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THE AFTERLIFE TRAP PART 21 – DESPERATION

by
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The drizzle pattered softly against the high-rise windows, leaving trails of water over the neon-lit skyline. Alina pressed her fingertips against the chilled glass and gazed at the hulking shapes of old, concrete buildings spread across the city. Many had once been modest homes. Now, they were glitzy towers—bought up by the wealthy, subdivided, and rented out at obscene prices.

Everyone knew the truth: The rich owned the entire city. “They,” the elites—boomers, to use the slang—who had not only hoarded the houses and land but, in recent years, had also begun life itself. Transference technology, once whispered of as conspiracy theory, was now a quiet, open secret. It was illegal but ubiquitous. Law enforcement turned a blind eye when the powerful indulged in transferring their consciousness into fresh, young bodies. Officially, it was called the “Resurrection Trade”—a crime so serious it carried a life sentence, though no one had ever seen a billionaire stand trial for it.

Alina peeled herself away from the window. She was behind on rent—again—and trying to decide whether she should dip into her meager savings to keep a roof over her head. By any

normal standard, she was “successful”: twenty-five, college degree, working two part-time jobs while freelancing online. But it didn’t matter. Real estate was impossible; you needed generational wealth and connections just to sign a lease in a decent district.

Her phone buzzed, and she glanced at the holo-display. It was a text from Kelsie, her roommate and best friend since high school:

We need to talk. Can you meet me at the diner near Trinity Bridge? 8 PM?

The abruptness of the request put a tremor in Alina’s stomach. Kelsie rarely left cryptic messages. Lately, though, her friend had been acting distant, anxious—far more than usual. Alina replied that she’d be there. She threw on a threadbare raincoat, jammed her keys into her pocket, and hurried out into the night.

The Temptation

Trinity Bridge was a place of gray desperation, half-lost in the shadows cast by the fancy new condos across the river. A single flickering streetlamp illuminated the chipped facade of the diner, where the “Open 24 Hours!” sign had lost half its letters.

Kelsie was hunched in a booth by the window, fingers dancing nervously around a chipped mug of coffee. Her normally bright eyes looked bloodshot, her cheeks hollow from too many skipped meals.

“Hey,” Alina said, sliding in opposite her friend. “What’s wrong?”

Kelsie let out a shaky sigh. “It’s Mom. She needs the procedure. Her kidneys are failing, and the insurance company is refusing to cover all but the cheapest dialysis plan. She won’t make it more than a few months.”

“Oh, Kels.” Alina reached for her friend’s hand. “I’m so sorry. What about your uncle? I thought he was helping with the medical bills.”

“He can’t anymore. Lost his job last month.” Kelsie swallowed hard. “I can’t just watch her die. I have to do something.”

“What can you do?” Alina asked gently. “There’s no money. You’re already working two jobs, and they barely pay enough for rent.”

She regretted the bluntness of her words the moment she saw Kelsie’s expression. The flicker of shame was immediate.

“I—I’ve been looking into...options.” Kelsie’s voice quavered. Her gaze darted around the nearly empty diner, checking if anyone was close enough to overhear. Leaning in, she whispered, “I’ve found a buyer. For me.”

Alina’s heart pounded. She had heard of it before. Everyone had: young people selling their bodies to the wealthy dead people – and having their consciousness uploaded to a digital afterlife. The wealthy used a black-market version of the technology that uploaded people into Eternity Inc’s Forever Program and could also download people into a new body. But hearing it come from her best friend’s mouth chilled her to the bone.

“No,” Alina whispered. “You can’t be serious.”

“I can’t see another way,” Kelsie said, tears gathering at the corners of her eyes. “He’ll pay enough to cover Mom’s procedure and put her up in an apartment for the rest of her life. All I have to do is sign a contract. After the swap, I...go to the digital afterlife where I can live out the rest of my life.”

“This is insane.” Alina gripped the edge of the table so hard it squeaked. “You’re talking about letting some old creep snatch your brain out of your body.”

“You think I want to do this?” Kelsie snapped back, voice shaking. “I have no choice. This city—this country—won’t lift a finger to help us. The only thing the older generations care about is living forever. They own the houses. They own the hospitals. They own the government that looks the other way.”

Alina felt her eyes burn with frustrated tears. “This is a death sentence for you.”

Kelsie took a deep, ragged breath. “Mom is all I have left. I can’t let her die.”

The Deal

Before Alina could respond, the bell over the diner’s door chimed. In walked a well-dressed man—gray hair, hunched shoulders, a bored expression. He glanced around, spotted them, and slid into the booth beside Kelsie without so much as a greeting.

“Ladies,” he said, voice a polished baritone that hinted at old wealth. He dipped his head toward Kelsie. “I assume this is your friend.” His gaze swept over Alina, and she felt the weight of it, like a cat eyeing cornered prey.

“Kelsie nodded numbly. “Alina, this is Mr. Carnell.”

“Charmed,” he said, not bothering to extend his hand.

Alina gritted her teeth. “You’re disgusting. Preying on desperate people.”

Carnell merely smiled. “Desperation breeds opportunity. Kelsie has made a rational decision. I’m here to finalize the arrangement.”

He laid a contract on the table, sliding it to Kelsie. “Sign this, and the money will be wired immediately. Once it’s done, there’s no going back.”

Alina looked at her friend, heart pounding. “Don’t do it. Please.”

Kelsie hesitated, her pen hovering over the page. She glanced at Alina, then at Carnell, and finally looked down at the contract, tears spilling onto the paper. With a trembling hand, she signed.

Carnell retrieved the document, folding it with mechanical precision. “Well done. You’ll be contacted for final arrangements shortly.”

As he walked away, Alina buried her face in her hands. “You didn’t have to do this,” she whispered.

Kelsie wiped her tears, her face pale and resigned. “I couldn’t lose her. I couldn’t just do nothing.”

Alina squeezed her hand. “We’ll find a way out of this. I swear.”

Kelsie gave a faint, broken smile. “I know you’ll try. But I’m already gone.”

As the rain picked up outside, Alina made a silent vow. She would find a way to expose Carnell and save Kelsie. Even if it took every ounce of strength she had, she wouldn't let them take her life without a fight.

End – Part 13