

## HELEN'S LAST WILL

by James C. Glass

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In future legal proceedings, the first crucial question may be, "Who goes there?"

The lobby of Advanced Technologies was steel struts and white polymer panels reaching toward a high vaulted ceiling of clear glass. The receptionist and an armed guard sat in a glass-enclosed booth on an otherwise vast but empty floor of black marble. Both looked up as Blanche approached the booth.

"May I help you, madam?" asked the receptionist, a blond, pretty man in his twenties.

"I wish to see the body of my sister," said Blanche. "She was interred here last Thursday."

The young man smiled, fingers poised over a keyboard. "Name?"

"Helen Charlston Winslow. Age eighty-four. I believe the arrangements were made by Arthur Winslow, her son. It was all quite sudden, and I wasn't notified."

"Are you a relative?"

"Her sister, Blanche Charlston Packard." Blanche sniffed and slid her national identity card under a partially opened window in the booth. The man looked at it, then at something on his computer screen.

"Helen Winslow, yes. She was brought here directly from her home. Arthur Winslow attended her admission to verify identity."

Blanche managed a sob. "I talked to her personal physician, and he didn't even know she'd been ill. I'm wondering why he wasn't called in or at least notified when she died."

The man gave her a sympathetic smile. "We have a staff of twenty physicians, madam. Three attended your sister and pronounced her dead at twenty forty-five. Cause of death was a massive cerebral hemorrhage." He turned back to his computer screen and studied it.

“Your sister had a long-term contract with us. Everything was done according to her specifications.”

“Yes, of course. I knew she was an investor in your firm. When may I view her body?”

The young man’s eyes wandered from hers. “Ah—that won’t be possible. There are no viewings here. The clients are placed in sealed tanks. Decanting them for viewing would involve considerable expense. The tissue cannot be allowed to warm above liquid nitrogen temperature once it’s quick-frozen.”

Blanche’s manner changed abruptly. “Save that for the believers, young man. I want to see my sister’s remains, and I want to see them *now*.”

The guard in the booth shifted his feet uneasily, and the receptionist forced a smile.

“I understand, Ms. Packard, I really do, but it isn’t possible, and there are no exceptions. It’s in the contract. The remains can be removed only for advanced medical treatment when there is a high probability for success, as determined by our physicians. There’s so little to see, anyway. Your sister’s contract allowed only her head to be preserved. The rest of her body has been designated for research purposes.”

Blanche put a hand on the window, as if to ward off an evil spirit. “You decapitated my sister?” she asked softly.

“It’s quite common, Ms. Packard. The expense for preserving the head is a fifth of that for the entire body. Over half our clients choose this option. The others have specific medical problems they wish to have solved when the technology is available in the future. It would seem your sister didn’t have such a problem.”

“Only a massive cerebral hemorrhage,” said Blanche. “All right, I want to speak to one or more of the physicians who attended my sister and find out what’s going on here. This entire thing smells foul to me.”

“If you leave your number, someone will call you and hopefully explain things better than I have.”

Blanche gave him her card. “It had better be tonight, or we’ll be talking about this in a court of law.”

“I’ll forward this card right away and tell them your concerns,” said the receptionist.

Blanche turned her back on him and marched away fuming, swinging her arms. She was dressed expensively in white pantsuit and black tie and looked important. She was a handsome woman, looking perhaps fifty, even forty, yet she had recently turned seventy-six. She pulled out her cell phone and spoke a number. Waited, one foot tapping the floor.

“Arthur Winslow, please,” she said, and waited again, then, “Arthur, this is Blanche. I’m here at Advanced Technologies, and I’ve just been told I can’t see my sister because you’ve had her decapitated. Now what are you up to, you miserable little worm?”

She waited a moment, then punched the phone off in a fury.

Arthur had hung up on her.

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“There’s a conspiracy here, Randal, and I expect you to unravel it.”

Randal Haug, Blanche’s expensive attorney and longtime friend of her late husband Ralph, leaned over his expansive desk to study the document there and thumped it with a finger.

“Nothing,” he said. “Not one red cent. The last version I saw had you down for over two million in stocks and property alone. What happened between you and Helen?”

