

Angie Situation
(INNOCENCE)

by
Angela Sherice

KARMAIC PUBLISHING

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Publishing

Library of Congress Pre Assigned Control Number
LCCN 2010925624

p. cm.
by Angela Sherice.
Sherice.

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The paperback's ISBN: 978-09709806-6-3 (KARMAPUB) Angela Sherice

KARMAIC PUBLISHING
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Cover art and design by Angela Sherice

Author photo by Angela Sherice

Written and edited by Angela Sherice

Printed in the U.S.A

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Grateful acknowledgement goes out to everyone who inspires me, encourages me, ennobles me and truly wish me well, because that would mean at some point; I either, have or I continuously do the same for you. That is how kinetic energy and kindred spirits work.

It is only by way of my Creator, and you, that the pulse of my beating and bleeding heart makes it way to my pen.

You keep me supplied with inspiration, love, light, the reason, and something to write about.

With love and because of yours,

Angela Sherice.

I graciously thank you all.

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his heart broke loose and from that point on, life as he knew it was never the same. I swear that boy followed me around ever since that day; clinging to me like laundry static.

So outside of being beat-branded by Collar Girl, smacked by Landon, and in later years; bum rushed and nearly ganged-raped at Leroy's store by "Cable-Boy" and his boys; that was about as traumatic as childhood got for me.

My secret life was merely a pleasure to me-it didn't cause me any pain or problems.

I wasn't exposed to porn or sex of any kind on television. I wasn't exposed to drugs, a drug lifestyle, or a dysfunctional household with absent parents and bad examples of the same. I can very well warn and proclaim: "Daddy's guard your daughters! Watch their every move! Keep up constant dialogue with them! Know where they are at all times!"

...but that would merely be a public service announcement and something that was true for even-me, yet and still-under their nose, care and watchful eyes, they saw and knew nothing.

I kept conversation going with my mom and dad-at all times. My mom and dad did guard me, nurture me, protect me and watch my every move. I was where I was supposed to be at all times. It's just that sometimes I slipped away next door, upstairs, in the attic, around the corner, across the street, in the closet, or behind the couch. But I was never too far from hearing my mom call out to me: "Angie!"

Yet and still...

RIPE & READY. G-ANGS. B-ANGS & P-ANGS.

Ah man. I had my day all planned out until Aunt Dot and Mother Nature started gossiping.

Ten years-old on a hot summer day and I got my period. Typically, I would wear cut off jean shorts-but this particular day, I searched high and low for a full pair of jeans.

Every summer, I would cut every pair of jeans that I wore in the fall, winter and spring, so that I could have tons of jean short choices in the summertime. My mother *hated* that. By the time school came back around for the fall, she would be screaming at me for having no jeans for school.

This particular day-I know how she felt, because I was out of my head from trying to find a pair; knowing that I most probably had none.

By some stroke of luck, I found a long pair and wore them with a pink and mint green polo t-shirt and a pair of sneakers. I did not want any part of my skin exposed at all. If I could have-I would have covered up to my neck that day.

I had gotten up early that morning-my mom was gone to work. I went to the bathroom and there “she” was when I wiped. I sat on the toilet seat and smiled; ready-and in complete preparation for what I was supposed to do next. Obviously, since I had been reading any and everything I could about sex, what to do when I became a woman, was too, something of interest to me. I had no recollection of having my mom tell me exactly what to do when that day was to happen-I only read about it.

There were no sanitary napkins in the linen closet, medicine cabinet, under the bathroom sink or in my mom’s room-just tampons. I called her at work to tell her the news. She giggled and whispered through the phone: “Oh my baby’s a woman now-bless her heart.”

With a half-frown and a smile on my face I said to her:

“But mom, there are no pads here-only tampons. I don’t want to be sticking nothing in me like that,” I said to her-reminiscing how (during my reading) I skimmed past “how to use tampons.” The cartoon-like picture of this woman with her head back, mouth open and one foot up on the toilet did not appeal to me. The whole page and picture played in my head while I was talking to mom. “Pads would suffice-thank you,” I said-cutting her off-not hearing a word she was saying while I reminisced about the corny tampon lady.

“I’m going to have [your friend Dana’s mother] bring over a few pads for you until I can bring you some-home when I get off from work,” she explained.

“Hold on,” she paused, putting me on hold to place the call six doors up from me.

She returned back to the line: “Ms. Andrea should be ringing the bell any minute to bring you a few pads over, and I’ll see you when I get home.”

“Okay,” I replied-while I sat on the chair of my third-floor bedroom: pigeon toed and eager; waiting for my doorbell to ring.

Dana’s mother finally made it to deliver my essentials.

The doorbell rang: she held onto it as if she was singing and giggling my name before removing her finger to release it.

“Here I come!” I yelled, repeatedly out of the third floor window-down to her.

I ran down to the second floor and peeked in to one of my brother’s rooms and he wasn’t in there.

I continued to run down the steps to the first floor, and there my twin brother lay; watching television on the couch.

“Here I come!” I yelled down the steps leading to the front door.

I heard my brother yell while throwing a pillow at me:

“Uhd! You’re nasty!”

I figured I had blood on my light-blue night gown and it grossed him out. I didn’t care, I kept running down the steps to get to the bottom to open the door for Mrs. Andrea who stood there with a big smile on her face-she too was “so proud of me.”

She looked me up and down, rolled her neck back-giggled-then gave me a hug so tightly; echoing the same thing my mom said: “Oh Angie’s a woman now. Bless your heart baby,” she said.

I gave her a side smile-not knowing whether I was supposed to say “thanks,” throw my thumb up and say: “yeah-check me out,” or what.

“Now do you know what to do with these?” she hurriedly asked me; ready to educate me.

I replied, “Yes, I do. I know what to do.” I laughed assuredly; finding it so funny that these two old battle axes acted like I was supposed to be asking them a ton of questions when little did they both know [I thought] I was damned near ready for the world and all that was to come with it by age ten.

My period, like anything else was something I had been planning for and read about-ready for the moment it was to happen. I just wasn’t ready for what happened in Old Man Leroy’s candy store some nine hours later.

From the moment I got those sanitary napkins, I had done everything right.

I took my time as if the world had to wait on me that day. Aunt Dot and Mother Nature was the boss of me, but I was the boss of Father Time that day. I took my bath different and slowly that day. I combed my hair intently and differently that day. I prepared and handled myself like a complete “woman” that day, but I had been preparing for that day to arrive

like a wife prepares for her wedding day to arrive.

I was so dramatic. When I went to visit my friend Dana and other friends, I was quiet and reserved, feeling like I was now on some different level than all of my friends, because they hadn't got their periods yet. That day, I felt very secretive and protective of myself, as if-beginning this day, I had to do things a little different than the day before because I was now a "woman."

By the time I got dressed to begin my day; I noticed that my brothers talked to me slowly and intently. We hadn't fought all day like we used to do while my mom would be at work. In awe, they stared me all up in my face as if they were going to see something different in it that they didn't see the day before. I could tell that my mother told them over the phone not to piss me off, because they were on their best behavior, and anything I said-went (that day). So for about nine hours into my womanhood, I was able to have it all my way until running into "Cable Boy" and his buddies in the middle of Leroy's candy store. Well, something like that...it was the other way around.

Totally fucked up my big day.

All I did was go to the candy store to grab a bag of Crunchy Cheese Doodles, A Little Hug fruit punch and a pack of watermelon Now & Later's hard candy. That short trip turned into a situation at a distance unforeseen. When I walked in, no one was in there but me. Behind me was a Galaga arcade game to the left, and a Pac-Man arcade game-to the right. I was leaning to the right side with my elbows on the counter. My knuckles were dug into my right cheek as Leroy (the store's owner) began to brown bag my goodies. The front door of the store swung open to one of the six boys who smiled at me as I turned around with my right hand above my brow; squinting from the glare of the bright outdoors-shining in my face and through the dimly lit hole in the wall neighborhood store.

The one boy looked at me and smirked then ran back outside as the door shut quickly behind him. By the time I reached for my brown bag from Leroy, the door swung back open, and like a swarm of bees, all six guys came running in and around me while one of them pressed upon me with his hands grabbing my waist; humping and thrusting into me like animals in the wild.

I reached my hands into the eleven by fourteen serving window's ledge for support. I tried bucking back and kicking like a wild horse because I was so afraid that he was going to try to wrestle me to the dirty floor of the store. I held onto that window for dear life, I must have looked like Carol Ann hanging on while getting pulled by the Poltergeist.

I started screaming bloody murder when each boy took turns grabbing me from behind while holding on to my waist and humping me like wild animals. I was **so** angry and disgusted. I let go of the window while trying to turn around and keep my balance, but they had me pinned and bent over. All of them were taking turns hunching on me while grabbing my one fully developed breast-the other stuffed with toilet paper. (I was one of those girls-who for almost a year-had one fully developed A-cup left breast while the right one remained swollen and looking like a little bud that, at any moment was going to pop out and catch up with the other one).

I tried hard to keep my balance and not fall to that filth because I knew that it would be a bad situation if they got me down on that floor, but before I knew it-my back was flat to that filthy floor-I couldn't over power them at all.

They all hovered over me, as I screamed for Leroy's help. I could hear him faintly from beneath the chest of one of the musty boys lying on top of me hunching and pumping me wildly while I screamed and cried my heart

out. This three-minute catastrophe was so barbaric and painful that it seemed like I lay there for hours. I was so tired and worn out that it felt to me, what it must feel like for football players running into one another on the football field.

Old Man Leroy had the door to his store and counter's entry and exit wall so booby-trapped (from being afraid that this kind of thing would happen to his cash register rather than a person) that it took him *forever* to get from behind that damned counter. Knowing Leroy, he probably was struggling to decide how he was going to watch his cash register while trying to help me fight off the pack of wolves.

I never recalled Leroy's candy store ever getting robbed, so all of that self-made booby trapped wiring he did to lock himself in (while servicing the neighborhood through that stingy eleven by fourteen window), ended up backfiring on poor little me-laying there getting treated like a piece of meat that had been tossed into that lion's den.

By the time Leroy made his way out to them (with his rolled up newspaper in one hand and a full forty ounce bottle of beer in the other-as weapons) they had all scattered about; busting their way out of the beat up wired self-made front door.

Leroy kneeled down to me as I lay there in fetal position, crying my heart out. He began apologizing to me while running all their names off to me. I held my hand up to quiet him as I shook my head and said: "No, no need for that. I already knew who they are."

They all hung out together-every single day. None of them lived on our street. Each one lived a couple of streets over and the ringleader lived in a different neighborhood altogether. They had friends on my street that they would visit, so everybody knew who they were from being known as big-time troublemakers. Each one of them had double names like: Tom-Tom, Bay-Bay, Day-Day, Ray-Ray and Kay-Kay. The ringleader was the only

one with a single syllable acronym name (one that he earned, courtesy of a cable tv channel-because it was rumored that he was the original inventor of stealing cable television). That earned him massive street-cred and the moniker of an entire cable channel's acronym in place of his own (real) name.

