

Parramatta in the Fifth

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Parramatta in the Fifth

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Introduction

There are cities that announce themselves with an aggressive, unavoidable noise—metropolises built on the grinding screech of elevated trains, the blinding, strobing neon that paints the midnight pavement in garish reds and electric blues, and the relentless, suffocating scent of hot diesel and charred street food. They demand your attention through sensory assault. And then there are cities that endure by the quieter, far more stubborn persistence of ordinary lives. Parramatta belonged, until the terrifying, impossible afternoon it did not, entirely to the second kind.

It was a place defined by the specific, golden-ochre light of the river—a heavy, suspended light that caught the dust of the Western Sydney basin and turned the afternoon air into something thick, breathable, and ancient. It was a city of deep, bruising purple jacaranda shade, where the blooming trees dropped thousands of delicate, bell-shaped flowers that popped with a soft, wet *snap* under the tires of passing cars, releasing a faintly sweet, rotting perfume into the humid air. It was a sprawling network of brick-veneer homes and shared kitchens that smelled fiercely of roasted coriander, simmering garlic, damp wool drying on indoor racks, and the low, constant accounting of days. Parramatta had learned over generations to hold the immense, shifting weight of countless arrivals—migrants, workers, dreamers—without demanding that any of them explain themselves too loudly. It was a city that absorbed you into its dull, comforting hum.

Then, without the blare of a celestial trumpet, without a blinding flash of cinematic light, and without any fracture visible to the naked human eye, it was taken.

It was not destroyed by fire or scattered by wind, but smoothly, terrifyingly withdrawn into a geometry that the four familiar dimensions of height, width, depth, and time could neither map, comprehend, nor forbid. The fifth dimension—a theoretical expanse long suspected by those who work at the bleeding edges of quantum physics, and long intuited by those who have occasionally felt the solid world grow dangerously thin beneath their feet—simply opened a passage and received what had always seemed immutable and solid.

The transition was marked by an absolute, nauseating subtraction of the senses. The vibrant, chaotic palette of the city—the rusted terracotta roofs, the glaring silver of the commercial high-rises, the

murky, olive-green flow of the Parramatta River—did not turn black. It vanished into a flat, featureless non-color that offered zero depth perception, a visual static that made the eyes water and the stomach heave. The acoustic death was instantaneous. The distant, rumbling bass of the M4 motorway, the shrill, screeching chatter of sulfur-crested cockatoos, the hiss of the wind through the paperbark trees—all of it was severed. In its place remained a silence so complete, so dense and pressurized, that it felt like diving into the freezing depths of an ocean trench. It was a silence so absolute that even the cicadas and beetles in the surviving suburban gardens paused mid-chirp, freezing their bodies as if listening for an impossible, unpronounceable name that had just been spoken in a language older than the concept of speech itself.

At 69 Cowper Street, a large, weathered house continued to stand, stranded on the edge of the void. Its paint, the color of old bone, was peeling in long strips; its rusted iron lacework cast intricate, shifting lattice shadows across the concrete porch. In and around this fragile, surviving island, nine couples went on with the small, necessary, rhythmic work of living.

The house was a cacophony of contained life. You could hear the precise, dry *shhh-shhh* of basmati rice being measured into a stainless steel pot, the dull, rhythmic thud of heavy cotton cloth being folded against a wooden table, the wet, green snap of mint leaves being pinched from their stems in the backyard. You could hear the careful, learned listening to floorboards that had memorized their exact footsteps over years—a symphony of groaning pine and settling joists. The air inside the house was a thick, comforting soup of scents: brewing Assam tea, camphor, old dust, and the metallic tang of heated iron.

Among these couples moved a man named Chunmun Singh. He was a solution architect by trade, a man who built intricate digital structures out of logic and code, but he was profoundly quiet by nature. His presence in a room was like the cool, still air at the bottom of a deep well. His attention was a formidable thing; it could leave his physical body the way a bloated river gently but inevitably leaves its banks in a flood—without violence, without a sound, but with an unstoppable, sweeping grace. When the city eventually returned, it returned *through* him. He acted as the silent conduit, the anchor that dragged the geometry of Parramatta back from the fifth dimension, restoring it to every cracked brick, every rusted awning, and every lengthening shadow. Yet, the official world—a world entirely dependent on ledgers, requiring concrete proof that could be photographed, stamped, and filed away in a fluorescent-lit cabinet—arrogantly denied him the ten-million-dollar prize that had been publicly offered for the city's recovery.

This, therefore, is not a story of spectacle. It is not a tale of blazing wormholes, flashing lights, or screaming heroes. It is a story of what remains when the spectacular has passed and the dust of the impossible has settled.

It is found in the physical textures of the aftermath: the ledger left open on a kitchen table, smelling sharply of iron-gall ink and dried paper; the damp, loamy soil still packed dark and thick under a woman's fingernails; the third wooden stair that now creaks with a slightly altered, deeper pitch that vibrates differently through the bones of the foot; the glass window left an inch wider than before, allowing the night air to spill over the sill.

It is the meticulous, sensory record of nine women who watched a massive city vanish into a void and return, and who understood, each in her own unique measure, that some cosmic restorations

leave absolutely no evidence, precisely because they fundamentally rewrite the physical and philosophical conditions under which evidence is even possible. What follows are their accounts—not sterile testimonies offered to a judge in a echoing, wood-paneled court, but the quieter, heavier reckonings of those who stayed anchored inside the house that remained, breathing in the scent of their own survival, while the larger universe folded and unfolded around them.

Chapter 1: Sumitri

The ledger was already open when the light failed, and with it, the world as it had always been known.

Sumitri had been recording the week's shared expenses, a ritual of grounding that she performed with the solemnity of a temple rite. The front sitting room was suffused with the syrupy, golden-ochre light specific to Western Sydney in the late afternoon—a light that usually carried the suspended dust of the suburbs, making the air look thick and breathable. The room smelled fiercely of the ordinary: the sharp, green astringency of fresh coriander bought that morning, the earthy warmth of roasted cumin clinging to the iron skillet on the stove, and the faint, metallic tang of the two new copper-filament bulbs she had just purchased for the upstairs landing. She was noting down the small sum paid to the boy who cleared the gutters after the last storm, her pen scratching a steady, rhythmic cadence against the heavy, cream-colored grain of the paper.

Then, the afternoon sun on the kitchen table simply ceased to arrive from any recognisable direction.