Blanche’s fingers twisted together in her lap. “I don’t know. We saw a lot of each other until a few years ago. I think it started when Fred died. Helen was a recluse for months after that, but Arthur was there to comfort her. Dear Arthur, her baby boy. Fred didn’t leave him a dime; it all went to Helen. Even then, she designated a portion of the estate to me; we’d talked about establishing a foundation to support local performing arts. I know Arthur opposed that. I heard him say so. The man is a financier, an accountant. He exists solely in his left brain.”

“You think Arthur has manipulated his mother into changing her will?”

“I do.”

“For what purpose? The bulk of the estate was left to him in the older

version of the will, and he's an independently wealthy man without it. You don't need the money. Ralph left you, what, twenty-five million? Fifty? I can't recall now."

Blanche's voice rose in pitch. "It's not the money, Randal. Not money for me, that is, but Helen and I had a foundation planned, and suddenly I'll have to do it alone while that son of hers puts all *her* money back into the company that has mutilated her for no reason. Cost, indeed! My sister would *never* have allowed her head to be removed and her body destroyed just to save a measly hundred thousand each year. They say it's in her contract, then tell me I can't see the thing to verify it. There's something sinister about this, Randal, and I want you to get to the bottom of it! I'm thinking of filing a wrongful death suit against both the company and Arthur Winslow. Murder would be harder to prove."

"You're not serious," said Randal.

"I have inside sources. As of last Tuesday, Arthur owns twenty percent of Advanced Technologies. The buy he made Tuesday had to come from his inheritance; my sources can list the stocks he traded. We can link them to Helen's holdings. We have a motive, Randal. The method is harder to prove."

Randal seemed suddenly interested and drummed the fingers of his right hand on the desktop, then pointed at Blanche and said, "I can write that in a way to force a show cause hearing before a judge. But if I get one, will you accept the judgment? If it goes against you, will you drop all of this? Helen was also my friend, Blanche, and I think she'd be very unhappy with me for dragging her son into court. Arthur has always struck me as being smart and hard working. I don't think he'd do what you're suggesting here. He could just be making what he considers to be a wise investment with his inheritance. You have no physical evidence for anything else."

"You're not being supportive, Randal," said Blanche softly. "You've been my lawyer for years, but that can end right now."

Randal didn't even flinch. "It *will* end right now if you don't answer my question. Will you accept any judgment of a show cause hearing? If not, then find yourself another lawyer."

Blanche glared at him. She did not like being pressured by hired help, but she needed the man. "If I'm convinced my sister wasn't murdered, I'll not press for anything beyond the judgment of a hearing," she said.

“Good,” said Randal, then closed the file on his desk and gently hammered on it with a fist. “Let’s go to court.”

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The call came late at night when Blanche was preparing for bed. The kitchen help had left for the night, and Paula had retired to her basement bedroom after leaving a warm brandy and a cookie on the nightstand for her mistress. So when the telephone rang, Blanche picked it up quickly so Paula would not be awakened.

It was Arthur Winslow.

“I was served with a summons this afternoon. Wrongful death? Have you totally lost your mind?”

“It’s only a hearing, Arthur,” said Blanche. “There are questions to be answered before I proceed with further litigation.”

“For what? This is all about mom’s will, isn’t it? All the money you have, and you’re greedy for more. That’s why mom cut you out of it in the first place. You don’t *need* more!”

“It isn’t about money,” said Blanche. “My sister died under mysterious circumstances, and I want them explained.”

“You’re nuts! Paranoid! Do you know what this hearing can do to my business if it gets into the papers?”

“That’s nonsense. I’m just trying to—”

“You’ve always been a greedy bitch. Mom told me so. You were always after her to finance your social butterfly events, even when Dad was alive. He went along with it. Well, I don’t. You badgered mom for money when she was alive, and now you’re doing it when she’s dead. Finance your own social status, and leave us alone!”

The cell phone clicked in Blanche’s ear.

“That’s not fair,” she said, but Arthur was gone.

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A show cause hearing was held in the court of Judge James Maxwell

on a Friday. A team of lawyers from the firm of Abercrombie, Nels and Faber represented both Advanced Technologies and Arthur Winslow. They requested a private hearing in judge's chambers. Randal Haug opposed the request, arguing that the public had a right to know about the operations of the company. Judge Maxwell compromised when Advanced Technologies rebutted by saying that in order to adequately defend themselves it might be necessary to reveal company proprietary information related to pending patents.

