

The Man Who Sold Sleep

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Introduction

Before the giant, before the business, before the dream, there was only the hum. It was a low, incessant, and deeply resonant thrumming that lived inside Chunmun Singh's cramped Parramatta apartment, a sound with two distinct sources.

The first was the server rack that squatted in the corner of his room like a malevolent shrine, a metallic beast of blinking green and amber lights that exhaled a constant, sighing stream of warm, dusty air. The lights flickered against the peeling beige paint of the walls, casting long, dancing shadows that made the small space feel even more claustrophobic. The air in the room was a stale, layered cocktail, thick with the lingering scent of last night's reheated curry, the sharp, hot plastic smell of the overworked servers, and the cold, metallic tang of profound loneliness. This rack was his altar and his cage, his only tangible connection to the outside world and the source of the paltry 2000 AUD a month he earned as a freelance solutions architect for BABA Bank. He spent his days as a digital ghost, his consciousness projected through glowing fibre optic cables into the sterile, logical world of the cloud, a silent, colourless place where his physical body was an irrelevant, inconvenient, and hungry anchor.

The second hum was quieter, coming from within. It was a silent, invisible resonance he felt thrumming just behind his eyes, a strange and potent energy he had cultivated through fourteen years of disciplined, almost accidental, celibacy. It had begun in his late

teens as a peculiar quietness, a sudden and startling ability to tune out the cacophony of the world so completely that it sometimes seemed to bend to his will. Through years of solitary trial and error, he had learned that he could not only create this quietness within himself but also project it outward. He could feel the frantic, jagged edges of another person's consciousness—the buzzing anxiety, the racing thoughts—and he could smooth them, gently and insistently, until they succumbed to a peaceful, irresistible slumber.

It was a secret and shameful power, one he never spoke of, a strange and unnatural byproduct of his austere life, like a rare, pale flower blooming in the sterile, nutrient-poor soil of his solitude. Its primary application was born not of malice, but of a desperate, gnawing hunger that rivaled any physical craving: his insatiable love for books. The narratives locked between their covers were his only escape from the monochrome reality of his existence. To him, stealing a few hours of a stranger's awareness to borrow their story felt like a balanced, if illicit, transaction.

His life was a stark, repeating loop of quiet desperation. He would wake to the blinking green and amber lights of the server, his digital companions, and code for twelve hours straight, fueled by bitter instant coffee that tasted like burnt earth and scorched ambition. Then, in the evenings, as the sky outside his window bruised from orange to a deep, lonely violet, he would ride the rails. The T1 Western Line was his library, a rolling capsule of humanity where each person was a potential portal to another world, a universe locked between the pages of a book. The carriage lights would flicker over the tired, slack faces, the air thick with the competing smells of fast food, cheap perfume, and damp wool, and Chunmun would feel like a predator, his eyes scanning the herd for the weak, the distracted, the ones already halfway to dreams. The

sharp pang of guilt he felt after each successful “heist” was real, a sour, acidic knot in his stomach, but it was always overwhelmed by the intoxicating thrill of a new story, a fresh universe to inhabit for a precious, fleeting hour or two. He was a man starving, and the narratives were his only nourishment.

He knew little of his own family’s grand, tragic narrative. His memories of his parents were faint, disjointed whispers—his father, a great sage named Vishrava; his mother, a demon princess called Kaikashi. He had siblings somewhere, lost to a life and a land he barely remembered, a place of impossible colours and epic sorrows. He particularly recalled a colossal older brother, a being of truly mythic proportions whose name was a deep, resonant sound buried in the fog of his childhood memories: Kumbhakarna. But these were just fragments, scattered pieces of a puzzle he had no way of assembling. He felt like a stray leaf blown an impossible distance from its ancient, mighty tree, utterly disconnected from his roots, and terribly, completely alone.

One evening, standing on his small balcony, he watched a plane etch a silent, brilliant white scar across the deep violet of the twilight sky. As he watched it disappear into the gathering dark, he felt a strange, inexplicable pull in his chest, a thrum of anticipation that had nothing to do with the servers or the power humming within him. It was the distinct, electric feeling of a story about to begin, a palpable sense that a character of epic, world-altering importance was about to walk onto his very small, very lonely stage. Hindi translation has been provided at the end of the book.

Chapter 1: The Sleeper of Sydney

The morning light was a cruel, liquid silver, pouring through the grimy single window of the Parramatta apartment and splashing

across Chunmun Singh's laptop screen with a merciless glare. He squinted, the harsh light transforming the familiar Salesforce dashboard into an abstract pattern of piercing, hostile white and deep, mocking blue. The recycled air in the cramped room was a thick, stagnant soup, heavy with the lingering scent of yesterday's dal and the low, incessant hum of the server rack that doubled as his bedside table and primary heat source. Its blinking green and amber lights were his constant, silent companions, a digital pulse in the lonely quiet, their hypnotic rhythm the first thing he saw upon waking and the last thing he saw before a restless sleep.

As a freelance solutions architect for BABA Bank, he was a ghost in the machine, a disembodied consciousness haunting the cloud from this tiny, beige room for a paltry 2000 AUD a month. His existence was a stark contrast to the city that lay just beyond his window. Sydney was a vibrant sensory explosion, a place that smelled of sharp sea salt, rich dark-roast espresso, and hot exhaust fumes. It was a city painted in the brilliant, almost-unreal colours of jacaranda trees in bloom and the warm, honeyed tones of colonial sandstone buildings. But Chunmun lived in a monochrome world of code, of late invoices and the looming, ever-present threat of financial disaster.

His real power, the one that truly defined him, had nothing to do with coding a clean API or debugging tangled legacy Java. It was a strange, silent energy he had cultivated through fourteen years of disciplined, almost monastic celibacy. It had begun as a faint, curious thrumming behind his eyes in his teenage years, a strange resonance that he had learned, through lonely practice, to nurture and control. Now, it was a formidable and finely honed tool. Chunmun could make people sleep. It wasn't a violent, thuggish blow of unconsciousness, but a gentle, irresistible wave of