pounding through his brain.

"Was he killed instantly?" He finally asked.

"No the poor guy wasn't", the paramedic replied in a much softer tone.

"Was he in great pain?"

Daniel focused his eyes on the pale face on the other side of the table, as he recollected the crash scene.

"I arrived about five or six minutes after it happened. Your friend was trapped under the cab; I managed to squeeze myself in next to him so I could check to verify his condition. Amazingly, the guy was still conscious even though he was very badly beaten up. From the position and condition of his limbs, I assumed that his neck was broken, so the pain could have been greatly reduced. On top of that, he was fighting for every breath due in part to the weight of the vehicle, but he still managed a brief smile as I got up close to him. That's when John whispered, 'Tell Andrea I love her', followed by an address. A second or two later his eyes closed, he said something strange a few times, then he was gone."

Tears rolled down Allan's cheeks. "We had been laughing and joking together only an hour before, about our spirits being recycled," Alan stood and offered his hand to Daniel.

"Maybe we do get recycled, who knows," the medic replied, shaking hands.

"You mentioned John said something strange?" Daniel nodded his head. "Yes..., he repeated something for a few seconds."

"Could you hear what it was?"

"Not really sure. It sounded foreign..., German maybe. Allan waited but the medic shrugged his shoulders and held out his hands in that, 'how the hell do I know' stance.

"I don't know; it sounded like 'kuss moss' or 'kiss ross'."

There were several seconds of thoughtful silence before Daniel got up to leave.

"Tell Allan about the bag lady," he said turning to the officer.

Allan looked at the woman, who made a face. "It's not a reliable source and there's no way to substantiate her statement," the officer paused for a moment.

"An old lady sheltering in a doorway said the driver aimed for your friend".