

ANGELINA - THE END
BY
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Chapter One

THE END

As I lay here on this cold ass, marble floor waiting to die, I realized where I had gone wrong in my quest to have it all. But it's too late to cry about that now because death's masterful process was upon me. I knew my soul was up for grabs, and death was not letting on to who he was turning my soul over to.

Whether death himself got his orders from the man upstairs who would be happy to take my soul into his bosom, save, deliver, forgive and show me mercy for all of the sinful things that I was guilty of, or the man under the stairs, the devil himself, just lusting after me for the destruction that I had helped to cause this world that made him so proud of me. Of course, I prayed to God to save my distressed soul. I figure I've sinned so much that at least I owed him my distressed soul and it can finally be cleansed of me and live

in peace because I definitely destroyed it. For the first time since I was a kid, did I even consider praying to or asking for a favor from God himself?

My alliance is with God, so I know that I must answer to him for this shitty decision. I just hope that I'm not left out there in limbo, between two worlds, and neither wants my crappy soul because it's beyond saving, even for the devil. Since I've never died before or come close to it, I can't imagine how I'll make my transition, but I guess that one has to try something once to see what it's like. Damn, I'm gonna miss my favorite show on T.V. tonight.

It was a Sunday, about seven o'clock in the evening. The sky was cloudy and gray, but with that came one of the most beautiful simmering rainfalls that I've ever seen and heard. I should have known it was gonna rain because my sinuses and allergies were acting up, and I could just feel it. The distinct smell of wet grass mixed with sweet oils and freshly dried linens. Rain brings about peace and relaxation that allows me to clear my head. At the same time, rain is chaotic and can create havoc and destruction, which too I am guilty of. When it rains, I go into my little invisible bubble, and I take time to reflect on my life and where my foggy path is taking me. Most people don't like rain, for obvious reasons, especially us Black women because we hate getting our hair wet. Kids love playing in it, nature needs it, and your life slows down just for a bit. My granny used to say the rain was tears from God and the angels because we

aren't following his commandments. I don't know if I fully believe that, but I do know that it brings me peace.

As I lay here sweating profusely and growing weaker by the second, I could see myself in the back of my thoughts like that of an actress in one of those black-and-white silent movies, playing the damsel in distress. The only prop missing was the audience shouting for an encore or the roaring thunder of a standing ovation so many secretly yearn for after an epic, award-winning performance, such as mine. But I was the only star of this movie. This was my story, and I didn't expect this twist.

I could sense that my mind was fading into the darkness, and all I had to hold on to was a tunnel of light. I figured if anything, it would help me find my way back to real life, and Mrs. Reality was always right there to show me a preview of what I was in store for. I tried desperately to get through the insignificant scenes of my life and get to the encore, you know, the one where I would make this phenomenal, life-changing recovery. So, I looked a little deeper into my thoughts just to see if I focused enough I could wake up in another place and time. Unfortunately, it was the same scene as it was when I closed my eyes just five seconds earlier. I tried it again and again, but this movie was the real thing, and no director would yell cut.

As I was coming to grips with the fact that I was not able to physically change my fate, I decided to try and change it by faith and getting in a final prayer. So, I decided to ask God to do what

he could to alter my story. Although I knew that I was asking way too much of him, I know that he's a forgiving God and all I had to do is ask. I wished I would have had that conversation with him before now, with my stupid ass.

My eyelids were heavier than one of those mornings I didn't want to get up for work. I always made a point to get a few more snoozes in, even if for a moment. But this time was different because they were weaker than ever and taking a lot out of me just to try and push them back up. But I had no choice. As I strained to open them, for what felt like the last time, I knew that if I closed them again, I would succumb to the drug and alcohol-induced state I was in.

