



# A CHILD *of* ARTHUR

AN INSPIRATIONAL STORY

LEE KESSLER

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**By**

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# CHAPTER ONE



She had known that one day the story would have to be told. It had been more than 35 years since she had met him on the mountain in Switzerland, yet hardly a week went by without her remembering him. And now that she had publicly thanked him at the ceremony where she and her producing partners had accepted the award for Best Picture of 2020 for the adaptation of her first bestselling novel, *White King and the Doctor*—and with the other two books of the trilogy in production as well—she knew what the first question in her first post-award interview would be.

*Grace, what have you done?* She chastised herself for having to open those defining moments in the summer of 1980. It was momentary, however, as deep in her heart she knew she had intended to reveal this at some point in her life. Now, in the final chapters of her own life's story, Grace Archer knew it was time.

For many would wonder how the actress who had been the first woman in the world to portray the legendary diarist, Anais Nin, could possibly have transformed into a stellar businesswoman and leadership coach to a generation, a social activist whose projects were designed to present ideas which could change the world, a passionate human rights activist, and an outspoken political activist.

She smiled, realizing just how much she had, in fact, changed. The original Grace Archer who went up the mountain that day long ago bore no resemblance to the woman she had become, and her life and its full activities bore no resemblance to her life of 1980, let alone 1967—the first time she had unknowingly met him.

The front door chime rang out, and she heard Bertha quickly open it, greet her guests, and begin to escort them to her on the patio of her home. She had decided to do this outside overlooking the Pacific. Smiling now, she admitted she still had a bit of a devilish streak. Selecting three journalism majors from USC to have the honor of the exclusive interview, as compared to the usual Hollywood suspects, she knew their enthusiasm alone would carry them through, and they would not fail to ask the question that had to be asked, if the true story were to be told.

It was not their first question she dreaded; it was their last—if they were as earnest as she perceived this trio to be. *Ah, well, it'll be over in a few hours...* she thought, as Bertha led two young men and one young woman to her.

"I'm Grace Archer. Welcome to my home." She extended her hand firmly to each, looking all three in the eye to see which one seemed the most confident. To her surprise, they were all evenly

matched, but she sensed they had already selected the “head of their party.” His name was Doug. He was tall, clean-cut, with wavy dark hair and eyes the color of the Mediterranean. He respectfully thanked her for this great opportunity and introduced Adam and Alyssa. Though mere colleagues, the two looked like brother and sister, each sporting curly red hair and a few freckles. There seemed a natural alliance between the two, and Grace wondered whether their questions would mirror each other as well.

Seated now, with beverages and refreshments, Doug placed an mp3 recorder in the center of the patio table, and each of his colleagues opened up their notebook to commence note taking. Adam and Alyssa sat side by side. She noticed Adam was left-handed, and that Alyssa seemed more inclined to listen than to take notes. They certainly represented different styles of engagement in listening and interviewing. Grace decided she liked these young people.

“Is it all right to record?”

“Yes, definitely,” Grace answered. Though her heart was pounding, she quashed her own anxiety and prepared to tell the story she had never told. She and she alone knew what happened on the mountain. Much benefit had come from it, and it was time to give credit where credit was due. It was not a secret she wished to carry to her grave.

“We know, Ms. Archer, of your noteworthy works in the last thirty years,” Doug began. “But we would like to ask today about what happened that changed you so, and what led you onto the path you have been on?”

She nodded and smiled at him.

Doug continued. “And, given that you spoke of this at the Awards, I would first like to ask you, who is Klaus? And why were you thanking him?”

There it was. They had begun just as she guessed young, ambitious, self-confident journalists would start an interview, which could enhance their careers immensely. The opening question had been asked, and she was ready.

“It’s best if I answer that by reading you a story. In the spring of 1980, I traveled for the third time to a small town on Lake Lucerne. It was a desperate and dangerous time in my young life, and the only haven I trusted was this little-known community...”

She could see it clearly now, as she reached into her memory to select the best point to begin. It was important for them to understand why she had been suffering, and why she had fled to Brunnen, Switzerland years ago. Pausing for a moment, she opened a manuscript she had placed on the side table. “This is my autobiographical novel. I wrote it in 1981 but never published it. Your answer lies in here.” She selected the start point and began reading to them the work she intended to publish next.

