

An
Unconventional
Visit

S I R A J - U L - H A Q

Published by Liberty Publishing
C-16, Sector 31-A Mehran Town Extension,
Korangi Industrial Area, Karachi – Pakistan
www.libertybooks.com



First being published in Pakistan
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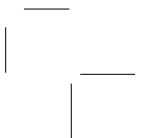
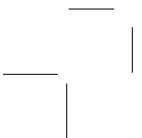
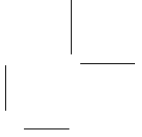
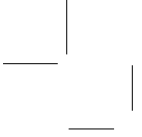
ISBN 978-969-8729-639

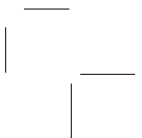
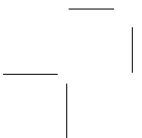
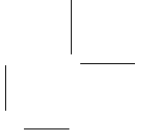
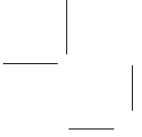
Printed and bound in Pakistan

Typeset by Ozair Soomro

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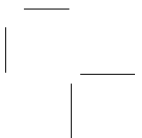
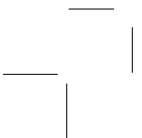
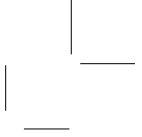
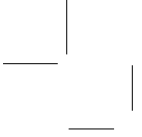
DEDICATION

Much thanks to all my friends and family in the entertainment industry who helped me to reach my creative peak. Writing this book was an incredible journey in itself.

The inspiration behind the main characters and the uniqueness in its creation is dedicated to all my readers.

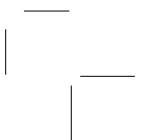
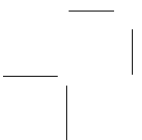
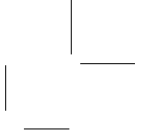
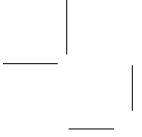
My deepest gratitude to my parents, *Nizamuddin* and *Afroz Begum*, for believing in me.

A holistic thanks to some of the world's great leaders and philosophers for creating progressive nations under their capable leadership and wisdom.



Life without liberty is like a body without spirit.

- Khalil Gibran



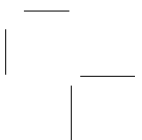
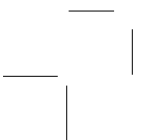
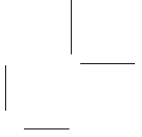
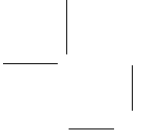
AUTHOR'S NOTE

An Unconventional Visit is the answer to the present question: can we discover the real leader? Will we be ready to comply with a society where justice prevails and humanity reigns? Where the ruler doesn't engage in politics for the sake of the state, for the sake of his supremacy, but works for the higher way forward for the country and the nation. Let the commoner be entitled to his right by liberating himself from racial subjugation. Don't support the oppressor, but become the friend of the oppressed. The leader should be an excellent example of honesty, not a usurper of people's rights. He should represent the people.

World history is full of great leaders who started their political life with politics, truth, and honesty. And by winning the hearts of the people, cemented with strong character, they formed the government by the vote of the nation and made the best nation and civilization in the world. Only the utilization of proper vote can change the simplest way forward for any nation's prosperity.

An Unconventional Visit may be a novel where the protagonist will acquaint you with these political rituals; which will raise an issue by hitting the wall of our outdated form of political system that has prevailed in Pakistan for generations. Can we have the power to acknowledge ourselves? If so, who are we?

And here are the answers to all or any of these questions in the novel **An Unconventional Visit**.



Chapter One

She surveyed the street with far more interest than the average shopper, or even the occasional tourist as she stepped onto the curb. Angela pushed her sunglasses back, framing her face with waves of blonde hair. Motioning the taxi away, she paced leisurely down the sidewalk. Mayfair Street, the posh area of London, was a favourite place of hers for this sort of thing. The people shopping among the boutiques, enjoying the high-scale dining and resting from their journey in one of the classy resorts, clearly had money - and enough to spare.

She caught a sight of herself in one of the many glass storefront windows that lined the street; tall, slender, sporting the newest fashion, blonde hair held out of her fair face by her designer shades. Satisfied that she looked the part, Angela turned her attention to the passersby.

