

NEMESIS

Book Three of Zach's Story



Wendy Milton

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WENDY MILTON

ILLUSTRATED BY PATRICK HAWKINS



Zach's Story Continues...



So far, Zach Brinkley's life hasn't been easy.

We first meet him in *Angel of Fire*, when he's fighting for his life and has only one worldly contact, the dreaded, know-it-all Sophie Ferguson. Even worse, someone is trying to kill him!

In *Sophie's Return*, Zach recovers and begins to appreciate that Sophie has qualities he likes. Then, just as he's learning to appreciate her, he almost loses her to the evil lurking in Bottleneck Bay's dark, subterranean world.

Now Zach and Sophie are leaving Lamington Primary to begin their secondary school education at a prestigious, private school on Bottleneck Bay's north shore. Will life for Zach at Josiah Batty Grammar be any easier?

ONE

It was a hot day in early December. Although the afternoon sun was low, the shed in the backyard of the terrace at 48 Denison Street had retained much of its heat. Zach's father, at his workbench, seemed oblivious. Trickle of perspiration ran down his face and his sandy hair was damp, but his expression was one of rapt concentration. His shirtsleeves were rolled to reveal tanned, sinewy arms. His hands with their long, delicate fingers, worked deftly upon the little piece of wood that held his interest. The wood had already begun to take shape.

Suddenly his concentration was broken. He looked up. He turned. The shed door was open but no one had appeared. Yet he smiled and indicated a stool a few feet away from his workbench. 'Sit yourself down, Billy.'

The boy in the doorway was dressed in a striped, collarless shirt and knee-length pants with straps that went over his shoulders. He looked feverish and sickly

and not a little put out that Zach's father had sensed that he was there. Anyone who could have seen the boy would have known he was unhappy by his drooping shoulders and the tight line of his lips.

Mr Brinkley paused. 'It *is* Billy isn't it? Milly would have moved something. I'd say you're alone, eh? Milly's been helping Zach's mother with the cooking. Never could see the point of putting all that effort into something that's only going to be eaten. Now with woodwork,' (he indicated his bench and tools) 'you always end up with something to keep. I thought I'd have a go at this. What do you think?' The man pointed at an open book in which was a picture of a 19th-century Australian Army officer. He wore a scarlet uniform jacket with silver and gold braid on the sleeves and epaulets, shiny gold buttons, a white belt with a gold buckle, a spiked, white helmet with a feather, and white gloves.

Billy stared. A trickle the same colour as the officer's jacket dribbled from the corner of his mouth. It was the uniform he might have worn, if he'd lived. How could Zach's father have known he'd wanted to be an officer? How had Zach's father known he was *there*?

'The temperature dropped when you came in, in case you were wondering,' Jack Brinkley said. 'As for that picture, Zach mentioned that you'd intended joining the Army when you were old enough. At first you would have worn a khaki uniform and a slouch

hat, but I'm sure you would have become an officer before long.'

Billy's guard dropped. After all, who could hear him? His eyes glistened. 'Yeah, I would've if I hadn't been so stupid. I didn't know when someone was poisoning me. I should've known. I should've been smarter. I was supposed to be looking after Milly. Father told me to look after Milly. Instead I let her die. I don't deserve to wear a slouch hat or a white helmet with a feather.'

Jack Brinkley paused long enough for Billy to answer. But he'd heard nothing, so how could he possibly have known what that answer was? He put down the wooden figurine and drew up a stool. 'You know, Billy, I'm finding it really hard not to be angry with myself over what nearly happened to Zach. I keep thinking I should have been there to protect him. I should have stayed in his hospital room. But we have to move on, don't we? We can't go on blaming ourselves for our mistakes. I'm very glad *you* knew the Goose was coming back. That makes you a hero in my eyes. You're a smart lad. I'd be proud if you were my son. Zach will grow up and leave home but I want you to know that you'll always have a home here.'

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'Didn't he go outside?' said Sophie.

'Who?' said Zach's mother.

'Billy. Milly was wondering where he was.'

'I thought he must have gone with Zach and Astra. Zach said they were loaming to Lamington Mall.' Zach's mother wiped her floury hands on her apron and sighed. 'Zach's left his body in the lounge again and that dog is guarding it. I don't know how many times I've told him not to leave his body lying around. What if someone comes?'

'You could say you'd had him stuffed?'

'*Billy!!!*'

Billy had just walked through the kitchen wall. There was a swagger in his step. Milly looked at him sharply. 'Why are you so happy? You snapped at me when I asked if you wanted to help us cook. You've been like a bear with a sore head all day.'

'Sorry.'

'Where have you been?'

'Talking to Zach's father.'

'About what?'

Billy shrugged. 'Things.'

Sophie grinned. 'Secret men's talk.'

'Secret what, dear?' said Zach's mother.

'Billy's been talking to Mr Brinkley but he won't say what about.'

Zach's mother sniffed. 'Probably about Jack's precious chess set. Would you believe he's carving a chess set? Why bother when he can buy one? He's just started on the first piece, so I'd say he'll still be doing it

this time next year. In the meantime, he's dehydrating in that hot shed. Probably hasn't had a drink for hours.

'I'll take him one,' said Milly. 'Are you coming, Billy?' She waited until Sophie filled a glass.

'Milly's taking him a drink,' Sophie explained.

'Such a thoughtful girl.' