

I Have a Husband

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Introduction

Chapter 1: Girls' Night Planning

Chapter 2: The Husbands' Opportunity

Chapter 3: Bar Deflections

Chapter 4: Escalation at Home

Chapter 5: Wives' Early Return Decision

Chapter 6: The Shock Discovery

Chapter 7: The Chase-Out

Chapter 8: Confrontations

Chapter 9: Resolutions and Reflections

Chapter 10: The Sterile Aftermath

Conclusion

Introduction

The Parramatta evening always begins with a vibrant, intoxicating deception. As the sun dips below the Sydney skyline, the heavy, golden light surrenders to the sharp, electric hum of neon signs. The air along Church Street becomes a thick, sensory paradox—the crisp, salty breeze blowing in from the distant coast completely overpowered by the sizzling aromas of roasted cumin, frying garlic, and sweet jalebi spilling out of the corner restaurants. It is a neighborhood suspended between two worlds, a place where the diaspora tries to anchor its ancient traditions in foreign, modern soil.

Tonight, the spotlight falls on a specific circle of eighteen: nine women and nine men whose lives are about to collide in a spectacular, devastating clash of culture, expectation, and desire.

As Ubers pull up to the suburban curbs, catching flashes of brilliant silk sarees, the sharp sparkle of diamond bindis, and the sleek lines of modern denim, the evening's architecture becomes clear. The nine women are arming themselves for a night out in a city that is as predatory as it is liberating. Their chosen armor is not just flawless makeup or the sharp scent of designer perfume; it is a single, impenetrable phrase: *"I have a husband."*

It is the ultimate cultural shield. A polite, absolute barrier deployed against the aggressive advances of strangers and the dangerous, lightning-fast gossip of the desi auntie networks. It is a sacred vow transformed into a weapon, designed to protect the fragile honor of their families back home and their standing in the community.

But shields are only effective against external threats. As the women head toward the blinding strobe lights and thumping bass of the clubs, leaving their husbands—including Vikram, Arjun, and Bholu—behind closed doors, they leave their true vulnerabilities unguarded.

They trust that the vows they defend so fiercely in public are being honored in private.

They are wrong. This is the story of the night the armor held, but the sanctuary burned—and the sterile, agonizing aftermath that proved some stains can never truly be scrubbed away.

Chapter 1: Girls' Night Planning

In the vibrant, multicultural suburbs of Parramatta, Sydney, the late autumn evening air hung warm and heavy, carrying the distant, savory scent of sizzling garlic and roasting cumin from nearby restaurants. The golden hour cast a brilliant, honeyed glow through the floor-to-ceiling windows of Bholu and Ms. Aussie's spacious tenth-floor apartment, illuminating the dust motes dancing over her pristine beige rugs. Nine women gathered in the sprawling living room, an explosion of color, sound, and competing perfumes that completely transformed the space.

The air inside was a heady, intoxicating cocktail of scents. The sharp, sophisticated bite of Priyanka's Chanel No. 5, freshly applied upon her arrival, mingled seamlessly with the earthy, sweet aroma of fresh jasmine woven intricately into Sumitri's long, thick braid. The faint, sweet smell of mango mocktails and the sharp tang of fresh lime lingered over the kitchen island.

The group was a breathtaking tapestry of desi diaspora. Priyanka, the confident Indian-Australian marketing executive, paced the room in a sharp emerald-green kurti paired with sleek black jeans, the soft clack-clack of her stilettos setting a rhythmic heartbeat for the evening. Her career had been a hard-fought battle of balancing corporate cutthroat deadlines with demanding family expectations, and tonight was her release. Beside her sat Rashmi Bongi, a curvaceous and fiery Bengali beauty draped in a deep crimson saree that seemed to absorb and radiate the room's warm light. Her heavy gold bangles jingled like wind chimes every time she adjusted her bold, ruby-red lipstick in the mirror.

Lounging on the velvet sofa was Puju, the ever-bubbly Punjabi, radiating infectious energy in a neon-pink top that practically

glowed. Her loud, bell-like laughter cut through the hum of the city traffic below. Next to her sat Sumitri, the graceful Tamilian, adjusting the pleats of her rich mustard-yellow silk saree, her quiet elegance a stark contrast to Puju's vibrant chaos. Dhivya, the sharp-witted Sri Lankan-Aussie, leaned against the wall in a distressed denim jacket over a glittering black dress, the scent of her vanilla perfume trailing behind her as she cracked dry jokes. Komal, the quiet yet strikingly beautiful North Indian, sat softly in pastel peach, her silver anklets chiming softly whenever she shifted her weight. Pallavi, the elegant Maharashtrian, wore a deep forest-green outfit accented by a traditional pearl *nath* that caught the fading sunlight, while Kajal, the glamorous Gujarati, sparkled in intricate mirror-work that threw tiny, dazzling reflections across the apartment walls.

Finally, there was Ms. Aussie, affectionately known as Priya Sharma. Born and raised in coastal Sydney, she had completely revamped her style to blend into this tight-knit desi crew, wearing a stunning sun-kissed yellow lehenga skirt paired with a modern white crop top. She smelled of coconut and sea salt, a lingering reminder of her roots. Her husband, Bhola, stubbornly refused to adopt any Aussie nuances, a point of loving contention Ms. Aussie was still trying—and failing—to navigate.

Priyanka raised her crystal mocktail glass, the ice clinking sharply against the rim. "Tonight is ours, ladies," she announced, her voice echoing off the high ceilings. "No husbands. No in-laws calling about dinner. No drama. Just good music, drinks, dancing, and laughs. We deserve this after months of work, family duties, and all the usual pressures."

The room erupted in a chorus of cheers, the collective sound of nine exhausted but thrilled women echoing like a sudden burst of music.

These women, all married for several years, navigated the incredibly complex world of desi expectations in modern Australia. The heavy influences of arranged marriages, the suffocatingly tight community networks where gossip traveled at the speed of light, and the delicate tightrope walk between traditional values and modern Sydney life left them little room for spontaneous joy. Tonight, they dressed to impress.

Conversations flowed freely as they finalized their plans, their voices a melodic mix of English, Hindi, and regional dialects. "My husband keeps complaining about these late nights," Rashmi laughed, the scent of her cherry lip gloss catching the air as she checked her reflection. "But he knows girls' night is sacred."

The topic shifted to their shared universal shield: the "I have a husband" line. They shared animated stories of deploying it in everyday life—at brightly lit gyms, under the fluorescent glare of supermarkets, or at loud social events.

Ms. Aussie, blending seamlessly into the dynamic, added her perspective. "You desi girls have perfected it, honestly. I've learned from the best. It's polite but completely final." The group laughed in agreement, bonding over the shared exhaustion of deflecting advances in a city full of stags from every background imaginable—Anglo-Aussies with their laid-back grins, Lebanese men with their smooth confidence, and fellow Indian expats. They discussed how the tactics varied: direct and unyielding for some, indirect with a forced, sweet smile for others, but always prioritizing their safety and family honor.

As their Ubers were called, phones pinged sharply in the room. The women touched up their makeup, the smell of setting spray and pressed powder filling the space. The Uber ride down the buzzing