“Go get your brother's baby, go on and get your brother's!” Leroy said to me as I began to peel my tired little body off of his filthy sticky floor. I felt *so* icky.

“Say no more,” I gestured and said to Leroy. I was so agitated and disgusted.

I then peeled myself off of his filthy floor-still holding on to my brown bag full of goodies.

The first day I got my period, and feeling ever so violated; I stood up and placed my hands to my knees, bowed my head and cried and little puddle of tears that fell straight from my eyes down to the sticky floor without even rolling down my cheeks. “Does anybody have any reason why these two should not be joined together in holy matrimony? Speak now or forever hold your peace.”

...In an instant; my big day was squashed; squashed like a woman's wedding getting interrupted by an objection unforeseen. I felt so robbed of my special day-all lost to these saps who had no idea what they were in for, when I made my way out past Leroy's beat up store door that he was standing there holding open while yelling at Cable Boy and his boys outside:

“Stupid little twerps down there humping on that lil' girl! You lil' nasty fuckers! Get 'way off from in front of my store! Get 'way from here! Don't come back 'round here no more! I'm getting my gun! I'ma get it! I'll get 'cha's!” he threatened; still swinging that forty ounce of beer and rolled up newspaper as if he was going to do some serious damage with them

both. Those weapons of choice he had in his hands did not convince these thugs that he had anything remotely close to a real gun near or on him. They proceeded to curse and laugh at Leroy as if he was merely cracking jokes with them.

My walk home from Leroy's was all but two minutes away. From my porch, I could step right down and peek around the corner to see if Leroy was open-on any given day.

When I got to the corner of my building and in front of my porch, I turned to make sure those heathens were all still standing there arguing with Leroy. They had no care or concern that I was gasping and crying hysterically. They had no idea that I had just become a "woman" some nine hours earlier that day, and in an instant-they made me and it feel icky like Leroy's sticky floor that they plastered me to.

By the time I placed my right foot onto the first step of my porch, it was like an alarm had gone off in the neighborhood: my mom was just getting out of the car from work. People were running up to her trying to tell her what Old Man Leroy had told them. All the while, you could still hear Cable Boy and his boys laying into Leroy with laughter, watching him fight with words and a forty ounce.

"Are you okay Angie! Are you okay baby?" my mother kept asking me over and over-while in between her care and concern; calling upstairs to Twin so that he could get downstairs to kill the muthafuckas and save her the trouble...

"What's wrong with Angie!" Twin yelled from the first floor window-repeatedly-all the way down the steps while slipping on his sneakers at the same time. He busted through the front door:

“What’s wrong with Angie? What’s wrong with Angie?” he continued asking. All the while getting prepared to kick *somebody’s* ass for every teardrop he was watching fall down my face-that’s all he knew.

All I had to do was stand back away from the porch, get close to the curb, and point down to the sight of Leroy still trying to swat Cable Boy and his boys ‘way off from in front of his store. Twin could sum up what happened from there. Say no more, because he commenced to saving my mother the muthafuckin’ trouble by charging across the street like a lightning bolt; going in on all six of those fools with the speed and force of a rolling bowling ball knocking down a full set of pins. He was knocking and socking three of the boys at one time, while they were falling into Leroy’s wooden and wired barely there door. They were so caught off-guard; yelling and screaming for dear life-while catching quick, swift savage beat downs from one fiercely angry boy who loved his twin sister despite how much he picked on her.

The other three sat from across the street watching in horror, still knowing they did not stand a chance even if they tried to do a six-on-one. My brother was a madman that day-like a bull in a China shop. Those boys had no idea how hard my brothers worked to treat me like a little princess and refrain from taunting me with the daily: “stop-punching-me-I’ll-let-go-of-your-collar” jokes for the day, and now this? Oh hell no.

In what seemed like the blink of an eye, and a scene out of a movie; my now crazed twin brother made his way across the street to the other three boys. Cable Boy was the first to shoot off running up the back way of our street. The two remaining boys got smashed together like a set of bowling ball pins entrapped in my brother’s hands. One fell to the ground, as my brother held on to the other one. With the one under his foot, and the other in a full-nelson; Twin was hungry for that ringleader. He yelled out to the onlookers: “Where did [Cable Boy] go? Where did he go? Where did he

go? Where did he go? Where did he go?"

We all knew (if you weren't from the neighborhood) the uphill direction that Cable Boy ran-was the only way off of the street. And from the very bottom (where we were); getting to the top of it was quite a long ways to go-even if you ran rather than walked. The unfortunate part about not actually living on our street was that, like snitching, we had a "code" of our personal street. Nobody was to ever know or go through the quick secret back way to get *off* of the street if you didn't live on the street. Cable Boy and his boys didn't know that if you did not make that dash to the right, and through the wooded back alley down past Old Man Leroy's store; your only way off our street was that long haul up hill. No matter how cool you were with the boys on our street, that secret back exit to get off the street was privileged information that only the boys in the neighborhood shared amongst one another-just in case they ever needed to use it for a quick getaway. Cable Boy and his boys weren't privy to that information, so Cable Boy had no choice but to run the wrong and long way.

The APB was put out on him, and all my brother's friends headed up the back side and front sides of the street to make sure he would be cornered from wherever they met him on the hill, which ended up being about mid-ways before he was off the street. When they cornered him; they backed him down towards the front side of the street where my brother walked slowly up on him like the grim reaper. You could practically hear theme music playing. I don't know if Cable-Boy was opening his mouth to apologize, plead his case, talk shit or all three, but before he could utter a full sentence, my brother had his hands around his throat; lifting him off the ground as if he was a killer in a horror movie. Cable-Boy tried his best to fight back but he could not, he was in complete shock. Twin then released him so that he could allow Cable-Boy to go toe-to-toe with him, but instead, Cable Boy threw what looked like a terribly rehearsed drop-

kick that he had rehearsed one too many times with his lil' brother and cousin's. That puny little leg got caught up in my brother's hands like a fly trap-it seemed to annoy Twin even further.

He then lifted Cable-Boy up and tossed his body on top of the banister railing that hang six-feet high over the cement-walled basement apartment where my third-grade girlfriend lived with her dad, brother and sister. In what was looking like a murder about to be committed; my third-grade girlfriend and her dad stepped outside their door only to see poor Cable-Boy hanging from their basement apartment railing looking like a piglet being roasted while trying hard to catch his breath.

Twin was merciless as he pushed, punched, bent and bitch-slapped Cable-Boy like a slab of lard while hanging him over the railing as if he wanted his body to break in two. My third-grade girlfriend walked up the steps to me and began to rub my hair and forehead, then asked:

“Are you okay Boo? Are you okay?”

“Yes,” I nodded back to her.

As a nickname of endearment, she always called me “Boo,” way before it was a popular term of endearment.

Twin was busy handling his functions for his sister-torturing that poor boy. My TGGF's father was finally able to convince him to unwrap Cable-Boy from hanging six-feet over and above the cement floor of his basement apartment:

“Come on my man, let him go, he ‘got your point-he don’t want no more. Let him live young-blood, calm down. Your sister’s alright now my man. This lil’ knucklehead punk’s not worth it-let him go. Look at him crying. Let him down man, he’s not worth it,” pleaded my TGGF's father.

My brother then unwrapped Cable from the railing and lifted him back safely over and onto the ground.

