

# ROY

*A story of hope, where the only motivation to go on, is survival.*

Cate Beresford



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# 1

## Chance Meeting

**R**oy hid in the cave before venturing out for a short walk. It was down

by the water that he saw the woman, where elements of bush, beach, and ocean meet.

Waves lapped the edges of the littoral forest, where once it was said, red cedars grew. Swimmers were rare, bar locals who surfed there regularly. Hodads came to watch when the big guns were around, but this morning it was quiet, and the woman walked alone with her dog.

She stopped for a moment, dipping her toes to test the temperature of the water whilst the small pup played with the waves as they washed ashore.

The warm ocean was inviting, and she waded through its gentle whitewash, seemingly unperturbed by the roughness of grit on her bare feet.

That summer had been hotter than usual and whilst fire had raged not far away, in the hills of the small town, it had bi-passed the sheltered reserve where she now swam.

The area was well known by those who visited regularly, often coming to dive the protected marine area. The waters held dark secrets of the past as those who ventured into its deep terrain discovered shipwrecks and unique fish species swam in its sanctuary.

The littoral rainforest of the Reserve bore a diverse but unique landscape and

its closed forest, influenced by the marine environment which surrounded it, somehow survived, in the harshest of conditions.

Roy knew the sheltered area was heritage-listed. It had been an Aboriginal meeting place, called Wonwin by its original owners and was originally inhabited by the Wadi Wadi tribe. They had remained on the coastal plains during the warmer months, taking advantage of abundant marine resources, then moving in the cooler winter months to higher ground and rock shelters closer to the escarpment.

History of the area was dated back many thousands of years, most notably at Bass Point and it was traced to 17,000 Before Present (BP). Initial settlement was dated back to the 1800 – 1850 period and the European name referred to the large quantities of shells found in Aboriginal middens along the foreshore.

It was even said that Bass and Flinders had explored the area in 1791 and had been named after Bass. It has also been mentioned in Captain James Cook's journals as he sailed past the region in 1770 and could have been his first landing place except for weather sending him north to Botany Bay.

These days visitors were mainly tourists and local surfers. The area had been transformed into a nature conservation and passive recreation Reserve. They called it the coastal jewel, located on the south coast of NSW.

Locals had tried unsuccessfully to delay the developer's hand as the area was known for its unique flora and fauna. Some even said a rare bird inhabited the swamplands.

These days, though, the area was part of a thriving city as a new estate grew.

The stretch of surrounding waters around was also where out of towners would come to rape the sea of undersized fish. They sold or made them into fish cakes for restaurants and it was a well-known practice. It was difficult to police though, so many locals took it upon themselves to scorn those seen with a bucket.

Lifesavers were also kept busy during summer months as tourists jostled for space in the crystal waters of the nearby beach. Yet further along the shoreline, it was quiet today, and the woman enjoyed her time alone.

A capable swimmer, she seemed to enjoy the refreshing water and Roy stayed hidden by the overgrowth of lantana. The reserve had finally succumbed to this noxious weed and Roy likened it to developers.

Roy watched as her body slipped below the surface. The small underwater boulders often sheltered smaller temperate fish and was pleasurable to those who

were brave enough to snorkel where bull rays and sharks patrolled.

It was still early, and Roy stayed hidden, hoping no others would yet venture by and see what he was planning.

As she dived again, he took this as a sign and made a move.

She'd left her bag on one of the basalt rocks the area was known for and he waited patiently. When she was far enough under the surface of the clear waters, Roy skulked down. He kept a watchful eye on her dog as it swam in circles, barking as it looked for its owner.

Roy had his back to the water as he bent to scoop the bag, not realising the woman had just. She floated for a moment, her body listing on the rolling waves, as she enjoyed the warmth of the sun breaking through clouds threatening the oncoming rain.

Roy lifted the bag and wondered whether its contents may include something useful like small change, or a credit card. He was busy ransacking its contents when she approached, speaking calmly. Her voice startled him.

'Hey there. Are you OK?'

'Uh, yeah, I, um, I,'

Roy stood back. He didn't know whether to run away or stop and face the woman, though his upbringing made him think better of the first, and he turned, instead, to apologise.

'I'm sorry, I shouldn't, I mean I didn't mean to.'

The woman looked at Roy's bedraggled appearance and immediately understood.

She had dealt with kids like this before. Runaways, who leave home because of an abusive family, or difficult upbringing, yet going back to basic instincts to take responsibility.

It was unusual these days - respect - most families were too busy working or too tired to rare kids to be polite. They left that for schools to own.

Parents paid top dollars for private schools popping up around the area, so they could feel good about giving their kids the best education. The public system appeared to be failing them.

