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Approx 1,600 words

AFTERLIFE TRAP PART 6 – THE UPLOAD TECHNICIAN
by
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Wesley hovered outside Room 214, the hush of the hospice corridor pressing in on him. The ceiling lights hummed softly—almost too softly—highlighting how strange his job could be. He was an Upload Technician for Eternity, Inc., responsible for guiding patients’ final moments from a failing body to a digital afterlife. People called it salvation; Wesley had come to fear it was something else entirely.

He glanced at his tablet. **Michael Nolan**, age thirty-three, comatose after a severe fall at his warehouse job. Complications from a MRSA infection meant his body was shutting down. The doctors said he wouldn’t survive the week. *Another life measured in hours and data points*, Wesley thought grimly, stepping into the room.

A man lay in the hospital bed, his once-muscular frame reduced to pallor and bandages. Standing beside him was a woman in her thirties, eyes rimmed red with worry.

“Hello,” Wesley said gently. “I’m Wesley. I’ll be overseeing Michael’s upload procedure.”

She managed a small, trembling smile. “I’m Rachel Nolan, his sister.” Her voice wavered as she looked at her brother’s limp form. “Our parents can’t...they can’t watch him like this. He was so strong, always outdoors, always working with his hands.”

Wesley nodded, stepping around the IV poles. “I’m sorry. I know this is tough.”

Rachel exhaled shakily. “The doctors said he’ll never wake up. And now the infection—” She pressed her lips together. “Eternity, Inc. told me he’d have a second chance in their virtual afterlife. Maybe that’s better than...this.”

Wesley mustered his professional calm. “It’s painless. We’ll sedate him further, map his consciousness, then transfer his neural data to the *Forever Program* servers.”

Rachel bit her lip. “He deserves something better than just—dying like this. Let’s do it.”

Discovering the Darkness

Before administering the upload, Wesley headed to the facility’s cramped control room—a space lit by flickering LEDs and lined with server racks. He tapped through a series of screens, preparing the sedation protocols for Michael. A side monitor caught his eye, displaying a queue of recent uploads. Among them, a few entries glowed red with a label: **Account Erased (Payment Default)**.

His stomach twisted. He’d heard rumors: if a family couldn’t keep up with Eternity’s mounting subscription fees, their loved one’s digital existence was *deleted*—a second death. Officially, it was “policy for inactive accounts.” But seeing the word *Erased* in bold brought home the cruelty of it.

“Staring at the wall again, Wes?” came a tired voice. Elise, his supervisor, leaned against the doorframe. She was a tall woman, her eyes shadowed by too many double shifts.

“I just saw three erased accounts,” he said. “Did they have no one paying for them?”

Elise stepped closer. “It happens sometimes. Families get a year to say their goodbyes. Residents get to make peace on their terms. Death used to be final, but it doesn’t have to be final anymore. Of course, some people aren’t ready to go even after their free trial...” She eyed him. “Don’t dwell on it. Our job’s just to do the uploads.”

Wesley’s grip on the console tightened. “So we give people this hope, and if they can’t pay—”

“Corporate sets the policies and we need to earn money to be able to provide this service.” Elise’s tone was brisk. “Look, I know it’s hard, but we don’t control the business model. We only manage the procedure.”

He wanted to argue, to shout that the price structures were exploitative. But the memory of colleagues who’d been fired for “negativity” kept him silent. Instead, he diverted his eyes to another data panel. *NeuralMapping in progress...*

A Memory of Clara

When Elise left, Wesley’s gaze snagged on a small brass plaque affixed to the main console:

Prototype System: NeuralBridge Chip v1.0—Clara S. Project.

He ran a finger over the text, recalling how he'd once read an old research file. Clara was the first ever to have her consciousness bridged to a computer—years ago, long before Eternity Inc. had perfected the *Forever Program*. She'd fallen off a horse, ended up comatose like Michael, and became a human test subject for the rudimentary “NeuralBridge” chip. The logs said she couldn't cope, begging to have the chip shut off after only days in that digital limbo. Her short-lived trial, however, gave Eternity's scientists the insight to build what they had now.

Clara fell, Michael fell... Wesley rubbed his temples. So many accidents leading to the same corporate solution—upload the mind, collect the fees. *Would Clara have ever wanted her legacy to become a pay-to-exist system?*

The Procedure

Wesley returned to Michael's room, sedation meds in hand. Rachel stood vigil, stroking her brother's hair. The infection had spread up his arm, an angry flush visible even under bandages.

