

ELIZABETH GRIFFIN

SCRUBALICIOUS

one day her prince will come



## *One day her prince will come...*

Erin felt his lips on her neck, his tongue tickling her throat. The passion of his words— the *Kashmiri* phrases of Northern India pressed into her skin. His need was growing as his mouth, his teeth played with the hollow of her throat.

She could resist him nothing as his hands reached out and restrained her arms directing them high above her head and pressing them against the wall.

Her breasts lifted with the action leaving them exposed and available to his traveling, hungry mouth. Her brown flesh excited him; its radiant bronze color glistened with a fine layer of sweat. His tongue followed a beaded trail of perspiration alone the side of her neck lingering seductively in the grooves of her collarbone before sliding lazily down the midline of her chest.

Nestling his face between the soft cleavage of her breasts, he groaned as greed consumed him and his mouth sought the feminine delights of her flesh so sweet and lush like an exotic flower shimmering in a distant rainforest.

His force restricted her actions— controlled her need to take the dominant role in their match of foreplay and aggression.

She heard him say, “*Dha nya vadh*. Thank you for such pleasure— for such giving. I want to resist, but I can't stop taking. Your body is my palace, my sanctuary— my peace.” His voice thickened as he continued to murmur in *Hindi*, “*Shanti, shanti...*”

Erin tried to speak, but his words filled her mouth with hot desire as he reclaimed her lips. He tasted, tested the warmth between her parted lips. He traced the line of her front teeth before he sucked her tongue into his mouth ruling it as was his right..

*once...*

# SCRUBALICIOUS

*Elizabeth griffin*

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## Roberta Lucille Griffin

Words cannot adequately describe the type of woman you are. You mothered, nurtured, saved, protected and taught generations of people with your kindness for over 90 years.

Your entire life is a wonderful example of what it means to be a Christian woman. You and your husband, David Huyler Griffin, lived independently and in good health until the very end of a long marriage. I am amazed at how God has blessed you both. He is still continuing to bless your memory...

Love Always,

your niece

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Thank you, Bruni Lopez-Spiller, for your friendship and all of your technical information. I have learned a lot about our Philadelphia police officers and what they do. Their jobs are not easy and they contribute so much to our society. I will not forget that.

Once again, I am delighted to say that I could not have written this book without my intimate group of friends and close family. I am thrilled that this book is finished and I am very pleased with its final version. I hope my readers enjoy it as well.

## *Prologue*

"It doesn't matter what I think. It's what my family decides— that's what counts. Do you not see that?" demanded Murari Varadharaj. "Have you not learned that much by now?"

Erin heard the words, felt his emotions, but could not respond. She stared at him— at his flawless face, high cheekbones, black eyes. Everything about him was perfect or had been up until then.

She scrutinized his movement.

His arrogance stunned her; his tone of voice disarmed her. She did not recognize the man standing before her. The sky blue scrubs and the white lab coat were familiar, but he was a stranger— not the microvascular fellow she had met seven years ago— not the brilliant doctor who had urged her to specialize in cardiothoracic medicine— and definitely not the man that she had kissed good morning.

Erin stiffened her back, straightened her posture.

She listened.

"You have expected too much— assumed more than you had a right to," he said catching her eyes with his and trapping them in a bold stare. "Our relationship was never meant to be more than temporary. I have family obligations to fulfill— you know that."

*This had to be a joke*, she thought. How else could she explain this madness?

She couldn't.

But if it was a gag, where was the humor? She heard no laughter, felt no comedic relief. The room was quiet and there was no punch-line.

*Unless, she was it.*

Vile curse words filled her mouth, wrapped around her tongue. She wanted to release them. She wanted to strike back—

## SCRUBALICIOUS

to crush his haughty attitude— to bruise his ego, but she waited. She did not want this situation to erupt into total chaos. He was already standing in the middle of her office yelling.

The doors to the surgical office suite were closed and most of Erin's staff were at lunch; she was supposedly at lunch too, but her food remained untouched in a vinyl bag on her desk.

Murari moved closer to where she sat; his expression was intense. "I am Hindu!" he declared as though the information were news to her— as though she had not been his girlfriend for the past three years. "I am expected to marry a woman within my own caste—a woman of similar status. I do not come from a family of farmers. My parents are not merchants. My bloodline runs blue. I come from— "

"Royalty?" she asked as the word popped into her head. She had no idea where it came from.

"I was going to say money, but both are true. I am a *yuvaraja*— the youngest of five princes."

The declaration brought a hysterical sound to Erin's throat. It would have formed a laugh if the circumstances were different, but they were not. Here stood a man who had obviously tracked her down for a reason.

"A what?"

"I am a prince of *Varajha*— a large province in Northern India."