He was so weak and crying at this point that he had no more energy to

try that cornball ass drop-kick he pulled at first. Unlike the loudmouth he was earlier; he limped back toward the top of the hill to freedom as if he was just released from a cage. It was he-who know had his hand over his brow, looking to the light for God to lead his ass up and away from Twin, and out of my neighborhood-where he had no business carrying on like they way he did in territory uncharted by knowledge he was not privy to...

~~~~~

Life eventually returned back to normal, and I was back to having fun with my friends again.

We liked to get together and take turns singing our favorite songs to each other and using one another for each other's audience. The fun in it (for a few) was giggling at my TGGF-she sang the worse out of everyone and couldn't hold a note if her life depended on it-lord knows she tried. For about two years already, she and I had been secret kissing buddies, so I secretly had her back-no matter her shortcomings, awkward ways or in spite of the fact that she did not fit in with my other friends; just me-outside of them...

In addition to taking turns singing, a life that was good and normal also included whipping out the tetherball and rope, then heading to the bottom of the street to wrap it around the pole and go at it for hours at a time. All who wanted to play, knew the rules: just take a seat at the end of the wall and wait your turn to step up to (me) the tetherball champ; whose forearms stayed red, swollen and welted so much that the pain eventually turned numb.

The only time I would get a break and some sit down time at the end of that line on the cement wall, was when big-corn fed Jasmine would bring her bodacious presence to the set. Her apartment was way up the street towards the top of the hill, all she had to do was step outside and look down

the hill for a crowd, screams, laughter and commotion. She knew that we were huddled there and it was game-on. It was like she could sense the excitement in her body, so she would head down that hill to prepare us for her reign of terror. We would know when she was coming because we could practically feel the earth move under her feet. When she would arrive down to the bottom of that hill, she would change the energy of the whole game. It was one thing to be beating my friends in the game-it was challenging, but fun. We spent a lot of time laughing at everybody stepping up with their “A” game having told themselves that this time, they were going to sit *me* down. But when Jasmine would sit at the end of the wall, I would get annoyed from having to use up all my endurance; knocking that ball back and forth from playing with my mediocre-skilled friends, knowing full-well that I was going to need all the endurance I could muster up in order to play Jasmine’s big corn-fed ass. Because of the tension, our laughter and fun of the sport would turn serious and quiet. All our brows would be frowned up, and we seemed to be fighting one another with the ball in between us-instigating the fight.

It was one thing for me to be kicking butt in tetherball, but she gave kicking butt in tetherball a whole new meaning. It was like, when she would hit the ball, if you weren’t quick and careful; she could wrap you around the pole with the rope *and* the ball. The tetherball had its own sound when she would hit that bitch. It sounded as though she would bust a whole in the ball each time she hit it. If you played her too hard, and she was forced to use both hands, we would pray that the rope was tied to the pole and the ball tight enough, because we remembered all too well, both flying off the pole and headed uphill a time or two or three.

Part of me hated Jasmine’s presence on the set because she didn’t have that kind of “respect-fear:” that fear of being defeated-not even possibly. It was almost like she knew she was going to beat everyone twice over but wanted to come down and interrupt the game just to stroke her own ego. I

would sometimes hold the ball and rope in my hand, then glance over and scowl at her. I would fantasize about the rope being long enough to toss the ball out to swing toward her face, so I could say: “oops, ‘scuse me,” just so she could look me in my face before giving me a run for my money and sitting me down. The way she would sit there eating her barbeque potato chips and orange Jungle Juice, smacking all loud and paying no attention to other people’s game-totally annoyed me. She wouldn’t turn her head away out of fear or shyness, bur rather, sheer disregard-as if in her mind, she was saying: “I can beat you with my eyes closed.” She even disregarded her champion opponent at the pole-always. She didn’t give a damn who won, because she knew her big heavy handed ass was going to clear the set real quick after a round or maybe two, because nobody wanted to play against her with the exception of me and “If-You-Stop-Punching-Me-I’ll-Let-Go-Of-Your-Collar” [girl].

Watching big Jasmine and Collar Girl go at that tetherball would be like letting two beasts in the wild go at it in a game of survival of the fittest. It was always a treat and a long entertaining match to watch. Sometimes it would go so long that you would either forget which one won or you would be so tired from vertigo, and your head bouncing from left to right: Jasmine (then Collar Girl). Jasmine (then Collar Girl). Jasmine (then Collar Girl). Jasmine (then Collar Girl)...by the time the game was over, we really didn’t care who won.

Listening to the sound of both of them hit the ball was an experience in and of itself. Each punch sounded as if the air was trying to escape both their abuse, or like the ball itself, wanted to take legs and run. I could only relive the pain my head was going through while Collar Girl made her way up my steps and beat the crap out of me that one day-three years earlier. I wanted out of that ass-whipping: stat! It seemed like she had so much fun at my screaming and poppin’ her collar; that ever since that day, she only felt half alive if she wasn’t teaming up and starting trouble with another

shit-starter nicknamed “T-Rubble.” Her nickname was fitting, because all she did was stir up riff-raff and trouble. The both of them would be doing their best to terrorize me, but I was a defiant little something. **Nobody** was going to bully me comfortably and easily. I had been there-done that in my little life-time years before this and refused to allow it to blossom and manifest ever again.

No matter how many times I sat outside on my porch, from four doors up where Collar Girl and T-Rubble would be sitting, a rock would always come flying down-hitting me upside the head. Even after screaming and nearly stomping a hole in my porch’s cement steps, and yelling at them both with the force of a good tetherball beating; you best believe I was coming *right* back outside to sit *right* back on *my* porch. Sometimes I would get fed up enough with the rock throwing, that I would run off the porch to go and fight back. And each time, I would run into Collar Girl’s fist.

No matter *how* many black eyes she gave me, I *refused* to let her scare me away to oblivion. I was not going to be forced in to staying in the house because of these girls. I had no shame, and besides, I was lived there first! I wasn’t going anywhere! Trying to bully me was a full-time job. I insisted it be.

Bully me? Oh hell no!

At eleven years old, I had way too much eleven year old clout: The love and adoration from of every parent of my eleven year-old peers, all the way down to the love and respect from our church and Sunday school teachers. I was the lead in every church play and provided spontaneous entertainment many-a-day, for the adults and older teenage girls who would stop me from playing with my friends just to ask:

“Angie, do me an acting scene where the girl is in love with someone!”

“Angie, do me an acting scene where the girl is fed up with her cheating husband and she’s going to leave him!”

“Angie, do me an acting scene where the girl just got attacked!”  
I nearly had to take orders for the requests I was given.

Innocent, kind and totally shameless without a shy bone in my body- whatever you would ask me-without any thought, or contemplation-spontaneously; I would deliver. I was happy, athletic, humorous, animated, theatric, artistic and dramatic. From age nine, I attended a school where I was being groomed for art, drama and dance; so the adults and the older teenage girls where I lived always wanted me to exhibit what it was I was learning five days a week/eight hours a day while away from home.

I would burst into character for them, and then laugh afterwards while they would all clap and hug me with words of encouragement: “You see? That baby’s going to be somebody-watch and see!” The people of the streets where I was raised, made me feel so special. They had no idea about my secrets and the life I had been living up through that very day. They were so helpful for my self-esteem and self-worth and I didn’t even know it at the time. I had no idea that I so badly needed their words of encouragement that later-ended up meaning more to me than they would have ever known...

Other times the adults and older teens would put singing requests in: “Sing something for me Angie!” they would say. I loved to pretend to be exhausted and overwhelmed by all their requests and surprising them by bursting out impromptu classics like: Natalie Cole: “Keeping a Light,” Deniece Williams’: “Gonna Take a Miracle,” “Silly,” or “Too Much Too Little Too Late.” It would be shocking to them because it was uncommon for a girl my age who (little did they know) had been studying and teaching myself just *how* to sing just like whomever I would be singing. I was an expert at imitating the Natalie Cole’s and the Deniece Williams’ with the emotion of heartbreak, shame and despair, as if I had experienced everything that I was singing about. Other times, I would be singing

Natalie Cole's: "Our Love" or Deniece Williams': "Free"-gesturing and performing for them while standing on the steps in front of our brownstone-like apartments; singing about love and freedom from the type of relationship that I still had yet to experience, and was light-years away from being able to identify with-but singing and them as if somehow, I too (at eleven years old) had experienced every lyric.

While every sinister, secret and wrong thing was going on; everything else was going right. Because I didn't see the sinister and the secrets as wrong, but rather: "right"-right along with all that going my way. From my eleven year-old point of life's view, the only sinister and wrong worth reporting to my mom was a first-grade bully named Cindy and the pre-teen blues that Cable Boy and his boys, Collar Girl and T-Rubble all gave me. All else felt good, because I knew what felt bad: getting beat-up, black-eyes, gang-grinded, and bullied did not feel good. In my life up through this point, *that* is what "made me feel uncomfortable."

So, bully me? Oh hell no!

At eleven years old, I had too much clout as well as a mentor at that time, and much earlier in my eleven year old life as well. Life could have started off badly and with me having my spirit broken had it been up to Mrs. Cavanaugh. She was a fat meanie of a teacher who spent most of my kindergarten school year disciplining, yelling and placing our noses into chalk drawn circles on the blackboard.

She would have us stand there for the entire class on most days, occasionally switching us off by placing us underneath her desk and stuffed between her fat legs and stinky feet.

She spent practically my entire kindergarten year doing this to all of us kids, putting these acts in heavy rotation as if this was part of the school curriculum. It didn't seem to bother me once I got home any more than it did when I got free from under her desk while at school.

Life at home for me was so busy. I was always at church with the Lord

and the Mormons, who set up worship down in the basement apartment at the back end of my building.

I divided the other half of my time with the Lord and Reverend Knight of the Baptist church.

Both churches were on the opposite ends of the city just like they were the antithesis of one another-in the way that they fellowshiped and the way that they looked. Reverend Knight's church was a complete hole in the wall with drapes that varied in design and color. You could tell they were hung for blocking shade rather than vanity. His pews were a few, but where the pews stopped, the metal chairs held us comfortably and safely. It was there where I learned my first black gospel song: "I'm Goin' Up To Yonder." I was serious business about singing that song from the bottom of my lil' heart. At least once a month the church would sing it and allow me to start it off until the chorus part of the song would begin, and then the choir would take over from there. I loved them for that. I fell more in love with the church and the Lord, so much so that at six years-old I orchestrated my own baptism down to the night gown that I wanted my mom to buy for me, to wear for it: "Pastel Easter colors"- I insisted and made happen.

My other part-time with the Mormons was special to me too. I would be prepared-with my hair in ponytails, those black patent leather shoes (thank ya' much), white stockings, and full length slip already on. In the basement of the apartment building that I lived in, located three windows beneath my bedroom window; the moment I would hear those Mormons crack the door open, I would hurriedly put on one of my many ruffled dresses that I had laying out-ready to wear. I was serious-business about dressing and being prepared for church and you had better disturb my groove: "Here I come! Here I come!" I would yell out my window-bright and early; bidding my mom farewell in a hurry, then dashing down to the little neat and tidy basement church with rows of wooden pews to spare, matching curtains and no metal chairs. Over in the corner would be what I

