

Fed-up 11 year-old sues parents for independence in gut-wrenching saga

Written by Kam Williams



When their daughter Kate (Sofia Vassilieva) is diagnosed with acute promyelocytic leukemia (APL) at the age of 2, Sara and Brian Fitzgerald (Cameron Diaz and Jason Patric) are willing to do whatever it takes to save her life. And once her doctor explains that her best chance at beating the disease lies in finding a stem cell donor who's an exact genetic match, they decide to have another child, knowing that they can achieve their goal via in vitro fertilization.

From birth, the test tube baby's life becomes intertwined with that of her sickly sibling when tissue is taken from her umbilical cord. As time goes on, Anna (Abigail Breslin) is subjected to a series of increasingly-invasive procedures as she is stuck, poked and prodded for assorted extractions of platelets, blood and bone marrow.

By the time she's 11, Little Miss Stem Cells is asked to donate one of her kidneys because by then both of her big sister's are failing. However, the surgeon also states that after this operation she'll have to be careful for the rest of the life, which means she will never be able to be a cheerleader or play soccer again.

Fed up with being expected to make so many sacrifices, Anna consults an attorney (Alec Baldwin) who sues her parents for Medical Emancipation. The pending lawsuit creates a rift between her parents which pushes them to the brink of divorce. For her mother, who abandoned her own legal career to care for Kate 24/7, suddenly sees Anna as selfish, and slaps the youngster right in the face. By contrast, her father, a hard-working fireman, proves far more understanding.

He knows that the family has focused so narrowly on Kate that their son Jesse's (Evan Ellingson) dyslexia went undiagnosed for years. Now, seeing the toll that the situation is taking on Anna, he can't help but be sympathetic, if torn.

Based on the Jodi Picoult best-seller of the same name, *My Sister's Keeper* is a character-driven drama of deceptive emotional depth. This remarkably-rich screen version was directed by Nick Cassavetes who went to great lengths to develop each of the principal player's perspective of the fundamental, ethical life-or-death question at hand. Faithfully adapted (except for the ending) by Cassavetes with the help of scriptwriter Jeremy Leven, this gut-wrencher heralds the maturation of Cameron Diaz into a consummate thespian capable of handling the most challenging of material.

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Her powerfully-grounding performance is matched in intensity by those of Abigail Breslin as the taken for granted Anna; Sofia Vassilieva as the wasting away Kate; Jason Patric as the stoic family patriarch; Evan Ellingson as the brooding big brother; Alec Baldwin as a vulnerable crusader for the underdog; and Joan Cusack as a judge concerned about the best interest of the plaintiff. Don't forget to pack a box of Kleenex, because the floodgates will be open by the end of this heartrending saga.

Easily the most poignant picture of the year, and without resorting to manipulative soap opera devices.

Excellent (4 stars)

Rated PG-13 for profanity, sensuality, mature themes, disturbing images and underage alcohol consumption.

Running time: 109 minutes

Studio: New Line Cinema

To see a trailer for *My Sister's Keeper*, visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EiOWevDj1mw>