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THE TALE OF A
SLEEPING BEAUTY

ELIZABETH GRIFFIN

The tale of a sleeping beauty...

Dr. Lee Anderson stopped abruptly. He could not believe his eyes. He stared down at the floor in amazement. His breath was held in place by the sleeping woman leaning against the bookcase—he recognized the mass of black curls and familiarized himself with her long eyelashes. Her mouth was slightly parted but he heard no noise.

He took in her tight Phillies tee-shirt and ripped blue jeans. The shredded material gave him glimpses of mocha brown skin which appeared smooth. He smiled in wonderment. She was even more beautiful asleep than awake—and so utterly young. She looked like a teenager—still in high school.

In her right hand, she held a half eaten candy bar; its melted chocolate stained her loose fingers. Next to her was an open textbook—microbiology. He recognized the upside down microbial illustrations.

His heart leaped.

He was speechless. In all of his wildest dreams, he had never expected this—his friend Glen O'Donnell was right-- life was definitely all about the surprise—

Once..

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THANK YOU GOD FOR MAKING THIS POSSIBLE

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In memory of a young man whose life ended too abruptly

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CHAPTER ONE

The 72 hour fecal fat specimen stank... There was no other way to describe it. The muted, mold green stool clung to the sides of the container as tiny particulars swirled around inside. Elise Montgomery tightened the lid and removed her soiled gloves. They were slick and caused her to shake her head in disgust. What was the point in sending a timed specimen to the lab if the lid was not secure and the *shi--* stool leaked everywhere? *Come on nurses,* she thought; *it is not that complicated.*

Two years of clinical training should have taught them that much, she scolded as she dropped the used gloves into a bio-hazardous receptacle. She removed her white disposable lab coat as well.

The Afro-Asian bombshell moved to the nearest sink and waved her hands under the automatic soap dispenser. Her 007 looks and athletically toned body were not completely hidden by the hospital uniform she wore. The mocha brown skin of her upper arms gently pulled against the firm musculature of her biceps as she vigorously washed her hands. Her movements activated the faucet and permitted the water to splash over them.

Her life was cursed, she thought—Grimm's fairy tale cursed.

The near miss stool catastrophe was just another example in a long list of accumulating facts. She did not want to think about what if... but her mind could not resist. She envisioned putrid liquid gushing across a counter top at river speed as it splashed onto everything in its path: keyboard, mouse, telephone, specimen-rack... She could almost smell its acrid odor which would have caused her to bit back a nauseous attack or worse.

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Yes, she had been cursed and it all started with her genes.

One egg. One sperm.

One tiny cell dividing and subdividing until a beautiful girl with voluminous black curls and tangy brown eyes was born, but the dark magic did not stop there. This daughter of a cleaning woman and a doctor soon developed into an alarmingly attractive teenager who had to be diligently watched because beauty at any age could be snatched away and lost forever.

Now she was a young woman who mesmerized countless men causing them to stop and stare in the oddest of places-- under umbrellas in torrential rainstorms, on mega flat-screen monitors at sports events...

But somewhere in that genetic code of beauty and intelligence, Elise inherited a sleeping disorder which had been complicating her life for the past three years. A type of disorder she found harder and harder to believe or even manage.

Elise Daiyu Xiu Jiang should have been her legal name, if her father had married her mother; but he had not. He instead chose to have a 20 year on-and-off affair with Tamara Montgomery who was too emotionally crippled and profoundly in love to walk away from the relationship or the doctor.

Hence, Elise was the illegitimate daughter of Philadelphia's top oncologist, Dr. Bolin Jiang. She despised him for not offering her mother a platinum wedding band and the respect of marriage. She had little time for him or any other man who tried to enter her life.

The only thing important to Elise Montgomery was medicine. It was the one thing that could change the world-- make it a better place for all. It was her sole focus.

