

Santa's Last Christmas

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Introduction

Santa's Last Christmas follows Chunmun Singh, a young migrant from Punjab, India, who arrives in Sydney seeking a better life. Armed with a student visa, he enrolls in a business course in Parramatta but quickly faces the harsh realities of high living costs, leading him to take up delivery gigs and share a cramped apartment in the vibrant Indian enclave of Harris Park. Over five years, Chunmun adapts to Australian culture while grappling with isolation, financial strain, and the fading novelty of city life. The 25,000 AUD figure is used as a seasonal/annual total, but the text later implies his total earnings are 30,000 AUD. Clarifying the nature of the 25,000 AUD figure is key.

Amid his struggles, Chunmun finds love with Priya Sharma, nicknamed "Ms. Aussie" for her seamless blend of Indian heritage and Australian flair. Their romance blossoms through community events, picnics, and shared dreams, but cracks under the pressure of his unstable income and Sydney's exorbitant costs. The turning point comes when Priya leaves, unable to envision a stable future together. Heartbroken and facing insurmountable expenses, Chunmun realizes his Australian dream has soured. To numb the pain, he throws himself into his grueling shifts as Santa, projecting jolly cheer while dealing with chaotic incidents like a puppy urinating on his suit, a child's mispronounced wish for "fucks" (meaning trucks), and bizarre requests such as a unicorn that poops rainbows or a real human skull. These humorous mishaps provide a brief, lighthearted escape and boost his tips, but they can't mask his growing exhaustion and doubts about his deferred dreams. With savings from his final Santa season totaling around 30,000 AUD—a fortune back home—he decides to return to Punjab.

Chapter 1: Arrival in the Land of Dreams

The automatic doors of Sydney Kingsford Smith Airport slid open with a pneumatic hiss, unleashing a sensory assault that Chunmun Singh would never forget. Five years ago, he stepped out of the pressurized, sterile silence of the arrival hall and into a world that vibrated with a frequency entirely different from the slow, rhythmic hum of his village in Punjab. The air here was distinct, crisp and sharp against his skin, laced with the medicinal, camphor-like scent of eucalyptus—a foreign perfume that seemed to hang in the atmosphere, a far cry from the dusty, sun-baked warmth and the smell of burning wheat chaff that defined his home.

He was twenty-seven years old, standing on the precipice of a new life, having left behind the emerald expanse of his family's modest farm. He clutched the handle of his suitcase, his knuckles white, while his other hand instinctively sought the cold, hard metal of a small gold locket in his pocket. "Beta, make us proud," his mother's voice echoed in his memory, as vivid as if she were standing beside him. He could almost smell the rosewater and flour on her hands as he recalled her pressing the locket into his palm, a talisman etched with a family portrait that felt like a burning ember of home against his skin.

With a student visa tucked securely in his pocket, Chunmun navigated the neon-lit labyrinth of the city to enroll in a business course at a local college in Parramatta. He had imagined glass towers and boardrooms, but reality hit him with the violence of a sudden monsoon. The tuition fees were a voracious beast, draining his savings with terrifying speed. To survive, he took up work as a delivery driver, navigating the maze of streets where the smell of wet asphalt and exhaust fumes became his constant companions.

He found residence in Harris Park, a bustling enclave in Parramatta that assaulted the senses in the most comforting way possible. It was a riot of color and noise; Bollywood tunes thumped from the speakers of shopfronts, the bass vibrating through the pavement, while storefronts displayed mannequins draped in sarees of electric blue, crimson, and gold. The air here was thick and heavy, not with eucalyptus, but with the mouth-watering, spicy aroma of curry wafting from every corner.

Parramatta was known as Sydney's second CBD, a melting pot that pulsed with a vibrant, chaotic life. The area had swollen to house over 29,000 residents of Indian origin, creating a demographic tapestry woven together by the need for affordable housing and the craving for cultural familiarity. Temples like the Sri Mandir rose from the suburban landscape, their intricate carvings painted in pastel hues, offering a space of spiritual solace where the scent of sandalwood incense and marigolds overpowered the city grit. Grocery stores were cramped treasures, overflowing with sacks of *atta* flour, fragrant basmati rice, and exotic spices—turmeric, cumin, cardamom—that transported Chunmun back to the olfactory memory of his childhood kitchen.

Despite the vibrancy, his living conditions were stark. Chunmun shared a cramped two-bedroom apartment with three other migrants—two from Bangladesh and one from Nepal. The rent was a steep 500 AUD weekly, a crushing weight on his shoulders given his meager earnings, especially in a city where median unit rents had skyrocketed to 740 AUD. The apartment itself was a sensory landscape of struggle: the wallpaper was peeling in pale, sickly strips, and the shared kitchen was perpetually cluttered with pots encrusted with the yellow residue of dal and the starchy film of rice. The balcony, his only escape, overlooked busy streets where the

cacophony was endless—the screech of brakes, the rumble of engines, and the rhythmic, metallic honks of commuter trains passing nearby.

His days dissolved into a relentless, grey blur. Lectures under the buzzing fluorescent lights of the college consumed his days, while his nights were spent pedaling his second-hand bicycle through the humid Sydney evenings, delivering food to strangers. He adapted, albeit slowly. He forced his tongue to shape strange new vowels, practicing Aussie slang like "fair dinkum" and "barbie," and learning the crack of the cricket bat to bond with locals at weekend barbecues where the smell of searing meat and onions filled the air. "G'day, mate," he would whisper to his reflection in the foggy bathroom mirror, watching his lips move, his thick Punjabi accent softening by degrees, though the cadence of his mother tongue never fully faded.

Friendships bloomed in the cracks of this hard life—at college group projects or during breaks at delivery hubs where the smell of stale coffee and damp raincoats lingered. These connections helped him navigate the subtle cultural shocks, such as the casual informality of Australians, which contrasted sharply with the rigid, hierarchical respect he was accustomed to back home.

Then, on a rainy afternoon where the sky was the color of bruised slate, his big break arrived. Rain lashed against the window of the bus shelter where he stood, scrolling through job ads on his cracked smartphone screen. The blue light of the phone illuminated a listing for seasonal Santa roles at Eastfield Parramatta. The mall was a behemoth of commerce, a world of gleaming glass facades that reflected the city lights, endless escalators humming softly, and over 450 stores ranging from high-end boutiques smelling of expensive leather to budget outlets. It was a sterile, organized