## CHAPTER TWO



It wasn't until she was thirty that she experienced depression. Like a Golden Girl, she had lived a previous life that seemed to be brightly illuminated, with only the occasional shadow of despair fleeting through. To her, in fact, it seemed as if she had only occasional clouds, which would block the sun for a day or two and then be gone, leaving nothing behind—no scars, no healing wounds.

But since that day in February 1978, darkness was a constant factor in her life. That is not to say she was living in a state of depression, rather that Depression was always present—waiting in the wings of activity and feeling, waiting to enter onto the stage if she were too tired, or suffering from defeat or uncertainty.

Before, she had known warmth, brightness, and an intrinsic sense that any darkness was transitory and harmless—not a part of her cosmos. It was almost like a fugitive from someone else's pain who had strayed into her story, looking for his rightful place. Recognizing his error, Depression would hastily exit, begging forgiveness for his false entrance. He would not be seen again for months.

Now, however, her life was changed. Even when she felt brightness and direction, there was a pervasive sense—an intimation if you will—of a dark and powerful force always hovering, always ready to enter. She sensed that this time the entrance would be authoritative and aggressive, with no hasty and apologetic exit. This time, the character would enter the play readily, if only she gave him the right cue.

A few times in the last three years she had thrown that cue, and Depression had indeed entered. Only through an ensuing fierce battle could she extricate herself and restore calm. And always now she was aware of the threat—the possibility of his re-entrance. Life was now light, air, and brightness in the midst of infinite darkness and clouds—a finite oasis. Depression had gone from undesired acquaintance to intimate friend. Her task was to hold him at bay.

And she thanked God—or whatever was out there responsible for the order of things—that she was in the oasis now. Three years ago it had not been so.



She hadn't heard the announcement. Only when the young man's hand lightly touched her arm did she look up.

"Madame, we are boarding now. Your boarding pass?"

*Charming dialect*, she thought, wondering if he were French. *Lovely eyes*, she noted. Grace opened her bag for the young man. As always, when someone's eyes gazed steadily at her, she couldn't find the boarding pass. For someone who made her living with eyes gazing at her—who relished people watching her in a role performed with remarkable control—she never could understand why it was that boarding passes, parking ticket stubs, dollar bills in her change purse, etc. seemed to elude her when she was called upon to present them. Like objects with a life of their own, they seemed intent upon causing her to fumble, to lose control, to appear clumsy. Tonight was no exception. She exhaled loudly as she told herself to relax, that it would turn up.

Voila! Right there on top. The blue eyes flickered, and the young man said, "Danke schön," as she handed over the recalcitrant card. That rush of impatience came up again. She seemed so impatient today. Grace knew why, but she did not want to take time to think it through now. If she could just get to Brunnen, there would be time enough to do that there. Everything would be all right in Brunnen.

*Keep that storm front out*, she coached herself. *Hold onto the oasis*.

The trip would have been so much easier had Robert, the producer/writer she was dating, been able to travel on the same flight. He, however, lived in Los Angeles, and she lived now in New York. With a recent filming schedule conflict, he was unable to make the connection into New York to fly with her. Instead, he was arriving a bit later, coming straight in from Los Angeles. It was his first trip to Europe and their first trip together.

Though Grace had some trepidation about this, and what it might portend in their volatile relationship, her thoughts were not on Robert. *Keith again! Why today? Why Keith? It must be Brunnen*, she reasoned. The last time she was there a decade ago, she was with her husband, treating him to a vacation in Bavaria before they moved to Los Angeles for him to begin law school. Ten years later she was returning, but without a husband. The husband had jettisoned at eight and one-half years.

Sitting at the window looking out at the flagman motioning the plane away from the gate, she felt a little jolt, slight really. And the trip was on.

*Jettisoned after eight and one-half years*. That was an appropriate way to put it. That night was very clear to her now. It was a night when she had asked a question she didn't really want to hear the answer to. The answer had been there anyway.

Grace snapped back to present time when the stewardess handed her ear phones. Along with the earphones came a Swiss chocolate bar, a magazine, the menu in French, and a pair of red and blue booties. *Now what in the hell are these for?* she thought. *With Balair written on them*. Casting a glance at her neighbor as he kicked off his shoes and put on his booties, she followed suit and settled in for a comfortable evening flight to Zurich, Switzerland.

