

Chapter 1 of Seasoned with Grace

The sound of Trinidad James' southern drawl and the infectious chorus of his hit song "Gold Everything" snapped Grace King out of her alcohol induced slumber. She squinted to read the screen of her iPhone. *Ethan Summerville*, she read slowly before tapping the green telephone icon to accept the call from her attorney slash agent slash everything. Throughout the years, Grace had come to rely on Ethan. To Grace it seemed like no one understood her except for him.

"Hello," she grumbled into the phone.

"Grace Terisha King, I know the reason that you are not late to this meeting is because you're still in bed."

"No, I'm up, Ethan."

"You know what my mother used to tell me when she caught me in a lie? Lying lips are an abomination unto the Lord."

Grace mustered up enough strength to sit up in the bed so that she wasn't completely lying, just telling a little half-truth. Those half-truths had taken her far. The half-truth she told the bouncer that her friend was drunk and needed her help getting out the club enabled her to finagle her way into the VIP section of the 40/40 Club where she was discovered by Bleeker Kios, the head of Fresh Faces Modeling Agency. Her friend was drunk and did need her help, but she was passed out with her head on the bar. From there, Grace parlayed that half-truth into a prosperous modeling career.

"You can't continue to do this."

“Do what?” she asked, slapping her thigh. Sometimes Ethan’s paternal and overbearing nature frustrated her and it also made her think of all the things she’d left behind, like family, namely her father, who she once considered herself close to.

“You cannot continue to walk out of nightclubs inebriated and expect to book legitimate jobs. It’s all about branding, and no one wants you associated with their brand. These proceedings were supposed to begin at eight and it is now nine o’clock. The judge has been calling here every hour on the hour since six a.m. trying to determine why it was exactly that she didn’t lock you up and why it is that she shouldn’t lock you up now.”

“So, what?” Grace shrugged her shoulders. “Am I not supposed to enjoy myself ever?”

“Not when you’re trying to break into the world of acting. Tell me which producer wants the drunken girl on page six on their billboard.”

“Page six?”

“I knew you were not out of bed. You’re on page six of the *Post*. Page two of the *Daily News*, and I’m sure they have a shot of you in every free paper that exist in New York City as well. If you keep this up, your star is going to nova soon.”

Grace ran her fingers through the long, blond bang she’d had sewn into her short pixie cut as she digested what Ethan was telling her about her career. Since she’d left home at sixteen the only thing she had was her career.

“Grace, just hurry up and get down here to sign this plea deal before Judge Laramie comes down here to arrest you herself.”

“Alright, Ethan,” she whimpered into the phone before hanging up.

It took everything inside of Grace to fling her legs over the side of her bed. She rushed out of her bedroom creeping over her platform pumps, Michael Kors jeans, white shirt, and the

fuchsia blazer she'd worn last night. Her feet slapped the parquet flooring on the steps of her condo as she headed to the door to fetch the newspaper.

Grace hated disappointing Ethan and she really didn't want to see her bad side in print, but she needed to see the photo that might get her sent to jail. She cracked the door slightly to make sure there were no paparazzi in the hall trying to get the exclusive candid shot of her that magazines like *Them* and *Soundoff* loved printing—models with no makeup.

After verifying that the coast was clear, she liberally pushed the door open and collected her loot—*The Times*, *Daily News*, and the *Post*.

Grace tucked the *Daily News* under her arm and placed the other papers on the small, brown marble legged table near the door. She walked into her living room and pressed the button on the remote sensor for her window treatments. Slowly the white panels rolled back and revealed Central Park. From her condo, Grace could see the ice skating rink, the pond, and a group of children escorted by three adults. The adults pointed at the pond and the children scribbled on their yellow notepads. *Why didn't I become a school teacher or a librarian or someone that was responsible and able to contribute to society in a meaningful way?*

It crossed her mind that maybe she should have completed high school and opted for a normal life. On the other hand Grace had to admit she loved the perks and the pay that accompanied being a top model, but after delving a little too far into the dark side of things she found herself constantly fighting for air.

Taking a seat Indian style on her red Italian leather sofa, Grace peeled back the first page of the paper and read the caption that accompanied her photo: *'A fall from Grace' Supermodel Grace King, best known for strutting her stuff, reaches an all new low as she stumbles out of Greenhouse after a night of binge drinking onlookers say.*

Onlookers? What onlookers?

After reading the caption twice, Grace allowed her eyes to stray to the photo. She swallowed the image of her long limbs awkwardly contorted. Her legs curved inward with her kneecaps touching each other and the sidewalk, her right arm bent slightly to brake her fall, and her left arm was tied up in the hands of her friend Chela, another model who had somehow managed to escape the photogs. As if that was not enough to highlight her fall, the editors were gracious enough to provide readers with a photo of her on the catwalk for Zac Posen from Fashion Week in case they didn't have a point of reference.

Grace's eyes darted back and forth from the inset picture to the photo of her collapse.

"How did you get all the way down there, Grace?" she asked herself.

The buzzer on the intercom interrupted her moment of quiet contemplation.

"Yes, Arnie?" She stared at the dome of her doorman through the intercom camera and wondered why he didn't wear the hat that accompanied his uniform to hide his premature balding.

"Good morning, ma'am. Your car is here."

"Good morning, Arnie. Could you please stop calling me ma'am? Your Christmas bonus is depending on it. And please send the car back. I did not call for a car. It's probably another one of those lousy photogs trying to lure me outside looking crazy so they can post it on TMZ."

"Ms. King—"

"Grace," she insisted.

"Grace, Mr. Summerville sent this car to take you to his office."

Grace smacked herself on the forehead. She'd totally forgotten the reason why she bothered to get out of the bed this morning.

“Let the driver know I’ll be down in half an hour.”

“Yes, ma’—Grace.”

“Thank you, Arnie.”

Grace made a mad dash for the bathroom. She took a two minute shower like she used to when she was homeless and used the showers in the parks department to get cleaned up. Either she’d ask to use the restroom and hop in the showers or she’d sneak in with a crowd of teenagers walking in for their after school program while they were really busy.

She wiped the fog off her mirror with a towel, spiked up the front of her hair with pomade, and lined the dark circles around her eyes with concealer. *Let’s make the most of today. All you have to do is a little bit of community service and you’ll be back on top.*

“Brittney, T.I., Chris Brown.” Grace called out the names of celebrities who’d behaved badly recently yet had managed to make a comeback while slipping into a grey a-line skirt and an ox-blood peplum blouse with sheer shoulders.

“This is not a death sentence,” she proclaimed, sealing the ankle strap of her black patent leather Mary Jane red bottoms. “It’s just another part of your journey.” She pulled her navy blue Burberry cape over her head and checked herself in the mirror before walking out the door. Grace smoothed a stray strand of hair and spoke to her reflection. “What doesn’t kill you can only make you stronger.”

She continued to mouth other clichés and life affirming statements on her elevator ride down to the lobby and during her car ride to Ethan’s downtown office in an attempt to co-opt the thoughts of darkness that threatened to besiege her entire day and the rest of her life. These words had gotten her through so many other trials; she was depending on them to be enough to steer her through this.

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