often thought about and loved so much: those pretty golden bells. I would slip my little fingers into the black handles and grab me one, and then we would be off to the neighborhood to paint it golden: me and the Mormons—ringing our church bells and collecting as many people as we could magnetically attract, to follow us back to the little basement church.

They didn't discriminate. I didn't discriminate. Everybody from 8 to 80, blind, young, crippled or crazy would have service with us. I welcomed them all because that was my church home, too.

Before service would begin (which consisted of quietly reading the scripture and modestly singing from hard cover hymnals); I would make sure all of our pretty golden bells were placed back in the corner of the church in their righteous place for the next time we would wake up the neighborhood for followers and fellowship. Those bells to me—were like diamonds. I polished them so good that they never had a scratch on them. I guarded those things with my life.

Both churches welcomed me with open arms. I was so inspired and happy that I cared nothing about my kindergarten teacher Mrs. Cavanaugh or my kindergarten through first grade bully: Cindy.

She knew my routine and would frequently hear me say that I had to hurry home to pee so that I could come right back outside to play. I was always in a tight and a rush to get home. Cindy took it upon herself to follow me home one day and forced me to pee in a corner by my building's basement back door, rather than allowing me to get up to our third floor apartment to pee in the toilet. When she passed that test, she figured she could make me do other things that I did not want to do—like harass my best friend Rhonda, all because she refused to reveal to Cindy; the Halloween costume that she was wearing in the school's Halloween parade.

Rhonda was defiant and would stand up to Cindy. Myself and everyone else gave in and showed our costumes, but Rhonda stood her ground. She



insisted that hers be a surprise and indeed, it was. She was so pretty and so happy in her red tights, blue body suit, a big gold belt, her mother's big gold bracelets and black wig; feeling like Wonder Woman for a day at our school parade.

To test Rhonda's super powers, afterschool, Cindy made me follow behind Rhonda on her route home-forcing little ole' me to try and intimidate Rhonda-for her. I felt so badly for my friend that in between my kicks and yells that I was told to give her, I kept apologizing. Rhonda already knew I had long been caught in the rapaciousness of Cindy's rage and ridiculousness, and there was nothing my little self could do about it.

After watching me kick and hit Rhonda too lightly, Cindy would get up in my face like a drill sergeant and yell some more-forcing me to hit Rhonda harder. She would not let up until she saw that I put Rhonda through some kind of torment.

Growing tired of Cindy's yells and needing to hurry home to pee, I caught Rhonda off-guard and hurriedly pushed her to the ground, then proceeded to run home, hoping I could beat Cindy there.

I did. I made it to my building, past the back basement door and up to my third floor-with my key around my neck and into safety.

While at church with the Mormons part-time, and at Reverend Knight's church the other part-time; I would pray to my Lord that eventually my dear friend Rhonda would forgive me, and that I would never have to put up with anyone like Cindy ever again. I was defiant, serious-business and hell-bent about not being bullied. So for a whole five years since then, the Lord had been making good on his promises to me up to and through Collar Girl. And she thought she was just going to bully me easily?

Bully me? Oh hell no!

My first grade teacher Mrs. Tolliver would have just as soon as broken her box of chalk to know that years later and after all her love, encouragement and grabbing me by the cheeks; forehead-to-forehead, grunting in my face and poking into my chest: “don’t you **ever** let anyone tell you: Angie-that you can’t do **anything**, because you can! You can do anything, and I know this!” she would assure me-daily. She would probably turn over in her grave to know that her passion for teaching and my ease at learning did not pay off, but instead, some bully who beats up tetherballs and got inspired by my poppin’ her collar, was now bullying me in ways that could have easily broken my spirit. Mrs. Tolliver was so impressed with the fact that at six years old, I knew how to spell words like “giraffe,” and countless other words that were spelled unlike they sounded, that she kept me and couple other ‘special” kids at a desk close by hers away from other kids. There was no way in hell she would accept anything not right or like-seep into or get next to her golden-child.

Bully me? Oh hell no!

My second grade teacher Mrs. Belland, would have just as soon as broken her box of number 2 pencils to know that years later and after all her love attention, and affection; some bully who beats up tetherballs and got inspired by my poppin’ her collar, was now bullying me in ways that could have ruined my self-esteem. Mrs. Belland was from Maryland; a shy, timid lily-white lil’ lady with a mushroom hair-do and bright blue eyes. You could tell that she had never been around one single non-white kid for this length of time in all her life. I was the only one with enough personality to bring her out of her shell to make her comfortable enough to run the class. I would sing-talk to her and end whatever I was sing-talking with the words: “Miss Belland from Mare-landddd.” She would spend the majority of the class teaching and squeezing me so tightly; rocking me back and forth like she never wanted to let me go. She needed me around- to give her the momentum she needed in order to do her job. She was interested in being there, but she was as scared as she was timid as she was

interested, but needed me to balance it all for her. I was her diamond-child.

Bully me? Oh hell no!

My third-grade teacher Mrs. Jasper, would have just as soon as let that pretty red apple on her desk rot to know that years later and after all her attention, adoration and encouragement; some bully who beats up tetherballs and got inspired by my poppin' her collar, was now bullying me in ways that would normally cause a child to withdraw from the world. Mrs. Jasper was the wife of one of the members in a classic singing group, so she loved to acknowledge and separate her singing talented kids from the ones who weren't. She treated the fifteen minute talent portion of her class as if it were a part of her curriculum. Mrs. Jasper was old-school and around my mother's age. Little did she know, my mother and older brother would play a lot of old-school classics around the house every Saturday morning that I would be cleaning up-and that's how I learned the songs I would sing. When Mrs. Jasper learned that I knew and could sing songs she could relate to, that at my age, I should have known nothing about; that won her over. I was her star-child.

Bully me? Oh hell no!

I had too much clout as well as a mentor: Mrs. Tipton from fourth grade through seventh-grade, who spent a tremendous amount of time: loving me, tending to me, adoring me, encouraging me *and* wishing I was her child. All my mother had to do was say she didn't want me and Mrs. Tipton would have been glad to hand her the walking papers. To know that some bully who beats up tetherballs, and got inspired by my poppin' her collar, was now bullying me in ways that would normally cause a child to have massive irreconcilable behavioral problems; she would have had a conniption fit. Anything that Mrs. Tolliver, Mrs. Belland and Mrs. Jasper felt, Mrs. Tipton felt it one better. Every single thing they felt I could do- Mrs. Tipton felt I could do it better. I was her baby "everything," let her tell it.

Bully me? Oh hell no! I had way too many people who looked after me and was growing up to be way too much of a lady for that kind of child's play.

My right boob was making its way to catching up the fully blossomed left boob I'll have you know. There was no way in hell Collar Girl or anyone was ever going to sit me down with a rock, a couple of threats, a black eye, and a finger in my face. I was blossoming, growing up, coming up and busting out in places that girls my age could only dream of, and I was slowly becoming more and more a little queen bee by the days. There was no way in hell, some girl was going to bully me and think she was going to have a pleasant life in my neighborhood-one that she arrived to well after I did.

I ruled with kindness, and interest in care about me. I was a happy child, with lots of personality-the queen bee of all of my peers and their parents. By the time the social dichotomy of how everything was forming, Collar Girl had to try and beat me in a major way that she could not: *earn* her own clout. Either that, or she had to make up her mind to put her fists and rocks down to try and join me (provided that I let her in). I had no enemies, so I was not going to keep putting up with that bullshit. She however, was just as defiant and insistent on bullying me and my other friends as I was insistent on not being bullied. I had no idea where she came from with all this fight and fire inside of her, but I was a lover-not a fighter. I loved everyone and everyone loved me. That pushed she and T-Rubble out and away. I was untouchable, guarded and protected, and by this time, had no interest in letting either one of them in. I was running shit.

My friends and me would have "umbrella parties" and I was the head of them.

Like a gang would have you "jumped" in, to hang-you would have to "dump" in.

By invite, in order to be a part of my umbrella party you had to chip in

by stocking up on penny candy, watermelon Now & Laters hard candy, Crunchy Cheese Doodles and Little Hug juice drinks. From there, you would have to step into our private little huddle (if I liked you and you liked my friends). I was such a female king and elitist from having being taught and experiencing that different things had their place-even if that included people, so, not too many invites had been given out because my little club was exclusive and you couldn't jump-in empty handed.

When you would get behind those two big umbrellas to block the view from the outside of the porch, you had to place your brown bag-front and center and then dump your penny candy, watermelon Now & Laters hard candy, Crunchy Cheese Doodles and Little Hug juice drinks. Low and behold if you came in with a couple of Snickers or Payday candy bars, you got extra love and special consideration during initiation. I was the gatekeeper of that covert operation and if I heard footsteps coming anywhere near our huddle, I would slide that umbrella over to the side and peek from behind it; squinting my eyes and daring anyone to try and infiltrate.

One thing about me was that I was nice and fair to everybody. But if you were mean to me-I'd never fuck with you, and you'd feel and regret it in the worse way. The tug-of-war and eleven year-old social clout of mine forced Collar Girl and T-Rubble to be closer to one another than each of them really preferred to. By the time I was through with those bitches, they had no one but each other to hang out with. They didn't have to see too much of each other however, because if it wasn't for Collar Girl's aunt and uncle, and T-Rubble's older brother putting them on punishment four out of the seven days of the week; they barely made it outside to see one another anyways. They just conducted the majority of their shenanigans, bull crap and shit-starting from their bedroom windows, while me and my peers went swimming, attended church, camps, Sunday school, karaoke and played tetherball, all-with a special kind of peace.

In between the talks about “life,” with my dad, observing my mom (who lived life and whose thought process was the total antithesis of my dad), life at the school I was attending, the secrets, and the way I was living my life up through this point; I was slowly learning about secrecy, compartmentalization, cliques and elitism. My queen bee wings were growing by the day.

At home, everything was right, comfortable and going my way.

I was a growing little lady and knew all too well that I was a growing little lady, without fully understanding (at the time) just how I got like that—my body, my ways and my mind.

However, now was the time to make everybody take notice, and to be treated like the queen bee that I had blossomed into.

So save the narrative.

Anybody got a problem with that had to speak (now) or forever hold their peace...

**THE QUEEN BEE in ME**

“Playtime” was nearing an end, when my right boob woke up for good and finally said hello to the world. The completely developed left one had been around for about a year. That right one had finally caught up with it. Both had now arisen: perky and straight-forward like they were kissing the wind. I was *so* happy to rid myself of having to stuff the right side of my right bra with tissue. It was such a task trying to demi-plie’ and arabesque my way through dance class with Mrs. Eckhardt constantly pirouetting up and down past all of us-patting and positioning our body parts.

Like clock-work it seemed to happen. Right at the moment where I’d stand facing the bar in first position: heel-to-heel, then turning with one hand on the bar-arm extended; frappe’ing forward then backwards. That seemed to always be the moment she would move in. She used that as her chance to run by and hold us by the front of our chests to straighten our backs, then she would look down and smack our asses-checking for any jiggle whatsoever. If she caught any jiggle she would yell out loud: “jelly booty-no jelly booty!” I had been so tired of trying to guard my right titty tissue while trying to keep my ass tight in dance class for Mrs. Eckhardt’s approval. Thanks to her, it had been no problem bouncing quarters off of it-all praises due to her pressure and scrutiny.