In order not to be distracted, she plugged in the ear phones, selected a classical channel, and turned the volume to its lowest position as her gaze drifted out the window. Pretending she was sleeping, she enjoyed her little deception, her moment of stolen solitude. The fact that she had to steal solitude caused her to hesitate. These damned doubts! Why were they sneaking in like this? Why now? And why so often? She knew they were divisive. Perhaps the trip would disperse them and bring her back to Robert again.

She acknowledged the feeling of sadness—the sense of something lost, or at the very least

changing. She acknowledged a sense of malaise accompanied by fear. But, like a patient who is unwilling or unprepared to deal with certain symptoms, she denied them. *Remain in the oasis, Grace, she coached herself. This is no storm front, probably only scattered clouds. Just a shadow in a bright day.*

It had not always been so. Ah, pain. She was back to that night again. Keith had been away on business for two weeks. It was February 1978. The fact that February had always been disastrous for her eluded her for a while. They had had a standing joke about it. This February was to be no exception. In fact, the others were all preparatory—a training ground of thirty-one years—for the jolt she was to get that night.

She had been married when marriages were to be forever. June 22, 1969 was the only sunny day in the month of June that year. It was a good sign, a sign typical of her life to date. Actually the day had been postponed from the 14th because the country club in the nearest town couldn't handle their reception on that day. Since she was to have one of the biggest and most formal weddings in her little village of nine hundred people in an upstate New York county, the day had been changed.

Her father—a tall, severe man who looked like George Washington—had bought a new Cadillac, ostensibly to have four doors so that she could get in and out more easily in her gown. But she knew he had coveted that silver car for months and needed only an excuse. Cars were his weakness. No one minded. Despite the Vietnam War. Despite tear gas in her world at the University of Wisconsin Graduate Department of Theatre, despite Martin Luther King, she and her family lived isolated from that world—secure in their comprehension of the world but without involvement in it.

All were unscathed by the slings and arrows of the outrageous fortune of the late '60s. She herself had survived the tumultuous period of youth's revolt and confusion with remarkable clarity. She had not used drugs, did not drink, and was not part of the sexual revolution. In fact, that day in June, dressed in her white peau de soie gown with seeded pearls and lace bodice, she was a virgin—almost. Ironic that.

All her life she had done the impossible. If she had set her mind to do something, it had been accomplished. If she wished to achieve some goal, she assessed the requirements and set up the plans, the work regime, and settled in to very shortly thereafter achieve her goal. It all had come easily for her—her life and the American dream. She was graduated Summa Cum Laude from a small Presbyterian college in Western Pennsylvania whose school song was astonishingly written in a minor key, thereby making it all but impossible for anyone but music majors to sing.

Gerald Ford had given the commencement address that graduation day. Perhaps because, alphabetically, she was the first Summa Cum Laude grad to be called forth, or whether something in her sparked his interest, the future President had looked up, scanning the graduates, waiting for her to rise. As she did, he had deviated from the planned decorum by rising and personally handing her the diploma and shaking her hand. Their eyes had met and, as he firmly crunched her fingers together, he had simply said, "Well done. Keep it up." Little did she know that ten years later, she would be his spokeswoman in a very controversial California television commercial. At that moment she had flushed, probably blushed, and, above all, had felt blessed.

She was the only female Summa Cum Laude graduate that year. She was the only one, further, who had won every scholastic award presented by the college. She was the one who, with her debate partner Keith, had been debate and oratory champions. It seemed only natural then that she would be the only one who, in her senior year, would have become pregnant while technically still a virgin.

The doctors in Western Pennsylvania had had a difficult time with that one. She had been sent to three—each of whom had said, “Yes, you’re pregnant, and yes, your hymen is completely intact. How did you do this?”

She remembered only that Keith and she were fooling around on a debate trip. Naked or near naked, they were in a hotel room consumed with a sense of ignorant liberation, believing that if the man came outside, no harm could be done. Grace may have had the highest IQ in her private college, but she also had never read anything regarding birth control. To add insult to injury, she had become pregnant two days after her period.