She noticed a well-dressed man entering the street from a coffee shop. She quickened her step. Yes, that was him. He probably visited the coffee shop every weekday. She had seen him a few days ago here. He had been rude to the barista, and then left without giving a tip. She narrowed her eyes at him, a soft smirk at the corner of her mouth. He deserved what was about to happen.

The front page of the newspaper in the man's hand held more of his attention than the sidewalk. He didn't know that a pair of sapphire eyes watched him, marking him as her next target. She took her mobile phone, pretending to be engrossed in snapping a selfie. A sudden step backwards and she bumped squarely into the portly coffee-shop man.

"Hey, now," the man began to bluster. "Look where you're-". He stopped his scolding. Perhaps he was more willing to forgive a morning jostle if given by an attractive young woman.

"Oh, I'm so sorry." Angela cried in alarm, pulling a tissue from her purse and dabbing at the coffee splashed on his white dress shirt. Her face was full of embarrassment, her stunning blue eyes shocked at her clumsiness.

“No, I’m sorry.” The man dismissed her apology. “I wasn’t looking where I was going.” He was certainly looking now.

With a quick smile, Angela turned and walked away. The man turned his head, allowing his eyes to follow the graceful form for a block or two before carrying on his way. Turning a corner into an alley away from the bustle of the street, Angela looked down at the item in her hand. A chunky leather wallet. Her deft fingers removed the credit card and slipped it into her jeans pocket. She chucked the wallet into the nearest trash bin.

The stolen credit card was swiped later that evening in exchange for a handful of coins. The young woman was now dressed in a long silk gown that swept the floor around her evening heels. Her hair was swept into an elegant twist at the back of her head, revealing even more of her pretty face. She moved with the familiar air of one well-acquainted with the establishment. As she made her way across the Casino floor, heads, mostly those belonging to men, turned to watch her pass. She scanned the crowded room until her eyes lighted upon the acquaintance she sought. She approached the Roulette table and plunked her stack of bank notes onto the game board with a shrewd, “Hello gentlemen.”

“Angela!” One of them exclaimed. “You’re back.”

“I’m back.” She said it like a threat. She shrugged out of her lightweight sweater, revealing the low-cut top of her formal gown. The man’s eyes grazed her form then dropped to the chips on the table. Angela’s eyes connected with the friend opposite her and he gave a slight nod. She smiled easily as the croupier asked them to place their bets.

Back in his office cubicle the coffee shop man sat with his jacket buttoned over the coffee stain on his shirt. He had held his arm very still during the first business meeting of his day for fear of someone noticing his smudged shirt. His mobile phone buzzed. He glanced at it expecting to see a text from his wife, reminding him of their dinner company. She requested him not to work late tonight. What he saw caused him to move forward in his chair, his face aghast with rage and confusion. He fumbled in his pockets. Where was his wallet? “Transaction of 5000 pounds from my account?” He gasped. His wallet was gone. He grabbed the phone from his desk, punching in the numbers.

999.

Within the hour, Angela had collected ten thousand pounds. A general cry rose from the table. "You are the Lady of Luck!" One man exclaimed.

She shrugged her shoulders with an airy smile. They placed their bets again. Angela always played well, confident in herself. She knew the moves; she knew the numbers that were most likely to bring her success. Tonight would be more successful than most.

"No more bets." The croupier announced. Her eyes fixed on her friend opposite Angela. She extended her hand underneath the table. It was time to rake in some serious winnings. A thrill of excitement raced through her. She felt the cold hard magnet press into her palm.

A side door opened catching her attention. She recognized the manager stalking across the room, his keen eyes fixed squarely on her. She kept her game face on, despite the sense of alarm that clutched her chest. Had they seen her? She continued to arrange her chips. The manager was talking to a security guard, and it was obvious they were focused on her table.

"She has won twenty-five thousand pounds in just six days." The manager mused when the guard told him about the exchange he had seen. "Smart ass! Arrest her. We have enough proof."

In her periphery, Angela saw the guard speaking on his radio as he walked in her direction. She was aware of their presence. Game over. Time to get out of this mess. She dropped the magnet, proof of her guilt, to the floor and kicked it away. The guards were directly across from her.

