

## **The Good Characters of Sydney**

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### **Introduction: The Architecture of Romance**

There is a widely accepted, foundational theorem in the world of modern software engineering: if you input clean, perfectly formatted data into a well-structured system, you will receive a predictable, flawless output.

Chunmun Singh, a thirty-two-year-old Lead Solution Architect at Baba Bank in Sydney, had built his entire professional existence on this theorem. He spent his days in the sterile, climate-controlled glass monoliths of the Central Business District. The air on the 27th floor was heavily filtered, smelling faintly of ozone from the server

rooms, expensive dry-cleaning, and the sharp, acidic tang of corporate anxiety. He was a master of Azure Data Factory, a man who could untangle the most chaotic, archaic legacy code and migrate it flawlessly to the cloud. He understood logic. He understood systems. He found comfort in absolute predictability.

But Chunmun housed a deeply illogical, messy secret.

When the cold blue light of his dual monitors faded into the warm, bruised-purple twilights of the Australian evening, he rode the train west, back to his apartment. As he shed his tailored corporate armor, he transformed. He brewed thick, bubbling pots of cardamom-laced *chai* that filled his small kitchen with the sweet, heavy scent of ginger and crushed black tea leaves. And then, he wrote poetry.

Under his real name, he managed vast, unfeeling databases. Under his Instagram handle, he was a poet of the diaspora. He wrote of the Parramatta River winding darkly past the sleek, towering glass of the new high-rises, of the bustling, spice-scented chaos of Church Street's restaurant strip on a Friday night, and of the heavy, humid monsoons of his childhood in Jalandhar. He was currently compiling his debut collection, *The Parramatta Princess*, pouring the quiet, agonizing loneliness of being a romantic in a city of five million people into verses that attempted to bridge two completely different worlds.

The problem was that Chunmun's romantic life was currently running on heavily corrupted data.

For two years, he had waded through the treacherous, sensory-overloading swamps of modern Sydney dating. He had endured dates that smelled of cheap tequila and immediate regret in deafening, sticky-floored nightclubs. He had sat across from women

who treated conversations like aggressive LinkedIn networking events, their eyes darting over his shoulder to find someone with a more lucrative stock portfolio. He had his heart bruised, ignored, and ghosted.

The ultimate breaking point occurred on a sweltering Tuesday in February. Chunmun was on a video call with his mother back in India. The internet connection was characteristically terrible, the audio crackling with heavy static. Through the pixelated screen, his mother—waving a wooden spatula dripping with golden, fragrant ghee—delivered her ultimate, terrifying ultimatum.

"Chunmun! You are thirty-two!" she yelled, her voice vibrating the plastic casing of his phone speaker. "Your cousin in Toronto has two children and a brand-new Honda Civic! Stop wasting time with these confused city girls who do not know how to respect elders. You must find a Good Character Girl. Only a Good Character Girl will bring peace and order to your house!"

### *The Good Character Girl.*

It was a mythical, universally understood archetype spoken of in hushed, reverent tones across every culture, continent, and diaspora. She was the ultimate marketing brochure of tradition. Depending on the culture, she was the girl who prayed exactly on time, or the girl who went to therapy and set boundaries, or the girl who could cook a perfect Sunday roast, or the girl who scored 99% on her exams without shedding a single tear. She was the human equivalent of a zero-defect software launch.

Chunmun hung up the phone, the smell of his own burnt toast lingering sadly in the air. He walked into his bathroom and stared at his reflection in the harsh, unforgiving fluorescent light. He was

tired of the chaos. He was tired of the exhausting unpredictability of human emotion.

If love was a system, then perhaps his mother was right. Perhaps the "Good Character Girl" was the clean, optimized data he needed to input into his life to guarantee a peaceful, predictable output.

He walked back to his desk, pushed aside a stack of cloud migration schematics, and opened a fresh, blank notebook that smelled of crisp paper and binding glue. He uncapped his favorite fountain pen. He decided, with the absolute, blinding hubris of a software engineer, to run a Global Romantic Audit. He would seek out the pinnacle of "good character" across the diverse cultural landscape of Sydney. He would date the archetypes. He would find the perfect, flawless system.

He wrote at the top of the page in neat, block letters: *Project: The Algorithm of the Heart.*

He didn't know it yet, but he was about to launch himself into a twelve-chapter, globe-spanning gauntlet of color-coded spreadsheets, telenovela tears, beachside brawls, existential dread, and extra chillies. He was about to learn the hard way that the human heart is the ultimate legacy system—and it violently, beautifully resists being optimized.

## **Chapter 1: The Chinese Enigma**

In the hyper-sterile, climate-controlled ecosystem of Sydney's financial district, Chunmun Singh sat at his desk on the 27th floor of Baba Bank. The overhead fluorescent lights hummed with a low, oppressive frequency, casting a pale blue, shadowless glow over his dual monitors. The air smelled faintly of ozone from the overworked server towers and the sharp, acidic tang of stale espresso radiating

from the breakroom down the hall. By day, he was the unflappable Solution Architect, a master of logic who could make tangled legacy systems sing in flawless Kubernetes clusters.

But by night, the cold blue lights faded into the warm, golden-hour hues of his imagination. He transformed into Chunmun the Poet. He spent his evenings trying to adapt the complex, melodic structures of traditional Rabindra Sangeet into modern English verse for his upcoming debut poetry collection, *The Parramatta Princess*. His verses about monsoon rains, eucalyptus shadows, and unspoken longings went mildly viral on Instagram Reels, catching the attention of the city's literary and romantic hopefuls.

Women noticed. Messages flooded in, accompanied by the constant, soft *ping* of his phone notifications: heart emojis, poetic replies, and invitations for coffee. But Chunmun had standards. After one disastrous date with a girl whose idea of "good character" meant screaming off-key karaoke over the deafening bass of a subterranean nightclub, he declared to his bathroom mirror: "Only good character girls from now on."

His first candidate materialized amid the sensory overload of a Chinatown dumpling house during a Tuesday team lunch. The restaurant was a chaotic symphony: the aggressive clatter of ceramic spoons against porcelain bowls, the roar of massive steel woks erupting with bursts of orange flame, and the loud, rapid-fire chatter of hungry patrons. The air was thick with the mouth-watering aromas of roasted star anise, sharp black vinegar, and the rich, fatty scent of pork broth.

Her name was Li Mei. Born in Shanghai, raised partly in Sydney, she worked as a risk analyst two floors below him. She wore a perfectly tailored navy blazer and ordered steamed buns with the

surgical precision of a battlefield commander. Chunmun watched in awe as she calculated the perfect dipping sauce ratio—exactly three parts soy to one part vinegar—her chopstick movements a blur of practiced grace.

"Stability is beauty," she told him a week later when he recited one of his *Parramatta Princess* poems under the flickering neon glow of a Sussex Street bakery. Her eyes sparkled with a disciplined, calculating mischief. The scent of freshly baked egg tarts wafted between them, sweet and buttery. Within two weeks, they were exclusively dating.

Mei woke at 5:30 AM every day to the soft, rhythmic chimes of her meditation app. She practiced tai chi while the sky was still a bruised, indigo purple, mapping out local property price fluctuations in her head. When she cooked for him, the kitchen erupted in sensory glory. Her authentic mapo tofu arrived in a shallow bowl, the silken white cubes drowning in a pool of crimson, bubbling chili oil. The dish smelled fiercely of Sichuan peppercorns, a scent so intensely aromatic it made Chunmun's eyes water with pure, nostalgic joy before the numbing heat even touched his tongue.

On their third date, she brought her mother along "by coincidence" to the Art Gallery of NSW. The gallery was hushed and smelled of beeswax floor polish and expensive dust. Aunty, wearing a jade necklace that clicked softly against her collarbone, inspected Chunmun from head to toe, her gaze as piercing as a high-beam headlight.

"You are poet?" Aunty asked, her Mandarin-accented English slicing through the quiet room. "Poetry does not pay mortgage."

Chunmun laughed nervously, the sound echoing too loudly in the cavernous room. He quickly recited an impromptu verse about the