

Lehrerlösung für *My Sister's Keeper*

Aufgabe 1:

Anna Fitzgerald, a 13-year-old girl, has an older sister, who suffers from leukemia. Since she was a baby she has been a donor for her sister at least on seven occasions. The first few times she donated without being asked for her consent, because she was still a baby. This time she is approached by her parents to agree to a donation of a kidney. She has the impression that her parents do not really care whether she agrees or not. She even thinks that she was conceived for the single purpose of providing parts of her body to her sister („They had me so that I could save Kate.“). It seems that this time she will „put [her] foot down“, even at the risk that her own sister will die. She appears to be tired of being a replacement pool for her sister („... it never stops.“). As a consequence, she is seeing a lawyer about the matter, who at first seems to think that she is coming to ask for help in a case of unwanted pregnancy. It is not clear from this excerpt whether Mr Alexander specializes in the field of genetic engineering and donations of organs, but towards the end of the excerpt it seems that he will take on the case of Anna, if only for the reason that “[no] one can make you donate an organ if you don't want to.” (30 min)

Aufgabe 2:

The interview begins with a misunderstanding. The cause for that misunderstanding is not clear, as the reader is introduced to the scene, when the conversation has already started. The lawyer apparently thinks that Anna is looking for advice on how to handle an unwanted pregnancy or on preventing a pregnancy. The conversation thus gets off on the wrong foot. Anna is not amused at Mr Alexander's assumption, probably because the reason for her visit is much more serious, but at least of a very different nature, as she is looking for legal assistance in her attempt to stop donating blood, blood stem cells or bone marrow to her sister. She manages to present her case in a dramatic manner, when she is told by Mr. Alexander that she cannot be expected to donate, if she does not want to. Leaning forward at the lawyer, she counts off on her fingers the various occasions when she had to donate. This sort of presentation must have left an impression on the lawyer, making him feel how urgent her case is. That and her use of precise medical vocabulary make Anna appear as a rather adult person, in spite of her relatively young age. It goes to show that she has probably thought about her fate for a long time, and that she means business now. It also shows in her immediate reaction to the lawyer's statement that she does not have to donate an organ without her consent. “Oh, really?”, a sort of reaction that is not very polite, especially towards a person from whom she is expecting assistance.

But when she tells Mr Alexander that she “wouldn't be alive, if it wasn't for Kate's being sick”, it seems that he is beginning to understand her situation, and that she has his sympathy. This becomes obvious in his inner monologue about the “heir and [the] spare”, and his thought that “[being] an afterthought might not sit well with this kid”.

Apparently he is won over to her case, when Anna explains that she was an “embryo that would be a perfect genetic match”.

In the next paragraph it becomes obvious that he as a lawyer does not really have the training to handle a case like Anna's, but we see him think that basically he is informed of the public “controversies” on such matters from the media. This seems to be the point where Mr Alexander decides that he might be the one to help her. It also becomes clear in his explanation to Anna that his serious questioning of her motives is meant to for him “to figure out what made [her] want to put [her] foot down, after all this time.”

As to Anna's situation, it is, of course, presented from the point of view of the lawyer, maybe because his decision to help or not to help is crucial at this point, even if the reader knows practically nothing about the preceding course of action. I cannot make too much of the passage where he reflects about the “forked road”. It almost certainly refers to the decision he is about to make, namely whether he should take on Anna's case or not. But to my mind, this passage here is

unmotivated, i. e. it comes at the wrong time, at least, if I view it from this short passage here. If it was only for this passage, with no before or after, I as the writer would have placed it further down, perhaps at the point shortly after Anna has mentioned that she was “had” by her parents to “be a perfect [genetic] match”. It would have made more sense to the reader there. But, as I said, I do not know what came before. (45 min)

Aufgabe 3.1:

One would probably have to have a more solid knowledge of medicine and genetic engineering to pass judgement on Anna's parents' decision to have a baby that serves as a replacement pool for their first-born daughter. It could be imagined that in future times there would be methods of sharing physical substance, parts of the body or whatever, that would not place such a heavy burden on the decision to have two children instead of one, where one would serve as an emergency donor for the other. The idea itself is sound, maybe even humane. What is slightly eerie is the process of interfering with conception, or rather selection of a matching embryo – after the act. It comes at least close not only to abortion practice, but even to selection. Reminds me of “survival of the fittest”, while in this case survival depends on the genetic needs of the first-born and on the decision of the parents to “have” a second baby or not to have it. In the latter case it would mean to do away with the embryo, in other words to abort it.

Without knowing much about the present state of affairs in genetic engineering, it would make sense to me to breed test-tube organs, like for instance the kidney that Anna's sister will be needing, instead of using a human being as a spare parts pool, that will have to be ripped apart, whenever the need for an organ comes up.

In that case, humans behave like gods, like the creators of life, willingly and consciously accepting the risk of the donor's death. And even in the case of non-fatal surgery to the donor, they put up with the risk of doing harm to the donor, who – like Anna – faces repeated use of his physical resources. This is inhuman, especially if the scenario is one-sided, i. e. if from the outset it is determined who is going to be the donor and who is to be the recipient.

As in Anna's case, such a one-sided affair will leave its trace on the parent-child relationship, and inevitably persons in her situation are bound to bear a grudge against their parents, especially if the decision about cooperation is totally with the parents, and not the child. In Anna's case this has led to the refusal to co-operate, maybe even to feelings of revenge.

On a political and legal level, one could even regard the practice of having a child as a potential donor to its first-born sibling as a form of productive euthanasia, as it treats abortion of embryos lightly, embryos which are not a useful match to an already existing child. (40 Min.)

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Für Schüler vermutlich unbekannte Vokabeln (unter Zuhilfenahme des OAL 2007):

cord (umbilical), esp. cord blood

legal pad

sit well with (this kid)

oxymoron

put your foot down (von zentraler Bedeutung, aber fraglich, ob es überhaupt nachgeschlagen wird)

genetic match

peripheral blood stem cell