The ball had finished rolling. "And the winning numbers are-". The croupier never finished his sentence. In a twinkling, Angela had overturned the table, crashing it into the guards. She used the moment of mayhem to escape through the fire exit. Through the door, she darted down the long corridor. The single beady eye of a security camera glared down upon her from its lofty position. She darted into a nearby washroom, pushing past the cleaning cart parked in the doorway. She heard footsteps running past.

A woman was cleaning the furthest stall, unaware that she had company. Angela's fingers closed around the cold steel of the pocket-knife in her side pocket. She crept silently behind the woman.

“I won’t hurt you if you keep silent.” Her voice hissed. She held the sharp blade pointed towards the woman’s jugular. “Just give me your clothes. C’mon, quick!”

The middle-aged maid, too frightened to resist, began to unbutton her collared shirt. Discarding her gown in a silky heap, Angela pulled the rougher clothes on. She opened the window and forced her way through. No sooner had her feet touched the ground below, the piercing scream of an alarm sounded from every square inch of the building. She darted down the street, running until she was out of breath. Her heart pounded in her head; she couldn’t breathe.

She ran into a nearby store, pretending to look at the various bags of potato chips on the shelf. A woman stood at the cashier’s, holding a little fellow by the hand. The young boy’s eyes stared at Angela, then slowly raised to the TV. Angela followed his eyes to the screen and saw herself. Her picture was on TV. It was a security camera photo, but a shockingly clear photo of her face.

They were looking for her. The voice of the reporter broke through the trance she was in. “Police are searching for this woman... In connection with a robbery at the local casino... Call the police with any information.” She swallowed against the panic swelling in her throat. Her little game was not fun anymore. The child’s eyes bored through her once again.

She had to get out of here. She escaped to the street. The piercing wail of a siren shattered the quiet night air. She took off, running once more, her breath coming in ragged gasps.

A dark alley beckoned to her. She slunk against the wall. The wailing car sped past. She gasped a sigh of relief. She had escaped them again. They would circle the block for half an hour or so and then speed off to the next urgent call. She was no stranger to this chase.

The sirens faded, blending with the distant hum of the city traffic. She crept out of her hiding place and glanced around to gather her bearings. She continued down the street, turning her steps towards home. She lurched as her foot stumbled over a chunk of pavement. One of her heels had broken off during her run. She tossed the pair of heels angrily to the side.

An engine roared behind her. Suddenly, the blue and red lights

were flashing upon her – the shrill sirens ringing in her ears. She turned to run the opposite way. A car with flashing lights was already there. There was no escape. She was surrounded. Standing in the middle of the street, she raised her hands in surrender.

“Hands up! Hands up!” The officer commanded.

Panting, Angela raised her arms higher, dropping to her knees. I am so screwed. I still have all this money on me! And Iftikar is going to kill me!

* * *

Standing on the bank of the Indus River, Roshan looked back towards the village of Nawbpur, hazy in the distance. He had selected a good spot. Close enough so that the spectators would come for the event, far enough so that the bear fight, technically illegal in Pakistan, would escape the unwelcome attention. Satisfied with the location, he glanced at the gold watch on his left wrist. The bear handler should arrive at any minute.

The bank sloped gently up from the placid river, forming a flat sandy table, perfect for an arena. On the distant bank, the sandy shore met the vast edge of the forested jungle. Fields of wheat, barley and cotton irrigated by river’s waters filled the distance between the river and the village.

Roshan dabbed at the sweat forming on his forehead, with the end of his shawl. He let the fabric fall once more across the white tunic of his shalwar kameez. Puffs of fine sand settled on his sandaled feet and the hem of his cuffed pants as he walked to one end of the sandy showground where his half-a-dozen friends stood. His appearance was greeted by his two dogs, restrained by the ropes from greeting their master. The ropes were controlled by his friend Shano.

Roshan’s eyes lit up at the sight of his dogs, his mouth twisting into a pleased smile. He knelt before the larger of the two bull terriers, grasping its face in his hands. The dog was tawny in color, with small but vigilant eyes and the shoulders of an ox.

“Today you will fight the bear!” Roshan shouted at him. “You will win! You are strong! You are my tiger. Do not disappoint me!”

“He is in good condition,” Shano remarked with an expert nod

of his head. He threw a few pieces of meat at the dog. The iron jaws snapped the meat up in seconds.