The third doctor, upon hearing that, had said, “Well, that just goes to show you the idiocy of the rhythm method.” He had revealed that he had read of one or two such cases like hers, but had never experienced one. And there she was again—in the top 99th percentile!

The nurse who first apprised her of the test results had oozed warmth and an almost jealous enthusiasm for Grace’s condition. “You’ll be happy to know the test was positive. You are pregnant. The doctor, of course, will be happy to take care of you during your term. I’ve set up a schedule of visits for you and a diet...” Grace never heard the end of that sentence. She had vomited in the phone booth, dropping the phone. Keith had helped her back into an empty classroom, set her down, and let her weep. Kneeling beside her, his arm awkwardly consoling her shoulder, he had done what any young man of his era and background would have done. He asked her to marry him.

Grace was grateful, but she had no intention of having a baby. She had just received a coveted fellowship to the University of Wisconsin for four years of study with full expenses paid, and no teaching requirement. She was the sixth-ranked student at the University of Wisconsin. She was also very conservative, very insulated, very afraid, and *very* certain she did not want a baby.

An abortion was arranged. That was no small accomplishment in those times when all were still illegal. It was essential that her parents never know. Keith made the arrangements by day, and she lay in her room by night, secretly praying for the baby to be gone.

Two days before she and Keith were to have flown to New York City to have an abortion, under the guise of a special debate tournament at New York University, she had miscarried. Her prayers were answered. She was relieved. So was Keith.

The only setback to their wedding that sunny day one and one-half years later was the fact that, two days before the wedding, Keith had been called to active duty. The Draft Board had tracked him to her minister and the minister had called to tell him. Keith’s particularly spicy John Birch Society mother from the North Shore of Chicago laughed as she chewed her potato salad and said, “Well, it looks as if you’ll be a ‘war bride’ after all!”

Actually, Keith was in the Reserves. He had wanted to serve his country—within reason. He had no desire to go to Vietnam, and he did desire to go to law school. So he had compromised. He had enlisted in the Reserves.

Their honeymoon was cut short, and five days after they were married he left for four and one-half months of training in a hell-hole of mosquitoes, steam, and spinal meningitis called Fort Leonardwood in Missouri. Grace very practically used the lonely summer to write her Master’s dissertation, get her degree, and move to a small Illinois college where she would teach drama, speech, direct plays, and develop a drama department. She was twenty-two.

All these pleasant anecdotes make a good story, but not necessarily a good marriage. Although they seemed to have a perfect marriage with companionship, friendship, compatibility, shared dreams, playfulness, and a beautiful home with just enough funk, she lay in bed that night, eight years later, knowing by the squeezing in her gut that something was wrong.



That February she was working at the Meredith Tandem Forum in Los Angeles. For a young actress in the L.A. theatre scene, this was the most prestigious and experimental of the theatres in Hollywood. Her career was going well. The television roles were getting larger, and her recognition among casting people and directors was running high. She was enjoying the reputation of being a “splendid actress”—that is to say a “true” artist, not just a “Hollywood” actress.

She had just performed her one-woman show on Anais Nin for the first time. Now she was understudying a major star in the West Coast premiere of “First Day.” The play later moved to New York. The role was incredibly challenging, as it was the story of a released convicted killer on her first day out, trying to make a life for herself. It was tough both physically and emotionally. The demands upon the actress were especially intense, as she’s on stage the entire two hours, controlling the flow and rhythm of the entire piece. The understudy’s job was a tough one on this show, and was aggravated by the star’s lack of concentration in a staged rape scene. She rarely played the scene as it was choreographed. The result was that either she or her male partner were likely to get hurt. Grace knew she would have to go on, and she was ready. Deep inside, she felt it would be her big break—the role that would establish her as a stage star with powerful presence.

But that night she was still angry at Keith for his stunt the week before. He had been away at a trial all week, and had left flowers in her dressing room at the Tandem with a note saying he was going to a University of Southern California basketball game, and would see her at home after the show. It was so typically sweet and thoughtful of him. Even romantic. And she had raced home, saying no to a drink with friends in order to get home to him.

He wasn’t there. By midnight she knew, of course, that the game was long over. She had begun to worry and had stationed herself on their deck overlooking the San Fernando Valley and the only access street to their house in the hills. Only a few cars had driven up, but none were the Renault 17 she had given him for his 30th birthday.