The hearing was held in court, but was closed to all but participants on that Friday. Arthur arrived in financier's uniform, his pudgy, soft body encased in a finely tailored woolen suit that made him indistinguishable from his lawyers. They sat behind one table, Blanche and Randal behind another, facing the bench. There was a bailiff, court reporter, and physicians who could be called as witnesses. They all arose when Judge Maxwell entered court in the matter of Packard vs. Winslow and Industrial Technologies re: the Wrongful Death of Helen Winslow.

Maxwell was in his fifties, respected by his peers, and known as a no-nonsense judge who got right to the point without theatrics. "This is a hearing, not a trial," he told them. "I don't want to hear objections or attempts to withhold evidence. I *do* want to hear reasons why this issue should, or should not, go to trial, and I am confident we can accomplish all of this today. Mister Haug, it's your serve."

Randal smiled and arose chuckling at the judge's reference to his devotion to tennis. His opposition sat glumly silent.

Haug outlined his case: the mysterious death, an unseen contract, the bizarre beheading and storage of a client with only a son's knowledge of what was happening, and that son a major investor in Advanced Technologies, Incorporated. He demanded proof that all had been done according to the wishes of Helen Charlston Winslow, that she had indeed been dead before decapitation, and that an autopsy be ordered to prove cerebral hemorrhage as the cause of death.

Arthur Winslow stared straight ahead and never made direct eye contact with Blanche. The spokesman for the legal team at his table, a wiry, little man named Richard Camus, described Arthur as a loving son whose mother had died in his arms, a devoted son who made sure her every wish was carried out by rushing her to a laboratory for preservation and hopeful rejuvenation in the future. Helen Winslow herself had had a long-term interest in their work, contributing considerable funds for the development of new technologies in the freezing and rejuvenation processes.

“Your Honor, we doubt that a loving son would allow his mother’s body to be mutilated if he wanted her to be rejuvenated in the future,” said Randal Haug.

“The head was the relevant part of the body in question, and there was considerable cost savings in preservation,” rebutted Camus for the defense.

Haug snorted rudely. “The woman had a cerebral hemorrhage, we’re told. It seems the rest of her body was fine, and you have disposed of that part of her when she could easily afford the cost. I don’t accept that, and neither will a jury.”

“It was all in her contract,” said Camus.

“Then let’s see it,” returned Haug.

There was a long silence. Camus whispered to his colleagues, and Arthur leaned over to listen, frowning.

“As written, contracts with our clients include company confidential information on procedures, and the medical conditions they’re applied to. Patents pending approval can be put at risk by public exposure, but the client approves each step of the procedure, and company-sensitive information must be included in the contract.”

Judge Maxwell smiled and looked at Haug.

“Then let’s go to trial so I can subpoena the contract and any other admissible documents I need for my case,” said Haug. “Your Honor, this is a possible felony case. I have the right to know if legal procedures were followed during and after the death of Helen Winslow, and if those procedures were indeed according to her will.”

Judge Maxwell folded his hands in front of him and looked down at Richard Camus. “The contract is admissible, counselor. Your patents are applied for and protected under patent law. Why the resistance?”

“I’ve just explained that, Your Honor,” said Camus.

“I see. Well, let me explain something to you. I’m a simple man who likes simple solutions to problems. I’ve studied the briefs you gentlemen have submitted on behalf of your clients. The mystery is clear enough to

justify further investigation at the least, and it seems to me we could learn a lot by having a look at that contract. We can learn even more by ordering the autopsy requested by Counselor Haug in his brief. Now, if I see nothing to substantiate a claim of wrongful death, there's no reason to move forward with a long and expensive trial. We could all be home in time for lunch, so to speak. Showing us the contract makes a lot of sense, counselor. What do you think?"

"I don't want to set a new precedent, Your Honor," said Camus. Arthur was pulling at the man's sleeve, whispering something.

"No precedents to be set, counselor. This is a hearing. We're seeking evidence to justify a trial."