It was often these same public schools who graduated the highest achievers, yet private education allowed alternatives for those who clung to old fashioned standards. Not all schools were the same and it often depended on the area you lived in. Most tried their hardest but there were at least options.

It seemed though, it was really *society* who was failing, as work and time

became a parents' true enemy.

Roy was different. His family held these old-fashioned ideals, and his eyes showed his true nature.

She stood waiting for him to run, but instead, he remained before her, waiting for his punishment.

She held out her hand.

Automatically Roy returned the bag and its contents, then turned to walk away.

'I understand,' she called after him.

He turned back and smiled. She hadn't yelled at him or given him a scornful look, like most other people. Instead, the woman's body language was non-threatening, and he felt kindness.

She added quietly; 'Can I take you home?'

Roy paused - his mind caught in the whirlwind of last night's events.

'No, I'm ok,' he replied, then added 'But thanks.'

She smiled again, then and scooped up her towel as the dog sat calmly at her feet. Suddenly, she called him back.

'Hang, on, I want to give you something.'

He walked the few metres back to where she stood.

'Here's my phone number, and some money. You look like you could use some.'

He held out his hand and stared at her face. There was a warmth, like his mum's, and he felt remorseful for what he'd done.

'If you ever need anything, anyone, I live locally,' she suggested. 'You are welcome to stay with me if you need a bed, a space, or just to talk'

She smiled as though thinking of a memory that touched her, then gave him the card and walked back to her car.

Roy grinned as he looked at her name. Jane Cordyline.

'Funny name, Cordyline,' he thought. 'Like the red plant in mum's garden.'

She had planted them to brighten a space around the house, knowing they needed little water in the recent drought. Roy liked it to climate change having wrapped its fingers around mother nature and bringing havoc to its soul.

As the woman walked back to the carpark, Roy stayed on the beach and watched until she was inside her car. She turned the ignition and looked back again to wave. Roy lifted his hand in acknowledgement, then headed back to the bush.

As he passed a thicket of thistle, Roy went to throw the card underneath, though for reasons he wasn't sure of, except it seemed respectful, tucked it instead, into what was left of his shirt pocket.



# 2

## Saved

**R**oy decided he needed to explore every part of his new landscape. He

had only ever known the warmth of his own home. Four walls, his own bedroom, a comfortable lounge, and the love of his mum who cooked his breakfast each day.

Now, as he wandered along the dirt road which wound its way through to the littoral forest carpark, he realised this would be his home - for a while.

Dust collected on his shoes as he trudged along and his mood changed from feelings of hurt, to anger, then deep depression. He was annoyed with the world - and his parents.

It wasn't his fault he had ADD. It wasn't his fault he wasn't able to achieve A grades. It wasn't his fault he couldn't sleep. He did, however, realise it was his fault he deceived his parents about his drinking.

He knew he wasn't old enough to drink alcohol. He'd learned through the Harold the Giraffe programs in primary school, what alcohol and drugs did to a young body.

Yet he made the choice. His friends convinced him it was the right thing to do because it was a quick fix to the pain he felt inside.

As he plodded along, Roy kicked the gravelly stones that had rolled to the edge of the road. The grader had gone through the month before, taking out the corrugations and lined the road with gravel from the nearby quarry.

With each kick, he yelled out.

'I hate you. I hate me. I hate the world. I hate that I did this. I hate my dad. I hate my friends. I just hate.'

Roy stopped occasionally to sit by the side and cry. Fine particles of dust were thrust into his space as impatient P-Platers raced past, not noticing.

He covered his face each time, yelling at them too.

'Idiots, can't you see me!'

Eventually, Roy arrived at the end of the road. He knew the space would soon be filled with tourists and divers seeking the thrills the ocean revealed and he hated them too because he wouldn't be able to do what he wanted without them noticing.

Roy found a rock high up on the face of the cliff. It was on the furthest point he could sit to watch the ocean. His mind was blank as he pondered the pain he felt inside.

Roy watched dolphins flip and play and felt each wave as they rolled in, as though they were a tide of emotions washing over. He placed his backpack on the rock, took off his shoes and carefully climbed to the edge. It was a space where he could slip in.

The ocean would take him, and his flesh would be eaten by local sharks. It made perfect sense. Quick and painless, he wouldn't even feel his body as it floated down. His mind was ready. The rocks would do their work and the ocean the rest.

Just as he was about to jump, he heard a scream. He hadn't noticed the local who'd climbed the rocks to find the best surfing.

'Don't! It's too dangerous!'

It startled Roy.

Roy glanced across as the surfer came closer.

