

Excerpt from the Upcoming Novel: *Angelina*

Written by Allison Taylor

Chapter 3: The Pact

Uncle Titas always had a way of commanding attention. He was smooth, calculated, and unapologetically himself the kind of man who could walk into a room and shift its energy without saying a word. I idolized him, not for his morals, but for his mastery of manipulation. He didn't just live life; he bent it to his will.

"Never let them see you sweat, kid," he'd say, his voice dripping with confidence as he adjusted his cufflinks. "You control the game, or the game controls you."

I took those words to heart, perhaps too much. By the time I was in high school, I wasn't just playing the game, I was rewriting the rules. With my friends Melissa, Jazmine, and LuLu by my side, we formed "Pretty Girls, Inc.," a name that sounded harmless but carried more weight than we realized. We weren't just a clique; we were a force.

Our monthly meetings were part therapy and part strategy sessions. We'd gather in hotel suites, wine glasses in hand, flipping through our "Life's Portfolios." These weren't ordinary journals. They were blueprints for our ambitions, filled with names, dates, and conquests. It wasn't just about boys or relationships; it was about power.

"We're untouchable," Jazmine said one night, her laughter echoing through the room. "No one can stop us."

At the time, I believed her. But now, looking back, I wonder if we were building something or destroying ourselves piece by piece. Uncle Titas had taught me how to play the game, but he never warned me about the cost of winning.

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