Haug and Blanche had been hastily conferring, and Blanche nodded her head.

"Your Honor," said Haug, "my client will not pursue a request for an autopsy and will drop her charges if she's satisfied with the contents of her sister's contract with Advanced Technologies."

Arthur and his attorneys conferred again, and there was obvious disagreement. Arthur slapped his hand on the table to emphasize a point. Finally, Camus cleared his throat and said, "We did not come prepared to show the contract, Your Honor, but we can have copies brought here if it's absolutely necessary. We feel it's in the interest of all parties to avoid the expense and publicity of a trial."

Judge Maxwell checked his watch. "It's nearly ten. We will resume at one. I expect Counselor Haug will have at least an hour to study the contract and formulate his questions. One way or another, I hope we're going to settle this today." He smiled down on them all. "Coffee time," he said, and banged his gavel lightly.

"No wonder they didn't want us to see it," said Blanche. "This is not only outrageous, but obscene. Helen would never have agreed to this."

"You agree that's her signature?"

"Yes, it looks like it. Signatures can be forged, Randal."

"I doubt it here, Blanche. I think you'll have to accept that Helen was involved as a subject for experimentation with Advanced Technologies before her death, and what's happening now is an extension of that work."



“*What* work?”

“Good question. Whatever it is has to be approved by Arthur Winslow, but otherwise, ‘my body can be used in any form or for any purpose within the AINI project.’ That’s both vague and specific. We have to find out what AINI means. It’s the only unknown. Otherwise, Helen has allowed them to do anything they want with her after her death.”

“Then they brainwashed her to get her money. This AINI thing is probably part of it.”

“We can still argue for an autopsy,” said Randal, “but my bet is she died the way they said she did. And seeing the contract hasn’t strengthened our case, Blanche; it’s weakened it. They’ve documented Helen’s total consent to the procedure. All we can do is try to show that consent was somehow forced out of her.”

They were sitting on a bench outside the courtroom. Arthur came down the hall with his entourage behind him, and Blanche glared at him.

Arthur broke away from the group. Camus made a grab for his arm but missed. Arthur headed straight for Blanche. Randal stood up, prepared to defend her, but Arthur stopped short. His round face was flushed, and he posed angrily, hands on hips. Blanche had a sudden urge to laugh at him.

“Well, I suppose you’re *still* not satisfied,” said Arthur.

“We might be, if you tell us what the AINI project is,” said Randal.

“That’s none of your business.”

“It might be if it involves coercion and fraud. Let’s see what the judge thinks.”

“Monster,” said Blanche, “you’ve been allowing experiments with the body of your own mother.”

“You don’t know *anything*,” shouted Arthur. “Mother would be furious if she heard you say that!”

Camus arrived and pulled Arthur back. “You won’t accomplish anything by this. They don’t have a case,” he said.

“We’ll see,” said Randal.

Blanche smiled, pleased by Arthur’s boyish rage. “You always got away with tantrums when you didn’t get your way, dear. If you’d been mine, I wouldn’t have allowed it.”

“How fortunate you weren’t able to have children,” snarled Arthur.

“Arthur, *please!*” Camus pulled him away backward by both arms.

“No! This has to stop here. I’m going to have my AINI unit brought in for testimony. It’ll settle everything once and for all.”

“The patents, Arthur. We can’t—”

“The patents are filed, and the hearing is closed. If anything leaks to the press we’ll sue her for everything she has. Let me go!” Arthur twisted in Camus’ grip and broke it.

“Wait for me here. I need to make a private call.” Arthur turned to Blanche and pointed a shaking finger at her. “*Now* you’re going to get it!”

Everyone was amazed as Arthur stormed away from them. For one instant, Randal Haug and Richard Camus were sympathetic colleagues. Randal shrugged his shoulders in dismay, and Camus said, “What can I do? The funding was his, and he has the authority. The board, of course, will blame me.”

Randal shook his head sadly. Blanche was mystified by everything she’s just heard.

Two hours later, she understood everything.

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“What’s all this?” asked Judge Maxwell, after he’d seated himself. He gestured at a large black screen and computer console with projection system that had been set up along one wall of the courtroom. Two fish-eye cameras mounted on the console pointed outward into the room.

