

A Pitchful of Joy

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Introduction: A Pitchful of Joy

Chapter 1: Sumitri's Frozen Boundary

Chapter 2: Puju's Sterile Field

Chapter 3: Rashmi Bongi's Armored Bowler

Chapter 4: Komal Gupta's Orbiting Field

Chapter 5: Pallavi's Conducted Feast

Chapter 6: Priya Sharma's Returning Boomerang

Chapter 7: Priyanka's Iron Weights

Chapter 8: Khushboo's Vortex of Perfection

Chapter 9: Rohini's Digital Rebellion and the Final Stroke

Conclusion: The Pitch That Remained

Introduction: A Pitchful of Joy

In the sun-drenched, pressure-cooked, relentlessly beating heart of Parramatta, the sensory overload of the physical world was a heavy, suffocating blanket. Here, the Great Western Highway's low, guttural, mechanical hum never entirely ceased; it was a foundational, bone-rattling frequency that vibrated through the soles of the feet and settled deep into the jawline. The air above the dark asphalt shimmered with brutal, undulating heat waves, smelling sharply of scorched rubber, vaporizing diesel exhaust, and the bitter, metallic tang of hot brake pads. Towering above this river of steel and noise, massive new developments of pristine, blue-glass towers threw razor-edged, perfectly geometrical shadows

across the baking, stark-white concrete of the sidewalks. The light in the city was aggressive, a blinding, over-exposed glare that bleached the sky into a pale, breathless, washed-out indigo by mid-afternoon.

Nestled uncomfortably within this aggressive urban sprawl, the residential block at 69 Cowper Street stood as a dense, beige, spectacularly unimaginative monument to constrained, claustrophobic lives. It was an aging structure of porous brick and weeping mortar, radiating the stored heat of the day long into the suffocating night. Within its thin, wildly inadequate plasterboard walls and groaning, settling timber joists, a complex, toxic olfactory and auditory ecosystem thrived. The building breathed with the competing, intensely domestic scents of its inhabitants: the sharp, eye-watering sizzle of mustard oil hitting a hot pan, the heavy, sweet earthiness of roasting cumin, the chemical sting of cheap lemon floor polish, and the stale, damp odor of poorly ventilated laundry rooms.

Here, nine *desi* couples lived shoulder-to-shoulder, measuring the perceived failures of their marriages daily against a single, impossible standard: the profoundly quiet, flawlessly disciplined bachelor downstairs. Chunmun Singh, a highly sought-after Solution Architect at Baba Bank, was a man who had seemingly optimized his very existence. He was a dedicated practitioner of Raja Yoga, a master of the *Manomaya Kosha*—the mental and astral sheath of the human soul. His ground-floor apartment was a heavily fortified sensory sanctuary. He had meticulously stripped his physical environment of all chaos, sealing his windows against the highway's roar and filling the cool, dark, stagnant air of his rooms with the thick, cloying, deeply resinous smoke of pure Mysore sandalwood. His lighting was restricted to the soft, flickering, amber glow of a

solitary brass oil lamp, casting long, peaceful, dancing shadows against stark, unadorned white walls. When the psychic miasma of his neighbors' resentments—their muted arguments, their heavy, frustrated footsteps, the aggressive clinking of their dishware—leaked through the floorboards, Chunmun had once answered with the precise, surgical interventions of a spectral debugger. He would project his astral form into the building's cavities, pruning the chaotic emotional noise, restoring absolute, deadening silence, and returning to his sandalwood-scented physical shell, fully believing that the human system, like a data pipeline, was best when perfectly optimized and entirely frictionless.

Then, inevitably, the Sen family arrived, shattering the fragile, forced equilibrium.

Surya Sen brought with him the chaotic baggage of a messy, physical life, but more importantly, he brought two remarkably disruptive children. The first was Srustu, a young girl whose soul already carried the quiet, blinding radiance of pure divine inheritance. To Chunmun's astral senses, her very presence in the building smelled of fresh, ozone-rich rain striking dry earth and the intoxicating, sweet perfume of crushed jasmine flowers. She did not walk through the hallways; she seemed to illuminate them, leaving faint, residual trails of warm, buttery golden light in her wake, a visual anomaly that made the cheap fluorescent tubes of the lobby look sickly and gray in comparison.

The second child was Dustu, a boy whose cheap, neon-green plastic cricket bat and seemingly tireless, oxygen-rich lungs immediately declared a total, uncompromising war upon every quiet hour of the day and night. With Dustu's arrival, the narrow, beige-carpeted hallway instantly became a designated cricket pitch. The fragile, hollow plasterboard walls became the unforgiving boundaries. The

constant, hollow, echoing *thwack!* of the hollow plastic bat striking a polymer ball, followed immediately by Dustu's shrill, triumphant, echoing shouts, became a structural flaw in Chunmun's perfectly curated reality—a persistent, ringing acoustic virus that no amount of polite, tightly-smiled adult complaint could permanently correct. The neighbors would knock, voices would be lowered, and a suffocating, tense silence would return for perhaps ten agonizing minutes. Then, inevitably, the game resumed with entirely undiminished, explosive kinetic force, the *thud-thud-thud* of running feet vibrating the dust right out of the ceiling fixtures.

The breaking point arrived on a sweltering night characterized by a catastrophic power failure and the rise of a massive, heavy, blood-orange full moon. The sudden death of the grid plunged 69 Cowper Street into a shocking, absolute darkness, silencing the hum of the refrigerators, the drone of the air conditioners, and the distant, electronic chatter of televisions. In this sudden, suffocating vacuum of physical noise, the rhythmic, defiant *thwack* of Dustu's bat in the pitch-black hallway echoed like a gunshot.

Chunmun, his patience finally, mathematically exhausted, separated his *Manomaya Kosha* from his physical form. He rose through the dark, sandalwood-scented air, his astral body glowing with a cold, precise, cyan-blue light, fully intending to manifest before the boy as a terrifying, spectral authority figure to frighten him into permanent, paralyzed submission.

Instead of a cowering child, he was immediately met and blocked by Srustu's luminous, overwhelming soul positioned squarely outside the family's peeling veneer door. In the spectral plane, the girl was a towering inferno of protective, blindingly bright gold and amber energy. She stood fiercely defending the loud, chaotic brother who, in the physical world, sometimes annoyed and beat