I felt the piercing cold of the floor shooting through my body; my legs were getting numb and I started to feel like I couldn't move. As the room began to spin and things got blurry more, I could feel my chest accelerating up and down, so I was still alive. I only hoped that I could remain alive long enough for my nosy-ass neighbor, Mrs. Jones, to come over as she does whenever there's something to gossip about or somebody new moved into our subdivision. Oh, how I wished that she would bring her nosy, gossiping ass over here right now. But it doesn't look like that's gonna happen, so I should just allow the hand that I've dealt myself to play out. I'm not going to win this hand; I'm so used to winning all of the hands that I was dealt or dealt out. It was gonna be the final episode, the final hand of this poorly produced reality show of a life and the consequences that

came along with it.

Leave it all up to my many well-wishers, who'll say I had too much to live for and would genuinely mourn for me.

First, the naysayers, the ones that are gonna report they knew it was coming and it was all just a matter of time. Then, the ones waiting for me to spiral downward because they secretly hated on me and all had one thing in common. They want to be the bearers of bad news and gossip, so to speak.

Finally, the fake ones; they just can't wait to say they would never do something as stupid as kill themselves. And rightfully so, most people in my circle know how to deal with the stresses of life because they've braved the realities of pressure and stress. One would think that I, of all people, could endure anything that came my way in life. I knew stress, I knew pressure, homelessness, hunger, and welfare, and I know what it is to be broke. Plus, it's usually unheard of in my culture anyway, the act of suicide upon oneself. And if a suicide did happen, it's either because of some old crazy-ass crap because of a breakup and someone doesn't want the other person or some sort of crime of passion. It wasn't due to not wanting to live anymore because you have way too much going on. But suicide, I'm gonna have to come back as a spirit or ghost and find out what everybody's gonna be saying.

Most people, from the ones who met me once or twice or have known me for a while, will want to tell my story; people just have a knack

for that kind of messiness. We all know them: the junior street reporters, the "know-it-alls," and the "guess what I heard" ones. They would want to be the first person to relay the story but can't tell anyone where it came from or who their sources were. I would imagine it gives them a high of sorts once the first word, "guess," comes out of their mouths, followed up with, "what." I can just imagine what the headlines will look like.

I've found out the hard way the difference between friends and associates. So, I stay away entirely and only surround myself with Melissa, Jazmine, and Lulu. Some people are so desperate to have friends that they sacrifice their common sense and instantly add everybody to their friend group. You have to make it a point to distinguish between the two; please do, for your own protection. So before I go, I figure I have time to kick a little game to you all so you won't find yourself in that friend trap that is draining, hurtful, confusing, gossipy, hateful, and sometimes can cause you to lose yourself, your freedom, and your life.

So, all you have to do is this: initiate a little test to see if this person is even worthy of being in your circle. I was hanging around so many people that I had met since college and always wondered why there were so many mountains of drama amongst these friends. I decided to start a little rumor about myself by telling the first part of the chain, and you have to follow it up with the classic, "Don't tell anybody." Of course, we all know a good, solid friend

will keep it and take it to the grave, but an associate will take that rumor and spread it just as soon as they are out of your sight. Then, once you start your own rumor, just sit back and wait, and either you'll hear nothing or you'll hear, "Girl, I heard from such and such that you did this or that." Not only is the idiot that you told not your friend, but the idiots that assist in spreading the rumor are not your friends. Another bonus test is to wait to see which of your friends get a whiff of the rumor and what they do with it. A real friend will call you just as soon as the rumor spreader starts telling the story; they'll put them on the spot and confront them on where it came from, and immediately, they should be calling you on the phone or something to put the person on the spot that is claiming that they heard it from somebody. And, if your friend can't get in touch with you because they are a true friend, they wouldn't feed into the rumor, nor will they assist in spreading it. They'll let you know where it came from and tell you not to "fuck" with that "bitch" anymore. Those people are what you call "haters," "backstabbers," and "frenemies," who are associates because no real friend would want to be a part of making you look bad.

