

Futures

The Nana inheritance

Sibling rivalry. By Amanda Helms



The deathbed of your beloved grandmother isn't really the place where you should decide who inherits her brain, but that's what we did.

Octavia held Nana's hand while glaring at Evangeline and Silas. Nana lay in her hospice bed, eyelids twitching in REM sleep. Decades ago, her hair had gone so white it approached translucence, and the soft curls at her crown gave her an angelic mien.

"Evangeline will get the implant," Octavia said. She had an annoying habit of spouting dictums to us. A hazard of being the eldest, she claimed. "Her brain is the most plastic, so it'll adjust the best."

"I'm only four years younger than you," Evangeline said. "My brain can't be that much more plastic. Especially compared with Silas, as I'm just one year younger than him."

Silas grunted. "I'm pretty sure Nana won't want to live in my brain."

"Don't be gender essentialist." Octavia patted Nana's hand, as if soothing her from the

worry that a cis male brain wouldn't accommodate her. "Maybe you *would* be better than Evangeline. You liked Nana's cross-stitches the most."

"How could anyone *not* like a cross-stitch of Cthulhu devouring the Universe with 'Sorry I woke up cranky' beneath it? But that doesn't mean I want to cross-stitch myself – no offence, Nana," Silas said.

Nana snored.

"Besides," Silas turned one of Octavia's death glares upon her. "I would've thought you'd like to implant Nana to have instant access to her gyros recipe."

We'd begged Nana a few months ago to type it out, including the homemade tzatziki. But she got this *beady* gleam in her brown eyes and said, "Over my dead body."

Then she explained about RecycleYOU, which is a terrible name for cognitive-copying-plus-AI-enhancement, but that's Nana for you. Bargain over cachet.

Silas continued: "If you implant Nana, you'd

have that at your fingertips. Er, brain-tip."

"We all loved the gyros equally," Octavia said. "But not the cross-stitch."

"Yeah, that was *your* domain," Evangeline added.

What followed was not our finest moment, involving sophomoric insults and a hefty shove that sent us sprawling into the hall – and an instruction from security to "take it elsewhere".

What we can admit now, with the distance of time, is that we were displacing our grief at the prospect of losing Nana.

And, let's be honest, the prospect of losing Nana's gyros recipe with her.

An hour later, we sat in the hospice's cafeteria, where we'd printed ourselves some truly godawful coffee and Danishes.

To her pastry, Evangeline said, "What do you think Nana even wants, anyway, being downloaded into our heads?"

Octavia shrugged. "To make sure she's not forgotten. An urn of ashes can get shoved

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to the back of a closet. Grave sites can go unvisited. You can't turn off a Nana-implant."

"Well, if she'd just given us the gyros recipe, and maybe her cross-stitch patterns" – Silas coughed – "we'd remember her through those."

We sighed at the thought of that ideal. So simple! So elegant! And yet, Nana couldn't bring herself to do it, not without the most massive of strings.

Much as we loved Nana, none of us wanted her in our heads, you know? There for every spray of the bidet, every shower, every "You're an adult, *don't* shove your sibling into the bushes over a disagreement about who won the epic *VR Teen Idol Slap Fight!* family tournament at Thanksgiving 15 years ago" lapse of judgement.

Hypothetically speaking, of course.

And that's before we even touch what goes on during any sexytimes. Some things are definitely not meant to be shared with your Nana's AI-enhanced memory.

Silas cocked his head while he ruminated, and *ruminated* is truly the best word because he kept chewing and chewing a mouthful of Danish. "I love her, but it is a bit manipulative, isn't it, saying we can't get the gyros recipe

unless one of us has her in our head?"

Octavia picked at a loose thread from her sweater. "It is," she said. Then she sighed. "OK, well if neither of you wants to volunteer –"

"Why can't *you* volunteer?" Evangeline asked.

"– then the next-fairest way to do this is to use a random number generator."

Evangeline clucked her tongue. "Or bring in the cousins."

Right away Silas and Octavia hissed "Nooooo" in unison.

"You know they'd never share the gyros recipe," Octavia said.

"And none of them really loved Nana," Silas said. "Not the way we did. That's why she only approached us."

We fell silent as Evangeline made a Danish-crumble pyramid. When it collapsed, she said, "OK. I have a proposal."

So that's how we all ended up with a copy of our beloved Nana in our heads. We've opened up ThoughtPort connections to each other, and Nana-O, Nana-S and Nana-E all talk together, trading their favourite cross-stitch patterns (as it seems our individual brains influence their favourites somewhat) and keeping their

grandchild judgeyness to themselves.

And, unfortunately, the gyros recipe. The Nanas *still* won't share it. Apparently, they're unimpressed with our continued inability to work together.

What's worse, however, is our former *I*'s are beginning to subsume into *we*. Turns out that while we affect the Nana implants, the connection between them bleeds into *us* a little, too.

Ironically, this development means the Nanas will get what they want: we're working together, united in pressing Nana's estate to spring for MindPartitions. Then the ThoughtPorts will continue to allow the Nanas to communicate, while leaving *us* as *mes*.

We hope.

In the meantime, Silas-self thinks we have a way to hack the gyros recipe out of Nana-S. It involves us all learning cross-stitch.

Amanda Helms is a biracial fantasy, science-fiction and horror writer whose stories have appeared in or are forthcoming from *FIYAH*, *Lightspeed*, *Uncanny Magazine* and elsewhere. She lives with her family in Colorado. Although all of them are natives, none ski or snowboard, proving that such creatures indeed exist.

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

Amanda Helms reveals the inspiration behind *The Nana inheritance*.

I'm a member of Codex Writers, an online writers' community that hosts a couple of flash-writing competitions each year. This particular story originated from one of those contests. The prompt I selected was to incorporate particular words from a list; I chose legacy, mourners and recipe. After editing, only recipe remains explicitly, but legacy and mourners immediately brought to mind familial connections and what a person on their deathbed might wish to leave to their descendants — or hoard vindictively, as the case may be. Add in some brainstorming about the mourners and the mourned, and I wound up with grandchildren trying to figure out who'd inherit their grandmother's brain, more or less, and her famed gyros recipe. As you do.