She shook her head and rolled her eyes, "This isn't funny Murari. I do not have time for games. I have two surgical consultations scheduled plus a cardiac procedure— "

"It's true Erie. I never mentioned it, because I was living in this country— trying to fit in with everyone else. My total identity would have made that impossible. Do you remember all of the security last month? The V.I.P. touring the hospital? It was my uncle, Dr. Naggar Sheth."

ELIZABETH GRIFFIN

A startled look crossed Erin's face. She did remember the man.

Murari continued speaking, "He attended the opening ceremony of the Neuronal Research Pavilion. The hospital was on temporary lock down. The Philadelphia Police Department was everywhere— our own security was on high alert. No one made a move without permission. I do not want to live my life like that, to learn under those conditions."

"So you have been deceiving us all?" Erin's voice rose in volume, "I asked you about him. You said he was a surgeon from your country— you didn't say he was family. You never mentioned that you were related."

Erin grasped for comprehension. Her world was suddenly spinning faster and changing direction.

*Her boyfriend was no longer a microvascular surgeon, but a prince?*

A prince who had just insulted her family. Who had accused them of being beneath him. Hadn't he just referred to her as a descendant of farmers— a sharecropper's daughter?

Her temper began to blister. She knew a little about the caste system of India which strongly influenced the people of that region of the world.

She was also aware of the fact that even today many of their segregating practices were closely adhered to when it came to social events and marriages.

She'd learned in college of the four occupational classes a person could be born into. The young surgeon had even taken specific world history courses in order to understand the man she was now in love with. She'd wanted to learn about his culture, his beliefs so she'd studied them both.

Erin thought briefly of the *varna*— the Hindu ranking system. She recalled the *Brahmins*: the priests and the religious

## SCRUBALICIOUS

teachers; the *Kshatriyas*: the noble families and the warriors; the *Vaishyas*: the merchants and the businessmen; the *Shudras*: the laborers and the service providers.

Finally, she thought of the lowest ranking members of the Indian Society—the *Dalits*. They were also known as '*the untouchables*', a backward group of people who were excluded from the caste system.

Each category in the elaborate system had its own rules and way of life. The upper two classifications: the *Brahmins* and the *Kshatriyas* were honorable, prestigious and Murari obviously belonged to one of the two ranks. She also knew that all, but the last group, the *Dalits*, were respected in his country.

It wasn't until religious leaders and the government demonstrated a strong opposition against the ill treatment of the untouchables that laws were enacted and change became possible.

Erin tightened her hands and made two fist. Yes, her family had migrated from the south after slavery, but their professional trade at that time had not been a matter of choice. They had worked the land and harvested the crops out of absolute fear and blatant brutality. Her people had been captured, brought to this country and sold.

If any of them had become merchants, businessmen; then it had been because of their sheer talent and drive. She refused to apologize for them. Her history was full of amazing people—accomplished men and women.

Erin's eyes were glued to the silent prince as she opened her mouth and the words rushed out, “Do you consider me a *Dalit*? Am I defiled—unclean?”

“Of course not! What are you talking about Erie? I've never treated you like that.”

“Not until now,” she said disagreeing with his statement.

“You cannot seriously believe that!”

ELIZABETH GRIFFIN

Erin stared at him, "I don't know what to believe anymore," she declared in a frustrated tone. "Tell me Murari. Is there a princess in this story? A young woman who has suddenly attracted your eye?"

She judged his expression for several seconds and then made a distasteful sound with her mouth.

*She should have known there was more to this story. Of course, there was another woman involved.*

"Listen to me Erie. I am not making excuses. I'm simply trying to explain—"

"Stop lying. This is what you want. Admit it."

He moved about the room drawing his hands through his black hair and looking around in frustration. "Things are not that simple. I am accountable for all of my actions. Each decision I make."

"You should have thought of that, three years ago, before you stepped into my life," she said brushing aside his comments and continuing with her interrogation. The sarcasm in her voice was thick. "Are you moving out? Is that what this is all about?"

"I am not trying to hurt you— this isn't how I had planned to leave things. I wanted you to at least understand my side of it."

She became incredulous. He couldn't possibly be expecting empathy from her. He was literally breaking her heart yet he wanted compassion, mercy?

"Where are you going to live?" asked Erin when he did not deny her accusation. "No, no, no. Don't tell me. Let me guess. You have a palatial residence in India with lots of servants which is also a part of your birthright. Am I close? You cannot possibly be royalty without such luxuries."

He glared at her and noted her biting sarcasm.

"You are correct. I am leaving. My family own a palace in Northern India, but we no longer live there. Today it functions as a

## SCRUBALICIOUS

hospital. When I complete my training in the States, I will return to it,” he declared. “And as for princesses, the only ones in this tale are my sisters— I have eight of them.”