The summer of that school year, I turned twelve years-old and playtime was definitely over back home with the girls and me under those umbrellas: *“Playtime is over bitches! This aint no muthafuckin’ sit-in! I’m twelve years-old now and a full-grown queen bee, with cultured, polished and celebrated queen bee ways. It is now time to show and prove. I got my titty in full bloom-sitting up on perk, my ass tight and on perk and a fully blossomed flower with lots of grass on it. These lil’girl games are beginning to be a bit passe’ to me-the kissing and grinding games are getting tired. It’s time to try something different bitches!”* I may as well had

## ~READING GROUP GUIDE~

**1)** Although it happened some 20+ years prior, during a conversation with her mother, Angie revealed some of what had gone on in her life (with regard to her being molested) whereby, she (herself) was taken aback by her mother's "fresh like it had just happened yesterday" kind of response. In the book, Angie stated that because she was participating, enjoying [and in one particular case]: even "seducing" one of her offenders; she never regarded her being violated as "molestation," and always had a hard time seeing herself as a victim (although she was a child).

a. How did that reach you, or make you feel?

b. What or how did that make you think about cases like that?

c. Have you ever heard of such a reaction or misunderstanding/misinterpretation coming from a victim of molestation?

d. Angie also stated that because she didn't go on to having deviate fetishes and thoughts and desires surrounding pedophilia, porn addiction, drugs, prostitution, bed-wetting, acting out, other behavioral problems etc; she just didn't think her being molested affected her in any way. In having read [book1/Innocence] of the trilogy; do you think that what happened to her manifested in any way and perhaps showed up in other ways? (Do not interject any thoughts or opinions about other excerpts or sneak peeks that you may have read off her website from book2/Naivete').

**2)** Do you think that Angie and her TGGF ever grow out of that situation they had going on?

a. Do you think it was a "phase" or something that will probably continue or re-surface in book2/Naivete' or book3/Sophistication?

b. Do you think the TGGF will end up being a mere BFF as Angie gets older in book2/Naivete' or book3/Sophistication?



**3)** How do you feel about “Ms. You Know Who?” Do you think that she dropped the ball too soon or do you think that (as woman herself-who too I am more than sure, experienced that teenage love and rebellion phase); felt that it was too much to contend with?

a. Do you think she could have handled it any more differently than she did? How would you have handled such as situation? (If you were “Ms. You Know Who”).

b. Thus far, in having only read (and sticking strictly to this book1/Innocence), how would you guess that Angie’s life would have turned out had she followed through with Ms. You Know Who’ “life plan” that she had mapped out for her-under her mentorship. (Think about and consider all situations that happened through to the end of this book1/Innocence).

**4)** How and what do you feel about Angie’s *mother*? (Everything: what type of person she was, what she did, what she didn’t do, what she should have done, what she could have done differently) etc.

**5)** How and what do you feel about Angie’s *father*? (Everything: what type of person he was, what he did, what he didn’t do, what he should have done, what he could have done differently) etc.

**6)** What do you feel about life in general, as compared to what Angie’s situation and feelings were (with regard to the artsy-school she attended)?

**7)** What do you feel about Santana? Do you think they will break up and get back together and end up together throughout the 3-books/trilogy and live that “happily ever after” in spite of all that had gone on thus far? (Do not interject any thoughts or opinions about other excerpts or sneak peeks that you may have read off her website from book2/Naivete’).  
What do you think will become of them (together)?

**8)** What is your interpretation of what was going on at the very end of the book-at “Day 7” through “Day 8” (the last 4 pages of the story)?

**\*BONUS QUESTION\*** So, she (Angie) mentioned that thanks to Madonna's song "Papa Don't Preach" ringing in her head and playing on her heart; she could not term the pregnancy. Although we do not know what is going to become of that child throughout the trilogy, hypothetically speaking, if so-with Madonna having adopted all these kids, she's got another one out here she doesn't even know about huh?

\*In order to understand the joke, you would have to know that Madonna's adopted a few kids. :)

## ~MEET the AUTHOR Q & A~

### 1) How did you come up with the idea for this book?

The original 'idea' (which began in 1997) was this same story and pretty much the same concept. However, as a novice-then; my writing style was indicative of what was "popular" at that time: the self-help/spiritual guru craze. And even though my story *was* what it *is* (then and now), I had the book broken down as such that I was kind of "evaluating" each chapter and speaking to my readers as if I was identifying a problem & providing a lesson by finding a solution for it.

There were three big chapters: "Innocence," "Naivete," and "Sophistication." But the "lessons" were listed in categories of how we evolve. First by: learning ourselves, then earning ourselves (having being done by way of surrendering things that stunted our growth and involvement-be it by way of people, certain situations, circumstances etc.)

I completed the manuscript (which ended up being 600 pages).

When I took a step back from it and evaluated it after some time, I started *hating* it-badly. I got discouraged. So I sat the manuscript down-for years. In 2000, I picked it back up and started to "fine-tune" it. And that's when my feelings of *being* discouraged turn into courage. Because I began to re-write it honestly and from *my* voice-instead of trying to interject what the "new what's-happening" was (that self-help/spiritual market).

I'm already a spiritual person just-by nature. So I had a long talk with myself. I told myself to stop trying to write to please a whole world of people-so as to not offend, appall or isolate anyone. In short: BE YOURSELF ANGELA. The only way I could "be myself" was to write: introspectively, reflectively, and efficaciously. I had to tell myself to let the motivational/inspirational/self-help gurus (who define themselves as that) do their thing, and me-do mine. And in order for me to be myself and do my own thing; I had to come to realization that I was *indeed* going to offend, appall and isolate some people (in the world). I struggled with that. But I dealt with it.

I had to condition myself, to believe in myself by saying: "*so what, there is an audience out there that will appreciate you simply being yourself. And*

*since you are naturally spiritual and a good storyteller; narrate your story as such that if there is any self-help, motivation and inspiration to be found within it; allow the reader to find it for themselves within the message in the story. Narrating and storytelling is your strength, so stick to that-even if you only have ten readers who love you. Do not try to please everybody. People who like you-will find their way to you and stick to you.”* That is the talk I **had** to have with myself. And after conditioning myself to write honestly and from the heart (introspectively, reflectively, and efficaciously); that 600-page manuscript looked a complete mess to me-how stupid and fake I sounded trying to be a little bit of myself plus tell a story, but at the same time, trying to be something that I wasn't-simply because sententious was popular.

So in order to do it *my way*, I put out of my mind; having an audience of ten, one-hundred, one-thousand, ten-thousand or one-hundred thousand. I allowed myself to be my own audience. I then taped to the wall, these words when I began the re-write:

- Introspective
- Reflective
- Self-Efficacious

Although the concept and story was still in the crux of the manuscript; it required a complete literary overhaul. Page for page, and paragraph by paragraph; I was reading from the manuscript's (fakeness) and had to turn to the computer and say: *“Okay, now write it how you really wanted to write it. Say it how you really wanted to say it-and without fear of being judged and feeling the pressure to be apart of the guru market-share. Just do you-Boo.”*

It was one of the most liberating but expensive, emotionally and creatively taxing experiences I had never gone through. Because the re-write had taken me more time to do, than it actually took for me to write the book itself. That experience (though it took years to discover) taught me a *big* lesson in being comfortable in my own writing skin: that even if my style or “way” wasn't the “new what's happening-” as long as I remained true to myself from start to finish; the task will be smooth and nothing but a total labor of love that will surely birth nothing but pretty little unique babies with their own look.

The lesson: be your own guru-your own way. Even if in the end, they have to create a genre around you...

## **2) Why the title? And how did it come about?**

The original title was called: "Keeping Secrets." I gave it that title because (as you know from reading the story) "Angie" (the main character) talks about many things that were kept secret, and how she had grown so accustomed to the "covert;" that almost by second nature, she was "pro-vert," (with all that was secret and covert). But then in the middle of my re-write, I discovered there were so many *situations* within the story surrounding and within the main character: "Angie," that I felt compelled to change the title to: "Angie Situation."

**3) Speaking of "*so many situations within the story, surrounding, and within the main character: 'Angie.'*" All that is packed in to her journey, life and experiences within this book; the reader learns a whole lot about: bullying, peer-pressure, molestation, sexuality, tween growing pangs, the mentor-mentee relationship, sexuality, sexual identity, bi-sexuality, teenage love and rebellion, teenage angst, the parent-child relationship (father-daughter/mother-daughter), elitism, classicism and teenage-pregnancy. Did you have to do a lot of research in order to bring so many important, taboo, and heavy issues into the story?**

Scientific research-no. I went with and wrote on life as I know it, experienced it, heard tale of, supposed, witnessed and observed-period.

**4) It is interesting to read this story from the voice of "Angie" (the story's main character) and her thoughts behind the goings on. Yet, we can clearly see all the other characters involved in the story as well. We know their personalities without you going in heavily on physically "describing" them and making your readers paint-by-number/page for page; trying to bring those characters to life through extensive physical description and excessive dialogue. It's like, you go right in to narrating your characters, and as we read on, we already know what they look like, what type of person they are, and how and why they do what they do within their role/character without a lot of description**

**and dialogue about them, in order to bring them to life. How did you manage to do that and why?**

When I write, I like to write how I like to read. And when I read, I want to read as though I am reading someone's diary. I want to read as though someone is telling me a story: uninterrupted-uninterrupted by my asking questions and uninterrupted by excessive quotations and dialogue.

To me-a book is just like a diary. When we kept a diary, we didn't write a lot of dialogue and quotations in order to describe a conversation, secret, desire or happening. And when we talked about a *person* in our diary, we didn't go heavy in on describing them. We described them within the context of talking *about* them.

Don't "remind" me that I am reading a book. Make me *feel* like I am reading a diary (or watching a movie).

The "rule" in (fiction) writing is dialogue.

The "rule" of Angela Sherice fiction is "narration" and some dialogue (when absolutely necessary).

Because when you think about it, when a person buys a book and goes to tuck themselves away in the corner of a couch or an area to read it, they almost do it like it's a secret. (Take a look around at people at the bookstore-next time you go in). And when they go off to read a book, they tuck themselves away like they are hiding a secret. They want to be left alone to read [it]. When you catch someone staring at the book in your hand at the library or bookstore, what do you do? You draw back and frown, just like you would with a letter in your hand. Words are emotionally powerful (and personal).

How often is it that two people get together and cuddle up in the corner of a couch and read out of the same book together? That visual is odd isn't it? That (to me), is because the reader wants to be a voyeur. And for me (in my opinion), I think it (subconsciously) forces the reader to *think* while reading (when there is too much quotation dialogue and description).

I feel that as a writer, if you are thorough enough in your storytelling; you can build the character's personality, their description and the scene right in your readers head through good narration and storytelling versus too much quotation-conversation (dialogue) and list-like description.

The five senses are *magical*. I'm an extreme "sensualist." And to me-reading is as personal as it is sensual, especially novel/fiction. Your words,

your writing, and your storytelling can send your voice narrating to a reader's head like a movie in front of their eyes, and theme music in their ears.

Too much dialogue (quotation-conversation) and description in order to build a scene makes a reader think and ascertain rather than see and voyeur. Readers tuck themselves away because they want to be a voyeur. I insist on allowing them to voyeur when they open up my book. I did all the thinking when I wrote it. None of the five senses require "thought." I just want the reader to voyeur and enjoy.