At 1AM the phone had rung. Leaping at it, she had shouted, “Hello.”

“Now don’t worry. I’m all right.” It was Keith.

“Where are you? I was so worried.”

“At the police station. We were mugged.”

“Oh my God...”

He had reassured her, “But I’m all right. There was a knife skirmish, but I’m okay. They got the guy, but I have to stay here to make an ID.”

At first, there was relief. But then she remembered he had said “we.” A question not to be asked?

“Who were you with?”

He had delayed a second—or a minute. “A couple of girls from the office.”

“How’d you manage to hook up with them?”

“Well, I had given them my tickets. When I returned early, I realized I could go, too, so I joined them there,” he had said smoothly.

“And you were mugged at the game?”

“No, at the Red Onion.”

Grace knew that was a disco. Her mind had struggled not to piece this together. But only one picture came together, no matter how many times she shook it up, hoping another, better one would appear.

All she had said was, “You left me flowers.”

“Yes.”

*What was in his voice?* “You told me to meet you at home.”

“Yes.”

She knew she sounded as if she were interrogating or reading an indictment, but she couldn't stop herself. He had given the direct textbook witness answers—a simple, unembellished yes or no. So she pursued. “And you went to a disco with two girls?”

“Yes.”

His courtroom delivery confused her, and there was no way to conceal the hurt. “I'm coming down to get you. Where are you?” she had demanded.

Keith jumped in. “No. I'm all right. We'll finish here soon. They're about to take my statement on the knife fight.”

*That brought him around*, she thought, and added quickly, “I want to come.”

He had shouted, “No! I don't want you to. I could have been killed tonight, Grace. Almost was. I expected you to be sympathetic, not accusatory. But no. Well, I'm not going to have a jealous wife come down here and upset these girls anymore!”

“But what about me?” She was defensive now. “I'm upset, too. I've been afraid. I'd like to be with you.”

He was very angry and had started to hang up. She tried to reach into the phone with, “I won't make a jealous scene, I promise.”

“I'll see you at home.” And he was gone.

She had written him a long note explaining that she had not meant to accuse or to criticize. She had been angry at being stood up, angry from fear, angry at his thoughtlessness, and she had reacted to that. Fearing that her tone of voice would undermine the logic of her arguments, she had written it down. On a yellow legal pad she had poured it all out as articulately and completely as she well could. And like Martin Luther at Wittenberg, she had tacked the thesis to the front door and gone to bed.

When he pulled up in front, she had looked at the clock. It was 3AM. She had feigned sleep as he approached the door. *Why doesn't he come in? Of course*, she reminded herself, *I posted a God-damned thesis to it!* No doubt he was struggling to read it in the light of one art-deco porch light.

Their bedroom was on the same level as the entrance, and she had heard the latch turn as he entered. He had stood in the bedroom door. It seemed like an eternity. Apparently believing she was asleep, he had come over to the bed, sat beside her, embraced her, and whispered, “I love you.” As he embraced her, she had heard the “thesis” fall to the floor.

That was a week ago. He had been away again on the same trial in beautiful Bakersfield and would be home soon. She had wine chilling.

When he came in, the amenities were covered in less than 45 seconds. Declining the chablis, he said he was very tired and would like to sleep. She waited in bed as he undressed, hastily covered himself with pajamas, slipped into bed, and turned off the light. Trying to engage him—lonely, needing to talk, even if only shop talk; needing to be kissed or held or even tickled—she made the grand stand play, guaranteed to bring him to his senses.

Dramatically, with shimmering conviction, she bounded out of bed, hurling the covers back, and popped on the rheostat-controlled spotlight, which was focused on their bed. Keith rolled over—caught on the illuminated stage of their California king-sized bed—costumed only in his striped pajamas. He blinked as she said, “We have to talk.”

Pausing for maximum effect, and to make certain he understood her feelings, she then continued. “If we don't, we're not going to make it to number 10.” She had expected the act to end

with dialogue like, “Don’t be silly, Grace, you’re just dramatizing. I’m just tired. I’m overworked. We’ll talk about it. You know I love you.” Any of these would have sufficed.

Keith had center stage, however. He looked her straight in the eyes, took a deep breath, and delivered the curtain line. “I know.”

Blackout. And the beginning of darkness.