She had a 4.0 G.P.A. and was completing her fourth year at

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a state funded university which she financed through scholarships and grants. She refused to touch her father's money; it was not welcome in her life and she did any and everything to keep it out. She applied for as many scholarships as possible; nothing was too ridiculous, the essays ranged from the critical, analytical to the silly, playful. She wrote about the importance of genetic counseling. She believed it was crucial for a couple to know the diseases in its genetic family-tree before starting a family. This information could lower the rate of infants being born with crippling diseases-- and promote genetic awareness. She also wrote about being a lifelong cat activist which constituted feeding and helping any stray cat she encountered on the street.

Tamara Montgomery was not like her daughter; she took the monthly deposits into her checking account; she took the real estate property in South Philadelphia; she took the luxurious Penn's Landing condominium overlooking the Delaware River; she took the position as Dr. Bolin Jiang's personal secretary after going back to school and getting a masters degree in business administration. Tamara took everything he gave her. It was pathetic. Elise could not understand their relationship or how they even became a couple. That type of thing just did not happen at Penn's Landing Memorial Hospital. The scrubbed did not mix with the unscrubbed.

It violated the hospital's code of conduct. No one was supposed to do that. But not only did Tamara break all of the rules, she went for the best. She went for the elite-- the blue scrubs.

Those were the surgeons-- the hospital's money makers. They were then closely followed in rank by the black scrubs, the specialty doctors-- the rulers of the medical scene. Below them

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were the nurses, the white scrubs-- the caregivers of the health care institution. Next came the specialty fields such as respiratory, radiology, physical therapy, laboratory... those departments wore color coordinated scrubs which identified the department. This method of classification continued on down the line until the only group left was the unscrubbed. Those were the invisible hospital workers-- the nonessential-- the unimportant. The medical staff that wore designated one piece jumpsuits which denoted their type of menial labor.

This was also the class to which her mother, Tamara Montgomery, had belonged.

Elise could not control her mother, but she vowed never to touch her father's money or seek him out in anyway. It was a promise she had made years ago. She did not need him nor anything he represented.

"Elise!" a chemistry technologist called from across the centralized laboratory. "O.R.'s on the phone screaming about blood work sent on Simms? Said they tubed it ten minutes ago-- did you get it?"

"Let me check," she said as she shoved her hands into another pair of latex free gloves. She snatched a new lab coat from a shelf as she moved with urgency toward the automated tube system. Several canisters lay on the carpeted floor of the delivery shoot which received specimens from the entire Penn's Landing Memorial Hospital. The seven-hundred bed facility was constantly renovating and expanding. It was the pride of the Delaware Valley region and the waterfront locale continuously drew talented medical professionals from all fifty states.

She popped open four canisters before raising the specimen in her hand. Signaling to Troy, she shouted, "It's here. Do you

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want me to talk to them?"

"Yeah, it's that Lee Anderson. You know the one. All commands, demands and no tolerance."

"Transfer him over," she said preparing for the worst and remembering the importance of professionalism.

She picked up the telephone on a half-ring, "Clinical Lab, Elise speaking--" her voice was interrupted by a southern accent.

"How long before I get test results? Natasha Simms is a gunshot trauma-- we need her basic metabolic panel, complete blood count and prothrombin time."

"I have the blood . I am processing it now."

"Why the delay? It was sent less than fifteen minutes ago--"

"There is no delay," she said while her fingers rapidly typed the patient's information into the computer. She was ordering all of the test he wanted while he yelled in her ear. "I understand the urgency."

She dropped the tubes into the centrifuge, a counter top machine which spun the blood at a rapid speed and separated it into packed red blood cells and serum.

"Do you really?" the skepticism could be heard in his voice, "This patient is in critical condition. I'm sending down an arterial blood gas and I want those result immediately-- move it Elise!" he said startling her with the use of her own name. "I expect to be called back in five minutes--" those were his last words before the telephone went dead.

He hung up on her! The rude man had actually slammed the telephone down without a warning.

The 5'9" model prototype returned the receiver to its resting place and continued to do her job at top speed. She labeled the

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appropriate tubes with the correct patients' names and delivered them to the various laboratories.

She announced, "Stat!" as she dropped the test tubes into the chemistry rack. "He wants Simms results to be called immediately."