Roshan sprang to his feet as a cart, pulled by a sturdy team of oxen, lurched down the faint tracks that formed a road. A crowd of people followed the cart, forming a large circle around the sandy area. A man on a motorcycle sped down the road, creating a wave of sand as he slammed to a break near the cart.

“Our bait has arrived!” Roshan announced. The pleasure in his eyes deepened into a thirst. “Give the dogs some water.”

While Shano sprang to do his bidding, Roshan went forward to meet the man who stepped down from the motorcycle.

“Roshan Khan!” The man greeted. He turned to face the cart, his eyes settling on the caged bear inside the metal crate. “You see my bear? Is he not a magnificent beast? You should rethink your boast!” He chuckled in proud delight of his captured prize.

Roshan cast a swift glance at the caged animal. The bear was by far the largest he had ever seen. It certainly lived up to his reputation as a bear that no dog had ever brought to the ground.

Roshan gazed at his dogs with the pride of a father at his offspring. “But your bear has never faced my dogs. They are the finest in Sindh, the finest in Pakistan. You have never seen such a warrior as my tiger.”

The dog, sensing the presence of the bear, bared its fangs in a savage growl. A crowd of forty people formed a circle, waiting for the bloody spectacle to begin. Roshan returned to his dogs, his words demanding nothing short of a win.

A man dragged the captured bear by a rope tied to the sturdy ring in its nose. It snarled a toothless smile. The handler tied the rope to a stake in the middle of the field. The bear swatted the dust with its great paws. Roshan squinted at the bear’s paws. Its claws had been removed. He nodded in satisfaction.

Roshan positioned himself by the head of his dog. His hands gripped the collar. The dog lunged forward. His friend Shano held the second dog, eyes fixed, waiting for Roshan’s cue.

“You will make me proud.” Roshan growled in the dog’s ear.

Roshan released the collar of his dog. Shano followed his lead. The two dogs lunged the short distance to their prey. The tawny dog

sprang for the bear's nose, sinking his powerful jaws into the soft flesh. He pulled the beast to the ground. The bear clapped the dog between its powerful paws, tearing at him with the claws that were not there. The second dog tore at the bear's hind legs pulling its attention from the greater threat at its nose. The roaring of the bear, the baying of the dogs and the cheers of the gathered men created a din. Roshan stamped his feet on the ground, grinding his hands into fists as he watched.

The bear rose to its hind legs. The tawny dog jumped for its nose. The bear swatted the dog rolling it through the dust. The bear now lunged at its attacker. The second dog ran between them, protecting its companion.

"My tiger!" Roshan yelled, his fist pummeling the air. "Get up! Get up!"

The dog charged at the bear again. The crowd screamed in approval. The dog pulled the bear to the ground again. The bear struggled free, mauling the dog's head between its paws. The dog bit its way free. He stepped back, circling the bear.

Roshan glanced at the watch on his wrist. If the bear stood for three minutes, it would be declared the winner. He wiped the sweat from his forehead with the dark-colored shawl around his shoulders. "Fight, my tiger! Fight!"

The dog responded to its master's demands. It lunged at the bear again, powerful jaws tearing into the bloodied snout. He dragged the bear to the dust. The bear struggled, squeezing the dog's body between its arms. It quieted for a moment. Roshan glanced at his watch. With the energy of despair, the bear attempted to tear himself away. The bull terrier clamped down harder.

"Hold him, my tiger!" Roshan thundered. The spectators added their cheers, willing the dog to keep his prey down.

Hashim, the landowner responsible for the event, stepped forward announcing the three-minute mark. The cheers and applause of the crowd filled the arena.

Roshan pummeled the air again. "My tiger is a champion!" He yelled, spinning around in his victory dance. He and Shano clapped each other's backs in celebration.

Three of Roshan's other friends rushed forward. They used a

stick to pry the dog's iron jaws from the shredded snout of the bear. One man held the dog back while the other snapped the silver-studded collar around its massive neck. They pulled the second dog off and walked the dogs back to Roshan, who was accepting a pouch well-filled with coins from the man on the motorcycle. Roshan Khan had won the bet, and the purse of money.

