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## THE AFTERLIFE TRAP PART 20 – IDENTITY CRISIS

by  
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Felicia sat in the small, dimly lit room, her hands fidgeting restlessly in her lap. She'd lost count of how many times the lawyers had come and gone, each one looking more perplexed and defeated than the last. The air was stale and heavy, pressing down on her chest like a weight she couldn't lift.

Across from her, an older attorney named Ruth Whitaker sat hunched over a mountain of paperwork, her gray hair pulled back into a tight bun. Ruth flipped through a stack of documents with practiced efficiency, muttering to herself before looking up and offering Felicia a weary smile.

"Ms. Reyes," Ruth began, her voice gentle but strained, "I'm going to be honest with you. We've hit a wall—one I don't think we can get past."

Felicia's heart sank. She hadn't slept in days, constantly looking over her shoulder, half expecting someone from Eternity Inc. to burst through the door and drag her back into whatever nightmare awaited. Ruth's words felt like a final blow.

“What does that mean?” Felicia asked, barely above a whisper.

Ruth took off her glasses and rubbed her temples. “The legal situation is... unprecedented. There’s no framework for what’s happened to you—no precedent for recognizing your identity in your current body.”

Felicia looked down at her hands—hands that didn’t feel like hers, skin that didn’t match her memory. She fought back the urge to scream. “But... it’s me. I know who I am. I have memories—my family, my life before. That has to mean something.”

Ruth nodded sympathetically. “Your memories are compelling, but memories alone don’t establish legal identity. The body you occupy—this body—belongs to someone else, legally speaking. You were never declared dead. There was no funeral, no death certificate—nothing to officially mark your passing. As far as the law is concerned, you never stopped being this other person.”

Felicia gritted her teeth, frustration boiling over. “So you’re saying I don’t exist? That I just have to pretend to be... her?”

Ruth hesitated, glancing at the younger lawyer sitting beside her—a man named Cole, who had been brought in for his expertise in emerging technologies and digital rights. He cleared his throat, shifting uncomfortably.

“It’s not that simple,” Cole interjected. “The problem is that even if we wanted to legally establish your identity as Felicia Reyes, we would have to prove that a transfer of consciousness occurred. There’s no legal mechanism to do that. You’d essentially have to convince a court that consciousness can be transferred like data—and that the body is just a vessel.”

Felicia stared at him in disbelief. “But that’s exactly what happened. Dr. Crowe did it. I was brought back into this body—he said I was the first one to make it.”

Cole exchanged a glance with Ruth, who gave a slight shake of her head. He sighed. “Eternity Inc. denies the existence of any such procedure. They’ve publicly stated that no transfers of consciousness have ever been attempted. As far as the world knows, what you’re claiming is impossible. Without concrete evidence—or credible witnesses—it sounds more like a delusion than reality.”

Felicia clenched her fists. “There has to be someone. There were people there—other residents, technicians. Someone must know the truth.”

Ruth leaned forward, her eyes compassionate but firm. “Even if we could find someone willing to testify, it wouldn’t matter. Legally speaking, you’re still this other woman. And that’s where the real problem lies. We can’t legally prove you’re Felicia Reyes because the body itself wasn’t declared dead. There’s no process for declaring a living person’s consciousness dead and replacing it with another.”

Felicia felt tears prick at the corners of her eyes, but she swallowed them back. She didn’t want to break down—not again. “So... what am I supposed to do? Just live as this stranger for the rest of my life?”

Ruth hesitated. “We’ve considered filing a petition to establish your identity through other means—DNA tests, fingerprint records, medical history. But even that runs into problems. Your DNA doesn’t match Felicia Reyes. Your fingerprints don’t match. In the eyes of the law, you’re someone else entirely.”

Cole cleared his throat again. “There’s another problem. Even if you were declared legally dead at some point, reversing that declaration after so much time is virtually impossible—especially since your body was never recovered or identified. It’s not like cases where people were falsely declared dead and later found alive. This is different—because, legally, Felicia Reyes is still dead.”

Felicia buried her face in her hands. “This can’t be happening. I’m not crazy. I’m not some imposter.”

Ruth placed a hand on her shoulder. “We believe you. We really do. But the legal system doesn’t deal well with things it doesn’t understand. Your case is unlike anything we’ve ever seen. And even if we could get someone to listen, Eternity Inc. would bury it. They’re already actively discrediting the few conspiracy theories floating around. They’ve labeled the rumors about consciousness transfer as paranoid delusions propagated by anti-technology activists.”

Felicia looked up sharply. “So they’re just going to get away with it? Again?”

Ruth hesitated, glancing at Cole. After a brief exchange of looks, Ruth spoke carefully. “There is... one possible option. It’s a longshot—practically zero chance of success—but it’s better than doing nothing.”

Felicia’s eyes narrowed. “What is it?”

“We could file a civil case against the state to force them to acknowledge your identity. If we position it as a challenge to the state’s refusal to recognize you, rather than accusing Eternity Inc. directly, it might be harder for them to dismiss it outright. They’ll still fight it, but it wouldn’t be as straightforward as if we were accusing them directly.”

Cole nodded in agreement. “If we file against the state rather than Eternity Inc., it reduces the corporation’s leverage. The case would focus on the state’s legal obligation to identify living citizens accurately. If the court agrees to take it, we might be able to compel evidence—like medical records or surveillance footage. But getting the court to take the case... that’s almost impossible.”

Felicia’s heart pounded. “But it’s a chance, right?”

Ruth hesitated. “Yes, but... if Eternity Inc. decides to intervene, they’ll pull every string they have to crush it before it gets traction. And if it backfires, they could use it as proof that your claim is nothing more than a delusion. You’d be humiliated in court.”

Felicia took a deep breath, considering the risks. “If I don’t fight... they win. They’ll just keep getting away with it. I can’t live with that.”

Ruth smiled, just a little. “Then we’ll file the petition. We’ll prepare for the worst but hope for the best.”

Cole gave a supportive nod. “We’ll gather everything we can to build a case. It might not get far, but if the court grants us discovery, we might finally get the evidence we need.”

Felicia wiped her eyes and forced herself to sit up straight. “Then let’s do it. I’m not giving up.”

As the lawyers gathered their documents and made their way out, Felicia felt a fragile sense of purpose take root inside her. The odds were stacked against her, but at least she was doing something—fighting back instead of just hiding. And if there was even a sliver of a chance to reclaim her life, she would take it.

As the door clicked shut behind Ruth and Cole, Felicia stared at her hands—her unfamiliar, stolen hands—and whispered to herself, “I’m not done fighting.”

End – Part 12