Melissa, LuLu, and Jazmine all have been in situations where I've been talked about either to others and they overheard or directly within our friend group, and all of them would immediately address it either by text or a phone call so that I can hear what the person is saying, or they will get away from the situation or simply tell

the person that they should personally call and let me know where this came from. You know the classic response from people like that will always be, "Girl, I forgot who I heard it from." And you know for sure that's a lie because no woman forgets a juicy rumor or gossip no matter how green she may be. There's no way I will ever again surround myself with loads of people just because they are cool. You have to pay attention and watch how folks are. It is unfortunate that you have to test folks to see their character. My circle is small, and I am okay with that because we all know who we are. None of us are trying to be like the other. We wear different styles of clothing, we all wear different hairstyles, and we don't share makeup or clothing at all because we are all comfortable with who we are and know who we are.

These girls nowadays have no clue what it is to be a real friend. They would rather argue, pop off, and create chaos because they believe that is the normal way to conduct themselves as friends. You are mistaken, dear love. Nowhere in the friendship bible does it say that it is okay to argue, fuss, or fight, either physically, mentally, or emotionally, with your friends. Or that it is okay to do so and then turn around and act like nothing happened; that is the definition of toxic friendship. Nowhere does it say that you befriend someone and then treat them badly, gossip about them, spread rumors, tell their story, good or bad, yell, scream, or befriend their opps. Oh, how I wished that I could have used my psychology background to

develop a podcast or YouTube channel that is centered around what friendship looks like because these girls and women are all being raised on reality TV show drama where it is encouraged to fight, argue, disrespect, and overstep boundaries as long as you say, "I'm sorry," or you have mutual friends so you just deal with it.

Listen, ladies, your peace is yours and belongs to you and God, and you don't owe that to anyone, nor should you ever compromise your peace. You are supposed to treat others with love, kindness, and respect, not argue one day and hang out the next, and not only that but to simply act like nothing happened between you and the other person. It is crazy and narcissistic to conduct yourself in such a way to just go about life as if nothing happened. In order to heal from something that has caused you pain or stress, you must confront it, discuss it, talk about it, and get it off of you. Yes, we have God to look to for our burdens, but we also have an obligation to take care of ourselves and our souls for him, and we should prioritize our mental health, because as the saying goes, we all have only one life and most definitely one mind, and once that goes, there is no way to get it back. There are many sayings we have in the mental health field, and one of them is, "We Are All Crazy." Depending on your level of crazy, we all are touched. It is up to us how we decide to use it, and if it is for good or bad, our level of common sense has diminished greatly, so we no longer teach it to our children, and we no longer use it in everyday life situations because we are driven

by likes and social media, so we don't have any cognitive thinking nor thinking at all for that matter. Why should we? We have AI to do that for us now.

When we were in college, we all snuck around with CliffNotes, and if you got caught with them, there would be consequences. Today, kids are allowed to bring their cell phones to school and use them in class, and because the world has given the okay to use digital devices everywhere now, it is accepted. I recall a time when cell phones weren't even allowed on airplanes; now you can use them, like, huh? Kids do not retain the information in school like they should because they are so worried about likes, being accepted, and scrolling on their phones. There is no challenge for them other than being able to use their fingers to scroll. So, they don't have any real-world learning experiences outside of their digital devices.

They don't know how to be friends because reality TV has shown them how to deal with their emotions, in anger. Yes, you can debate, disagree, and huff if you want, but there is nothing in the friendship contract that says it's okay to argue and fight with your friend. Nothing's like having friends who are accused of talking behind your back. It's so hard to maintain a genuine friendship these days because you never know who a person is until a situation arises. Because I've tried to open the door to having more friends, I had to learn from experiences in the process, and the only people who can say they know me or that I would tell my deepest, darkest secrets to are Melissa,

Jazmine, and LuLu; Jazmine and LuLu are also homies from college.

