

**Wired for Gold**

**Kerry Shervey**

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**Proudly presented by:**

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**National Library of Australia**

**Cataloguing-in-Publication Entry**

**Title:** Wired for Gold

**Author:** Shervey, Kerry

**Subjects:**

Olympic Games (2032 : Brisbane, Qld.) — Juvenile fiction.

Neurodiversity — Juvenile fiction.

Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder— Juvenile fiction.

Autism spectrum disorders — Juvenile fiction.

Spina bifida— Juvenile fiction

Archery — Juvenile fiction.

Swimming— Juvenile fiction

Volleyball — Juvenile fiction.

Bundaberg (Qld.)— Juvenile fiction

**ISBN:** 978-1-923697-99-7

Cover design by: BASA-Q Team

Printed in Australia.

## **Acknowledgement of Country**

This story travels across ancient lands and waters.

From the cane fields of the Taribelang Bunda, Gooreng Gooreng, and Bailai peoples; past the sands of K'gari, home of the Butchulla people; through the glasshouse mountains of the Kabi Kabi and Jinibarra peoples; along the winding river of the Turrbal and Yuggera peoples in Brisbane; to the golden beaches of the Yugambeh language region.

We acknowledge that these lands have always been places of teaching, learning, and gathering. We pay our respects to the Elders past, present, and emerging.



# Chapter 1

## The Blue Silence

The morning air over the Burnett River tasted like warm caramel and fresh salt spray.

It was the peak of the crush season in Bundaberg. The thick, sweet scent of molasses from the distant Rum Distillery drifted downriver, mixing with the crisp breeze coming off the ocean at Burnett Heads. It was a smell that meant home. It meant energy. It meant harvest.

Noah sat on the edge of the small aluminium tender, his heel tapping a frantic rhythm against the rubber pontoon.

Tap-tap-tap-tap.

Fast. Precise. Like a piston firing in an engine.

Next to him, jammed awkwardly between the fuel tank and the esky, were their two transport bikes. The front wheels hung over the side, catching the spray as the boat cut through the water.

"Easy, turbo," Oliver grinned, reaching out to steady Noah's handlebars as the boat bounced over a small wake. "You're going to vibrate the bikes right into the river."

"I'm not anxious," Noah said, his eyes scanning the lush green mangroves of the riverbank, watching a King Parrot wing its way across the water. The bird was a brilliant flash of red and green against the wide, open sky. "I'm just... dry. I need to get wet. My brain is too loud."

"We're almost there," their Dad said from the back, killing the outboard motor as they drifted perfectly toward the Quay Street pontoon. "Tide's in. It's going to be a glass-out on the bay later. Perfect day for it."

In Bundaberg, it seemed like it was always a perfect day for it. The temperature was a steady, balmy twenty-four degrees—warm enough to keep your muscles loose, but with a cool breeze that kept the sweat at bay.

Noah was onto the timber jetty before the rope was even tied off. He reached back down and hauled his bike up in one fluid motion, the frame light in his hands. Oliver passed up the second bike, then the kit bags.

"Race you to the pool," Oliver challenged, swinging his leg over the saddle and clipping on his helmet.

"Loser buys the sourdough at Oodies," Noah shot back.

"Deal."

They took off. Riding through Bundaberg in 2032 was a dream. They flew down the riverside path, the wind rushing past their ears. To their left, the heritage buildings of the CBD glowed with a warm, welcoming light. To their right, the river sparkled, wide and majestic, the lifeblood of the town.

They rode hard, their legs pumping, burning off the excess energy that sizzled under their skin. Most kids their age were sitting in classrooms right now, staring at whiteboards, fighting the urge to sleep. Noah and Oliver had tried that. It hadn't worked. Their brains didn't learn by sitting still; they learned by moving.

They turned onto the palm-lined avenue leading to the Bundaberg Aquatic Centre. The facility was world-class, a gleaming structure of glass and steel that rose out of the lush green parklands—a testament to a town that bred champions.

As they walked through the glass doors, the humidity hit them—warm and heavy.

They changed in record time. When they stepped out onto the pool deck, the water lay before them: fifty meters of perfect, unrippled blue.

Coach Miller was standing by Lane 4, holding a stopwatch. "Morning, boys," he said. He was a man of few words, a former distance champion who moved with a slow, deliberate grace on land. "Main set today. 400s. Threshold pace."

Noah didn't groan. He adjusted his goggles, pressing them tight against his eyes until the suction held. He stepped up onto the block.

He looked down at the water.

On land, Noah felt clumsy. He bumped into doorframes. He lost his keys. He interrupted people because his thoughts were faster than his mouth. On land, the world was a chaotic storm of noise, lights, and distraction.

But water? Water was simple.

"Go."

Splash.

The moment Noah broke the surface, the world vanished.

The noise of the town, the humming of the lights, the tapping of his own foot—it was all gone.

There was only the blue. There was only the black line painted on the bottom of the pool.

Stroke. Stroke. Breathe. Stroke. Stroke. Breathe.

It was a metronome. The water pressed against his skin, providing a constant, soothing pressure that held him together. His ADHD brain, usually scattering in a million directions, suddenly locked onto a single thing: Efficiency.

