**Recycled Lives**

**Book 1….. Chapter 2**

Gripped by the coldest winter in living memory, brought severe food shortages in war-torn Germany. Albert and his invalid mother endured further misery due to inadequate heating in their two-roomed flat.

Albert had lived in a damp rat-infested tenement all his life and now worked as a hospital janitor, three blocks away. This proximity allowed him to sneak home with stolen food for his bedridden mother, who was going from one illness to another.

His mother and grandmother had raised him. At the age of five, the older woman told him father had left because his mother was pregnant. “Nobody wanted you from the start you little runt, not even your mother,” she’d shouted, before knocking back the last of her gin. His mother had reacted badly to losing her lover, and Albert had borne the brunt of her anger. Many times he’d been dumped at his grandmother’s without notice, to be retrieved several days later.

Ever since he could remember, there’d been a stream of men in his mother’s life. Drunken bums who’d share their cramped living space. Some for a few hours, others for days. He’d witnessed many sexual scenes that frequently ended in violence. He’d cower in a corner with his hands over his ears, while his mother was beaten and raped. His limited schooling wouldn’t have inspired the brightest. His small stature and introverted personality made him a target for the school bullies, leading him to skip tuition a lot. So his life had revolved around his guardians and playing alone.

At the age of seventeen, he’d received a horrific beating from his mother’s disgruntled lover. The Polish immigrant had arrived at the flat smelling of drinking, looking for money Albert’s mother didn’t have. The shouting match had turned into a beating that Albert tried to stop, but the bull of a man almost killed him with his bare hands. Eight weeks later he was released from the hospital, but with a permanent limp, severe facial disfigurement and the loss of an eye.

His mother had healed a great deal quicker, with little disruption to her downward spiralling social life or her ability to keep working. She’d worked at the hospital laundry for twenty years and maintained the strong chemicals had given her serious chest problems. Not the thirty cigarettes she smoked every day.

One frosty morning, she’d slipped and badly broken her hip. Recovery took so long, it affected her circulation, and she ended up losing her right leg just below the knee. Four years later, she was bedridden.

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It was in the hospital morgue where Albert had fondled the body of a young woman. As time passed, he’d found a new game to play that gave him unexpected pleasure. In his mind, this was overdue payment for all the scathing looks thrown his way. Women thinking they were elegant and pretty, but when in the morgue, he showed them. He’d smirked, what harm could it do?

Late one evening, he was wandering around the disused basement where he'd found a boarded-up vent. Squeezing through, he found himself in a cobwebbed filled corridor. With the aid of a lighted match, he fumbled his way along but suddenly heard agonising screams, so he fled.

Weeks later, he and Felix investigated again, and that’s when he found someone special. She wasn’t like the other women he’d had, this one was warm and soft to touch, with large breasts he enjoyed sucking. And the other things he did— brought much more pleasure. But the ramifications of his sordid actions were beginning to unravel.

In the adjoining building only meters away, the consequences would change the lives of several influential people and throw his mega existence into chaos.

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A tall young man with blond hair, dressed in a light blue housecoat and white trousers, walked quickly along the brightly lit corridor. He knocked and opened the doctor’s office door in one movement.

The woman behind the desk indicated to a seat. She was in her early thirties, with dark blond hair and penetrating blue eyes, which were now looking over her tortoiseshell rimmed glasses. “What do you have, Ralf?”

Hilda had been a pretty child. After passing through the skinny, gangly stage of her early teens, she’d blossomed into the elegant beauty of her mother. Her father had worked as a chemist for the large pharmaceutical company where he’d met the attractive research student, who eventually became his wife. A year into their marriage, Hilda was born. She’d been followed two years later by twin brothers Rupert and Manfred.

Born to academics and surrounded by books, as well as motivated and knowledgeable people, had given Hilda a passion for learning, cultivating an inquisitive nature. Her male siblings had grown up with a tomboy sister that had cemented a closer bond, until the terrible accident.

Her mother and father had travelled to the boy’s university to see them receive their diplomas. Hilda had been unable to go, due to a severe bout of influenza.

After the customary celebration at the Dean’s house, all four had returned on the evening express to Frankfurt. The massive derailment had sent the speeding locomotive somersaulting down an embankment into the icy waters of the flooded river, killing almost everyone. The bodies of Hilda’s family had been retrieved late the following day.

After the funeral, Hilda spent the next three months in Switzerland with her father’s sister. Her aunt lived on the outskirts of a small market town, where her life revolved around eight dogs, six cats and her elderly mother. As long as Hilda could remember, her sprightly grandmother had always had problems with her chest, but just recently, she’d taken a turn for the worse, so planned to move to a nearby convent.

