

THE *big* SLEEPER

Setta's girl went to bed a normal teenager – and woke up as a giant toddler...

Clatting downstairs in her basketball vest and shorts, my daughter, Lois, put on her trainers. 'Can you take me to training?' she asked, eagerly. 'Have you done your homework?' I said. 'Yep,' she replied.

That was the deal I'd struck with my 14-year-old, basketball-mad daughter – homework first, then training. Otherwise, she'd be out on the court every waking hour. Lois dreamed of becoming a professional basketball player, like the idols plastered on her bedroom walls. She'd just won a scholarship to study at a local sports college when she left school at 16.

I was very proud of her, but I wanted her to get her GCSEs first. Even top athletes needed a fall-back. Lois had knuckled down. Her teachers were predicting straight As. So I dropped her off at the court where she trained with the county team.

FAST ASLEEP

But one morning, the following week, she didn't appear with her sisters, Lauren, 19, Leigh, 17, and little brother, Luke, eight, at breakfast.

'She's asleep. I tried to wake her, but she wouldn't budge,' Leigh said.

I gave her a gentle shake. 'Come on, love, you'll be late for school,' I said. When she didn't stir, I got a cool flannel

and put it on her back, and she finally woke. 'I couldn't wake you up,' I said. 'Are you OK?'

'I'm fine,' she yawned. She went to school as normal, but came home and went straight to bed.

No other symptoms appeared, just this constant tiredness.

All of a sudden, she stopped going to basketball practice, her school work suffered and I got really worried.

'Are you pregnant? Or on drugs?' I asked one day. 'No, I'm just tired,' she sighed.

I took her to the GP. 'It's probably stress,' he said. 'But two weeks on, in the middle of her basketball awards ceremony, she fell asleep bolt upright. I nudged her, but she was out cold. Three of the lads in her basketball team carried her to the car for me.'

She woke as we pulled up on the drive, and she managed to get inside. But halfway up the stairs, she passed out and

tumbled down the stairs. Then, suddenly, she started trembling as if she was having a fit. 'Lois!' I screamed. She didn't respond, so I dialled 999. Paramedics arrived in seconds and rushed her to hospital. Leaving Luke with Lauren, I followed in the car. When I arrived, there were three doctors round her. 'Lois, can you hear me?' one was saying. Another was tapping her chestbone, the third, pinching her feet. 'What's happening?' I asked. 'The tests we've done suggest there's absolutely nothing wrong with her,' one said. 'But we can't rouse her.'

Still-sleeping Lois was



'She falls fast asleep in the strangest places'



'Lois likes all the things a toddler does'

admitted for observations. Three hours on, she woke up, sat bolt upright, then leaped out of bed and ran towards the toys in the children's ward. 'A jigsaw!' she shrieked, tipping out the pieces like an over-excited kid at Christmas. She'd gone to bed a teenager and woken up a toddler. It frightened me, so I went to find a doctor. 'She's behaving like a child, it's not normal,' I told him. 'We'll keep an eye on her,' he promised me.

REGRESSING

Over the next days, this pattern repeated itself. She'd sleep for hours, then wake up behaving like a hyperactive kid. She was constantly hungry, too. 'Can you get me a KFC burger? I'm starving,' she'd beg. The doctors were still baffled by her behaviour. But one afternoon, in the hospital canteen, I got chatting about Lois to another mum. 'It sounds like that Sleeping Beauty syndrome – I saw a programme on it once,' she said. 'I'd never heard of it, but



'I worry she'll sleep her whole life away'

for some neurological tests.' So, five days after she'd collapsed, I took her home and put her to bed. I had no idea how long this episode would last, or if there'd be more. But unable to leave her alone like this, I quit my PA job to look after her. For weeks she slept, waking only to

eat and go to the loo. And in these moments, she'd be manic. Then she'd slump in the strangest places – on the kitchen floor or the back lawn.

LIFE ON HOLD

She couldn't go to school. I had to tell her basketball coach she wasn't able to train and I didn't know when or if she'd be back. 'What if she's stuck like this?' I sobbed to Mum one night. 'She won't be,' she said. And sure enough, the next week, Lois came downstairs looking calm and normal. 'I missed you,' I said. 'I've only been to bed!' she laughed. Then I realised she was in her school uniform – the summer break had just started. 'You know it's the

her down. 'You've been in a sleep-trance,' I said. 'It's called Sleeping Beauty syndrome.' 'The last thing I remember is being at the awards ceremony,' she said. 'That was nearly a month ago,' I explained and she burst into tears. Over the next days, I told her bits about how she'd behaved. 'You got really excited about a jigsaw,' I said. 'Really?' she asked, horrified. The next day, we went back to the hospital for the tests. 'What's the treatment for this?' Lois asked the doctor. 'There isn't any,' he replied. 'We just have to hope you grow out of it.' Lois looked as devastated as I felt. 'I might never be me again!' Lois wailed on the way back. 'We need to stay positive,' I said. But it was hard for her. 'I've missed out on too much,' she sobbed after seeing her friends. And too tired to train, the future she'd planned for herself was slipping away as well. She started dreading going to sleep. 'What if I wake up like that again?' she shuddered. 'I'll be here to look after you,' I reassured her. But it terrified me, too. When the new term started, she went back to school. But two days in, I got a call to say she'd fallen asleep in Physics. When I arrived, she was awake, and raced up to me singing: 'Da na na na na na na na Batman!' Getting out of the car back home, she started barking at a passing dog walker. Leigh had come out to help me. 'It's so embarrassing!' she said. 'She can't help it.'

school holidays, don't you?' I asked. 'No, it's not, there's two weeks left,' she replied, confused. She obviously didn't remember, so I sat

I snapped. When Lois came down in Luke's goggles next morning and started swimming across the kitchen floor on her belly, I filmed her on my phone. I showed her when she came out of the episode two weeks on. 'My life will never be the same, will it?' she sobbed. I just held her. Two days later, she went into another episode, and I lost her for another three weeks. That was eight months ago. She's had more episodes since. The hospital tests proved inconclusive, but she's been referred to a sleep specialist, so we're hoping something positive will come from it. In the meantime, Lois is living her life part-time. She can't play her beloved basketball, and she's taking fewer GCSEs because she's missed so much school.

FUTURE FEARS

I worry about what lies ahead for her. How will she get a job, find a partner and have kids if she's asleep for months at a time? She's 15 now, and should be having fun with her friends and looking forward to the future. Instead, she's spending most of her time in bed, while the world passes her by. All I can do is hope the doctors are right and that she grows out of it, or that they find a way to treat it. It's called Sleeping Beauty syndrome, but there's nothing beautiful about it. It's robbing my daughter of her future. ■ **Setta Wood, 44, Stevenage, Hertfordshire**

AS TOLD TO JESS WILSON AND FAYE DOBSON



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'We make the best of her waking times'

PHOTOS: CATER NEWS AGENCY