Erin's entire body stopped moving, breathing.

What was he going to tell her next?

If this were the fourth month of the year, she would have expected to hear, *'April Fools!'*

Although it was not the first of April, Erin was beginning to feel like a complete fool.

She did not have time for this madness. She had a right atrioventricular valve replacement in two hours. She could not surgically fix the one-way circular opening which was located between the first and second chamber of the heart. The tricuspid valve prevented a backflow of blood from reentering the first chamber of her patient's heart. She couldn't do it in this state of mind.

Erin thought of the problematic area of the fist shaped organ which pump blood through the four chambers of the heart.

She needed to focus— to control this situation before it affected her surgical judgment.

She visualized the blood moving from the right atrium to its right ventricle and then being forced from the heart by a high arterial pressure which allowed it to travel through the pulmonary arteries and into the right and left lung.

There the liquid tissue would then circulate through the pulmonary system and undergo a gaseous exchange releasing carbon dioxide and gaining oxygen in the lungs. The oxygenated blood would then return to the heart via the pulmonary veins and fill the left atrium and left ventricle.

Erin pictured the blood leaving the aorta of the heart and traveling through a series of arterial vessel which permitted it to rush to the upper extremities of the body— the neck, head and

ELIZABETH GRIFFIN

arms as well as the lower regions of the body— the chest, abdomen and legs.

The graphic images calmed her as she meditated on the continuous red stream of liquid running the two closed circuits of the cardiovascular system— the pulmonary and the systemic circuits.

She envisioned the improved medical condition of her patient once the success of the operation was achieved.

Erin raised her eyes to Murari's and chose neutral words when she spoke, "Alright, let's get this over with. Talk to me, but do not yell. And no more cruel words, they are not necessary. The emotional outbursts do not suit either of us."

The microvascular attending paused. With some effort, he collected his thoughts, "I love you Erie. You know it to be true, but that is not enough. It will not free me from what I am required to do. My family is ruled by tradition. Our customs are a way of life. Our gods dictate the paths we choose— the stars announce my name at birth. My parents knew what to call me simply by their existence. You cannot compete with that— "

"I am not trying to."

I am my parent's son Erin. I make no excuses for who I am, but I cannot continue in this relationship."

She paused, took stock of what he said; "So this is it? This is how you end things? No negotiating, no compromising? Only the break-up speech? How long did you practice that? A day— a week? It sounded so poetic."

"This isn't easy—"

"Am I nothing to you?" she asked cutting him off. "Where is your loyalty to me?"

"It is here," he said jabbing a finger repeated into his chest. "In my heart. I did not have to come here and explain. I could have left you without a word, but I didn't. You were everything to

## SCRUBALICIOUS

me. My passion, my joy— "

"But now I am nothing— "

"That is not true."

"I am an inconvenience— a woman who should have realized that this relationship had limitations— that I was your transitional piece until your family picked out an appropriate wife for you. Is that what you are telling me? Is that what your family decided? "

"Now look who's being cruel?"

"You are. How could you keep this from me? The lies!"

"I promised you nothing"

"You gave me your love— at least that's what you led me to believe. You moved in with me— we just renewed our lease. We have joint checking accounts, " she said it softly as the reality sank in. "What about our savings?"

She stared.

"Is the money still there?"

"Of course it is Erin. I am not a thief."

Her facial expression contradicted his words. Right now he was a lot of things, and none of them were good.

"I haven't touched the money. It belongs to you. I have my own wealth and property. I never needed your money. I only wanted you," he confessed.

She ignored his words. They meant nothing. She felt nothing.

"What about our friends? Do they know who you really are? Do they know about us? That this— whatever it is— has ended?"

"Not yet. I have only told my friends."

Erin gave him a blank look.

"Your friends? Are we making distinctions now— dividing up people like marital property after the divorce? Which of our

ELIZABETH GRIFFIN

loyal friends did you tell?"

"None of them. The people I speak of live outside of the U.S. You haven't met them. Most are in England, South Africa—India."

"No, of course I haven't met them. I am just a secret you've been hiding for years—right?" Erin tried to manage her feelings, but the more he engaged her the angrier she became. "You took my trust and misused it."

"I care about you, Erie," he conceded, but I cannot go against my family. My marriage has been arranged. The date is set."

"You—you have a fiancée? Already?"

"That is what I am trying to tell you."

"Are you saying that you have been cheating on me?"

"No! I haven't even met her."

"You haven't?" Erin began whispering to herself. "This is ludicrous. Insane," then her voice rose in volume and she looked at Murari. "How do you agree to marry a woman you haven't even met? How do you plan a wedding and dump me— all at the same time?"

The questions went unanswered.