As a writer, I do not treat a book or novel any less different than a diary or a handwritten letter.

**5) Speaking of characters. Some of your characters, you do give actual names to, while others-you give names like: "Ms. You Know Who," "Ms. Beautiful," "Painful Pam," "TGGF," "Basketball Lena," etc. That is very interesting, but why do you do that?**

I do that almost for the same reason I elaborated on in the previous question.

As a writer, I have the responsibility to take full control of how I deliver my story. And as I stated in the (previous) response, narrating the story works best for me so that I can allow my readers to sit back and watch a movie in their head by the words that their eyes are seeing-line for line. In doing so (using names like: "Ms. You Know Who," "Ms. Beautiful," "Painful Pam," "TGGF," "Basketball Lena," etc.), challenges me to make sure I have done a thorough enough job in narrating my character's personalities, and what significance they play in a scene. And in having delivered that, what they *do* should be more memorable than what their name is.

It's just like watching a movie or television show. When we are telling someone about something that we watched once or for the first time, we may be talking about ten different people within that movie or television show. We may be able to recall two or three of ten of their names (definitely not all ten). But one thing we *will* remember about *all* ten of them is: what they did, what they wore and what their role was in the movie or television show. In recalling or re-enacting the movie to someone,

when we don't recall the name-we will snap our fingers and say: "the one with the light-blue suit on-who showed up late to the meeting!" ... (and recall the name after that-if at all).

Well, for me [if the moment hits me while writing, I feel that because of the role he may have played in my book] that my reader may not recall his name; but the fact that I know I was thorough enough in narrating the scene and the character, I leave myself with the *option* to call him: "Michael," or call him: "The Late Man in the Light Blue Suit"

As I stated before-two things: As a writer, I respect my reader enough to allow them to relax and voyeur. I don't want them to have to snap their fingers and "think" when trying to recall a character from any of my books. I've already done the thinking for them (in that regard). I just want them to "feel." It's no different than they saying: "people will not remember exactly what you said to them, but rather, how you made them feel."

That's what I mean when I say that I am an "extreme sensualist." An extreme sensualist doesn't just use their own eyes; they try to use someone else's eyes to see what they see, touch what they touch, smell what they smell, taste what they taste and hear what they hear, as well.

An "extreme sensualist" will go the extra mile to *see* (and intermix): smell, taste, touch and sound, the same way a blind man has to go that extra mile to *hear* (and intermix): sight, touch and smell.

It may sound excessive and confusing to you, but I am the mother of a blind child, so for years, my senses are like that of a blind person. I've had to see, smell, touch, taste and hear for two people practically all my life, so for me-sensuality/the senses is second nature.

That being said, as a writer-I oversee my reader's senses like I've had to learn to oversee my child's senses-with him.

So in that regard, that's how the naming method fell into place for me. And in overseeing while writing, the task of remembering character's names takes me away from delivering a good story that my reader can experience.



And as I said before, from a creative standpoint, I let go of trying keep up with the “new what’s happening’s.” When I let go of trying to be that genre that hindered me from delivering good storytelling, I also stuck with all things (creatively) that worked for me-for my reader-as well.

So by my book “Michael” (the man in the light blue suit who showed up late for the meeting) might be: “The Late Man in the Light Blue Suit,” so that my reader can move on. I’m not going to tie their brains up with trying to remember “Michael” by name when there may be nine other characters within the story with names as well. They’re not necessarily going to remember all ten characters’ names, but they will remember what all ten characters did, (and how those characters made them feel).

#### **6) How has writing “Angie Situation” changed you, if at all, in any way?**

It humbled the hell out of me! Because (just like all novice writers feel) once that first manuscript is “completed,” I thought I was ready for the literary world. In addition to that, you couldn’t convince me that my manuscript wasn’t blessed after the fact that in October ’97, I had even gotten it to sit across of the desk at Oprah Winfrey’s. And the fact that it was 600 pages of blood, sweat and tears, had me feeling like the rest of my literary career and process would be easy as pie. I felt like I had almost arrived after hearing all those voices in my head of the ghosts of millions of people chanting: “I always wanted to write a book.” Well, I had done it. And to add homage to honor (after countless query letter mailings) a major New York publisher-Kensington Books did the proverbial rarity: wrote back and told me they were interested in reviewing some sample chapters of my manuscript after my writing and mailing to them-that winning query letter that piqued their interest. “So step aside world-here I come!”

All up to that point was the high, stimulated by ups and downs at the fact that Kensington began asking for a few different sections of the manuscript versus simply asking for the entire manuscript. It annoyed me, and I couldn’t understand why, until some time had passed and eating that humble pie: when I got the letter that they were going to pass on it. The only crumb I had left was the fact that I “almost” got picked up (maybe)-

which still meant nothing, since “almost” never counted for anything. That shook my faith in the book, so I closed it for three years and went on to write and complete three other manuscripts (to feed my “I can write a whole book” ego). One book in which a smaller publisher was interested in publishing (my astrology book): “in about two years” from date. I was serious about writing, and two years was a lot of time to just hang around-happy, when I knew I still had the book (“Keeping Secrets”/“Angie Situation”) lingering in my head.

By this time, it had become a handy-dandy footstool for all those years. I picked the book back up after three years, and dusted it off. As I began to look at it all over again, I could see it with a different set of eyes. I had done a lot of living, loving, thriving and growing (as a writer) and could now (finally) see what I suspect Kensington saw: The book’s story was the “diamond,” but the rest of it was fluff in the rough. The fluff was in the way—a distraction—and better suited for a whole other book (all the rhetoric and “lessons” of learning, earning, and surrendering—as mentioned in question number one). So I began to re-write it by being myself and writing in my own voice, versus trying to write so “safe” so as to not offend or appall any particular reader. In addition to that—I could clearly see what parts needed to be cut out, but it was interwoven so well with the storytelling that it was *very* hard to do—very hard to get to that diamond (buried) within the book. I suspected that editor knew if she asked for that entire manuscript—she would have turned me down immediately. Because after growing as a writer, I (myself) could tell that regardless what parts of a manuscript an editor asks for, the story should still flow and be able to be followed—regardless the break or interruption. Those certain sections, regardless which ones were asked to be sent via query, could tell a lot about the amount of editing that would have to be done to it in order to make it a marketable book that would resonate with readers and sell. I had to do some creative and personal soul-searching and reminiscing. Over those few years, I would allow some of my close work-friends, associates, and friends read the manuscripts and I would end up having conversations (and even handwritten letters) from them revealing to me—many things within the story they could relate to and had experienced.

That's when I realized that the diamond was in the story and the storytelling, not the fluff (surrounding it).

I could clearly see it-but not until after all those years.

The diamond was interrupted with too much "teaching." The attractiveness and thick of the book was in the story. Inter-mixing both (the storytelling and the teaching) made the book run all over the place.

I could finally see that Kensington sure as hell did not want to deal with all of that. It was a full-on, knock-down drag-out editing overhaul that even I (myself-the writer) did not want to tackle. So if I didn't want to do it, how could I expect them to?

My eyes and novice didn't know that, then. I was too busy being "impressed." I had to get rough and real with myself. First, by dropping and letting go of all that I had been "impressed" with:

- the fact that the manuscript lay across Oprah's desk once upon a time
- the fact that it got a second glance by a major New York publisher
- the fact that the manuscript was "600 pages" of a story
- the fact that I proved to my ego that I could write an entire book quicker than a person could write a love-letter

I had to slow down and get real with myself.

In getting real with myself, I had to have the same conversation with myself, **and** give myself the same advice that I would give to someone else who would ask me if they were in my shoes: *"you can remain impressed with those "impressionables" that really mean nothing anymore, other than the fact that you have a manuscript of "600 pages" that too, mean nothing. Because until those 600 pages are re-written right, you just have 600 pages of words on paper. Get over yourself and get over being impressed about something that amounted to and produced-nothing (for you or anyone else). Get to work on those 600 pages. Get to the crux and diamond that people are responding to and resonating with first: the story. Save the guru-ism and teaching for another book. Until then, those 600 pages will sit there and always serve no-body and no-thing until you do it right-by serving it like you (really) mean it. After that-then be 'impressed' ...with yourself. Because one thing is for sure: a good story-teller can still always 'teach' if he told a good story-the way it's supposed to be told. Whereas a good teacher can just- 'teach.'"*

**7) “Angie Situation” was at one time, a stand-alone novel. Now it is a trilogy. How’d that happen?**

I study the business and the market as a publisher, an editor and a writer. It became a trilogy rather than a stand alone novel because in studying the market, you will eat even *more* humble pie and be forced to put your preconceived notations about how things are done-down. And in getting myself unimpressed with the fact that I had completed a “600 page manuscript, I had to remind myself that people aren’t anymore impressed with a 600 paged book any more than they are with a novice bragging about having written any *number* of books. ONE good 100 paged book can vibrate, sell and resonate for twenty years. Times are getting tough, people are busy and attention spans are getting shorter. No one wants to read a 600 page book. However, a 200 paged book was more reasonable. Therefore, what was once 600 pages was eventually divided by 2 and made into a trilogy-broken down by its three main chapter titles: “Innocence,” “Naivete,” and “Sophistication.” It made no sense to try and stuff an entire story that [in “Innocence”-alone] has a storyline built around issues dealing with: bullying, peer-pressure, molestation, sexuality, tween growing pangs, the mentor-mentee relationship, sexuality, sexual identity, bi-sexuality, teenage love and rebellion, teenage angst, the parent-child relationship (father-daughter/mother-daughter), elitism, classicism and teenage-pregnancy. So imagine what “Naivete,” and “Sophistication’s” storylines around *it* are going to contain? That’s all too much for one book. Therefore, I made it a trilogy.

**8) What (if anything) has surprised you the most about “Angie Situation” or since writing it?**

That so many people identified with some and most all parts of the main character and the storylines. And as a result, brought up a lot of old wounds and fond memories-alike, and as well; they still got those “lessons” that I wasted so much time trying to inter-weave into the story-anyway! Because the story provoked a lot of thought, consideration and proposed questions for many answers they thought they already had, while providing a resolve where there were once questions. I was surprised, humbled and inspired by that. That is what kept telling me that regardless how bad I ignored the

book, there are people out in the world that needed it more than I ignored and suppressed it because my bruised ego wanted to battle it. I had to earn the right to write the book and eventually surrender to doing so, as well. To do anything else or start another book without finishing what I started was less than acceptable to my spirit-both creatively and personally. The book came back to bite at me one-too many times. Now, I know and have surrendered to the reasons-humbly so.

Find out what happens in Angie's life, next-in the sequel: "Angie Situation (NAIVETE)":

## *Chapter One*

We had the time set-down to the literal minute that we would all need to finally spend time together.

Shana's mom would be leaving out for her club meeting at about 6:30p, but would be walking back into the building at exactly 9:25p. If all goes well, we all should be good and out by then.

We made plans to get together over at Shana's house on that cold November 4<sup>th</sup> day, where Shana would be cuddled up in her bedroom with his friend Wes. And he and I would be snuggled up on the comfy living room sofa by the door- you know: talking.