We weren't part of any sororities or groups; hell, we were way too wild, ghetto, and boujee for a sorority. So we created our own thing and called ourselves "Pretty Girls, Inc." We were smart, beautiful, stylish, popular, and the freaking life of the party. So, there was absolutely no need to join any sororities for status purposes. The Dean of Students respected the influence we had on many of the students, and he kind of knighted us anyway. We were the shit, and so much so that not only did girls want to join us, but the guys did too. They all just wanted to be able to say they were around a "Pretty Girl."

By the time we graduated, we had successfully created what we called "Life's Portfolio." It was kind of a pact that mapped out everything we wanted to do and be in life, beginning to end. From our careers, the cars we wanted to drive to the kinds and types of men we wanted to conquer; yep, I said conquer. We all kept, carried, and lived by these portfolios for many years; the portfolio is just a sweet name for a "little black book." We had to call what we did something cute and sensible so we wouldn't be looked at like the hoes we really were. I guess one could label us as anti-social narcissists if we all had a psych evaluation. We shared and compared our notes and conquests once a month during our monthly conquest meetings. These meetings were where we all came together either at a hotel suite where we would pamper ourselves, drink wine, order tons of food and

desserts, and have sessions about who we were doing, why we were doing them, how long we planned to do them, and what we were getting out of it.

Looking back on it now, it was a bit sinister, calculated, and premeditated. I am now a firm believer that birds of a feather flock together. I, of course, was ahead of the pack because I never wanted to or came close to getting married, so I never needed to put my little black book up anytime I decided to get into a relationship. Melissa was the only one happily married. Melissa married Denzel, her high school sweetheart, who I know and love like a brother. We all hung out together and still do to this day. Jazmine was in her world. She decided to stir the pot and come out as a full-blown lesbian, so her black book was pretty much filled with conquests with men and women, kind of like mine was set up, lol. I guess that she was struggling with something inside herself because we all had our conquests with women at one time or another. And because of that, we never made her feel uncomfortable because we were all open about our sexuality. I guess she had her reasons for not coming out before she did. We had to be honest with her and tell her we weren't surprised. We love her to death, but she was a ditz when it came to many common-sense things. You know that friend that you can do or say something in front of, and they look perplexed and ask you the dumbest question or comment that they didn't know that; our sweet Jazmine was the "Dumb Blonde" of the group. And she wore it just like the rest of the pack wore

our alter egos. Jazmine was clueless to the 10th power. She was extremely gifted, smart, and articulate, but because she asked so many dumb and self-explanatory questions, she got that title. I was "The Pimp." I was a force to be reckoned with when it came to men, dating, and hooking up. I didn't believe in sleeping around to get what I wanted, so I pimped out males and females alike to get what I wanted out of the deal, and then I was on to the next one. LuLu was a "Crash Dummy" because she was always falling, tripping, stumbling, or anything to do with her equilibrium; she was just so uncoordinated and clumsy that at least once a day, something would happen to knock her off her feet—literally. Sometimes we all thought a spirit was following her around or something and pulling her feet from up under her to keep her safe from falling, lol. Because she was literally tripping in the air. Melissa was "Dr. Ruth" because she was the sensible one of the group, and no matter what was going on, she was able to give the best advice to the crew, parents, teachers, and pretty much anybody she met or didn't know on the street that she thought needed advice. We are a mixed-up group, but we balanced each other out. I think that's what kept us close for as long as we were. We all had different personalities and liked doing different things, so we never ran out of ideas, things to do, or places to go. We were a crazy group, but we were genuine friends, and I wouldn't trade them for anything in the world.

And here my stupid ass was, lying on this beautiful floor, in

my own crap, about to miss out on my life, my girls, my money, and the pact I made to annihilate and destroy all of MAN-kind. They were counting on me, you know, the women of the world who've been cheated on, mistreated, belittled, abused, and not treated like the queens we were meant to be treated as; sadly enough, I will be failing my girls and the pact we made. I also failed all the women silently behind me rooting for me to put these fools in their place.

