

Parramatta Interrupted

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Introduction: The Architecture of Waiting
Chapter I: Sumitri
Chapter II: Paju
Chapter III: Rashmi Bongi
Chapter IV: Komal Gupta
Chapter V: Pallavi
Chapter VI: Priya Sharma
Chapter VII: Priyanka
Chapter VIII: Khushboo
Chapter IX: Rohini
Conclusion: The Ledger of the Night

Introduction: The Architecture of Waiting

The apartment block at 69 Cowper Street did not look like a vessel for miracles. It was a brutalist rectangle of faded, beige brick and heavily oxidized aluminum window frames, a utilitarian structure erected in the late nineteen-seventies that had slowly absorbed the heavy, exhausting breath of Parramatta for decades. As the harsh, blinding gold of the Australian afternoon sun began its slow, bleeding descent toward the jagged silhouette of the Blue Mountains, the building seemed to sigh, settling into the cooling shadows. The sky above the commercial district transitioned from a piercing, relentless azure to a bruised, magnificent violet, striated with ribbons of electric magenta and bruised plum. Against this

dramatic, theatrical canvas, the commercial neon of the city center flickered to life—emerald greens from pharmacy crosses, the harsh, buzzing crimson of takeaway signs, and the cool, sterile white of office towers where cleaners were just beginning their shifts.

The Parramatta River, running sluggishly a few streets away, acted as a dark, liquid mirror to the sky. It smelled of ancient, churned silt, damp eucalyptus bark shedding in the nearby parks, and the faint, metallic tang of diesel fuel from the ferries. The river was a silent, ancient artery completely indifferent to the concrete metropolis that had violently bloomed along its banks. The sound of the city was a complex, layered symphony: the relentless, sub-bass thrum of radial tires rushing along the M4 motorway, the rhythmic, metallic screech of the T1 train line curving heavily on its iron tracks, and the aggressive, territorial shrieks of white cockatoos returning to roost in the towering Morton Bay figs.

Yet, inside the concrete hive of 69 Cowper Street, a different, entirely silent orchestration was taking place. The building was segmented into identical, claustrophobic flats, stacked upon each other like a filing cabinet of human lives. In the dim, narrow corridors lined with cheap, mustard-colored carpet that perpetually smelled of damp wool and old cooking oil, one could usually hear the muffled chaos of ordinary existence: televisions blaring reality shows, children arguing, the clatter of pots. But on this specific evening, a peculiar, vibrating hush had descended upon nine specific apartments.

For weeks, the heavy, leather-bound pages of imported almanacs, the *Panjikas* brought over in heavily taped suitcases from Kolkata, Delhi, and Mumbai, had promised a rare, flawless alignment. It was a specific intersection of lunar phases and planetary gravities that ancient astronomers had calculated as the most fertile, the most

auspicious, the most aggressively forgiving window for new life to take root. This was the hour when the rigid, unyielding mathematics of the universe supposedly softened, bending down to listen to the desperate arithmetic of human desire.

The nine women scattered across the different floors of the building did not know each other's intimate secrets. They nodded politely at the mailboxes; they held the heavy glass lobby doors open for one another; they complained mutually about the strata fees and the perpetually leaking washing machines in the communal laundry. They did not know that their distinct, private hopes had all converged on this exact hour—eight guided by the meticulous mathematics of ancient almanacs, and one guided by the undeniable, magnetic pull of her own intuition.

As the violet sky deepened into a starless, **heavy** indigo, the building became a tapestry of intense, sensory rituals.. In one flat on the second floor, the air grew thick with the sharp, medicinal scent of crushed camphor and the rich, golden aroma of burning ghee. On the third, it was the heady, intoxicating perfume of ylang-ylang and sweet almond oil, masking the smell of the city exhaust. Some women smoothed down high-thread-count percale sheets until they were as flawless as fresh snow; others laid out worn, patterned blankets that smelled of mothballs and grandmotherly love. Some extinguished the harsh overhead lights, replacing them with the trembling, amber glow of brass oil lamps; others relied on the pale, ghostly silver of the moonlight filtering through the aluminum blinds.

The men arrived home, shedding the heavy armor of their working days—the suits smelling of stale office coffee, the high-vis shirts carrying the dust of construction sites, the retail uniforms carrying the synthetic scents of department stores. They stepped into these

meticulously curated sanctuaries, instantly feeling the heavy, charged gravity of the hour. The ordinary, water-stained plaster walls of the apartments seemed to hum with an internal luminosity. The deafening noise of Parramatta—the sirens, the traffic, the trains—was aggressively pushed back, relegated to a distant, meaningless murmur beyond the glass.

They were building a collective bridge of breath and skin, a desperate petition hurled into the dark against the crushing weight of biological clocks, failed medical interventions, and the silent, tearing grief of the months before. It was a moment of profound, breathtaking vulnerability, an orchestrated surrender to the promised magic of the hour.

But magic, in the modern world, is a fragile, easily shattered construct. It does not account for the mundane, chaotic variables of proximity living. It does not account for the complex, invisible circulatory system of copper wiring, pressurized water pipes, and smoke sensors that tethered these nine private sanctuaries together.

Two doors down from one of these sanctuaries of desperate hope, in the cluttered, poorly ventilated space of flat 4B, the air did not smell of sandalwood, camphor, or desire. It smelled of stale beer, unwashed laundry, and the sharp, chemical odor of cheap electrical coils heating up. Houtam, a man entirely unconcerned with celestial alignments, lunar phases, or the heavy, breaking hearts of the women separated from him by mere inches of drywall, had turned his stove on to boil water. His mind was elsewhere, heavily focused on the impending, fragrant release of a full-body massage across town. He left the apartment, the door clicking shut behind him with a terrifying finality.