

Lust and Algorithms

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Introduction: The Architecture of Illusions

In the luminous, sprawling, yet inherently treacherous archipelago of the modern human soul, where silent, invisible rivers of silicon carve their way through the ancient, unyielding bedrock of human longing, there unfolds a tale as old as desire itself. Yet, this narrative is violently refracted through the merciless, algorithmic prisms of our digital age. *Lust and Algorithms* is not merely a chronicle of nine women adrift in Sydney's glittering, sun-drenched harbour of opportunity; it is a profound, sprawling elegy to the

absolute fragility of true connection in an epoch defined by engineered, synthetic intimacy.

To understand their journey, one must first inhale the atmosphere of their displacement. Sumitri, Puju, Rashmi Bongi, Komal Gupta, Pallavi, Priyanka, Khushboo, and Rohini arrived in Australia as elite IT expatriates from the sun-baked, chaotic, and fiercely vibrant subcontinent, soon joined by Priya Sharma—a diaspora daughter known affectionately to her circle as Ms. Aussie. They brought with them the phantom scents of home: the heavy, intoxicating aroma of roasted cumin, the sharp, metallic tang of monsoon rains hitting parched earth, and the sweet, decaying perfume of bruised jasmine garlands. In Sydney, these sensory memories violently collided with a new reality. The air here was sharp and oceanic, heavily laced with the scent of chilled eucalyptus, expensive, roasted espresso beans, and the constant, briny breath of the Pacific Ocean rolling over the sandstone cliffs.

They were drawn together not just by their shared ambition, but by the quiet, gnawing ache of cultural displacement. Their days were spent in towering, climate-controlled citadels of blue glass and grey steel, under the harsh, humming glare of fluorescent lights that drained the rich, warm hues from their skin, leaving a pallid, corporate sheen. Their ears were filled with the ceaseless, staccato clatter of mechanical keyboards and the low, droning hum of colossal server farms that smelled faintly of ozone and heated plastic. It was a sterile, highly controlled existence, ripe for the disruption of a sudden, vibrant temptation.

Under the silken, calculated prodding of Gita—a local hire whose words dripped with the sweet, intoxicating viscosity of honeyed poison—they stepped out of the fluorescent glare and into the neon-drenched arena of digital romance. Gita's perfume, a heavy,

expensive blend of dark vanilla and synthetic musk, seemed to linger in the air long after she had spoken. She urged them to register on seven distinct dating platforms, pitching it as a necessary initiation into the cosmopolitan rhythms of the city. With the exuberance of birds testing newfound wings, the women plunged into the glowing, sapphire-blue light of their smartphone screens.

What began as a thrilling game of liberation rapidly overwhelmed their senses. The apps were a kaleidoscope of curated perfection: sun-kissed smiles flashing against the blinding white sands of Bondi Beach, the warm, amber glow of filament bulbs in hidden Darlinghurst speakeasies, the deep emerald greens of the Royal Botanic Garden. The digital world promised a buffet of sensory delights. It delivered candlelit dinners where the sharp, acidic tang of expensive Shiraz stained their lips, and the air smelled heavily of melting wax, charred rosemary, and the intoxicating, musky pheromones of new lovers. It offered roaming, breathless weekends along coastal walks where the deafening, rhythmic crash of the navy-blue ocean against the rocks drowned out the nagging voice of caution. It culminated in nights of uncontrolled, chaotic surrender, where bodies, slick with sweat and illuminated by the slashing, silver strobe of passing car headlights, spoke in ancient, desperate languages far older than any compiled code.

Yet, as the women reveled in the high-frequency voltage of these encounters, the sinister, invisible architecture of the platforms was silently at work. The algorithms—the cold, insatiable, invisible deities of our modern pantheon—did not merely exist to match lonely hearts. They were designed, with surgical precision, to harvest human souls. The soft, satisfying *ping* of a new match,

which had once triggered a rush of warm dopamine, masked a dark, extractive reality.

Private chats, filled with whispered, late-night confidences about homesickness and secret desires, were logged. Intimate, high-definition videos, born in breathless moments of absolute trust where the smell of rumpled linen and warm skin filled the room, were silently siphoned away from their devices. These digital fragments were pulled into the deep web's abyssal, lightless vaults—realms located far beyond the reach of the harsh Australian sunlight or any concept of human mercy. In those encrypted shadows, their vulnerabilities were reduced to binary code, becoming highly liquid currency for blackmail and organized extortion. The women who had sought the vibrant, messy colors of freedom found themselves violently ensnared in a dangerous, monochromatic game of absolute control, where hidden motives, orchestrated by faceless, unseen puppeteers, turned their romance into brutal ransom.

This narrative, rendered carefully in the tradition of the grand literary witnesses to humanity's tragic follies and triumphant resurrections, probes deeply into the shadowed, agonizing interstices between modern technology and ancient eros. It echoes the sweeping, tragic grandeur of classical epics, where blinding hubris inevitably meets a terrifying nemesis, yet it fiercely locates its power in the intimate, the contemporary, and the painfully, sensorily real. Sydney itself serves as both a breathtaking sanctuary and a hostile stage. Its iconic opera sails gleam like pearlescent, hopeful beacons against the bruising indigo of the night sky, while its ancient, rough-hewn sandstone cliffs constantly whisper of geologic endurance against the crashing tides.

Through the distinct, highly individualized, yet inextricably interwoven chapters of each woman's descent, we are plunged into the labyrinth of their digital awakening. We travel from the heady, intoxicating perfume of their initial excitement—smelling of expensive cocktails and new perfume—to the bitter, metallic aftertaste of total violation. We witness the terrifying shift in light, from the warm, golden-hour glow of romantic possibility to the cold, blue-white glare of a laptop screen displaying a blackmail demand at three in the morning. We feel the sisterly solidarity forged in shared, agonizing fire, and we trace the emergence of a hard-won, scarred wisdom that flickers, stubbornly and brightly, even in the absolute pitch-black of digital despair.

Lust and Algorithms is a sprawling meditation on our era's central, most terrifying paradox: the glossy promise of boundless, frictionless connection yielding an unprecedented, suffocating isolation and systemic predation. It asks, with an unflinching, bright-eyed honesty and a lyrical, mournful grace, what ultimately becomes of the human heart when love's oldest, most chaotic dance is rigidly choreographed by soulless machines serving hidden agendas of domination and profit. In the pages that follow, the intensely personal becomes the universal; the fleeting digital footprint becomes an eternal scar. Yet, the reader is left not merely with the bitter ash of despair, but with the quiet, resilient, breathtaking beauty of women who, though deeply scarred and sensorily battered, fiercely reclaim their narrative sovereignty from the very jaws of the algorithm. Herein lies the story's most luminous, enduring truth: even in the deepest, most suffocating shadows of manipulation, the human spirit refuses to be overwritten, authoring its own defiant, brilliant coda.