

The Beckoning

© Chinmoy Mukherjee 2026–2046. No part of this document may be used without the author’s express written permission.

This is a work of fiction. All characters, events, and places are entirely fictional, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

The Beckoning
Introduction
Chapter One: Sumitri
Chapter Two: Puju
Chapter Three: Rashmi Bongi
Chapter Four: Komal Gupta
Chapter Five: Pallavi
Chapter Six: Priya Sharma (Ms. Aussie)
Chapter Seven: Priyanka
Chapter Eight: Khushboo
Chapter Nine: Rohini
Conclusion

Introduction

In the western reaches of Sydney, where the dense, humid air settles heavy against the Cumberland Plain, the Parramatta River moves with a dark, unhurried patience older than the concrete city that has violently grown along its winding banks. It is a waterway of muddy jade and bruised greens, carrying the fine, ancient silt of the inland ranges, the remembered, torrential rains of upstream catchments, and the quiet, plastic refuse of thousands of suburban lives out into the wider, salt-stung harbour. Along its uneven edges, the massive, mottled trunks of the plane trees drop their broad leaves in slow, scraping drifts of burnt copper and brittle gold. Here, the low-slung, terracotta-roofed brick cottages of a fading century

stand in an awkward, uneven conversation with the soaring, glass-fronted high-rises that cut sharp, blinding reflections of the afternoon sun into the smog-hazed sky. In this sprawling, transitional place—a geography neither fully the chaotic heart of the city nor fully the quiet emptiness of elsewhere—nine couples lived within the tight, overlapping radius of a few familiar, grid-like streets.

Their days were constructed from the incredibly ordinary, deeply textured materials of migration, labor, and settlement. The mornings began in the dark, announced by the sharp, resinous crack of green cardamom pods crushed under a heavy stone pestle, releasing a heady, citrus-laced perfume that mingled effortlessly with the rich, heavy scent of ghee melting in a hot iron pan. Outside their double-glazed windows, the metallic, shrieking song of the T1 line trains violently tore through the quiet—a high-voltage spark of steel on steel, leaving behind the faint, acrid smell of ozone and hot iron as the carriages rushed commuters toward the glittering CBD. Inside their homes, the air vibrated with the soft, rapid friction of language spoken in two tongues at once, English and Hindi or Tamil intertwining like a complex, domestic fugue. Their mornings were a rush of sensory obligations: the damp, woollen smell of freshly ironed school uniforms, the suffocating sweetness of jasmine oil applied to dark hair, and the quiet, shadowed corners where small wooden altars of daily continuity stood, smelling faintly of old brass polish, melting wax, and the dry ash of yesterday's incense.

They did not know one another closely. They were islands in a crowded archipelago. Some offered a brief, polite nod in the blinding, sun-baked courtyard of the Murugan temple on Sundays, the soles of their bare feet burning on the hot sandstone. Others passed silently in the narrow, fluorescent-lit aisles of the same

Harris Park grocery stores, where the air was a thick, chaotic blend of raw ginger, dusty sacks of basmati rice, and the sweet, fermented odor of green mangoes arriving still hard and unforgiving in their wooden crates. Their lives ran on strict, parallel tracks rather than intertwined destinies. Each household was its own private, isolated weather system of gruelling work, quiet affection, sudden arguments over electricity bills, and the endless, small, negotiated compromises of long-term marriage. Yet, what they shared, entirely without knowing it as they waited at the same pedestrian crossings or bought coffee from the same corner cafes, was the profound, terrifying vulnerability of human bodies that had crossed vast, dark oceans and survived decades of labor. They shared the stubborn, blinding optimism of the living—the deep-seated, unspoken belief that their current state of health was a permanent, concrete residence, rather than what it truly was: a fragile, temporary visa, highly subject to sudden, violent revocation.

The human body, however, keeps its own dark, silent counsel. It operates in the absolute pitch-black of the interior, charting its own cellular topography far away from the conscious mind. Long before any catastrophic diagnosis is finally spoken aloud in a freezing consulting room that smells aggressively of sharp bleach, rubbing alcohol, and the synthetic, floral sweetness of hand sanitiser, the flesh quietly begins to send its earliest, encrypted messages. These are messages so quiet, so easily drowned out by the chaotic noise of modern life, that they can be seamlessly mistaken for the ordinary, dismissible complaints of middle age. It begins not with a scream, but with a whisper in a crowded room.

It is a subtle shift in the internal gravity: a hollow, leaden weight that settles in the long bones of the legs, leaving without explanation, making the simple act of rising from a chair feel like

pulling boots from thick mud. It is a dry, scraping cough that tastes faintly of old copper at the back of the throat, stubbornly refusing the calendar of the changing seasons, rattling the ribs in the dead of night. It is a night of sleep, drenched in a sudden, sour-smelling sweat, that returns the sleeper to the morning light feeling more bruised and depleted than the night before. It is a vivid, painless ribbon of crimson blood blooming like a dark orchid in the porcelain bowl, shocking and bright against the water. It is a frantic, invisible itch that burns deep beneath the dermis, a static electricity that no cooling cream or frantic scratching can ever satisfy. These strange, sensory anomalies are not yet the loud, undeniable declarations of ruin. They are mere invitations, almost polite, almost courteous in their subtlety. They are incredibly easy to decline, to rationalize, to file away under the heading of stress or weather or the simple, heavy accumulation of years. They are the beckoning.

This manuscript is a record of nine such quiet, terrifying beckonings. It is the story of the men and women who, in vastly different measures of panicked attention and stubborn, desperate delay, chose to finally answer—or very nearly failed to answer—the knocking at the internal door. It is absolutely not a sterile chronicle of triumphant medical victories or crushing, cinematic defeats. Instead, it is an intimate, visceral account of the precise moment when the private, deeply familiar landscape of the body violently shifts its tectonic plates. It explores the terrifying second when the comfortable, well-lit rooms of selfhood suddenly reveal a dark, heavy oak door that had always been standing there in the shadows, but had never before slowly creaked open to reveal the abyss behind it.

In Parramatta, under the exact same vast, bruised-purple sky that covers the slow-moving river, the shrieking railway lines, and the

quiet, sleeping streets, nine ordinary couples discovered a terrifying truth about devotion. They learned that love, in its most mature, tested, and resilient form, is not merely the comfortable sharing of sunny, unbroken days and warm meals. It is the fierce, terrifying willingness to remain physically and emotionally present when those very days begin to speak in a new, urgent, and violent tongue. The stories that follow in these pages are offered in the solemn belief that human attention itself is a profound form of grace. They exist to bear witness to the fact that the earliest, quietest signs—those strange colors, odd pains, and new, unsettling rhythms so easily dismissed in the rush of living—are sometimes the very last, clear chance the body generously offers before the internal conversation becomes impossible to hear over the deafening roar of the end.

Chapter One: Sumitri

Sumitri rose each morning before the first T1 Western Line train of the day rattled past the end of their street, the heavy metal wheels singing against the steel rails in a high, metallic shriek that had become as familiar to her as the rhythm of her own breathing. The flat in Harris Park was small, its walls painted a practical, unremarkable cream, but she had arranged it with the quiet precision of a woman who understood that domestic order could be a form of daily prayer. In the dim, pre-dawn shadows, the air in the living room was thick with the lingering scent of yesterday's sandalwood incense and the sharp, clean tang of the brass polish she used on the small shrine. The brass gods on the corner shelf received their daily anointing of jasmine oil and a single fresh marigold, its bright orange petals vivid in the gloom. The children's school uniforms hung ready on the backs of the dining chairs, smelling faintly of fabric softener and the hot iron. In the kitchen, the cool terracotta tiles bit into the soles of her bare feet. The rice