

## **Perth's Parvati**

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### **Introduction**

The light in Perth was a physical thing. It was not the soft, hazy gold of European cities, nor the diffused, smog-filtered glow of older, more crowded metropolises. Here, the light was a brilliant, unfiltered glare that poured from a vast, cerulean sky, a relentless force that bleached the footpaths to the colour of bone and sharpened the shadows into deep, stark lines of indigo and black. It was a demanding, clarifying light that left no room for subtlety, no space for half-truths. It was the very first thing Parvati Sharma had

noticed when she moved here, and it remained the one thing that both fueled and relentlessly frustrated her art.

In her Fremantle studio, a converted boat shed that smelled perpetually of sea salt, ancient sawdust, and damp earth, Paro worked under that demanding light. The wide doors were thrown open to the harbour, and the air that drifted in was thick with the briny kiss of the Indian Ocean, the screech of silver gulls, and the low, mournful horn of the Rottneest ferry. Inside, the light streamed in, illuminating millions of dancing dust motes and casting long, distorted shadows that shifted with the sun. Clay, the colour of rich terracotta, caked her hands, its surface cool and yielding under her palms. She was an artist, a sculptor, by trade, but lately, she felt more like a geologist of the soul, digging through layers of expectation and disappointment, searching for something true and essential in a world that seemed increasingly content with the glossy, manufactured surface.

Her parents had named her Parvati, a name that felt too large, too mythic, for a woman who spent her days wrestling with stone, scrap metal, and unanswered emails. Parvati, the goddess of creation, of divine, earth-shaking strength. Paro felt more like the goddess of looming rent and the quiet, creeping loneliness that settled in the corners of her studio after sunset. Her latest rejection lay on the scarred surface of her workbench, the crisp, white email from a CBD gallery a stark slash of clinical failure against the creative chaos of her space. The screen's blue light seemed cold and cruel amidst the warm, earthy tones of her work. "While technically proficient," it read, the words precise and emotionless, "your work lacks a certain... commercial accessibility".

The words stung, not because they were deliberately cruel, but because they were spoken in a language of commerce and

compromise that she refused to learn. The sting was a physical sensation, a hot flush that climbed her neck. She didn't want to be *accessible*; she wanted to be *essential*. She wanted her art to feel like the first cool drink on a scorching day, like the deep, resonant hum of the earth itself. She pushed back from the bench, the legs of her stool scraping loudly against the concrete floor. She looked around her studio, at the silent, patient figures that were her only true companions. They were a menagerie of her own making, each piece a vessel for a feeling she couldn't otherwise express.

A flock of galahs, their wings hammered from thin sheets of beaten copper, caught the light with a flash of rose-gold and silver. They seemed poised for flight, a burst of metallic joy frozen in time. Nearby, a sinuous serpent fashioned from a single, massive piece of polished driftwood coiled elegantly, its surface smooth and pale, the colour of sea-bleached bone. Its curves seemed to hold the memory of the Swan River's current. In the corner stood her stoic bull, a creature of immense patience and power, painstakingly assembled from smooth, grey river stones, each one chosen for its weight and feel. To her, they weren't just objects; they were diaries written in metal, wood, and stone. She poured everything into them—her quiet, profound love for this isolated, sun-drenched city, her deep, aching loneliness, and the simmering, volcanic power she felt coiled in her gut but didn't know how to release. When she ran her hands over the river stones of the bull, she could almost feel the cool memory of the water that had shaped them for centuries. When she touched the reclaimed jarrah, its grain a deep, swirling burgundy, she could sense the silent, ancient echo of the forest it had once been a part of.

Today, the frustration was a hot, bitter thing in her throat, tasting like metallic dust. She felt the crushing weight of her name, the

burden of a divine potential she couldn't seem to unlock. Pushing open the vast, creaking doors of the shed, she stepped into the searing afternoon glare. She looked out towards the shimmering, turquoise expanse of the Indian Ocean, a sheet of hammered metal under the sun. A profound, painful disconnect resonated within her—the chasm between the immense power she sensed in the land and the sea, the latent power she felt buzzing under her own skin, and the sterile, commercial world that refused to see any of it. Something had to give. The light of Perth was relentless, a brilliant, interrogating force, and it was starting to demand a new kind of truth from her, a truth that roared and burned, a truth that would not, could not, be denied.

## **Chapter 1: The Spark of Creation**

The air in Parvati Sharma's Fremantle studio was a trinity of scents, a layered perfume of her process. At the base was the damp, mineral-rich earth of wet clay, a smell as old as the world itself. Over this lay the sharp, volatile tang of turpentine, a scent that stung the nostrils and spoke of cleaning brushes and stripping away old layers. And floating over it all, weaving through everything, was the briny, salty kiss of the nearby Indian Ocean, a constant reminder of the vast, living water just beyond her door. Paro, as she was known to everyone, stood in the fading amber light of the late afternoon, running a calloused thumb over the final, perfect curve of her latest sculpture.

It was a Nandi, the sacred bull, gatekeeper and companion to the divine. She had forged him from smooth, grey stones, each one hauled from the muddy bed of the Swan River, their surfaces cool and dense in her hands. They were the colour of a stormy sky, flecked with tiny, glittering particles of quartz. To bind these stones, she had used veins of gleaming, recycled copper, painstakingly

brazing them into place so they flowed over the bull's form like golden, molten rivers of light. It was her most ambitious piece yet, a fusion of earth and metal, patience and fire. As her thumb traced the final, clean line along the bull's powerful spine, a warmth, potent and entirely unfamiliar, surged from her fingertips. It pulsed through her arm, a current of living energy that flowed directly from her into the stone. It felt less like finishing a piece of art and more like waking something up from a long, deep sleep. A low hum vibrated from the sculpture, a sound so deep it was felt in her bones more than heard with her ears, and then it fell silent.

That night, the weather turned. A freak thunderstorm, unseasonal and shockingly violent, barrelled in from the coast, its belly dark and bruised. The sky, which had been a placid canvas of pastel pink and orange at sunset, was now a roiling sea of charcoal and indigo. The wind rose to a mournful howl, rattling the tin roof of her studio and whipping the ocean into a frenzy of white-capped waves. Lightning, stark and blue-white, cracked across the sky in jagged, incandescent forks. For a split second, the world outside was illuminated with an almost supernatural clarity, and in that flash, Paro saw the Nandi standing in her small garden. For an instant, its stone eyes, which she had so carefully selected for their flat, lifeless quality, seemed to glow with a soft, inner light, a gentle, golden luminescence. Paro, watching from the rain-streaked glass of her window, shook her head and dismissed it as a trick of the storm, an optical illusion created by the flash and the downpour.

The next morning, the storm was gone, leaving behind a world washed clean and glittering under the brilliant sun. The air smelled of ozone, wet eucalyptus, and damp earth. The news, humming from the small radio on her workbench, was full of gentle, inexplicable oddities. A notoriously gridlocked traffic jam on the