“My client wishes to perform a demonstration he feels will clear up this entire matter, Your Honor,” said Camus.

“Any objections to this, Counselor Haug?”

“No, Your Honor. The only questions we have regarding the contract relate to details about the AINI project, and we’re told the demonstration will answer those questions.”

“Good. You may proceed, Counselor Camus.”

“Ah, the demonstration will be given by Arthur Winslow. He’s familiar with the technology and has been using it on a regular basis since his mother’s death.”

Maxwell looked at Haug.

“No problem, Your Honor.”

Arthur stood up, adjusted the knot on his tie, and walked to the computer, turned, cleared his throat, and folded his hands together over his stomach.

“The apparatus behind me houses what we call the AINI Model 10. By AINI we mean ‘Artificially Intelligent Neural Integration.’ It is basically a combination of a brain that stores data and a learning center that can synthesize new data from old. In other words, it’s an artificial intelligence system with a solid state brain made up of rare-earth impregnated carbon nanotubes.”

Arthur opened two doors at the base of the console, revealing what looked like a solid cube of silver metal. “This is the brain.”

Everyone looked at him blankly, searching for understanding and relevance. “Rubbish,” muttered Blanche, and Arthur heard her.

He glared straight at her, closed the console doors behind him and softly said, “It’s my mother’s brain, now, and if you’ll listen I’ll tell you how that happened.”

Blanche gasped. Randal squeezed her arm and hushed her.

Arthur blushed, and his voice quavered. “It all started with the Josephson Junction SQUID arrays to map magnetic storms in the brains of epileptics, but as resolution increased, our scientists began to see repeated neural current patterns related to specific thoughts, especially in memory recollection. We were soon down to the neuron level in resolution. Each memory, each thought, is a definite, three-dimensional current pattern

in real time. It's like scanning a picture, and this is what AINI does, building up a library of memories and thoughts than can be reassembled by an AI system to satisfy any scenario."

Arthur's voice cracked. He seemed to be struggling and took out a handkerchief to wipe his forehead. His eyes were suddenly quite moist.

"It was my mother who came up with the idea of using AINI to store more than the body of someone you loved when they died."

Arthur choked, cleared his throat again, and blew his nose with the handkerchief. Blanche rolled her eyes and sighed.

"She was interested in many things, and she'd had a series of small strokes, little blackouts that frightened her. We were so close. She heard about the freezing process at Advanced Technologies. If something bad happened, we wanted to have hope. Medicine is advancing fast, and then the people at Advanced Tech told us about AINI. They were looking for human subjects for testing. And Mother volunteered her time and her money."

Arthur took two steps toward Blanche and pointed a finger at her. "While *you* were flitting around with your elite social functions, my mother was making major contributions to both science and technology. She funded the entire project and spent nearly five years of nights and many days under the SQUID array cap, having the neural currents of her own brain mapped and deciphered. She was still doing it the day she—she—"

Arthur paused and breathed deeply, wiped his eyes with the handkerchief.

"This is sick," mumbled Blanche, too loudly.

Arthur gave her a look that promised pain and suffering. "Why don't we just let Mother tell you about it herself," he said softly.

"Randal, how long do we have to hear this?" said Blanche.

"Your Honor," began Randal, "I would like to—"

"I was about to give a demonstration relevant to this hearing, and I have the court's permission to do it," said Arthur.

"Then do it," said Judge Maxwell. "I don't think we need more

background information at this time.”

“This is company proprietary information, Your Honor,” said Camus, suddenly standing as Arthur walked back to the apparatus. “We must have a guarantee the details of the demonstration will not go in any form beyond this room.”

“This hearing is closed, ladies and gentlemen. *Any* information given here, including this demonstration, stays here. Any information leak will prejudice all future litigation and be cause for breach of privacy. Are we clear on this?”

Everyone nodded in agreement. “Yes, Your Honor,” chorused Randal and Camus.

There was a sudden hum that quickly faded. Arthur sat at the keyboard, fingers playing over the keys. He looked like an organ player sitting there, but this organ had a monitor in front of him, and a wide black screen stretched like a sail on top of it, between two fish-eye cameras. A ball of light had begun to glow, not *on* the screen but in front of it. Before their eyes a three-dimensional view of a room appeared. The walls of the room were white, the floor carpeted in crimson. There was a sofa and two chairs in red leather, a glass coffee table with a vase of red roses in the foreground. Three shaggy weavings in a rainbow of colors hung on the walls.