The bear handler untied its rope, prodding the creature to its feet with the stick he held. Roshan handed a small pouch of coins to his trainer, praising him as the best in Pakistan. Roshan knelt beside the head of his favourite terrier. He clutched each side of the blood-soaked jaws. "You are my tiger. You are the greatest fighter! The champion! My champion!" He fingered the remaining stub of the dog's left ear which was torn off during the fight. Blood oozed from the wound. "He got your ear, did he? Doesn't matter! You held him in the dirt! You are the champion!"

Engrossed with praising his dog, Roshan didn't observe the car driving up to the event. A cry went up from several of the spectators. The people scattered. SHO, the local police captain, slunk away to his police car. The officers with him scurried behind.

"Hey Roshan, your dad just pulled up." Shano's voice held a tone of warning. He shuffled uneasily, his eyes following the car.

Roshan's face contorted with a mixture of annoyance and dread. "What does he want from me?" He growled before he jumped to his feet.

Shano glanced around the nearly vacated arena. "Could be about this bear fight" He suggested. "Your father is the minister."

"My father doesn't care about these things. Even if it is illegal." Despite his bold words, Roshan shifted his weight to the opposite leg. He gave a final pat to his dog before stepping forward to meet his father.

Roshan watched the back door of the car bang open. His father jumped out, a newspaper in his hand. He held a paper and envelope in his other hand. His eyes flashed with fury. His step quickened when he saw his son.

"Roshan," he thundered. He waved the letter in the young man's face, too enraged to speak. He swung the newspaper across the young man's face. Then he let it flutter to the sand. He struck him again

across the other side of his face. Roshan stepped back, attempting to avoid the blows.

The dog growled, lunging at his master's attacker. Shano restrained the dog, wincing as he watched the man's fist fall again and again across his son's face.

"Baba, enough!" Roshan finally cried out. He stepped back, straightening his tunic. "Enough. What have I done?"

Ameer Khan stopped, panting as if unable to catch his breath. "You have failed the BA," He finally spat. His words tumbled over each other like the rocks falling in an earthquake. "You failed for the third time! Now the university will not accept you again! And I find you here, engaging in illegal activities. More interested in fighting your stupid dogs than becoming the next parliament member. You have reduced my honour to the dust." He stamped his foot in the dirt. "You have disgraced me! Who is going to run in the election now?" He shook the letter again and flung it away in disgust.

Roshan had nothing to say. He kicked a rock with the toe of his sandal. The only outlet for his anger.

"Do you have nothing to say?" His father demanded. "Nothing? Do you not care that we will lose our family seat? Does it mean nothing to you? Get in the car!" He demanded.

"Take care of the dogs tonight, Shano." Roshan muttered to his friend.

Obediently, he stalked to the car and jerked the door open. He entered the car, his scowling eyes refusing to meet his father's.

They arrived at the bungalow. Roshan sprang to the ground and up the steps of the verandah before his father had stepped out of the car. His mother, Shehnaz waited inside. She regarded her son with little sympathy. "Roshan, how did this happen? You promised me."

"It wasn't my fault, Ammi." He muttered. "This time, the accountant's son did my papers. I will kill him."

Ameer stormed into the foyer behind his son. "I am going to Karachi."

"This is not a good plan, Ameer," the wife interjected. Her voice held a tone of foreboding. "You do not know him anymore. Do not send for him."

"I have no other choice," He glared at Roshan again. "I would

have given this fool my seat, but he has thrown it away. I must give it to another. I will not lose my seat in the parliament!” The thunder of his voice shook the light fixture above them. “This is my village, my seat!”

He stomped out of the room. They heard the banging door as he left the house. Roshan glanced at his mother’s face. The wrinkles on her forehead stood sharp in concern.

“What’s in Karachi?” Roshan demanded.

“Your brother.” She snipped, without giving him a glance.

He bolted upright on the couch. “Say what?”

“The son of Ameer’s first wife.” She was in no mood to discuss the details. “He will ask her where to find this son of his, to run in his stead in the election.”

“Why am I just learning of this other son?”

Shehnaz shrugged. “What need did we have to tell you? You were a baby when his mother finally took him away. Good riddance. He was an obstinate boy.” She shook her head at the unpleasant memory. “Ameer made a mistake.”

Roshan snorted. “Do you think this city wife will give her son to him again?”

“She will not oblige him easily.”

“Then she will not tell him where to find this son.” Roshan relaxed against the cushions again. “Now stop worrying about it and go fix me some chai. I’m thirsty.”