Shana and Wes tucked themselves back into her cozy bedroom-door closed, while he and I had the luxury of looking at the front door while we talked. My heart was beating fast. I was shaking like the last leaf on a tree.

"Come here and stand up, stand right here-right here in front of me," he said to me with a deep frown in his brow, strategically positioning me in front of him like a chess piece.

"Why?" I asked repeatedly all the while, allowing him to position me.

"I just want to look at you," he responded.

He began to run his hands down my arms, waist, hips and thighs without saying a word. It was weird to me: his touch, his way, the scene-everything. I couldn't tell if I was turned on, scared or both. I think it was both but I was so afraid to allow myself to be aroused enough to respond, so I stood there.

He then lifted my shirt up, grabbed me by the waist, and then turned me around so that he could now look at me from the back. I cooperated by still allowing him to turn me in circles like he was admiring something that he was about to buy, take home, and eat. When I made my way back around to standing in front of him, he moved closer to the edge of the couch while looking up at my face as if he was asking for permission, yet, nothing came out of his mouth. He placed his hands around my ass and something finally came out: "Why do you always wear things to cover your butt? You can still see it," he said-bluntly.

That caught me off guard and made the moment even more awkward for me. I reached to pull my shirt back down while quickly removing his hands from around me as if to convey the message: "*You blew it!*" to him.

He ignored the gesture. He then stood up to turn the kitchenette light on then turned off the living room light in the room where we were.

He sat back down and proceeded with more instructions: "Stand back right here," he asserted.

He was so awkward and technical. I was so nervous and nervous. When he reached underneath my shirt again, I jumped back a little bit-not wanting him to touch my stomach. He was going straight for my breasts anyway; grabbing them while letting out an awkwardly aroused sigh that sent chills through my body as he began to caress my breasts fervently.

Before I knew it, my pants had hit the floor along with my shirt and all the rest of my clothes. He scooted back on the couch for me to get on top of him. I grabbed his dick and thought hard about mounting him, and just going for it-only because I could tell that was what he was expecting and positioned himself for me to do. I wasn't quite ready to do it though. He had positioned himself about as blunt, awkward and assertive as he was in conversation that whole evening already. I was powerless the whole night: from the conversation, his touch and this very moment. I needed some time to think, even though my clothes were off of my body. Although I knew he was laying there waiting for me to mount him, I could not do it. I froze. My mouth froze as well. I wanted to tell him that I needed him to enter me first-before I could mount him. At the point of intercourse and entry, I had a thing about being laid on my back, missionary or any way submissive and "in receipt-of," first-before the party could begin. It always seemed like that was they way it was supposed to go. It turned me on. I gestured to let him know how I wanted it without dripping a word from my frozen mouth. He cooperated. He laid me on the couch, folded my legs toward my chest and gently slid himself into to me. At that very moment, there were fireworks woven in between his moans, grunts and breathlessness. I had no idea this was going to be like this. I felt like a fucking virgin. It felt so good that I began to cry. I didn't know what was happening to me at this moment. I just couldn't process it at all. His shaking and deep breathing lead the whole moment as I followed his lead by slowly meeting his manly thrusts deep into me. We were fucking as if each long stroke was something that we both wanted to last forever. We must have sound like two cats in heat.



He jumped, yelled out and pulled out of me as if he was trying to stop himself from cumming so soon: “Angie, please-please get on top of me, I want to talk to you,” he pleaded. I could do it this time. By now, if he asked me to stand on my head I probably would have.

He lay on his back.

I got on top and mounted him. My legs were shaking nervously like a doe struggling for strength. I was afraid to grab him and put him inside of me, but rather-hoping he would take the lead again.

He did.

With his right hand, he grabbed his dick while holding my ass with his left hand and slid himself back into me, biting his bottom lip as if he was singing his favorite song; thrusting into me as if he was making moves to the beat of that very same song. It was awesome. All I could do was throw my head back and bite my own bottom lip.

He went from biting his bottom lip to puckering them and frowning with a kind of pleasure like he was in full concentration of the circumference of my warm vagina that gripped him so tightly. He nodded his head back and forth in total disbelief yelling “ah shit,” repeatedly-as if after this night, it was going to be some trouble...

It was explosive.

It was weird because initially, I wasn't in the mood to fuck him and he hardly gave me the foreplay that I was so used to and I certainly didn't give him the foreplay that I loved to give. I wondered if my pussy would even get wet enough for him. But from the moment he lay me down and entered me-I exploded and it was on and popping from there.

His awkward lovemaking was slowly turning me on. I felt like I could get used to his way. His touch-every sound, every facial expression he made, turned me on. Every step of the way, he surpassed my arousal times ten. So much so that I could barely fuck him back. I remained frozen stiff throughout the entire fuck. I could hardly move-consistently. He dominated everything all the way down to the way he fucked and thrust me. It was as if he just wanted to take and scrape it all. I eventually allowed him to use me every which way he wanted to. I had no other choice.

This second, time felt like what my first time was supposed to be like. I didn't know the how-many-eth time it was for him and I didn't care. I just

knew that from the moment I was with him this night, I felt like a virgin-all over again.

He more than busted my cherry (so it seemed), he also busted my fucking tear ducts because I cried silently while biting my own bottom lip as well, from the very moment he entered me throughout the entire fuck-the whole night. It felt unbelievable. I was a combination of: embarrassed, horny, virginal, sad, happy, worried, uptight and aroused. He didn't know what to think. All he could do was let all that he had inside of him-out, while he looked up at me wiping my tears:

“I wanted this so bad. I wanted you so bad. I thought about you for so long. You don't know how bad I wanted this moment. I'm so happy right now-girl, I'm so happy right now,” he confessed.

I still could not say anything back-I was still frozen. He was still doing all the fucking and grinding deep up into me while my eyes continued to roll in my head and my tears rolled down my face. I believed what he said. He had been fucking me that night like he had been alone with me inside his mind and in his dreams he kissed my lips a thousand times, and sometimes saw me walk outside his door.

Hello...

I was stunned. I placed my hands on top of one another, covering my lower stomach with my fingers and kneading my pussy-in an effort to keep his focus on and into my pussy only.

“Angie-you got some good pussy. This pus' is gooo-ed,” he pronounced and grunted, with his lips puckered again-looking like he was some thug, yet he was far from one. He seemed to pucker his lips when it would get good to him. I liked that. It was especially exciting because I always had a thing for opening my legs for my lover. So the thought of mounting him with my legs spread apart while he looked right down into my world as he slurped through his lips, was exciting to me. He would grunt, pucker and stare at my crouch-while enjoying the rhythm he had going; thrusting himself upward and deep into me with that concentrating look on his face-listening to the sound of himself going in and out of me but puckering his lips and looking into my world as if he could see the circumference of it all in x-ray vision.

It was a mess between us. He was digging from inside of me-a wet rush down onto him that was making all kinds of sounds that he was enjoying

like good music. Each thrust into me seemed to pop sparks inside of me, yet I still couldn't respond. He had a firm grip onto me and fucking me as if the top of me was not even there. He kept grunting and stroking up and into me harder as if he was going to fuck a verbal response out of me. He grabbed me by my waist and held me stiff, then began to grind up into me like he was punishing me for not fucking him back or telling him how much I loved it. I refused to say a word and do anything more than bite down on my jowls and gasp and moan-out for mercy. He was working hard and enjoying it so much. It was almost like had I told him I loved it-the fuck wouldn't have been as good. I couldn't talk if I wanted to, I could only gasp and squeal into the air. I was too stunned and speechless.

The more I gasped and squealed with my head falling back, the harder, deeper and slower he grinded up into me. I dug my nails into his arms, biting down on my teeth until my jaws and ears wanted to pop out the sides of my head.

I couldn't take it anymore.

I fell into his chest and bawled myself up like a snail while he lifted his legs up-nearly folding me; thrusting even deeper, and harder up into me. In an instant, he grabbed my shoulders to look me in the face: "Angie-Angie! Say you'll have my lil' girl, say you'll have my baby. Say it-say you'll have my baby."

Little did he know, those were the magic words that snapped me out of the daze I was in: immediately. I wanted him out of me, and I wanted me having this lil' girl from out of his mind: immediately.

"No, no!" I finally spoke.

"Please!" he kept asking-desperately. "Please have my lil' girl."

I could hear him near gargling-so I quickly lifted off of him but held my face into his chest while holding his dick with my both my hands; covering it completely as if I did not want any air to get in and spoil his moment or change what it was his dick was feeling while being inside of me.

I was insulating.

He was ejaculating.

I was jerking him.

I made sure every ounce rested in my hands-not inside me.

I wanted off of him-but he kept holding me like he didn't want to let me go.

As we got dressed and after, I never responded to anything he said to me for the duration of his stay-at all. I just wouldn't talk to him. I froze up-all over again.

It was time for Shana to make he and Wes leave so that we could straighten up the house before her mom came back home.

I walked towards the kitchen away from him and he came following me, backing me into the wall. He kneeled and dropped down to his knees to look up at me almost apologetically and like he had a 70's Billy-Dee Williams moment. It was so manly and romantic-his way. The way he frowned his brows and puckered his lips as if to say "ooh" when he would talk to me. It was a combination of lust and adoration; almost like my pussy was written all over his face. That's what turned me on more than anything about him. He looked at me the same way he did after we fucked, the way he did before we fucked. The same way he looked at me standing outside talking to me, in Wes' car and everywhere else. That look was there before and after.

He was so awkward, but sexy.

I was feeling just as awkward as I did before we fucked-standing there feeling just as awkward after. No less awkward while standing outside talking to him, in Wes' car and everywhere else.

I held my head downward but turned to the right some-not wanting him to look at me in the face. His placed his thick fingers to the sides of my face-trying to secure and center my face in his hands to look at him:

"Please talk to me. Tell me if I made you do something you didn't want to do?" he kept saying, over and over.

"No, I wanted it. I just have something on my mind, that's all," I responded.

To him, that must have sounded like this was goodbye forever:

"Angie, tell me. Is this the last time I'm going to see you again? Tell me," he demanded to know.

"No, no it's not." I responded.

"I'm going call you later tonight. Is that okay?" he asked.

He did.

We talked on the phone for a long time about the night we had and the days before it. All of a sudden, my other line rang. The male party asked: “Angie, what are you doing?”

I was confused because it didn’t sound like Santana, but I knew that the only other guy who had my telephone number was Pucker (on the other line).

The male party opposite Pucker started laughing in my ear. I was really confused then. It was Pucker using his parent’s line trying to confuse me. When we got back to our line he said to me: “Angie, I notice that you were nervous-real nervous, why? Why were you so nervous?”

I didn’t have a clear answer for him, but I did not tell him that I thought he was Santana either. We talked for a while longer, and then got off the phone.

We ended up cozying up on the phone pretty much the same time everyday-routinely- until my schedule changed because I had gotten a job at the hamburger joint that I had applied for work at, the same night I *officially* met him.

You see, we had originally first saw one another once while shopping for sneakers for Santana one Saturday afternoon-back when I was pregnant and home on one of my weekends from the pregnant jail.

