

## **The Invisible Tenant**

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### **Introduction: The Making of a Ghost**

The late afternoon sun in Parramatta did not merely shine; it pressed against the suburban landscape with a heavy, golden humidity that turned the air into a slow-moving syrup. It was a light that didn't just illuminate but transformed, turning the murky, silt-heavy waters of the Parramatta River into a shimmering ribbon of molten bronze. Along the riverbank, the atmosphere was a thick

tapestry of scents: the sharp, salty tang of the distant Sydney Harbour winds clashing with the earthy, medicinal fragrance of eucalyptus trees and the distinct, sulfurous whiff of mangrove mud baking under the relentless Australian heat. High above this sensory collision, in a modest apartment block, a single room was about to become the epicenter of a bizarre supernatural farce.

It was a compact space, a "godsend" in the cutthroat Sydney rental market, listed for a steep **\$340 AUD** per week. The walls were painted a generic "landlord white," a color designed to be inoffensive but which instead seemed to absorb the frantic energy of the household rather than reflect it. The owner, Surya Sen, a diligent software engineer at InfoCys, lived here with his wife, Puja. The apartment smelled perpetually of Puja's culinary industry—a comforting, spicy fog of mustard seeds popping in hot oil, the earthy depth of turmeric, and the sweet, milky aroma of simmering kheer that drifted through the hallway like a domestic ghost.

The apartment was never truly silent. It was defined by the *clack-clack-clack* of Surya's keyboard as he navigated the digital architecture of InfoCys, the soft, rhythmic *swish* of Puja's cotton sari as she moved between chores, and the chaotic symphony of their children. There was Master Srimi, eight years old and vibrating with kinetic energy, whose plastic cricket bat made a sharp, rhythmic *thwack* against the hallway walls, a sound that echoed like a heartbeat through the small residence. And then there was little Srishti, a toddler with eyes like polished obsidian, who babbled in a language of wet gurgles and high-pitched squeals, seeing things the adults had long ago trained themselves to ignore.

Enter Chunmun Singh. A solution architect at Baba Bank, Chunmun had arrived from India with dreams painted in the bright blue light of computer screens and the crisp green hues of Australian

banknotes. He was a man of cold logic, his mind a structured grid of AI prompts and architectural diagrams. He had spent months in the sterile, air-conditioned silence of the bank's offices, breathing in the faint ozone of overheating servers and the bitter scent of cheap office coffee, crafting intricate prompts to train a chatbot that was supposed to revolutionize customer service.

But the corporate world is a beast of grey morality and jagged edges. His management, realizing the goldmine Chunmun had built, stole his prompts. They calculated that his AI could handle 90% of customer queries, and the remaining 10%—the human element—was deemed acceptable collateral damage. Chunmun was fired, his existence in the company deleted with a few keystrokes, leaving him with nothing but the metallic taste of betrayal and a severance package that evaporated in the heat of Sydney's cost-of-living crisis.

For six grueling months, Chunmun's life became a desaturated montage of rejection. The bright Sydney sun felt mocking as he sat in public parks, the smell of damp grass and hopelessness clinging to his clothes. His savings dwindled to red numbers on a digital screen. In a desperate bid for control over a life spiraling into the void, he turned to asceticism. He embraced celibacy and meditation, seeking a stillness that the modern world had denied him. He breathed in the stale air of his anxiety and exhaled the noise of the city.

And then, the universe cracked. Perhaps it was the fasting, or perhaps it was a cosmic glitch in the matrix of reality, but Chunmun discovered he could vanish. It wasn't a slow fade; it was a sudden, jarring *shift*. Light bent around his physical form, rendering him a shimmering distortion, like the heat haze rising off the asphalt of Church Street. He found he could remain invisible for up to 14 hours

a day. This window allowed him to remain hidden during his stay in the apartment, though the strain of maintaining this state for so long began to take its toll.

He could not return to India. Even the thought of his son in Kolkata and daughter in Melbourne couldn't outweigh the shame of returning a failure to the prying, judgmental eyes of a thousand relatives. Sydney was his fragile, expensive lifeline. So, he devised a plan born of absolute necessity. He gave Surya his two weeks' notice, officially vacating the room to save the rent he could no longer pay. He packed the bulk of his life into a large suitcase—the smell of mothballs and old leather filling the room—and entrusted it to his friend Gobi Khan.

Stripped to the barest essentials—his laptop and a single change of clothes—Chunmun became a phantom tenant. Every day at 12:30 PM, he would slip back into the apartment, the metallic *click* of the key turning softly in the lock, and activate his invisibility. For fourteen hours, he was a silent voyeur in the home he once rented. He became a master of the "invisible flinch," dodging Master Srinu as the boy charged through the hallway, the wind of the child's movement brushing against Chunmun's invisible skin.

But Srishti, the toddler, knew. She would sit on the carpet, surrounded by her brightly colored toys—red blocks, yellow rubber ducks—and stare directly at the shimmering patch of air that was Chunmun. She would reach out, her tiny, milk-scented fingers grasping at the void, cooing for him to pick her up, her scent of baby powder drifting toward him in the still air. It broke his heart daily. He stood as her silent guardian, a man caught between dimensions, trapped in a prison of his own making, waiting for the shadows to grow long enough for him to exist again.

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## Chapter 1: Shubhodeep's Midnight Awakening

The first tenant to inherit the room was Shubhodeep Mukherjee, a young engineer fresh from the chaotic, vibrant streets of Kolkata. He brought with him the scent of strong deodorant and the nervous energy of a newcomer. The room, now his, was bathed in the harsh, blue-white glow of his dual-monitor setup.

It was late. The digital clock on the bedside table glowed a menacing red: **02:00 AM**. Outside, Parramatta was asleep, the only sounds the distant, rhythmic *chug-whoosh* of a train heading toward the city and the hum of the refrigerator in the kitchen.

Shubhodeep was mid-meeting, his voice a hushed murmur so as not to wake the landlord. "Yes, the latency issues are resolved," he whispered into his headset, his face illuminated in the ghostly pallor of the Zoom interface.

Under the cot, in the deepest shadows where the dust bunnies collected like grey wool, lay Chunmun Singh. He was invisible, curled into a fetal ball on the hard floor, the smell of carpet fibers and old shoes filling his nose. He had been there for hours, his body aching, waiting for the house to settle so he could sneak out.

Suddenly, the room's temperature seemed to plummet. The air grew thick and heavy, smelling abruptly of burning incense and stale marigolds—the scent of a funeral. A spectral light, sickly green and pulsating, coalesced above the sleeping invisible form of Chunmun.

It was his father-in-law.