The gregarious woman had stated firmly. She didn’t want to become a burden, so when the time came, she would spend her last days there. The nuns looked after many older people with chronic illnesses or those who had difficulty coping on their own.

She’d joked with the young Hilda, that if the convent had no room. She would sit close to the local ravine, savour half a bottle of her favourite wine before releasing the wheelchair brake. She’d said, I’ve never flown before, then started chuckling, which turned into a coughing fit that almost took her life.

When she’d finally recovered, the old girl had winked at her granddaughter. Her old green eyes were alive with so much mischief, which made Hilda laugh.

“Why do your eyes sparkle so much?” Hilda had asked.

“Maybe because I was a naughty girl and did things I shouldn’t have.”

“Did you have lots of boyfriends?” Hilda had joked.

He grandma had put a finger to her lips and smiled, her eyes alive like diamonds.

“Maybe the sparkle is the ecstasy and joy I have enjoyed,” she had added coyly. Both women had grinned. One, relishing the joy she’d experienced, knowing what the other could achieve: the younger, what tantalising anticipation and passions were to come.

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Weeks later, the old lady had moved into the convent. Hilda visited most days, so as time passed she’d started helping at mealtimes and she became friends with a soft-spoken Irish nun. Sister Clara and Hilda’s often took lunch together, and their discussions went a long way in helping the newly orphaned Hilda, to come to terms with the challenges she was facing.

Walking home one evening, Hilda had suddenly begun giggling to herself. She found it hard to fathom why she was feeling positive about life after her terrible loss. Indirectly, Clara had allayed so many unspoken questions that were too painful to ask.

Days before Hilda was due to return to Frankfurt, Clara had astonished her. The nun had declared, she was disillusioned and was contemplating renouncing her vows.

“But why. You’re so perfect,” Hilda had said.

Clara had laughed. “I’m far from that, my dear.”

“You are. You’re so gentle towards the old people and so caring— and you have this great gift for helping people— people like me!” Hilda had gushed; the nun had smiled and shaken her head. “You helped yourself, young lady. I only pointed out a few signposts. You did the rest,” Clara had replied.

The day before Hilda returned to Germany, she and Clara had spent the day together, and a great deal of in-depth conversation had accompanied their work. But when the time came to say their farewells, tears were in abundance.

Mother Superior had given Hilda a small Bible and asked her to return soon.

Clara and Hilda had walked a little way down the road in silence before the nun had put her arm around Hilda’s shoulders. “Thank you— you’ve helped me find clarity in my inner self, and this is why I must leave the convent.”

“I don’t understand,” Hilda had sniffled. Clara took her young friend in her arms and whispered. “No— neither can I, but it feels right— I’ll write and let you know where I am.” With eyes overflowing, Hilda had squeezed her tightly before walking quickly away.

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Over the following weeks and months, her positive mindset changed due to the loss of her family and Clara. Systematically she began purging herself of anything that reminded her of childhood and family connections. Personal effects were removed from the family home and destroyed. A month later, she’d rented out the house and was living in a small apartment, but her negative emotions persisted.

She had stopped using make-up and begun wearing plain clothes as a way of shunning her beauty. The budding academic became focused on her studies and research, leaving no time to think of the past. Letters between her and Clara had dropped to one every few months.

Clara’s first letter had arrived four weeks after Hilda had returned to Germany. It explained she was at a clinic overlooking Lake Lucerne, looking after terminally ill children.

Hilda’s reply had given a brief explanation about her new conviction. She may not have convinced Clara, but Hilda had convinced herself that the losses in her life had given her the time and space to focus on her research.

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Now in her early thirties, Hilda stood five-four in her flat shoes. Her hourglass figure hid under ill-fitting clothes and her habitual white coat. Her beautiful, dark blond hair was pinned neatly on the back of her head in a tight bun, sometimes embellished with a simple black ribbon. Her penetrating, steel-blue eyes were now looking over her glasses at Ralf, who had just entered her office.

“Doctor, the Angel experiment has produced confusing results. If I didn’t know better, I’d say that she is pregnant!”

“Ridiculous! We’ve had her on life support for six months,” replied Hilda.

Her assistant shrugged but continued with his findings. “Blood samples taken two days ago indicate she is.”

“Ralf, you need to check again.”

“I did, then ran the results by Ingrid. She confirmed.”

An hour later, a meeting was underway to discuss the issue.

“We need to find the culprit quickly. But this issue must not be discussed with anyone outside the department. Is that understood?” Hilda turned to Ingrid. “Has Angel gained weight?”

“Yes, doctor, four hundred grams.”

