

JL Spears  
authorjlspears@gmail.com  
<https://www.jlspears.com>  
© 2025 JL Spears

Approx 1300 words

THE AFTERLIFE TRAP PART 15 – CROWE’S BREAKTHROUGH  
by  
JL Spears

Dr. Elias Crowe adjusted the neural stabilization settings on the holographic console, his fingers dancing over the interface with practiced precision. The lab was quiet except for the hum of machinery, and the air was thick with the anticipation of either groundbreaking success or catastrophic failure.

Crowe barely noticed the soft chime as Alexander Voss’s face appeared on his personal terminal—sharp, calculating eyes boring into him.

“Tell me you have good news, Crowe,” Voss snapped.

Crowe straightened, masking his exhaustion. “I believe I’ve found the missing piece,” he replied, keeping his voice calm and confident. “The problem with previous attempts wasn’t just the donor body’s condition. It was the residual consciousness. Even if the brain was viable, the presence of the host’s consciousness caused instability. It fought back.”

Voss arched an eyebrow. “And you’ve solved that problem?”

Crowe nodded. "The answer is to upload the host's consciousness to the Forever Program before transferring the new one. This ensures that the body is viable but entirely empty—a blank slate ready for the new mind."

Voss's lips curled into a satisfied smirk. "Clever. I assume you're about to test this theory?"

"I am," Crowe confirmed. "The subject is Felicia Reyes—one of the most resilient consciousnesses in the Forever Program. Her survival instincts are unparalleled. She survived human trafficking as a teenager, escaped, rebuilt her life, became a social media influencer, and even survived a mass shooting long enough to end up on life support. Her mother uploaded her out of desperation. The subscription lapsed, and she fell into corporate possession. She's perfect for this test."

Voss seemed intrigued. "Survival instincts, you say? You think they'll persist in a new body?"

"That's what I'm counting on," Crowe said, his voice tinged with something like reverence. "Her drive to survive is embedded in her neural signature. If we can transfer that resilience into a new host, it will prove the continuity of identity even beyond death."

Voss gave a brisk nod. "Then do it. Prove that your theory works."

The call ended, and Crowe let out a slow breath, centering himself. He approached the operating table where Felicia's new body lay—young, athletic, and healthy. The previous occupant's consciousness had already been uploaded to the Forever Program, leaving the body empty and viable.

He initiated the transfer process, routing Felicia's digital consciousness through the neural interface. Data streamed across the monitors—neural pathways lighting up as the consciousness took root in the host brain. Crowe watched intently, his heart pounding in his chest.

The body twitched, and Crowe leaned closer, adrenaline surging. Slowly, Felicia's eyelids fluttered open, and she took a shaky, uneven breath.

"Felicia?" Crowe called softly. "Can you hear me?"

Her eyes moved, focusing on his face. Confusion flickered across her features, and her fingers curled against the bed. "Where... am I?" she whispered, her voice weak and uncertain.

Crowe forced a reassuring smile. "You're safe. You've been given a new chance—a new life."

Felicia frowned, struggling to sit up. "I... I was dead. I remember... bleeding out... my mom crying..." She choked on the words, her hands shaking as they touched her face.

"Yes," Crowe said gently. "You were on life support. Your mother made the decision to upload you. You've been preserved... until now."

Her breathing grew more rapid, panic seeping into her eyes. "No... that's not all. I remember... I remember being there." Her voice grew hoarse, and she pressed her palms to her temples. "The Forever Program... they hurt me. I couldn't get away. They... they controlled everything. It never ended."

Crowe froze, caught off guard. "What are you talking about?"

Felicia looked up at him, her expression haunted. "They tortured me. I was trapped—forced to entertain them. Over and over. I kept hoping someone would find out... that someone would save me." Her voice broke, and tears streamed down her face. "But no one came."

Crowe felt a chill creep down his spine. He had never considered that the Forever Program could become a personal hell for some of its residents. Felicia was shaking now, clutching her head as if trying to hold herself together.

"It wasn't supposed to be like that," he said softly, more to himself than to her.

Felicia didn't seem to hear him. "There was this... woman. She said I belonged to her—like I was her toy. She made me dance, made me beg... and when I tried to fight back, she would shut me down—make me feel everything and nothing at the same time. I thought it would never end."

Crowe clenched his jaw, pushing down his discomfort. "Felicia, listen to me. You're not there anymore. You're back. You survived."

She looked up, eyes glassy with fear and anger. "Why did you bring me back?" she whispered. "Why couldn't you just let me go?"

"Because you're unique," Crowe replied, trying to keep his tone steady. "You have a will to survive that defies logic. You kept fighting through everything—human trafficking, rebuilding your life, surviving a shooting. I needed to see if that instinct would carry over in a new body."

Her eyes darkened with fury. "You... used me? You didn't care what I wanted?"

Crowe hesitated, unsure how to respond. "I gave you a second chance."

"A second chance at what?" Felicia shot back, her voice cracking. "More pain? More fear? I didn't ask for this!" She buried her face in her hands, sobbing uncontrollably.

Crowe's communicator chimed, and he cursed under his breath, stepping out of the room to take the call. Voss appeared on the screen, his expression expectant.

"Well?" Voss demanded. "Is she functional?"

Crowe hesitated, swallowing his frustration. "The transfer was successful. Full integration. The subject is emotionally unstable, but that's expected during acclimation."

Voss frowned. "Emotionally unstable? That's not acceptable. The point is to create functional beings, not broken wrecks."

Crowe straightened. "She's functional. Just... processing trauma from the Forever Program."

Voss's eyes narrowed. "Then stabilize her. We can't afford to lose the project because of psychological fallout."

The call ended, and Crowe gritted his teeth, pushing back his anger. He returned to the lab, finding Felicia curled up on the bed, whispering to herself.

"I'll be good... I'll be good... Please don't hurt me..." she mumbled.

Crowe approached cautiously, forcing his voice to be calm. "Felicia. It's me. You're safe now."

Her eyes darted to him, wide and fearful. "You're just like them... You think you can own me. Control me."

He reached out, but she jerked away, backing into the corner of the room. Crowe's mind raced—he couldn't afford this breakdown. He needed her stabilized, coherent, functional. Without thinking, he triggered a mild sedation signal through the neural stabilizer.

Felicia's body relaxed, her breathing slowing, but her eyes remained accusatory even as the drug took effect.

Crowe forced himself to remain composed. He couldn't let his frustration or doubt show. The transfer had succeeded—technically. But Felicia's broken spirit and fractured psyche weren't part of his plan.

He made a quick note on his tablet, labeling the experiment as "**Successful - Further Psychological Rehabilitation Required**" and submitted the report. As he walked back to his office, his mind churned with questions he didn't want to ask. Had he really saved Felicia, or had he just traded one nightmare for another?

The sound of Felicia's muffled sobs echoed in his mind long after he closed the door behind him, and for the first time in years, Elias Crowe felt something almost foreign—a whisper of guilt.

End – Part 7