



A Sleeper

Srebrenka Peregrin

Mystery

Quite, quite far away, in a corner of the world so remote it can hardly be mentioned by name, there lived – or rather, did not – a Sleeper. The circumstances of her life were such that she slept throughout the day, woke in the evening to drink a little water, and lay back to sleep. And while she slept, she also dreamt, so that some came to call her a Dreamer. It was rightfully so, for had there not been dreams in her long sleep, people would not know about her, and would not come to visit the distant land of her slumber.

And people did come, due to the curious nature of her dreams. It was said that whoever slept on the same pillow with her would share her dreams, and learn much to their advantage. Thus people arrived, and borrowed a half of her pillow, and woke up strangely dazed in the morning. Some talked about what they had seen; others did not. Some laughed at it, others were deeply moved. Some said it was all nonsense, others swore it had changed their lives. Whether or not her dreams came true, or had some other sort of sway over people, they would walk away the following morning never to return. Nobody seemed to have wanted a second audience; nobody found they needed to live through it again; and nobody had ever asked if she willed such a use of her life or not.

There were many speculations as to why she was sleeping so much. Rumours spread of an illness, of a blessing or a curse from a strange god, of a twisted and inexplicable fate, of a vow given or broken, of sainthood and witchery. But especially abundant were rumours of the one who could break whatever it actually was. Though a true love's kiss was among the most favoured ones, there were many other remedies mentioned, such as strong potions, fairy magic, proper food, a change of climate, and even some proper slaps in the face. The Sleeper did not seem to care about it, however, nor did she ever speak her mind on the matter. Her suffering – if there was

any – was of a quiet manner; determined and wordless.

All this went on without change until one day there came a rider on a fine grey horse. He was no longer in his prime, but neither was she, having spent some decades in the unchanging condition of her sleep. Nevertheless, she had one advantage over the rider – the sleep had preserved the mildness of her features, the delicateness of her skin, and the softness of her eyes. The rider was, apart from being dishevelled by the ride, a man who had borne much hardship in his life. He was harsh with exertion, and dark with the sun and wind, and his eyes were sharp and unyielding. And still, when he came to the side of the Sleeper, he kneeled as carefully as if he were in a temple; and when he touched her hand, his touch was as kind as a lover's. And then he wept so sincerely that everyone withdrew in respect.

That evening he lay on the pillow beside her ever so slowly, and whispered something in her ear so quietly nobody could hear a word. Then, still holding her hand, he went to sleep, and spent the entire night beside her. But in the morning it was she who awoke, and kissed him in the mouth before walking out of the bed chamber, without him ever moving. She washed her face, broke her fast, and dressed to go. Everyone stood around in amazement, and whispered among themselves, looking at the sleeper who had awoken. But nobody dared approach her as she mounted the grey horse, except a very tiny and curly girl.

And she also dared to ask, in a very small and clear voice, 'Please, Miss, what did he tell you last night?' At this query, the woman smiled, both gratefully and sadly, and said, 'He said he had dreamt of me.' And with those words she pulled herself upright in the saddle, and was gone.

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