In Muller’s eyes, Ingrid was a little too attractive for a research facility. Most men took a liking to her, and focused minds were needed. But to her credit, she never appeared to get involved with colleagues. She was a little shorter than Muller. Her black hair was bobbed, cut close to her neck with a square cut fringe above hazel eyes. Making her narrow face and Roman nose look a little chubbier, balancing her face. Ingrid maintained she’d inherited her almond-shaped eyes and olive skin from her mother. Muller had worked with Ingrid before and found her a bright and determined young woman who projected positive views. So had quickly invited Ingrid to join her team.

“Someone has broken in and impregnated her, and he’ll probably come back,” Muller glanced around at her small group. “We must start guard duty. I'll do it tonight. Ingrid, please sort out a rota.”

“It could be one of the hospital guards?” Ralf volunteered.

“Possibly, that’s why we must not discuss this with anyone. And we need to devise a way of watching, without being detected,” she stated.

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In the early hours, Albert squeezed through the boarded-up door into the adjoining building. Halfway down the disused corridor, he slid open the ventilating grill that gave access to a storeroom. On two occasions he’d almost been discovered by people working late. Fortunately, his secret entrance emerged under a large table, which had several boxes stored underneath.

It had been over a week since he’d visited his beautiful girlfriend and he was now desperate to touch her. He’d tried two nights before, but a woman was in the storeroom reading a book, so he’d retraced his steps. The following night, a male nurse was slumped in the chair asleep.

The next night, Albert stood in the morgue staring grimly at a cold, lifeless body but he couldn’t touch her. He craved the warmth and softness.

Minutes later he was crouched under the table, peering between boxes at an empty chair. Aroused and desperate, the urge was overpowering. Moving the boxes, he clambered into the room. After checking the corridor, he dashed to room 15. In the subdued lighting, his beautiful vision lay waiting under a thin white sheet.

Her breast lifted and fell in rhythm with the machine standing nearby. A long tube extended to her mouth, several smaller, were linked to other apparatus but all were irrelevant to Albert. He was mesmerised, as callous hands followed her warm shapely contours. Bending he nuzzled then sucked her breasts.

Down the corridor, a bathroom door opened and Ingrid made her way back to the storeroom. Taking her seat, she resumed analysing sheets of data but suddenly stopped, sensing a change. Noticing the disturbed boxes and the open vent, she dashed from the room. The viewing panel in Angel's room gave perfect visibility.

Within minutes, the partially dressed intruder was being dragged screaming from the room by two guards.

Locked in an empty room, he sobbed and screamed demands. “I have to get back to work. My mother will need me! She will need feeding,” He yelled, beating his fists into the door.

By the time Muller arrived, he’d had a light sedative and now holding cotton wool to where Ingrid had taken blood. But as Muller asked questions, his eyes glared over her shoulder, to the burly guard who’d manhandled him.

“Your name is Albert Vogel. You work as a cleaner at the hospital next door?” Muller said, glancing at her clipboard. He nodded.

“You say you have an invalid mother, who’ll be expecting you to return home?” He nodded again.

“Then you’d better cooperate— and quickly,” she advised. “How many times have you abused that woman?” Albert sat silently looking at his feet.

“Well?” Muller demanded. “I don’t understand,” stammered Albert, then started sobbing.

“Vogel, if you cooperate, I can help you get out of this mess— but you need to talk, now,” she snapped. “What you were doing to the woman. How many times have you done that?”.

“Many times,” he mumbled. Muller raised an eyebrow.

“Have you ever brought anyone else in here?”

Slowly the disgruntled lover lifted his head and locked eyes with his inquisitor; he would not share her with anyone.

“Well, Vogel?” She pushed.

“Only Felix.”

Muller shot a look of annoyance at the others in the room.

“Does Felix work in the hospital?”

Albert smirked. “No, he has four legs and a long tail— but likes to watch.”

“You bring a cat with you?”

“No, he’s a rat!” Albert snapped.

“Does anyone know you come here?”

He shook his head and began to sob again.

Out in the corridor, Muller decided to release Albert without prosecution but wanted all his details verified. “I can’t explain why at the moment,” Muller said. “Something tells me to keep him close, and that’s what I’m doing.”

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Angel Two was retrieved by caesarean and those in the theatre were astonished. The child's eyes were wide open and had no iris, giving her a vacant look, but more serious was AT’s lack of movement. When linked to the EEG machine, they found only minor activity in her Cerebellum, the brain’s rear portion. But when the child slept— which was determined by reduced heartbeat, as her eyes remained open, apart from a sluggish blink now and again. But in sleep mode, her minimal brain activity transferred to the right frontal lobe, which Muller found bizarre.

