

BOBBI CHEGWYN

RADICAL RAY

Australia's Little Champion for Big Change



CHAPTER 1



RAY'S GROWING HEART

Ray Roxby of Banksia Street, Botany, had a knack for finding magic all around him. Whether it was sunlight making a shell shimmer like a pearl at Bronte Beach or a tangle of vines in the Royal Botanic Gardens that looked like the entrance to a secret world, his curiosity and imagination turned ordinary moments into extraordinary adventures.

With dark brown hair that always seemed to have a mind of its own, sticking up in playful tufts, and warm, deep brown eyes that sparkled with excitement, Ray looked like he was always ready for the next big thing. His skin was sun-kissed from afternoons spent exploring outside, and faint freckles dusted his nose and cheeks. His wide grin carried an infectious enthusiasm, as though every moment held the promise of something incredible waiting to be discovered. Ray wasn't just a boy who noticed things—he was a boy who lived for adventure.

Botany, a suburb of Sydney, was full of history. Captain Cook had landed in nearby Botany Bay in 1770, claiming the eastern part of Australia for Britain. Ray loved imagining what it must have felt like for Captain Cook to step off his ship, *Endeavour*, for the first time. Did he feel the same rush of wonder Ray felt when the fire station across from his house roared to life, with its trucks speeding off to face whatever awaited them?

Ray lived in a house filled with warmth and laughter. He shared it with his mum, Shirl; his grandmother, Leila; and his best mate, a Blue Heeler named Atlas. The house, perched near the end of the street, always smelled like fresh baking or flowers, depending on whether Grandma Leila had been in the kitchen or the garden. Atlas's paws clicked on the wooden floors as he followed Ray from room to room, always ready for the next adventure.

Shirl was a writer for *The Sydney Morning Herald*, working from her cozy home office. It was a cluttered nest of papers, sticky notes, and coffee mugs. She wrote inspiring, feel-good stories that aimed to brighten readers' days and shine a light on positive moments in life. Shirl had warm brown eyes that crinkled when she smiled, her dark hair often swept into a messy bun with a pencil tucked behind her ear. She wore glasses that sometimes slid down her nose,

and her favorite cardigan—soft, worn, and covered in ink stains—seemed to hug her as she worked. But juggling her writing and being a single mum often left her with less time for Ray than she wished. When Ray peeked into her office, she'd glance up with a tired smile. "What's up, little mate?" she'd say, her voice full of love but her hands still typing away.

Grandma Leila, retired from her years as a school librarian, stepped in to fill the spaces where Shirl couldn't always be. She had a way of making even ordinary moments feel exciting and fun. Whether teaching Ray to bake ANZAC biscuits or pointing out constellations in the night sky, she helped Ray see the world as full of possibilities waiting to be discovered.

But behind Grandma Leila's warm smile, there was a story that Ray only caught glimpses of during quiet times. Her husband—Ray's grandfather—had passed away when Ray's mum, Shirl, was just a teenager. Life had asked Grandma Leila to be strong and kind at the same time, and she had found a way to do both. She had always cared for others, but after losing her husband, she had to learn how to care for herself, too, while helping Shirl through her sadness. That's when she discovered something special: Radical Love—a love so big and powerful it could help heal hearts, bring people closer, and even make the world a better place.

Ray, of course, didn't know all of this yet. But that February afternoon, sitting on the porch with a lemonade Icy Pole in hand, he was about to get a glimpse of the wisdom his grandmother had carried for years.

The summer sun bathed the front yard, and Atlas lounged nearby, chewing on his favorite tennis ball. Grandma Leila sat beside Ray, her curly auburn hair, now streaked with grey, catching the golden light.

"Ray," she said softly, her voice carrying the weight of something important.

Ray looked up, licking a sticky drop of lemonade off his hand. "Yes, Grandma?"

She leaned forward, her blue-green eyes sparkling with a mix of mischief and wisdom. "Now that you've started third grade, I have a magical secret to share with you."

Ray's curiosity ignited. Grandma Leila's secrets were never ordinary.

"What is it?" he asked eagerly.

"Your heart," she began, placing a hand over his chest, "is bigger than you think. And here's the magical part—it can grow even bigger."

Ray tilted his head. "Like... when I eat more? Or like when I grow taller?"

She chuckled. "Not quite. It grows in a different way—through Radical Love."

"Radical Love?" Ray repeated, the words unfamiliar yet exciting. "What's that?"

"It's a kind of love that's so big, it stretches out to everyone," Grandma Leila explained. "Not just the people who are easy to love, but everyone—even people who upset you or seem different. But here's the secret: Radical Love isn't just about what you feel; it's about what you do."

Ray thought about that. "Do? Like... being nice to people?"

"Exactly," she said, her voice gentle. "It's about showing kindness, even when it's hard. Sharing what you have, helping someone in need, or forgiving someone who's made a mistake. Radical Love is love in action."

Ray's brow furrowed. "That sounds... kind of hard. Why does it matter so much?"

Grandma Leila smiled, her expression softening with a memory she hadn't shared before. "Because when you choose Radical Love, it doesn't just help others—it helps you. When I lost your grandfather, I was so angry

at the world. I didn't think I'd ever feel happy again. But then I learned that love isn't just something you hold inside—it's something you give. And the more you give, the more it comes back to you."

Ray sat quietly, letting her words sink in. "So... it's like when you throw a boomerang, and it comes back?"

Grandma Leila's face lit up. "Exactly, little mate. Radical Love is like a boomerang."

Ray nodded slowly. "I think I could try it."

"That's the spirit," she said, ruffling his hair. "The best adventures often start with small steps."

Atlas barked, jolting them both back to the moment. Ray laughed, the sound bright and carefree, but deep inside, he felt something stir—a seed of possibility, planted by his grandmother's words.