

The Sorrow of Parramatta

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Introduction: The Eternal Archive

Long before the first foundation of steel and polished concrete was ever driven into the western plains of Sydney, there was only the water and the earth.

The Parramatta River does not flow with the rushing, pristine urgency of a mountain stream; it moves with the slow, deliberate, and heavy crawl of something burdened by immense weight. To the untrained eye of the modern commuter—staring down from the hermetically sealed, air-conditioned carriages of the train line—it is merely a geographic hurdle, a murky, olive-green dividing line cutting through the endless suburban sprawl. They see the surface:

the distorted, shivering reflections of electric-blue neon signs and the stark, blinding white glare of streetlamps bleeding into the dark currents. They smell nothing but the recycled air of their transit.

But beneath that shimmering, polluted presentation layer lies the foundational truth of the city. It is a world defined by the thick, anaerobic, and deeply unforgiving silt.

To understand the city, one must first understand the mud. It is a dense, charcoal-black substance, smelling fiercely of decaying mangrove roots, crushed oyster shells, and centuries of stagnant water. But its most defining characteristic is the sharp, undeniable scent of oxidized copper—a metallic tang that coats the back of the throat and tastes like old blood. This silt is not merely dirt; it is the ultimate, unfiltered ledger of human existence.

For hundreds of years, the river has acted as the silent, indiscriminate archivist for every soul that has touched its banks. It absorbed the profound, world-ending grief of the First Nations people who watched the alien sails breach the harbor. It drank the hot, desperate tears of the convict laborers, their backs striped with the lash, who built the first sandstone walls with bleeding hands. It swallowed the bitter, choking terror of the gold rush prospectors, the post-war European refugees shivering in the unfamiliar heat, and the modern economic migrants who sacrificed their names and their histories for a chance to survive in the towering glass monoliths above.

The modern city—the gleaming financial districts of Redfern and the towering skyscrapers of Parramatta—is a frantic, desperate attempt to pave over this history. The architects and executives build ever higher into the sterile, cloudless sky, desperate to escape the gravity of the past. They deal in clean numbers, sanitized

aggregations, and flawless projections. But gravity is absolute, and the ancient earth is endlessly patient. The weight of human sorrow cannot be digitized, outsourced, or paved away. It sinks. It settles. It waits in the freezing, dark waters, perfectly preserved in the mud, humming with a terrifying, dormant energy.

This is not a story of clean data or corporate triumphs. This is the story of the bronze layer—the raw, messy, and agonizing truth upon which the fragile illusion of the modern world is constructed. It is the story of the unbearable price extracted by the earth, the heavy toll demanded for crossing the dark waters, and the lone architect who accidentally opened the greatest, most devastating ledger ever written.

Chapter 1: The Currents

The commute from the sprawling, heat-baked western suburbs of Parramatta to the sleek, towering glass monoliths of Redfern was a daily traversal between two distinct epochs of urban existence. For Chunmun Singh, a senior risk executive at BABA Bank, this fifty-minute train ride was a physical manifestation of a stark transition. He moved from a chaotic, raw, and vibrant source to a structured, sterile, and heavily air-conditioned endpoint. Chunmun viewed his entire world through the stringent, unyielding lens of logic, corporate order, and systemic categorization. His professional days were entirely consumed by the meticulous dissection of the bank's massive, unforgiving financial portfolios. There was the raw ingestion of reality—the unfiltered and often ugly truth of millions of daily human interactions, the desperate swiping of credit cards, the defaulted loans smelling of cheap gin and profound regret. Then came the cleansed state, a purgatory of spreadsheets where anomalies were smoothed out, where the blinding white glare of his dual monitors washed away the human element, and the chaos was

brought into a semblance of order through relentless corporate processing. Finally, there was the ultimate business truth: the refined, pristine aggregations presented in muted blues and slate grays to the executives who sat in the climate-controlled glass towers of Redfern, far removed from the messy, vibrant reality of the streets below.

But recently, the physical world outside his screens had begun to rebel against this neat, predictable categorization. It started during a suffocatingly humid Tuesday evening walk along the banks of the Parramatta River. The air was thick and heavy, a palpable, almost chewable mass that clung to his tailored suit. It carried the sharp, medicinal scent of wet eucalyptus leaves crushed underfoot, mingling violently with the stale, acrid exhaust fumes drifting down from the concrete overpasses of the M4 motorway. Beneath these modern odors lay something else entirely—a distinct, metallic tang that tasted exactly like an old, blood-stained copper coin left to oxidize on the back of the tongue. The sky above was a bruised, magnificent canvas of deep violet, slashed with angry streaks of crimson and burnt orange as the sun sank below the Blue Mountains.

The river itself, usually just a sluggish ribbon of murky, olive-green water winding through the relentless urban sprawl, seemed to hold a different, ancient weight tonight. The tide was unusually low, exposing the wide, muddy banks. It was a glistening, expansive stretch of dark silt that caught the dying light, reflecting the neon signs of nearby apartment complexes in distorted, shivering puddles of electric blue and violent magenta. To Chunmun, the mud looked suspiciously like the raw, unstructured mess of human history—messy, full of hidden variables, and deeply, terribly foundational. Chunmun, desperate to escape the humming sterility