There was an open doorway in the back of the room. Someone walked past it. A man. Blanche felt her heart skip a beat. Only a glimpse, but the face had seemed familiar.

And then a woman appeared. She was tall, draped in a red silken robe, her gray hair stylishly coifed in swirls framing her face. She could have been fifty or thirty. She walked like a model, posture erect and defiant, went to the sofa, sat down, crossed her legs, and smiled.

Blanche gasped. “Dear God, it’s Helen, the way she looked years ago,” she whispered to Randal.

The woman seemed to look right at her. “Well, they say you should pick an age you like and stick with it. Hello again, Blanche. From that frown on your face I’d say we’re still fighting. Are we?”

The voice was deep and husky, a voice Blanche had been jealous of for over sixty years. Men had been attracted to it like bears to honey.

Blanche's mouth moved, but nothing came out.

"No? Well that's not what I hear." The woman's eyes moved. "Hi, sweetie. I guess this is court, huh?"

"Yes, Mother," said Arthur.

Judge Maxwell was smiling and seemed fascinated by the display. "Perhaps you should introduce us to your—ah—demonstration," he said.

Arthur blushed crimson and seemed embarrassed by the request. "I'm not quite sure what I—"

"Never mind, dear. I'm quite capable of introducing myself," said the woman's floating image. "Officially I'm AINI, but some of the techs like to pervert it by calling me Annie. It's cute, but inaccurate. In every way, you see, I'm Helen Winslow, based on me the person, but synthesized and evolved into my present form by the AINI system. I'd prefer you call me Helen, because that's who I am, but I'll accept Annie if you like."

"But you are an artificial intelligence system," said Maxwell.

"Everyone in this courtroom functions like an AI, Your Honor. We store and retrieve memories, we think and learn and synthesize new ideas from old. The only difference between you and me is our computers. Yours is organic, incredibly compact, but slow. Mine is larger but very fast."

"Do you know why you've been brought to this courtroom?"

"I think so. Arthur was rather upset when he tried to explain it to me."

The woman's gaze shifted to Blanche and made eye contact. "I'd be upset, too, if someone tried to charge me with murder."

"This is a hearing, and no formal charges have been filed against anyone, Ms.—ah—" Maxwell paused.

The apparition laughed, a deep-throated laugh that Blanche remembered well. It had turned men's heads at gatherings large and small for years, without promising anything but her presence. "*You* don't know what to *call* me," she said. "If you say Helen, you acknowledge my transfiguration and oh, my goodness, what a precedent that would set!"

She laughed again. Maxwell grinned.

“Call me Annie, then, but remember who I really am when you hear what I have to say. This whole mess is partly my fault, anyway, and I intend to clean it up.”

“Very well—Annie,” said Maxwell, and turned to look at several anxiously waiting people in the room. “We’re open for questions, gentlemen. Counselor Haug, would you like to begin?”

“Randal, this is absurd,” whispered Blanche, as Randal stood up.

“Are we to consider this—Annie as a viable witness, Your Honor?” asked Randal.

“You wanted to know about the AINI system,” said Maxwell, eyes twinkling in amusement. “Well, here she is.”

“I really don’t think a machine can be—”

“This will go nowhere, Your Honor,” said Annie. “I never could talk sense to lawyers, even you, Randal, and it won’t be any different now. This is all between two sisters, anyway. It’s all about the money, and everything else is smoke. Talk to me, Blanche. We can settle this in a few minutes, if you’ll let it happen.”

“I doubt that very much,” said Arthur, who frowned at Blanche.

“Now Arthur,” said Annie, “you promised me you’d go along with whatever I agreed to today. No pouting. Just do what Mother says. Sit down with your lawyers and let me handle this.”

“I will not talk with this—this *thing*,” said Blanche.