Troy Daniels, a tall blonde tech, acknowledged her with a grin, "I knew it-- I've been calling back his results all evening long-- I can barely do my job because of his constant interruptions. I don't know why they have a computer up there in the E.R. They never use it," he said reaching for the specimen.

"It's easier to pick up the telephone and dial."

"And waste my time," he said.

"He was arrogant," she admitted. "He must be one of the new residents. I suppose he thinks the only way to get what he wants is by yelling," she said waving away a yawn and glancing across the room at her partner who was returning from a lunch break.

"We'll school him real soon," she said with a smile.

As Troy talked, he placed the tubes on the instrument. He knew the results would be available quickly and then he could call that annoying doctor without too much delay.

Elise yawned again. This time she shook her head from side to side trying to rid herself of the tiredness which was fast approaching. Her thick ringlets of black curls refused to stray from its ponytail.

"Late night clubbing?" Troy teased. "I thought you were above that?" he asked raising an eyebrow.

"More like late night studying," she said half truthfully. "Anatomy, Physiology and Microbiology."

"You're taking both classes at the same time-- during the

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summer? Are you nuts? What kind of summer break are you going to have?"

"An exciting one full of labs, research papers and weekly test."

"And no social life," he said in dismay.

"I do not have time for that right now," she acknowledged earnestly.

What a waste, thought Troy with a shake of his head. *What a beautiful, nutty, mixed-up waste of a woman.*

"I have to go," Elise said zooming back across the room. She felt the weight of exhaustion suddenly encompassing her like a cumulus cloud before a sudden storm. Her eyelids became heavy and the yawns more persistent. She needed to hurry. She could feel her body changing-- slowing down. If she were not so drowsy, she would have panicked at how rapidly her body was turning against her.

Elise's part-time shift was coming to a close just in time. She needed to hurry. She had thirty minutes to go before she swiped out and was off the hospital's clock

"How was lunch?" Elise questioned her partner in a groggy voice.

"It was alright," said the older woman in gray scrubs.

Elise eyed her partner for a moment before she returned to the stool specimen. It was her last send-out of the day. She needed to bag it and place it in the laboratory freezer immediately. Elise hoped that would neutralize the smell escaping from the container. If not, the specimen courier was going to curse his way through the hospital and back to his transport vehicle which he seemed to do on a regular basis-- stool or no stool.

"Sounds like you're still sticking to that 1,200 calorie diet."

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Paula shot her a frothy look, "Can't nobody survive on that. I ate one half of a tuna sandwich without mayonnaise," she made a face. "One strawberry yogurt and 15 potato chips-- you try stopping at just fifteen-- and a bottle of water. Look at me," she said showcasing her full figure with expressive hands. "Do I look like I can survive on that? And guess what," she quizzed. "I had the nerve to go over on the calorie count."

"It's only been a week," consoled Elise. "Give your body time to adjust," she said waving away the beginnings of a yawn.

"Why so sleepy," asked Paula changing the subject. "You up late doing something you ain't supposed to be doing," she smiled hoping for a peek into Elise's private life. The girl had been working there for six months and not once had Paula seen her with a man. Not once. The young woman was hot, Richter-scale hot. Exotic-continental hot. Her nationality was never discussed, but Paula thought she was Hawaiian or Indonesian. Whatever she was, the men throughout the hospital found a reason to stop by the lab and seek her out-- the scrubbed and the unscrubbed.

"I do not have time for that," said Elise casually brushing aside the other woman's words. "I'm building a career."

Paula smiled, "Alright, go ahead-- build that career, but don't forget to fall in love."

"Please," she said dismissively.

Paula assessed her momentarily before she spoke, "Honey, it really ain't that bad. I've known some good men in my life. And some are worth the risk of heartbreak."

"Love is not on my agenda right now," Elise smiled as she paced her activities to the ticking clock.

She was running out of time. Men were not her problem right now, she thought as she placed the specimen on the top shelf

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of the freezer.

Elise had other issues to deal with. She looked at the clock for a second time as she wiped her work station down with a 10% bleach and water solution. She wiped the keyboard, the mouse, the telephone-- anything she had handled during her four hours at work.

"Maybe it's on his agenda-- the young man who falls in love with you," she said taking her position at the front window of the centralized laboratory.