'You need to go around to the other Bay. 'He paused a moment as though wondering what next to say, then continued. 'It's better swimming there.'

Roy looked at the surfer's face. He knew what Roy was about to do. Taking his own life, wasn't meant for this moment and Roy shook himself, calling back.

'Ah, thanks.' The surfer waved, not moving for a while until Roy had moved away from the edge.

As he climbed down the rockface, Roy almost felt some sense of relief that someone cared.

# 3

## Sanctuary

Roy wandered as far as he could, along the edge of the coastline. Climbing back over large boulders, he occasionally stopped by small rock-pools to peer in. They often supported small marine life, trapped by the tides. Roy watched as they waited for the high tide to take them back.

Intermittently he bent to touch one of the periwinkles or anemones on the edge. Roy admired how they survived the wave of time and waited until their thirst was quenched by salty waters, eventually being washed over by the incoming tide.

Roy eventually reached the archway just south of The Bay. It ran at right angles to the shoreline and was impressive at three to five metres in height, giving way to a cave.

His mind was still broken, yet in a way Roy felt grateful. The surfer was the second person who'd noticed him and as he wandered back to the shelter he had made, felt he was not alone, as darkness began to close in.

Roy tried to process the decision his parent's had made and the predicament he now found himself in. Tired and bereft of emotion, he curled into a ball under the thick bush shelter as sounds of the night began to lull him to sleep.

He'd been noticed. That was something. People cared. For now, that was enough, and under the stars, he felt safe.

The bush provided a haven for Roy. No one seemed to notice him there, tucked into the hillside, where bottlebrush grew wild. It hid him easily, though he noticed he'd begun to wear a path which might expose him to prying bushwalkers and made a mental note to try to find a new bush shelter soon.

Roy ventured back to the beach each day, feeling the warmth of the sun on his tired body. He bathed in the coolness of the water and washed his tattered clothes.

As he closed his eyes at night, Roy could hear the roar of the ocean as waves splashed over the rock platform and he'd smell the salty air, feeling its comfort. At least the bush flowers which protected the entrance, reminded him of home.

After two weeks of sheltering in the harsh terrain, Roy began to wander further from the safety of the small space he'd made home. It was coming up to winter and most of the campers didn't stay at the Bay during this season, so there were fewer people around.

Without the familiar sounds of the families, Roy began to feel isolated and lonely. The food supplies his mum had originally packed when he'd left home were running low and though he'd tried to ration what there was, knew unless he found another source, he'd go hungry.

Roy also overheard a kid on the beach talking when he'd first sought shelter. The Reserve also concealed a gang. He'd heard about the group of teenagers who hung out, in the nearby bush but hadn't thought much about them -until now.

Now it worried him. They had a bad reputation amongst the locals, stealing and harassing anyone in their path. He'd also heard of the fights with other gangs where often one would end up on the hospital, or worse.

Though Roy had seen them wandering around on occasions, he'd stayed hidden, observing their routine. The gang seemed to sleep until late morning, so Roy would venture out during these periods.

He found the place where tourists read about the history of the shipwrecks. Roy almost knew the plaque by heart too and could recite it word for word.

The ship sunk there during wartime. Roy read that it ship was cruising up the coastline and hugged the shoreline to avoid submarine attacks. Due to cyclonic winds and high seas, the ship ran aground.

The nearby Six Marine Gun Battalion has assisted in saving some of the crew, though many lives were lost. He also read about another ship, the Bertha. It had been shipwrecked in the water around The Point. Although the Bertha hadn't been found, divers often snorkelled the area, looking for signs of the wreckage.

It was there that Roy could blend in with the many families who wandered along the shore, looking for signs of the shipwreck - as though he were part of them.

He would hang back a little and pretend to be one the kids in the family who wasn't interested in what his parents did. Often one of the kids would hang back too and they'd talk kid things. Roy felt it took away the loneliness - for a while.

Increasingly though, Roy knew he was looking like a runaway as his tattered clothes gave away his real persona. Eventually one of the members of the gang caught on.

One day, Roy stayed too long with one family. He was upset about his

situation and one of the family's had noticed. The parents made him feel like a part of their own, sharing food and conversation until late. He liked them very much. They even invited him to come home with them, though Roy declined.

'Thank you, but I have a home. I'm just staying with a friend for a while,' he lied, suggesting his parents were in a car accident and he didn't have any clothes at his friends' house. The family took pity on him. They knew his story was just that. They had seen it before too. The dad was a counsellor in the city, and he'd helped kids like this.

'That's ok. We understand.' The father shook Roy's hand. Listen, though, let me give you my phone number in case you need it.'

