

The Parramatta Alchemists

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Introduction

In the long, sweltering, heat-hazed light of Parramatta, the summer atmosphere does not simply surround you; it aggressively leans against you with a physical, heavy, almost suffocating weight that presses the breath right out of your lungs. Here, the ancient, meandering river moves with the slow, muddy, churning patience of something far older than the towering, brutalist monuments of reflective glass and steel that lean precariously above its steep banks. The water itself is a sluggish, rippling ribbon of deep, bruised purple and crushed, liquid silver. As it slowly churns, it carries the thick, briny, silt-heavy scent of the estuary—a deep, organic musk

of wet earth and decay—mixing seamlessly and violently with the sharp, acrid, choking grey exhaust of commuter traffic gridlocked tightly on the Great Western Highway. The highway produces a continuous, deafening, metallic grinding and the high-pitched, chaotic blaring of angry horns. It is a city caught in the violent, vibrating, screeching tension between what it once was and what it is desperately, frantically trying to become. The late-summer afternoons stretch out endlessly, painting the cracked, uneven pavements in the dry color of old, flaking parchment and a deep, baked burnt orange. Above, the punishing sun turns the massive, reflective facades of the new commercial towers into blinding, liquid pillars of white-hot fire, casting blinding rays that slice through the smog and force pedestrians to shield their watering eyes.

Within this violently shifting, intensely sensory-heavy environment, nine women lived quietly inside the ordinary, enduring architecture of marriage, motherhood, and the daily, exhausting conversion of hours into hot meals. Their names—Sumitri, Paju, Rashmi Bongi, Komal Gupta, Pallavi, Priya Sharma who carried the half-mocking, half-admiring title of Ms. Aussie, Priyanka, Khushboo, and Rohini—were spoken daily across balconies and fences. These names were traded in the soft, musical, rolling registers of a dozen mother tongues, sounding like low, rhythmic music, and in the sharper, highly clipped, staccato public English of the bustling city that had received them. They were the silent, fiercely protective custodians of households that stubbornly refused to resolve themselves entirely into cold, flat, mathematical equations.

Their domestic domain was defined by rich, heavy, grounding scents and loud, deeply analog sounds. Entering their kitchens, you were immediately hit by the sharp, eye-watering, throat-catching kick of raw, golden mustard oil hitting a violently hot iron pan,

sputtering with a loud, aggressive *hiss*. This was quickly followed by the incredibly sweet, thick, earthy fragrance of green cardamom pods splitting open in rolling, boiling white milk. The rooms echoed with the deeply satisfying, rhythmic, hollow *thwack-thwack-thwack* of a heavy metal knife rapidly striking against a deeply scarred wooden chopping board. And above all this, there were the sudden, incredibly bright, bell-like eruptions of children's pure laughter. It was a sound so sharp and joyful it routinely startled the flocks of sulfur-crested cockatoos into jagged, shrieking, chaotic flights, their brilliant white and yellow feathers flashing brightly against the thick green canopy above the streets. These women moved daily through the exact same cracked grey pavements, the same shared, heat-baked concrete courtyards, and the same stifling, airless evenings. During these heavy nights, the air thickened with a suffocating residual heat and the incredibly heavy, intoxicating, deeply narcotic breath of night-blooming jasmine and pale frangipani that draped over the brick walls, smelling of pure, concentrated sugar and blooming life.

Around them, however, the Sydney property and financial markets had violently entered a period of almost religious, manic, feverish intensity. The local economy had ceased to be a mere quiet background condition; it had swelled and morphed until it became an aggressive, invasive, highly destructive weather system of its own. Clearance rates for weekend property auctions were tracked with the breathless, wide-eyed, trembling fervor once reserved exclusively for terrifying celestial movements or divine, world-ending prophecies. Dense, labyrinthine strata contracts, printed on cheap, heavily bleached white paper, alongside glossy, thick, hyper-colored residential listings for properties in Granville and Harris Park, were obsessively studied late into the black night. The men poured over these pages, breathing in the chemical smell of printer

ink, reading them as if they contained the hidden, infallible, magical grammar of human destiny.

The husbands returned from their offices physically present but entirely mentally absent. Their eyes were perpetually glazed, reflecting a dull, glassy sheen, their minds still frantically traversing the cold, sterile, brightly lit labyrinths of rental yields, leveraged equity, and projected capital appreciation. The very physical air in these small apartments began to drastically change. It took on the dry, crackling, highly static charge of overworked, humming Wi-Fi routers. The once-fragrant rooms were completely overpowered by the faint, highly anxious, deeply sour scent of stale, burnt coffee and the sharp, metallic tang of sour, cold nervous sweat. Digital screens glowed relentlessly late into the darkest hours of the night. They cast a sickly, sterile, freezing blue and a harsh, unforgiving, surgical white light completely over the living rooms. This blinding artificial illumination turned familiar, soft fabric furniture into terrifying spectral shapes, and actively painted the men's exhausted faces in the pale, glowing colors of a perpetual, panicked emergency.

These men had entirely become the modern alchemists of Parramatta. They believed, with a deep, terrifying, unshakeable conviction, that pure, raw data, aggressively optimized and ruthlessly leveraged, could magically be spun into solid, gleaming, heavy pure gold. They spoke endlessly in a new, completely flattened, emotionless dialect. It was a cold, highly transactional vocabulary consisting entirely of basis points, gross yields, and complex depreciation schedules. In this terrible new language, every single, breathing human minute was aggressively assigned a strict monetary value, and every moment of deep, natural silence was loudly interpreted as just a wasted, unmonetized interval

between the shrill, vibrating *ping* of mobile notifications. The women, left completely alone holding the immense, physical weight of whatever warm fragments remained of an unmeasured life, found themselves performing a constant, physically exhausting, and largely unspoken daily translation. They stood bravely at the fractured border of two entirely warring realities, violently forced to mediate between the cold, sterile, highly mathematical language of glowing numbers and the much warmer, messier, infinitely less legible language of physical, heavy, breathing human presence.

This is the exact story of that profound translation. It is absolutely not a tale of a grand, cinematic, explosive victory where the massive market magically vanishes in a puff of smoke, where the terrifying property bubble dramatically bursts in a brilliant, loud shower of golden sparks, and the towering metal cranes crash spectacularly from the sky. The raging market did not die; the reflective glass towers continued to rise aggressively, casting long, freezing, knife-edged purple shadows entirely across the sweltering suburbs. What changed, slowly, quietly, and entirely without fanfare, was the specific, deliberate, highly colored quality of attention the women bravely brought to the ordinary days that remained.

They discovered, each completely in her own measure and in the quiet, dim privacy of her own fragrant home, that true alchemy has always absolutely required a physical vessel capable of withstanding immense, sustained, blinding heat. The vessel, in this specific case, was obviously not a heavily diversified property portfolio or a massive, glowing digital ledger of crypto-assets. It was the highly stubborn, incredibly fragrant, wildly colorful particularity of entirely ordinary life. It was the simple, profound, incredibly heavy physical fact of another person's bodily nearness completely without