

# PROLOGUE

A hospital room, filled with the hollow hum of medical machines. On a pristine white bed lies a boy, connected to a life support system. His chest rises just barely beneath a veil of wires and sensors.

The boy's parents — usually an elegantly dressed couple with proud, upright posture — are now two hunched figures with exhausted eyes, watching the monitors without rest, hoping that their son will wake up any moment. The mother holds the boy's hand. The father stands nearby, motionless with tension.

The door opens silently.

A man in his forties enters — tall, composed, confident in every step. His black hair is neatly combed, his face clean-shaven to perfection. He wears a white-gray coat with the clinic's badge and a name tag:

**Dr. Leon Halden, Department of Neuro-Innovation.**

A notebook and a couple of pens peek out of his chest pocket. He holds a thin tablet. His gaze lingers briefly on the boy, then shifts to the parents.

"Mr. and Mrs. Elwood," his voice is calm, assured, yet strikingly gentle.

"Following the recent discussion with the clinic board, I'd like to offer an experimental treatment.

I must warn you — it hasn't yet been used outside laboratory conditions."

He pauses. The air in the room grows denser.

"We have a new-generation neuro-device. It can penetrate the deepest levels of consciousness — into memories. And perhaps, draw the patient out by restoring empathic connections and mental threads.

Your son... his brain is stable. But he still doesn't respond to external stimuli. We continue monitoring, but truthfully, there's been no change in six months."

Another pause. He looks the parents in the eye, without pressure but with steady hope.

"This might be our best chance.

But again — the technology hasn't been tested on humans.

If you agree, the clinic will take full responsibility — legally and financially.

The decision is yours."

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A few seconds of silence. Only the rhythmic beeping of monitors and the low neon hum overhead.

The mother — a woman with tired features and impeccably styled hair — is the first to break the silence. Her voice trembles, but there's iron in it:

"You want to use an unproven device on my child? We've already lost six months... I won't risk what's left of him."

The father slowly rises from his chair. He looks older than he is, with graying temples and deep circles under his eyes. His fists are clenched, but his voice remains controlled:

"And you think he'll just wake up on his own? That we'll get a second chance?"  
(He turns to the doctor)  
"How much time do we have? Can we think about it?"

Dr. Halden nods:

"Of course. But the longer the mind stays locked, the deeper it may retreat. Some doors may close forever."

The mother turns back to her son. A few steps — and she's at his bedside again, stroking his hair.

"He looked so happy on his birthday. Do you remember how he sang?" she whispers to herself.  
"If there's even a chance... —" her voice cracks, "— I want him to sing again."

The father nods. Then, looking into the doctor's eyes:

"We agree."

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The doctor lowers his eyes to the tablet, swipes across the screen. His tone becomes quieter, more formal:

"There's one more important matter. We cannot send parents or close relatives into the mind.  
The emotional bond is too strong. Inside the consciousness, such feelings can become uncontrollable."

He looks up:

"An emotional surge is like a storm. The mind may not survive it. Best case — the person gets lost in someone else's psyche. Worst case..." he pauses for a split second, "...the entire session collapses. We don't risk immediate family."

The mother clutches her chest:

"So... I won't be with him? I won't be able to talk to him?"

The doctor gently nods:

“You are his anchor. But to save him, the anchor must stay outside. He feels you. He knows you’re here.”

The father exhales heavily and looks away:

“Then... we need to choose others?”

Dr. Halden:

“People he trusted. Family friends. Distant relatives. Perhaps a teacher, a mentor — someone connected to him but not bound by blood. And... we have volunteers. Trained. We’ll prepare them.”

The father sits heavily on the edge of a chair, covering his face with his hand. The mother, still holding the boy’s hand, doesn’t look away from the doctor:

“We... we’ll bring people,” Rion Elwood raises his eyes to the doctor. “Those who knew him. Who loved him — but not too closely. My brother — they used to play together. His art teacher. A family friend he called ‘Aunt Sophie.’ A couple of others he grew up with.”

The mother finally releases her son’s hand and gives a weak nod:

“I’ll contact them. They’ll come.”

Dr. Halden makes a note on the tablet:

“Good. We’ll prepare everything. After the initial neuro-scan calibration, we’ll determine who can safely dive in. The selection will depend on emotional wave compatibility and empathic resilience.”

The father shakes his head slowly:

“This... sounds insane. But if there’s even a chance...”