Roy thanked him and gave a false name. He didn't want anyone to know who he really was. His dad was a school principal, and he would be embarrassed, so Roy kept quiet about his identity.

The family gave Roy some money too.

'Here, if you won't let us take you in, then at least look after yourself.'

Roy nodded and thanked them again. It was getting late, and he would have to get back, he told them.

One of the gang members watched from afar and noted the exchange of money.

# 4

## The Gang

**T**hat night, he was woken violently as the gang surrounded him. They

intimidated Roy, poking fun and laughing and jeering at him, whilst the leader emptied the contents of his bag onto the ground.

Roy didn't resist as two members pinned him down and the leader rummaged through, mocking its contents.

'Oh look, boys, here's a blankie. And an apple.'

The leader took a bite and threw it to one of the others.

'Oh, and look at this, a teddy, how cute.'

Roy watched through gritted teeth. His mum had packed a few things to remind him of home but now they lay bare, taunting him in front of the gang.

As the leader held the bear and shook it violently, he laughed as the stash of cash Roy had hidden, fell from the hole. He'd pulled away a few stitches and stuffed the notes inside on the first night. He thought they were safe.

'Oh, looky here, what have we found?'

After scooping out the contents, the leader threw the bear at Roy and snickered as he stuffed the money in his own pocket.

'This is down payment on your life, sucker. You can either join us, or we'll come here every night and beat you to a pulp. Take your choice.'

He threw Roy's bag back at him too and Roy gathered the few contents and stashed them back inside.

Devoid of dignity and most everything else, Roy held back tears as the leader waited for him to make a choice.

'It's the only way,' he sneered. 'If you want to survive, you have to join us.'

Reluctant to give into their demands, Roy shook his head. The leader laughed.

'That's OK. Most of 'em say that. But you'll eventually give in.'

They turned and walked back into the darkness as Roy watched. Unable to sleep, he decided he needed to find a new and better hiding place.

Roy tried moving to different spots where the brush was thicker. Like a wombat digging its burrow, Roy used his hands to dredge dirt away and bunkered in. Then he'd use what scrub he could, to drag over the top of him, but each night the gang found him and would drag him out and beat him up.

After seven more nights of harassment and beatings, Roy gave in. His eyes were black from the beatings and every bone ached. His stomach longed for food, and he hadn't slept since they'd first found him. Roy decided it would be easier to give in to survive - and so, he became a one of the misfits.

Joining a gang wasn't something Roy would have thought of doing. When he was at school, one kid had tried to force him into enlisting into a group he'd formed, but Roy managed to convince them he wasn't the right fit. It cost him a few lunches but eventually, they gave up and left him alone.

Out here though, Roy was alone and exposed, and the leader knew it. Each member had lived rough in the bush of The Reserve, trying to avoid becoming members until they too, would eventually give in, realising it was at least a form of kinship and source of food.

# 5

## The Reserve

**T**he Reserve was a seventy-two hectare stretch of national park and

though it had long since overgrown, was protected for the moment. The gang knew their days were numbered though once some builder came up with enough cash.

Most had either been rebellious teens, beaten or spending time in juvenile justice for petty theft or joyriding. Some were victims of harsh upbringings or paedophiles who'd gone under the radar. The gang kept mostly to themselves and usually the locals ignored them.

A month after joining, Roy heard one of the youngest members was almost killed. He'd pushed a stolen scooter across a busy road without stopping for the traffic lights. The local driver hadn't seen him and collected the kid as he sped out in front.

Scattered on the side of the road, the kid had landed on top of the car, then rolled off the bonnet and onto the curb, breaking an arm and a leg. He was carted off to the hospital, then released into local foster care.

Roy decided he was one of the lucky ones. It didn't always turn out ok. The accident was a lesson.

The local foster support was friendly and supportive, but sporadically a kid would rebel. Feeling life had dealt them a raw deal, they often ran away to join the gang.

The gang grew quickly as society turned their back on kids at their most vulnerable. The system couldn't cope, youth services were overflowing, and less people were becoming foster parents.

That's where they were taken under the gang's wing. Vulnerable and sobbing, they would be curled up in a gutter or under the shelter of a bus-stop. The gang



would bully the kid until they became part of the gang. The leader had his script down pat.

‘Hey kid, you know no one loves you. Why else would they throw you out? You may as well join us where we will protect you. If you don’t, you get beaten up by the other gangs round here. But we’re survivors.’

Recruitment happened regularly, and younger kids believed their parents wouldn’t take them back. Once the leader found what they’d done, he’d say their parents wouldn’t forgive that kind of behaviour, but with the gang, they were safe - and so the gang grew, somehow finding brotherhood in one another’s wretchedness.