Memories began to flood my mind, pulling me back to a time when I was just a girl, wide-eyed and impressionable. I remember the day Uncle Titas took me along on one of his "errands," a day that would shape my understanding of relationships and power. It was a sweltering summer afternoon, the kind where the air felt thick and heavy. Titas had picked me up in his sleek, black car, the leather seats hot against my skin. I was excited, feeling grown-up and important, unaware of the lesson I was about to learn. We drove to a part of town I didn't recognize, stopping in front of a modest house. Titas told me to wait in the car, but curiosity got the better of me. I watched as he greeted a woman at the door, her smile wide and welcoming. It was odd to me because I knew that Titas was married to my aunt and they loved each other. They had been together for a long time, and they were always happy and smiling. He respected my aunt because he would get the "cast iron" treatment if he didn't, and that was what the women in our family called it. I didn't know exactly what it was at the time, but I have come to know it as a man

getting hit upside the head with a cast iron skillet. Women back in the day didn't play, at least in my family; they were strong, hard-working, took care of their homes, husbands, and kids, and still had time for themselves and most of all didn't take no mess from no man. Although my Uncle Titas was a cheating scoundrel, he was a good man to my aunt, as strange and crazy as that sounds. He was loving, took her on trips and dates, bought her nice things, and loved on her. So, I didn't understand the need for cheating until I got older. I didn't understand why if a man loves a woman so much and she is his world, what is the reason to entertain other women just to get into arguments and shit with them, too? Like, I would watch him as the years went by dealing with the same mess he was dealing with my aunt about.

They disappeared inside, leaving me alone with my thoughts. Minutes turned into an hour, and I grew restless. I decided to sneak out of the car, peeking through the window to catch a glimpse of what was happening inside. There they were, Titas and the woman, laughing and talking intimately, a scene that felt both foreign and fascinating. He was touching her, she was half-clothed, and they both were sweaty. She handed him some money, and I hurried away from the window because I thought they saw me. I didn't want to get back in that hot-ass car, so I sat on the lady's porch. When Titas finally returned, he found me sitting on the porch steps, my expression a mix of confusion and curiosity. He chuckled, ruffling my hair as if

I were a little boy who had stumbled upon a secret. "Angelina," he said, his voice low and conspiratorial, "you see how easy it is to get what you want from people? You have to play the game. Men will always try to take advantage, but you have to be smarter. Use what you have to get what you need. That's how you earn respect." His words lingered in my mind, a seed planted deep within my consciousness. I didn't fully understand it then, but as I grew older, I saw the truth in his advice. It was a lesson in manipulation and power, one that would guide my interactions with men for years to come.

Back to Jazmine, because she had us, she never felt like she had to hide, nor did we shun her for her sexual preference. Real friends don't make each other feel like they can't be themselves. The joy of friendship is being able to live in your truth and having friends that don't judge you or make you feel bad for your decisions. These Millennials these days got the friendship game fucked up. They figure that friendship is conditional and limited, and it just doesn't hit the same as how we were raised, which is you don't sit around and talk about your friends, plot their demise, or wish them ill will. That was unheard of when we were growing up. These idiots will be your lifelong friend, sleep with guys behind your back, talk about you with the opps, allow others to speak disrespectfully about you in their presence, blame you for their mishaps in life, blame their choices in men on you, play you like you don't know they just told you that they didn't have any money but go ahead and order food

and drinks and look away when the bill comes, use you and act like they love and care for you, and the whole time you are their crutch.

If they know and love you, they will automatically accept who you are. The true-blue friends are those that know who you are, what you love, like, and do; what makes you happy, what makes you sad, what pisses you off, what brings you joy, how you live, your dating habits, and who you're sexing. You accept everything about them because you would want the same. You take the time to talk to each other, not about each other, and you create a space where that friend can be just that, a friend. That is why I kept my circle small with who I started with, my girls, because everyone else that I've met along the way and attempted to establish any sort of friendships with always proved to be frenemies in the end. So who can give credit to a hater who starts a conversation with, "Girl, guess what I heard about Angelina?"

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