And bizarre was nothing new to Hilda, due to her dreams.

Two years ago, her research had lost direction, causing her a great deal of frustration that affected her health. But she put that down to poor eating habits. She’d also been experiencing weird dreams, visions relating to her work. One had repeated so often; she’d taken note of it. Oddly, the subsequent investigation became a turning point— the procedure had worked. Now every nocturnal insight was documented.

After reading the last few entries in her dream-book, Hilda turned off her bedside light.

The staff briefing the following morning, she relayed her plan.

“I want to fertilise two dead and two healthy women with Vogel’s sperm. Ralf— you take charge of a duplicate test by using sperm from another donor. I want to establish whether Vogel has created AT— Any questions?”

“Will you organise the prisoners?” Ask Ralf.

“I’ve already set that in motion.”

“We only have two ventilators. I’ll ask Marcus to make more.” Hans advised. Muller nodded. “Pass on the modifications you made. Your quick thinking and alterations saved our project.”

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Eight months and twenty-three days later, all but one of the babies were successfully delivered. The last natural birth was due in hours. If this child were healthy, as the doctor expected, it would confirm her predictions. Babies from natural birth were normal. Women on life support produced babies mimicking Angel Two.

Throughout AT’s eleven-month life, she’d undergone every conceivable test. Her development was different from the norm. She never cried and hardly moved. The child lay or sat wherever she was placed and gazed at what was directly in front of her. Muller wrote in her notes: ‘Normal babies gain muscle growth by moving. AT’s brain substituted her lack, by activating an individual muscle for a designated time. The process is eerie to watch, a muscle will contract and relax rapidly, like a nervous twitch. The child does not react; facial movements only occur when those muscles are activated. She has gone unfed for twelve-hour without reacting. Only eats and drinks when offered. To me, the child is an emotionless empty vessel.’

Many research programs took place at the hospital and university, so there was a high demand for guinea pigs. One programme was releasing a child, due to epileptic fits. Muller read through the boy’s notes and decided his malfunction set him apart. The malnourished three-year-old was bright and advanced, so he’d be ideal.

Muller had gained several medical procedures for her nocturnal visions, and this latest was bewildering. But she was inspired to take bold steps, due to prior success.

Explaining her intentions drew surprised glances from her staff. So she deliberately left out, where this experiment might lead.

“I want cells from the boy’s spinal cord, taken close to the base of the skull. Which I’ll transplant in the same proximity in Angel Two.”

“The boy will probably lose some functions,” replied Ralf.

“That’s not an issue, but the child must not die. It's also vital no contamination takes place. Thoroughly sterilising all equipment and neutralising static electricity, is a must. The cells balance and inner workings, must not be compromised,” she asserted.

That afternoon, the boy was strapped to an operating table, as cell retrieval took place under local anaesthetic. In an adjacent room, Muller delicately inserted the sample into AT before delicate stitches closed the wound.

Three hours later, both children appeared to be no worse for their experience. Both were given food and water before being settled for the night.

The following evening, the nurse was disturbed by a muffled scream from one of the treatment rooms. As she was dashing down the corridor, the cry repeated.

She found the donor boy shuddering violently. Bubbling foam oozed from his mouth, and there was blood on his pillow.

In the adjacent bed, Angel Two was lying motionless staring at the ceiling.

Back at her desk, the nurse picked up the phone. “I need immediate assistance! The boy in room 12 is having an epileptic fit,” she relayed.

The child’s face was now purple. Bulging neck veins appeared ready to burst. His malnourished torso arched like a strung hunting bow. Through clenched teeth, foam oozed and ran down his contorted face. Outstretched arms waved frantically. Fingers bent backwards, as tendons and sinew strained in contortion.

Suddenly, he took a huge gasp. Wide petrified eyes pleaded but his frail body collapsed to the bed, as air gushed from his mouth.

In that silent whitewashed room, the nurse checked for a pulse before pulling a stained crumpled sheet over the body. As she turned to leave, an ear-piercing scream made her heart miss a beat. Wheeling around, she found AT sat up staring at her with tears rolling down her cheeks. The astonished white-faced nurse didn’t hear her colleague arrive, who quickly comforted the sobbing child.

By the time Muller arrived, vital signs were complete, and Ralf was attaching AT to an EEG monitor.

Muller took the night nurse to her office.

“What time did the boy die?”

“I was preparing paperwork for the removal of two corpses by the disposal truck, which comes at five. So I’d just checked my watch. It was four-thirty.”

“And Angel, when did she start crying?” Muller asked anxiously, visualising four-thirty on her desk clock.

“Oh!— Within seconds of the boy dying.”

The doctor beamed inwardly.