

Parramatta Dreams

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Introduction

Chapter 1 – Chunmun Singh

Chapter 2 – Sumitri

Chapter 3 – Puju

Chapter 4 – Rashmi Bongi

Chapter 5 – Komal Gupta

Chapter 6 – Pallavi

Chapter 7 – Priya Sharma (Ms. Aussie)

Chapter 8 – Priyanka

Chapter 9 – Khushboo

Chapter 10 – Rohini

Conclusion

Introduction

There is a house on Cowper Street in Parramatta that does not announce itself to the casual observer. It sits quietly, receding into the background noise of the encroaching city. Its brick is ordinary, baked to a faded, dusty rust-red by decades of blistering Western Sydney summers, the mortar between the stones crumbling into a fine, grey powder that smells faintly of chalk and dry earth. Its windows hold the same flat, slate-grey light as the windows of a hundred neighbouring houses, reflecting the low-hanging clouds and the occasional, jarring flash of headlights from cars turning off the main artery. The river beyond it, a murky ribbon of olive-green and

brown, moves with the same slow, heavy indifference it has always shown the city, carrying with it the scent of wet mud, decaying eucalyptus leaves, and the distant, metallic tang of storm drains.

Yet, to step inside that unassuming house is to cross a violent, invisible border. Inside, the air is not empty; it is a thick, atmospheric pressure system heavy with unfinished journeys and the collision of disparate worlds. Fourteen lives press desperately against one another in rooms that were built for a modest, nuclear quiet, never designed to hold so much vibrating memory or so much stubborn ambition. The sensory overload is immediate and complex. The hallway, lined with scuffed beige linoleum, traps a swirling emulsion of scents: the sharp, biting sting of hot mustard oil; the synthetic, floral sweetness of cheap fabric softener; the damp, earthy aroma of shoes that have walked miles of concrete; and the underlying, unavoidable scent of old timber quietly giving way to time.

Chunmun Singh returns each evening to this pressure cooker from the towering, sterile glass obelisks of Redfern, bringing with him the ozone smell of the train and the frigid, scentless chill of corporate air conditioning. He spends his days designing vast, immaculate digital systems that make other people's chaos disappear into sleek, blue-lit screens. But around him, moving in a restless, complex choreography, are nine women—Sumitri, Paju, Rashmi, Komal, Pallavi, Priya, Priyanka, Khushboo, and Rohini. Each of them carries the heavy, colorful ghost of a former horizon, a phantom limb of the life they were supposed to have. The house echoes with their simultaneous existence: the sudden, bright clatter of a dropping pan; the low, urgent murmur of a hushed argument in a dialect meant for mountain air; the heavy, dragging footsteps of someone

returning from a double shift under the harsh glare of fluorescent retail lights.

They came across vast, terrifying oceans, clutching thin, blue passports, believing with a fierce, naive desperation that distance itself would act as a crucible—that the sheer act of traveling so far would burn away the impurities of their struggles and refine the precious cargo they carried. Some brought blindingly bright, highly saturated visions. They dreamed of private rooms with heavy brass locks that smelled of fresh paint and safety; of grand, velvet-draped stages large enough to absorb the full, echoing resonance of a classically trained voice; of pristine, white-tiled laboratories where the slow, quiet observation of truth would still be valued above the rapid, noisy currency of commerce; of lush, manicured gardens smelling of wet loam that would never be violently uprooted by the sudden, screaming devastation of the monsoon.

Others brought quieter, more fragile hopes, painted in softer, pastel tones. They hoped that love, unburdened by the suffocating weight of extended families and societal surveillance, might breathe more freely under these massive, star-choked southern skies. They hoped that motherhood could be a gentle, sunlit exploration rather than a rigid, inherited duty. They hoped that justice, stripped of corruption, might be a tangible, solid thing they could finally hold in their hands.

The house on Cowper Street received all of them, and all of their monumental expectations, without ceremony. It offered no grand welcome, only the harsh, yellow glare of the porch light and the reality of its limitations. It offered thin, hollow-core doors that transmitted every cough and sigh. It offered negotiated bathrooms that smelled of six different types of soap and the frantic, humid steam of hurried morning routines. It offered the terrifying,

constant arithmetic of rent, calculated late at night under the blue glow of cheap desk lamps. And, most profoundly, it offered the particular, suffocating loneliness that arrives only after the adrenaline of the journey fades, the suitcases are pushed under the beds, and one realizes they have finally, irreversibly, stopped moving.

What follows in these rooms is not a triumphant, glossy chronicle of arrival. Arrival is a sudden, blinding flash—the stamp on the visa, the blinding glare of the tarmac, the sharp intake of unfamiliar air. Arrival is only the deceptive beginning of the much longer, more agonizing, and exacting work of survival. These walls bear witness to the slow, painful alteration of ten deeply private dreams placed under the crushing, hydraulic pressure of shared existence.

These chronicles do not promise the cinematic triumph of dreams perfectly realized in high definition. They record, instead, a much quieter, grittier metamorphosis. It is the agonizing process by which a blinding, vibrant vision sheds its first, bright, naive skin. The colors fade from screaming neon and deep crimson to the muted, durable tones of slate, navy, and rust. The dreams shrink in circumference, losing their grand architecture, but in doing so, they become something both smaller and infinitely more enduring. They become something that can live, without apology or bitterness, among the ordinary, chaotic sounds of people who have stared at the grey walls, listened to the screech of the Parramatta trains, and made the grueling, daily choice to remain.

Outside, the river keeps its dark, swirling counsel, smelling of salt and decay. The ancient jacarandas lining the cracked pavement drop their bruised, purple litter onto the hoods of parked cars without regard for anyone's homesickness or longing. And inside the house, beneath the hum of the refrigerator and the glow of the