“Your Honor, this is a sham,” said Randal Haug. “Mister Winslow has obviously programmed the machine for this performance, and I must—”

“May I *please* be allowed to do something useful here?” said Annie. As she said it, a man appeared in the doorway behind her and said something softly. He wore a white bathrobe and had a toothbrush in one hand. Annie turned and said quite audibly, “Later, hon. I’m just getting warmed up here.” The man looked disappointed and went away from view.

Blanche’s face flushed hotly. The man was Fred, Helen’s late husband, only he looked to be in his forties or early fifties. The shock of

recognition must have shown on her face, for the apparition called Annie smiled at her.

“He’s such a dear, but so impatient, and I have a lot of fleshing out to do on him. So many of my memories are from when he was sick. You remember how hard that was, don’t you, Blanche?”

“Yes,” said Blanche, and caught herself. “I mean—”

“I know, I know,” said Annie. “It’s all so real for me, but not for you. It seems like yesterday I was old, and my joints were hurting, and I kept having these little blackouts, and then I can remember Arthur bending over me, screaming hysterically, and then—well, then there was nothing. No tunnel of light, no angels for old Helen. I was just suddenly here, still old at first, but no pain, and everything I thought, everything I remembered and wanted from the past—it just happened, when I wanted it to. Of course I also remembered all the downloading; my God, I wore that brain-sucking cap of theirs to bed for over five years! But there was no way I could really predict what it would be like until I got here.”

Annie’s eyes glistened wetly. “It was lonely here at first. Believe it or not, Tickle, I missed you. I knew you were mad at me, and I didn’t make it up to you before I left. I’m sorry.”

Blanche felt something catch in her throat. She hadn’t been called Tickle since the age of seven. It even softened her heart for one instant, and then she turned it into stone again. “You’ve been doing some research, Arthur,” she said. “It’s not going to work with me.”

Arthur lunged from his chair, but Camus grabbed him around the chest and held him tightly.

“Stop it, Arthur! If you want to speak to me again, you’ll sit right down and be quiet. Tantrums are not excusable for a man your age. Do you want me to be ashamed?”

Arthur sat down as if struck. A tear rolled down one cheek.

Annie glared at Blanche. “You always *were* good at goading people, but you were a coward when it came to standing up to me, so don’t try it. Yes, I want to convince you I’m what’s left of Helen; I’m most of her, in fact, if you take away the physical form. I could spend hours reciting things only you and I would know, like the time you bit me when I wouldn’t let you play with my dolls. We didn’t even tell Mother about that. And then there was the



time I caught you and your weird friend Ellen doing some interesting things with the little Waltham boy in our garage. I bet the details of that would perk things up in this hearing.”

“You wouldn’t dare!” shouted Blanche, standing and shaking a fist.

“I *would* dare, but I won’t, so sit down, Blanche,” said Annie. She stood up, stepped forward, and leaned over, as if peering into a camera lens. “It would be fun to watch you squirm again. Without me around, I bet you’ve been running roughshod over everyone. Want to hear something funny? I’m enjoying myself right now. I’ve missed our fights; they’re stimulating.

Blanche’s eyes filled with tears. “I haven’t missed them at all. I haven’t missed *you* at all.”

“Oh, that was supposed to hurt, but it didn’t. You miss me plenty, Tickle. Sisters know. It’s one of the reasons you’re so angry. Wow, the memories are still coming. I bet I could synthesize a somewhat younger version of you, and we could fight all the time right in my living room. Fred wouldn’t mind. He got used to it a long time—”

“Ladies, ladies, *please!*” said Judge Maxwell. “There are important questions to be answered here, and you’re not answering them.”

Maxwell wasn’t smiling this time. Blanche wondered if he saw through the sham of what Arthur was doing with his machine, the way his creature was making her look like a vicious old fool. Her hands were shaking. It was just like her fights with Helen over all those years. So real, so real...

“Question one,” said Maxwell. “How did Helen Winslow die?”

“A blackout, like I said, only this one brought me here. I’m told there was massive bleeding in my brain,” said Annie. She sat down on her couch again and crossed her legs.

“All right. Question two: why was Helen’s head preserved by freezing and the rest of her body separated from it?”

Annie thought for a moment. “Well, I remember it said in the contract my body could be used in any way to help the AINI project. Only the head was important, really; there was some data downloaded right after I—I should say Helen—died. Helen’s last image of Arthur was there. Oh, I’m sorry, sweetie. I have to be Annie to answer the questions, but you know

who I am.”

