

A Child Donor

ANNA

The secretary has perfect skin and perfect eyebrows and honeybee lips “Can I help you?”

“I have an appointment with Mr. Alexander. At four o'clock.”

Campbell Alexander comes in, too. He glances at me curiously.

“I'm here to retain you,” I say. “Mr. Alexander, my sister has leukemia.”

“I'm sorry to hear that. But you can't bring a lawsuit on someone else's behalf.”

There is way too much to explain—my own blood seeping into my sister's veins; the nurses holding me down to stick me for white cells Kate might borrow; the doctor saying they didn't get enough the first time around. The bruises and the deep bone ache after I gave up my marrow; the shots that sparked more stemcells in me, so that there'd be extra for my sister. The fact that I'm not sick, but I might as well be. The fact that the only reason I was born was as a harvest crop for Kate. The fact that even now, a major decision about me is being made, and no one's bothered to ask the one person who most deserves it to speak her opinion. There's way too much to explain, and so I do the best I can. “It's my parents,” I say. “I want to sue them for the rights to my own body.”

CAMPBELL

The girl sitting across from me waits for an answer. She says she wants to sue her parents, like every other teenager on the planet. But she wants to sue for the rights to her own body. With a sigh, I get up. “What did you say your name was?”

“I didn't.” She sits a little straighter. “It's Anna Fitzgerald.”

I open the door and bellow for my secretary. “Kerri! Can you get the **Planned Parenthood** number for Ms. Fitzgerald?”

“What?”

When I turn around, the kid is standing.

“Planned Parenthood?”

“Look, Anna, here's a little advice. Instigating a lawsuit because your parents won't let you get birth control pills or go to an abortion clinic is like using a sledgehammer to kill a mosquito. You can go to Planned Parenthood; they're far better equipped to deal with your problem.”

Anger glows around this kid like electricity.

“My sister is dying, and my mother wants me to donate one of my kidneys to her,” she says hotly.

“No one can make you donate an organ if you don't want to.”

“Oh, really?” She leans forward, counting off on her fingers. “The first time I gave something to my sister, it was **cord blood**, and I was a newborn. She has leukemia—APL—and my cells put her into **remission**. The next time she **relapsed**, I was five and I had lymphocytes drawn from me, three times over, because the doctors never seemed to get enough of them the first time around. When that stopped working, they took **bone marrow** for a transplant. When Kate got infections, I had to donate granulocytes. When she relapsed again, I had to donate peripheral blood **stemcells**.”

This girl's medical vocabulary would put some of my paid experts to shame. I pull a legal pad out of a drawer.

“Obviously, you've agreed to be a donor for your sister before.”

She hesitates, then shakes her head. “Nobody ever asked.”

“Did you tell your parents you don't want to donate a kidney?”

“They don't listen to me.”

“They might, if you mentioned this.”

She looks down, so that her hair covers her face. “They don't really pay attention to me, except when they need my blood or something. I wouldn't even be alive, if it wasn't for Kate being sick.”

An heir and a spare: this was a custom that went back to my ancestors in England. It sounded callous—having a subsequent child just in case the first one happens to die—yet it had been eminently practical once.

“They had me so that I could save Kate,” the girl explains. “They went to special doctors and everything, and picked the embryo that would be a perfect genetic match.”

“What happens if you don't give your sister a kidney?”

“She'll die.”

“And you're okay with that?”

Anna's mouth sets in a thin line. “I'm here, aren't I?”

“Yes, you are. I'm just trying to figure out what made you want to put your foot down, after all this time.”

She looks over at the bookshelf. “Because,” she says simply, “it never stops.”