“We'll start now,” Wesley said softly, placing a specialized helmet of electrodes over Michael's head. “He won't feel a thing.”

Rachel took a shaky breath, stepping back. “Thank you.”

The sedation drip hissed into the IV line. Michael's vital signs dipped into a deeper wave, his already-comatose brain sinking further under. Wesley tapped a code on his tablet, and the console by the bed emitted a quiet hum. Graphs of neural activity flickered.

Neural Transfer Initiating... the screen read. Streams of code scrolled across Wesley's monitor, every bar representing the intangible sum of Michael's being—memories, personality, instincts—converted into data. In a corner of his mind, Wesley pictured Clara's last conscious moments, how terrifying it must have been to awaken in an alien digital realm.

Minutes later, Michael's physical vitals flatlined; the hum quieted to a near silence. Rachel gasped, tears spilling down her cheeks.

"He's gone," she choked. "That's it?"

"Yes," Wesley replied gently. "Physically, yes. But the afterlife environment will be 'booting up' his mind soon. It may take a while to stabilize. You'll be able to visit him through our VR system once they finalize his account."

Rachel swiped at her tears. "He would have hated being trapped in a broken body. If he can be free, even digitally...we'll do whatever it takes to keep him there."

Including paying indefinite fees, Wesley thought, a pang stabbing his conscience. "He won't suffer now," was all he said, voice subdued.

Confrontation with the Supervisor

Outside the room, Elise was waiting. She gestured for Wesley to join her by the nurses' station. "Everything go smoothly?" she asked.

Wesley nodded, but the weight on his chest refused to lift. "Elise, I saw a queue of erased accounts earlier. You said it happens more than I think. That's not right. We promise families a

reprieve, but then we charge so much they can't sustain it. They lose them again. Doesn't that bother you?"

Elise's eyes flashed with warning. "Watch it. I don't like it either, but corporate's clear: if families don't pay, the server space can't be allocated indefinitely. 'Emotional cost is not our responsibility.' That's from the top."

He stared at her, frustration burning. "So we're basically lying to them at their most vulnerable moment."

Her jaw tightened. "We're not lying—just withholding the full truth until they're stable enough to handle it."

"That's semantics," he snapped. "Rachel literally just said her family would do anything to keep Michael alive in there. Do we have to exploit that?"

Elise crossed her arms. "We're technicians, Wesley. *Technicians*. You want to keep your job, keep your head down. Let corporate handle the big-picture ethics."

"And let them erase people when the money runs dry," Wesley said bitterly.

Elise paused, a flicker of sympathy in her gaze. "I know it's difficult. But we have no say. We're still doing so much good even for people who never pay." She lowered her voice. "Don't lose your job over this, Wes. I've seen people fired for questioning too much."

He swallowed, torn between fury and fear. "Fine," he muttered, stepping away. But his mind churned, unsettled.

Conflict Unresolved

After midnight, the corridor dimmed to night mode. Wesley lingered in the control room, the steady hum of servers a rhythmic lullaby. He stared at Michael Nolan's name in the newly uploaded queue. A green check mark indicated a "successful" transfer. Next to it, in faint gray text, was the note: *Subscription Tier Pending*.

Somewhere in the data logs, intangible and alive, Michael was beginning his afterlife. Rachel would soon be bombarded with offers to upgrade her brother's experience—any premium to ensure Michael's consciousness remained. The second she missed a payment, the system would mark *nonpayment*, and Michael's digital existence could vanish like a line of code.

Wesley's eyes again fell on the old plaque:

Prototype System: NeuralBridge Chip v1.0—Clara S. Project.

He ran a finger over the engraved letters. Clara's short, tragic brush with a digital realm had birthed the entire concept behind Eternity. Perhaps she'd never dreamt it would lead to a subscription-based existence for the comatose and dying. *If she'd known, would she have pleaded to shut it all down for good?*

He shut his eyes. An image of Michael's bandaged arm flickered in his memory, followed by the heartbreak in Rachel's voice. The hush of the corridor seemed oppressive—like a perpetual reminder that no one else was fighting this system from within. Did he have it in him to push back?

For now, he could only log off the system, his heart uneasy. Tomorrow, another family would come in, another final goodbye disguised as salvation. The thought coiled in his chest like a slow-burning fuse.

He left the control room, the overhead lights dimming behind him. Far away, servers hummed, bridging life and death. Wesley wondered if, somewhere in that digital sea, Clara's ghost still whispered—warning them all that not every miracle should be sold for a monthly fee.

End – Part 6