Arthur was crying, his face buried in a handkerchief.

“Separating Helen’s body wasn’t a cost-saving measure?”

“Well, it saved money, but the body was worthless, all used up, nothing left to revive. No matter, now. I’m here, and I have my Fred, my Arthur. We talk whenever we want to, don’t we, hon?”

Tears were running down Arthur’s cheeks. He nodded his head, smiled, and blew his nose loudly in the handkerchief.

“He keeps us right in his living room,” added Annie. “It was worth the extra cost, but there’s where I got into trouble with Blanche. I never thought she’d miss a couple of million; she always had more than Fred and I. I just got overenthusiased about the project, I guess. I was wrong. I was wrong because I promised Blanche the money for her foundation. But then the blackouts started, and Arthur was so upset and alone, and we—we just wanted to be together, at least until he finds that special girl.”

Arthur began blubbering again. Everyone in the room avoided eye contact with each other.

“Dear God,” said Blanche.

Annie bristled. “Oh shut up, Blanche. I don’t expect you to understand, but there is nothing stronger than the love of a mother for her only son. You never had children because you didn’t want them. I did, so try to respect that.”

Her voice had risen in pitch. Her male companion came into the room, walked up behind her, and put his hands on her shoulders, squeezing gently. “The ice is melting. I miss you.” He kissed the crown of her head.

Annie put her hands on his and pointed directly at Blanche. “See anyone there you recognize?”

The man looked closely. There was no doubt in Blanche’s mind that she was looking at an image of Fred Winslow from at least thirty years before he’d died.

“Is that Blanche? How did she get to be so old?”

Again that husky laugh. "I'll explain later, sweet. Pull the cork. I'll be there in a minute. Kiss, kiss."

He kissed Annie delicately on the mouth and went away.

Annie gave Blanche a sultry look. "More upgrades coming, but he's already quite a man. I've kept him waiting long enough, so let's get to it, Blanche. I'm Helen whether you like it or not, but I'm also a damn good AI. The judge here isn't going to help us. There are too many precedents involved: legality of AI testimony, the AI as a legal substitute for a human, dead *or* alive, et cetera, et cetera. I don't think he cares to appear in the legal journals that many times. Is that an accurate statement, Your Honor?"

"That is a reasonable approximation of what I'm thinking," said Maxwell, looking vaguely amused.

"So it's you and me, Blanche. How much will it take for you to drop all this mess? Two million? Three? How about four? That's tops. Otherwise you're going to trial, and there isn't a jury around that's smart enough or imaginative enough to believe I am who I say I am. And you will get nothing."

Blanche looked at Arthur. "I'll write a check for whatever amount Mother says and make it payable to your arts foundation in the names of my parents," he said.

Randal shrugged his shoulders and wiggled an eyebrow at her. The rest of the lawyers at the other table looked away. There was a long silence, horrible for everyone who waited.

"Three million," said Blanche.

"Write the check, Arthur," said Annie, standing up and smoothing her robed hips with her hands. "I'll talk to you tonight. Right now I have a date with your dad. Blanche, do come over for tea sometime. We must stay in touch, and Arthur will set up the machine for you, won't you dear?"

Arthur nodded numbly, not obviously pleased with the request.

"We should talk more often, and I'd really like to see how your foundation plays out. It's good for me to keep up a variety of interests, now that I have so much time. Promise you'll come soon?"

Blanche moved her lips, but could not bring herself to answer.

“Bye, then,” Annie said, and left the room. Arthur turned off the machine and the white room with red furnishings was gone. Annie was gone—and so was Helen.

“Let the record show the parties settled this matter out of court,” said Maxwell, looking pleased and relieved. “This hearing is ended.”

Everyone filed out of the courtroom. Arthur waited for Blanche at the door. “You’ll have the check in a day or two,” he said, then, “You know, Mother was really serious about visiting with you. Just give me some warning when you want to come over. I don’t have to be home. My secretary knows how to boot AINI for her.”

Blanche looked away from him. “I really don’t think I’ll be doing that, Arthur,” she said.

Later, she changed her mind.