He felt the water slipping over his shoulders. He felt the catch of his hand. He wasn't thinking about homework or the Opening Ceremony. He was a hydro-dynamic machine.

In the next lane, Oliver was matching him stroke for stroke. Oliver's hyperfocus made him a technical surgeon. He was analysing his drag coefficient with every turn, adjusting his elbow height by millimetres.

They turned at the wall in perfect sync—a tumble, a push, a streamline. They surfaced like dolphins, gulping the sweet Bundaberg air before diving back into the silent blue sanctuary.

For the next two hours, they weren't the "distracted twins" who couldn't sit still in Math class. They were kings of the deep, training for a moment that was waiting for them four hours south, in a stadium full of gold.

## Chapter 2

### The Tension and the Release

If Bundaberg was the engine room of energy, the Brisbane International Archery Centre at Belmont was the temple of focus.

Nestled into the base of the glorious bushland hills on Old Cleveland Road, the complex didn't feel like a sports stadium. It felt like a retreat. The air here was distinct—it smelled of crushed eucalyptus leaves, sun-warmed gum bark, and the faint, sweet scent of the beeswax used on the bowstrings.

Andy rolled her wheelchair down the concrete path to the 70-meter range. The path was smooth, wide, and perfectly graded. Brisbane was a city built for wheels, and she moved with an easy, gliding grace.

"Listen to that," Samara said, walking beside her, carrying her large bow case like it was a cello.

"I don't hear anything," Andy replied.

"Exactly."

It was true. Despite being minutes from the city, the only sounds were the warble of a magpie in the high gum trees and the rhythmic, distinct sound of arrows hitting the targets. Thwack. Pause. Thwack. It wasn't a violent sound; it was a sound of arrival.

They entered the range. It was cool under the massive shade structure, the light filtered and soft.

Andy locked her brakes. Click.

She opened her case and lifted out her recurve bow. It was a beautiful piece of engineering—carbon fibre risers, perfectly balanced stabilizers, shining in the morning light.

For many people, a wheelchair was seen as a confinement. For Andy, on the archery line, it was her secret weapon. While other competitors had to spend years training their leg muscles to stop swaying in the wind, to find a center of gravity that wouldn't shift, Andy was already grounded.

She was solid. She was a turret.

She nocked an arrow. The feathers—the fletching—were bright green and gold.

She raised the bow. She drew the string back to her anchor point—her chin. She felt the immense tension of the limbs, forty pounds of stored energy waiting to be released. Her upper body, built from years of pushing herself through the world, didn't tremble.

Through the sight, the gold center of the target was a tiny circle seventy meters away.

Breathe in. Breathe out. Pause.

She relaxed her fingers.

Thump.

The arrow flew in a perfect arc. It hit the gold with a solid thud.

"Center X," Samara murmured, checking the spotting scope. "You're scary when you're in the zone, And's."

"I'm not scary," Andy smiled, lowering the bow. "I'm stable. My brain usually spins at a thousand kilometres an hour. But here? When I'm holding that tension? It forces me to be still. Spina bifida gave me the chair, but the chair gives me the foundation."

Samara moved to her lane. She was different. She was a coiled spring. Her "obsessive" nature—the trait that made her colour-code her wardrobe and organize her day in five-minute blocks—was perfectly suited for this sport. Archery wasn't about luck; it was about the repetition of perfection.

She went through her ritual. Feet shoulder-width apart. Check the wind flags (limp, perfectly still). Check the fletching.

Samara didn't just want to hit the target; she wanted to understand the flight path. She loved the physics of the Archer's Paradox—how the arrow had to bend around the bow handle before straightening out in mid-air. She saw the math in the air.

They trained for two hours in the pleasant morning cool, the smell of the bush grounding them.

"Time to refuel?" Andy asked, checking her watch. "I've got a shift starting at twelve."

"Coffee," Samara agreed. "Desperately."

They left the range and headed to Yellow Box Coffee Shots, the cafe Andy's stepmum ran just down the road. It was a local favourite—an airy, open-plan space with big windows that let the Brisbane light pour in. It smelled of roasting beans and fresh pastries.

Andy rolled behind the counter, tying on her apron. She moved faster here than anyone on two feet. The espresso machine was her other instrument.

"Hey Andy!" a customer called out—a regular, a cyclist stopping after a ride through the Chandler velodrome nearby. "How's the aim today?"

"Straight and true, Gary," Andy grinned, deftly steaming milk with one hand while tamping grinds with the other. "Flat white, extra hot?"

"You know it."

Samara sat at a corner table, opening her diary to log her shots. She watched her sister work. Andy spun the chair between the grinder and the group head, a dance of efficiency.

"You know," Samara said, as Andy slid a perfect coffee onto the table. "People think we're different because we don't follow the 'normal' path. You in the chair, me with the obsession."

Andy wiped the counter, the steam from the machine curling around her. "Normal is boring, Sam. Normal misses the target."

"Normal doesn't make the Olympic team," Samara corrected her, taking a sip. "This coffee is gold, by the way."

"Only the best," Andy winked. "We're in Brisbane. We don't do bad coffee."

Outside, the sun climbed higher, bathing Old Cleveland Road in a golden glow, illuminating a city that felt less like a concrete jungle and more like a big, welcoming backyard where everyone, no matter their wheels or their wiring, had a lane to run in.