He and Wes were in the sneaker store following Santana and me around every section that we turned to walk through. Pucker would make his way across from me-forcing me into eye contact. I managed to ignore him for a long time, but it was obvious that he was not going to leave the store until I acknowledged his presence at some point. I decided to look back at him, and he looked at me like a baby deer caught in headlights. I kept Santana preoccupied with conversation representative of my being his personal shopper, slash fashion critic, slash buyer; so as to distract him away from this guy and his buddy who totally invaded my space.

I didn’t think much of him at the time because he looked like an older guy. And by this time (and years into a relationship of normalcy with Santana); it was like my crushes on older guys and my flings with girls, was [what I thought it was]: a phase that would soon pass. So in that sneaker store, Pucker (in my eyes) was merely another cute older guy trying to get my attention. And I did not want to give Pucker the same

opportunity that I gave the last older guy that sequestered me the last time I was in a store with Santana. It was a nightmare for me.

It happened quite some time before I was to report off to the pregnant jail. I was no where near showing-in the face or stomach.

Santana and I had walked around to the store to buy all the things to calm and satisfy my cravings I was having: vinegar, pickles, peppermints and plain potato chips. Out of nowhere appeared this older man (who invaded both of our spaces as well). He looked at Santana with his arm around me then looked at me as if he had a flashback and remembered his own daughter was once in love the way were. He had a few choice words for me:

“Don’t let this young man ruin your life! Don’t let him mess your life up before you get to live it! You bea-u-ti-ful girl you! Don’t let him get you pregnant and make your life go down the drain! Don’t do it!” yelled this stranger- sounding like the ghost of my estranged dad who would rather burn in hell than to know that I was in the condition that I was in.

It caught both Santana and me by surprise and ruined my day. I was already waning in and out and back and forth about what I was going to do about the pregnancy. This all was too much for me. I looked around for my dad in that store. Santana and I hurriedly walked out having bought nothing. My taste buds were even affected: my cravings were no longer. I just wanted to go home and finish off the cry that had begun the moment I turned away from that strange man and burst through the doors of that store to head home. Santana was so hurt. That scene both haunted and traumatized the both of us. Neither one of us said a word to each other about it-ever again. He just held me while I cried myself to sleep.

So when Santana and I were sequestered in that sneaker store as Pucker followed us around; I would be damned if this was going to be a repeat of what had happened just a short time right before. Uh uh-no how! No way! I insisted. So I broke Puckers forceful eye-contact then coached Santana into picking out the nearest sneaker, and we hauled ass out of that store.

But Pucker seemed to reappear what seemed like every other time Santana and me would go for a walk around the block and down to the (haunted) corner store.

From the moment we would make it to the left side of the street to begin our walk down on the long main street, like clockwork-this blue

vehicle would be out in the distance blasting this classic jam by a group called "Cameo." As lyrics would play: "*Back-back-and-Fourth-and-Fourth. Our loves goes: Back-back-and-Fourth-Fourth. As we go...Back-back-and-Fourth-Fourth...*" I could tell when it would be moving closer to us, because they would sound clearer-back by a lot of base from his speakers. After about the third time this had happened, when I would hear it-my heart would begin to beat faster. Because just as disregarding to Santana's presence he was in the sneaker store-he was that same way when he would see us walking. It's just that when we were in the sneaker store, I had no idea that he was that *same* guy-all that time.

But this day in particular that he had come down the street blasting his music, it all came together-it was him, yet again. Each time we would see him, I would just lower my head and hold Santana's hand tightly, and he would grab mine even tighter. Even though Pucker was evasive, Santana knew I didn't know him-so we both just ignored him.

Pucker refused to be ignored though. His face was becoming more common to me; popping up in strange places all over the city. This next time, from behind the kitchen of a chicken joint he was working at. He was peeking out at me looking like Tyrin Turner peeking from behind the fence in awe of Janet and her crew in that Rhythm Nation video. It was strange-he was strange.

This time however, I was not with Santana. I was with my oldest brother's girlfriend-out shopping. It was the same day that my mom and Dana's mom's had Santana sequestered in the house, torturing him by breaking the fake news to him that I was gone out on a date to explore my options. Ironically, I *was* out without Santana, but rather, *being* explored:

"Hi, how are you doing?" he asked, feeling like it was his lucky day.

"I've seen you before! I've seen you before! Can I talk to you for a second?" he said, excitedly and as if his double-confirming that he had seen me before was enough to have earned him the right to have my hand in conversation.

I didn't respond to him, but rather, acted as if I didn't hear him; fidgeting through my purse as if I was preoccupied and digging for something-do or die.

"Can I be your friend?" he asked-urgently. It was so awkward.

I thought he was weird-because he was so eager and excited. But he was simply trying to get in on this first open opportunity he had seen me without Santana-which was a rarity for anybody to see.

I looked up at him and snapped at him: "I have the same boyfriend!"

He kept on insisting:

"I can be your friend. Can I be your friend? I can be your friend," he kept insisting-impatiently and awkwardly as if he was bargaining at his last chance at life.

I scolded him with my eyes and gave him the look of death. Because although it wasn't visible to him, little did he know, I had a possibility growing inside of me and it felt gross to me-having him in my face way.

We made it out of the chicken joint without my being plucked.

Pucker refused to be ignored however.

He appeared again-the day Shana and me were up at the mall shopping and picking up job applications. We ended up, last, in Walgreens. At the end of the store aisle I saw a man staring down the aisle as if he knew either Shana or me. I couldn't make out that I knew him and I was sure he didn't know me, so I moved out of his view and stood closer to Shana and whispered to her: "Girl, you didn't take nothing did you? 'Cause it's a man in here way down at the end of the aisle-following us from aisle to aisle!"

I had to double-check on that with Shana because she was cunning as they come. She was a very sweet girl with a soft-spoken and delicate way about her, but you had to watch her. She could steal the clothes off your ass and have you walking around not knowing you were naked.

Once, she borrowed a pair of my sneakers and I called her up to get them back from her. She did me one better-she brought them to me. She allowed me (and went out of her way) to make me see that she was returning them by sliding them right back under my bed. But sometime during her visit, she stole them right back from me. She was sneaky like that-so, you had to watch Shana.

"Girl I didn't take anything! I swear-she insisted.

I responded: "Girl, he keeps looking down this aisle at us like he knows one of us-or something."

She squinted and looked down the aisle but he had walked away.

Coast clear.

Another guy walked down the aisle, and up on Shana:



“Hi Wes!” yelled Shana into the guys face, they hugged.

She introduced us.

“I’m in here with my dude-you guys hanging out longer? How are you getting home?” asked Wes.

From the other end of the isle, that *same* man walked towards us slowly.

He nodded and spoke to Shana as if he knew her. She spoke back to him. Wes was whispering in her ear.

Low and behold, it was that *same* guy who drives up and down my street, who works at the chicken joint and disregards my boyfriend.

This time, I was outnumbered-everyone knew each other except me. Confidently, patiently and like a gentleman, he gave me his hand, and introduced himself to me by name.

I replied:

“Hi,” I said quickly, throwing my hand up then down: quickly.

“Angie is it okay if Wes takes us home?” asked Shana-in front of everybody.

I pulled her to the end of the isle:

“That tall man always tries to talk to me girl! No! Not if he’s with him!”

I laughed and gasped-thinking of how he seemed to show up everywhere I seemed to be.

In her high pitched voice, Shana replied:

“Girl that aint no man! That’s Wes’ and n’em’s boy. They all grew up together. They’re all around the same age. He’s only about a year or two older than you and me! He just looks older than us. He is **so** fine! All the girls chase him. He is fine! I don’t know what you’re talking about! You’d better get on with that one if he’s chasing you like that!”

I laughed and said:

“He’s so hairy and tall. Look at all that shadow hair on his face. He’s got hair all on his arms and shit girl. What sixteen to eighteen year-old boy looks like that!” I cringed.

Shana thought that was the funniest things she had heard all day.

We walked out and over to Wes’ car. Hairy got happy-thinking he was going to be able to sit next to me in that back seat that he stuffed himself

into with space left for me. Before seating could take its course, I told Shana to switch places with me so that I could sit in the front with her friend Wes-who was driving. And she could sit stuffed in the back with happy Hairy. She agreed. We got situated and starting heading home.

From the back seat, Hairy's long arm kept reaching for my arm.

He kept begging for conversation in that same bargaining and impatient way he did at the chicken joint that day. I would short answer his constant questions with my head turned downward and to the left, then I'd turn quickly back to the right to look out of the window.

We pulled up to Shana's house and I hurriedly opened that car door to get away from that man.

"Could I PLEASE talk to you for a second, one second-PLEASE," he pleaded as if he could not take the chase anymore. I looked at him and squinted my eyes as if I was seeing if I could trust him:

"Yeah..." I replied.

He looked surprised, and looked me in the eyes as if he trying to trust that I would not yell: "Psyche!"

I didn't.

We stood outside the apartment talking small talk.

"May I switch phone numbers with you?" he asked.

"I keep telling you that I have a boyfriend. I can't call you. And you can't call me!" I said-firmly, desperately hoping that it was enough to make him go away and I would never see him again.

"Please, let me call you. Call me then-please, I just want to talk you soooo bad," he pleaded.

I paused. I was trying to think of a question to ask him that would be a perfect exit and way out for me. We went at it-and fast-like a game of talking tennis:

*"Do you have a girlfriend?"*

"No."

*"Why?"*

"We just broke up."

*"What was her name?"*

"Yolanda."

*"Why did y'all break up?"*

"It just wasn't working out."

He was ready. He *refused* to lose-knowing that he would never get another chance at me like this again. I paused for a second then mechanically gave him my phone number while still squinting my eyes, and looking him in his.

He called me that night and the next few nights.

I decided that I liked him after all. He was good-looking and it was something awkwardly sexy about him that I could not resist. And the way he would talk to me would be like he was pulling my arm-afraid that if he let go, he would never talk to me again. I could tell that he liked me a lot. During one of our conversations, it turned out that he lived in the next community over from me. We joked about him stalking me and clocking me down to the usual time of day I would be walking to the corner store-which typically would be the time Santana made it up to the house after work, and we would go on our daily walk and talk.

I would laugh-listening to his awkward methodology and things he was telling me he was doing trying to get to me and how he had narrowed down the proximity of where I lived. Little did he know, at that time, all those times that he would stalk me and Santana walking down to the corner store, I was craving something vinegary, salty, pepperminty and pickled in taste. My possibility would be sending me to the store almost the same time everyday with that craving (unbeknownst to him) but I did not tell him that part...

Day by day, however, I warmed up to him-letting him in on everything but that. We talked about everything and enjoying getting to know one another.

Although I enjoyed our talks and thoroughly enjoyed our first night over at Shana's house and every other time we would get together, all bets were off when it came down to actually discussing Santana and me.

Pucker had no idea that all those months he was stalking me; I was with-child. He had no idea about all the transitions, transformations and changes I had gone through in my life during all those *very* same times he was pursuing me. And as far as I was concerned, none of it was his business or a topic in our many lengthy conversations in getting to know one another. The fact still remained (and as he had already known) I still had that same boyfriend. And he had no idea that by the time we first got together over Shana's mom's house that day, I was no longer with-child.

But he had a secret too. All that time I was keeping a secret from him-he was keeping a secret from me too: a girl at the hamburger joint I had applied to and was working at. My new friend who too, worked there with me...

**~ABOUT the AUTHOR~**

Angela Sherice is a writer and expressionist of:  
Erotic, Self-Efficacious, Introspective, Reflective and Metaphysical  
Literature.

**INGEST. FEEL EMPOWERED. BE ENLIGHTENED. GET INSPIRED.**

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