She continued, "How long has your family been planning this arranged marriage. When did they start looking for a bride? Tell me!" her control was slipping; the room was filling with rage.

Murari paused to weigh the merits of telling the truth, "It's been going on for a couple of years."

"While we were dating? When you were pursuing me?" she released a brittle laugh; it cut at her throat.

"Yes."

"And you never mentioned it? You never told me?"

"It wasn't relevant at the time. I had no interest in a wife. I was caught up in you and in the fellowship program. The search

## SCRUBALICIOUS

for a bride could wait.”

"So what is the point in telling me now while I am at work? You could have told me everything this morning— at the house. There was time."

"Erin, you are not the easiest woman to argue with. I have learned that over the years. I needed to find a more controlled environment," he stated. "I wanted to bypass the drama and keep the neighbors out of our business. At home you would have been too unpredictable. At home you might have hit me or done worse."

"I feel like striking you now," she said.

"That's my point."

Erin felt the chambers of her heart shutting down. His words sliced through her. She felt an imaginary scalpel slashing at her— wounding her body in a thousand vital places.

"Murari, why did you need to tell me today?" she asked quietly.

"Because she's here."

Erin thought she felt the oxygen escaping from her lungs; the spongy lobes of her respiratory system were collapsing. The surfactant— that fatty lipid substance coating her alveolar sacs was not doing its job— it was not preventing her lungs from sticking to their inner lining. She struggled to breath. "She is in this hospital? In our lives?"

"Aarthi is in Philadelphia. She flew in from London this morning. I am meeting her family tonight— "

Murari thought it was best no to mention that the bride viewing ceremony would take place this evening. It would be his first opportunity to see his fiancée. He hadn't even spoken to the woman yet.

“Aarthi?”

Erin wanted to ignore the other woman's name, but Murari seemed too acquainted with it pronunciation— that really hurt her.

ELIZABETH GRIFFIN

"Is the engagement party tonight? Is this where everything becomes official?" Erin abruptly stopped speaking. She focused on his face, "Is she wearing your ring?"

"I haven't given it to her yet."

"But you have it?"

"That is not important."

"Where is it? I want to see it?"

"I cannot do that?"

"Why? Because it would hurt me even more?" she demanded rising from the chair behind the desk. Her body was reacting on its own— encouraged by his insensitivity. "I don't think that's possible. The fact that you left my bed this morning with another woman's ring in your pocket is a slap in the face. That you made love to me while secretly moving out of my life is absurd. That your bride-to-be has flown cross-continental in order to replace me is staggering. You have the audacity to enter my office and— " she was at a loss for words. She searched the ceiling and the walls for answers. Then she looked at him, "Am I invited to the celebration? I want to be a part of the festivities— let me buy the two of you a gift. Something befitting a prince and his new bride. What would you like?" she yelled. "A set of sterling silverware? A crystal vase? I certainly can't give you my virginity because you already took it," she said sarcastically.

He said nothing, but reached into his upper left scrub pocket and extracted several metal keys. He approached her desk and lay them flat. He began to speak, but she cut him off; "Is this how all Indian men treat their women or is this just you? I hope those stars that called out your name at birth explode in mid-air and drop from the sky in shame. To hell with you and your tradition. Screw your obligations and your wealth. Get out of my office!"

Erin turned away from his face and stared at the keys. She

## SCRUBALICIOUS

heard the unfolding of paper as his hand came into view. She realized he was holding a check.

"Still you insult me. You place that before my like I have no morals. I do not want your money— keep it."

"This is the only gift I can give you."

"What about your love, Murari? I wanted that. I gave mine freely— no price tag attached. And it was definitely worth more than what is written on that piece of paper," she said without having read the dollar figure.

"Erie, the amount is large— too significant to ignore. I am trying to do the right thing. I am trying to apologize."

"With money?" she asked sarcastically.

"I do not expect you to understand. Nor do I expect you to cash it tomorrow; but when you do, I will know that you have moved on— that you have forgotten me."

"Do you think that little of my love," she asked looking up at him. The tears were finally forcing their way through. "Do I actually mean nothing to you?"

"No Erie. You almost meant everything. I nearly walked away from it all, because of you. My title, my position. I wanted you that badly, but those are the desires of one man. They do not reflect the wishes of my family. They do not negate my responsibilities to my country. I fell in love with you— with your mind, your body, your brilliance. I wish I could forget that. I wish I could replace you, but I cannot. So I will pray to, *Manmadha*, the god of love. He is similar to your cupid. I will ask him for mercy. I will plead with him to redirect his arrows of love," Murari stated as he turned to exit the double doors of the office suite. "Then I will marry Aarthi Rahna."

## *Chapter One*

**S**he cashed the check.