"You should stop reading so many romance novels," said Elise. "They are obviously interfering with the way you think-- I'm leaving. Bye."

And as she chided her lab partner for being a foolish romantic, Elise hung up her lab coat, washed her hands and exited the laboratory. She used her identification card to swipe out and headed for the nearest stairwell exit. She had to get to her apartment fast before her sleeping disorder made it impossible. She did not want to think about not making it-- that would be a disaster.

She had been diagnosed with Kleine Levin Syndrome three years ago and even though it was considered a very mild case; it had altered her life completely.

In Elise's haste, she almost knocked down a man approaching from the opposite direction as she fought off another yawn.

"My fault," she said evading his body and continuing at top speed.

The man sidestepped Elise and spun around in awe. He caught a glimpse of topaz eyes and curvaceous lips. Her thick

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tangled hair trailed behind her and brushed against his cheek. It left behind a sensuous caress which caused the young man to touch his face in savored pleasure. Her beauty and body made him think of the legendary film star Dorothy Dandridge. Her tiny waist and round bottom were spectacular. And she seemed to have a lot of attitude. He could not move until she entered the staircase which allowed the trance to be broken.

For some inexplicable reason, he felt happy. Undeniably, euphorically, happy. As he approached the laboratory, the young man kept looking behind himself-- hoping against all logic that the young woman would reappear. He hesitated in the corridor.

"Can I help you?" asked Paula from the laboratory's open window.

"I'm looking for Pathology. I have these for forensic testing," he said holding up two plastic see-through containers. "O.R. samples."

"You're headed in the right direction. Continue down the hall and to the left," she said her voice instantly becoming soft and very feminine.

Still the man did not move. He kept looking behind himself.

"Is something wrong?"

"No," he said, but did not take another step. "There was a woman--"

"Isn't there always?" asked Paula shaking her head sadly and realizing what had just happened. She waited for him to speak.

"She had hair-- lots of black curls-- brown eyes-- gray scrubs--"

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"Was she beautiful?" quizzed Paula.

"Well yes-- I mean," he was tongue tied, stumbling over his words.

"Her name is Elise," said Paula knowing as she spoke that she was betraying her co-worker, but everybody needed a little love in their life and after all Elise did say her judgment was impaired by romantic novels.

"I spoke to a woman on the telephone earlier today about blood work," he stated as he reflected for a moment.

"That's her."

"Incredible-- I had no idea," said the young man in blue scrubs and a white medical coat with the title Surgeon stitched in coarse red script across its right breast pocket. The name that followed was Lee Anderson. His Tennessee twang and gracious southern smile slowly showed off strong, white teeth and a firm jawline. His green eyes sparkled at the near missed encounter.

This was his day. He had successfully removed three bullets from a young woman and her prognosis was favorable as she waited in the recovery room for further assessment. He was officially off duty after he delivered these specimens to the Pathology Lab, filled out the necessary paperwork and sorted through the red tape associated with this particular specimen.

Dr. Lee Anderson stood momentarily silent as he realized how close his patient had come to dying. The violence in the city continued to grow with each passing day and its homicide rate was one of the highest in the nation. If the rate continued to climb, his name would be on the O.R. board daily. He would be performing more emergency surgeries-- removing more gunshot bullets-- repairing more severed arteries-- pronouncing more deaths-- signing more certificates-- and sending more bodies to the

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morgue. The Medical Examiner's Office seemed to have a standing order with Penn's Landing Memorial Hospital; its van seemingly appeared to pick up the E.R. casualties on a nightly basis.

The young surgeon had no time to be distracted. He shook the exotic beauty from his head and shifted once more into professional mode. He still wanted to check on his patient one last time before he locked his office door and left for the weekend.

"Thank you for your help," said the young man as he moved further down the hall.

Paula could not resist the urge to say more. She liked this unknown surgeon with his confident swagger and purposeful walk.

"She's single, very particular-- extremely selective," said Paula causing the young man to swing back around and give her his full attention.

"I'll be sure to remember that, ma'am," he winked and exposed her to more of that southern gentility.