Ameer Khan sat in the backseat of his car, biting his nails. It would be a long drive to – Karachi, the capital city of Sindh. He had plenty of thoughts to occupy the time with. How to best approach his estranged wife about the location of his son. What was his son like now and would he come back to the village with him? He had to make him. This son was his only chance at saving his family seat in the parliament.

Another car approached his from the opposite direction. A crafty glint sprang into his eye. “Stop here.” He ordered his driver. The car braked to a halt and Ameer Khan jumped out and stood in the middle of the street. His security team stood on either side and slightly behind him. The other car jolted to a stop in front of him. Bahadur Khan, a long-time opponent for the parliamentary seat, stepped out to meet him. His security detail stood behind him.

“Ameer Khan,” Bahadur Khan began. There was no mistaking the gloating on his face. “It seems like your days are coming to an end. You have defeated me four times but your position in power is gone.”

“No Bahadur Kahn, the position will stay mine. What do you think? That I will lose my inherited heirloom? You think you will outdo me and take my family’s right? That is not possible.”

“Ameer Khan, everything is possible.” The man triumphed. “Neither you, nor your son are educated. My son has an education, so the seat will be mine.”

Ameer Khan laughed. “Dream away. This seat will be mine again and again. Anyone who even tries to take this, won’t stay alive for long.” He took a threatening step closer to his long-time opponent. The guards pointed their guns at him.

Bahadur also stepped closer. Ameer’s security guards raised their guns. A minute passed, then two.

“Put the weapons down.” Ameer ordered. “You talk first in politics, then let the bullets talk. It isn’t time for the bullets to talk yet. But remember, Bahadur, when that time does come come - and it will - we won’t hold back.”

He walked back into his car with a chuckle twisting his mouth. Bahadur thought he had found his opportunity, huh? No. He, Ameer Khan, was smarter than his opponents gave him credit for.

* * *

In his small London office, Iftikhar sat behind his desk writing a potential client’s name in his appointment schedule. He thanked the person on the other end of the line and hung up the receiver. He turned back to the stack of papers he had been sorting prior to the telephone’s interruption. In his fledgling practice, he did not have means for an assistant. He took the calls, worked out the kinks of his own schedule and fought his client’s cases by himself. Catching a glimpse of someone approaching the door, he hastened to open it. “Mr. Amjad, welcome,” he greeted the formally dressed man with a smile. Amjad removed his dark glasses and took the offered chair.

“What can I do for you? Coffee?” Iftikhar offered.

Amjad glared at him for a moment, before shouting out, “All

you're good for is making coffee! I gave you a case to gain citizenship. But you've just ruined it." His head fell into his hands.

Iftikhar seated himself behind his desk once more. "Amjad Sahib, you have a point. But like I told you before, you have a weak case."

"I gave you this case only because you are my countryman," Amjad regretted. "You have disappointed me."

"I am sorry you feel that way. I have given you some recommendations that will help your case to be—"

"You can just give me my file back," the man interrupted. "I'll find a more useful lawyer."

"Amjad, I want to help—"

"Just give me my file back." The man repeated. He was determined that the fault was not his own.

Opening the file cabinet, Iftikhar shuffled through the half dozen folders. His fingers felt cold, numb. He heard Amjad's impatient sigh and pulled himself together. Amjad snatched the folder from his outstretched hand and beelined for the door.

"C'mon, at least drink a cup of coffee before leaving!" Iftikhar called after his retreating figure.

The man turned at the door and stated simply, "Allah Waahi."

The words uttered in Sindhi language, a native language of his childhood, startled Iftikhar for a minute. He always spoke English with his clients. He only spoke Sindhi when his mother called him on the phone, and sometimes he even spoke in English to her.

He sat down with a sigh. He couldn't afford to lose this case! But poor Amjad couldn't afford to lose it either. He was desperate to be approved for citizenship. Iftikhar understood the longing, the hope, the fear of rejection.

The ring of his cell jolted him from his reverie. He listened for a moment to the speaker's voice tumbling words of explanation and apology on the other end of the line. "Angela? Are you okay? Slow down dear, I can't understand what you are saying." As he listened, his eyes closed, and his head dropped lower over his desk. "Shit, Angela!"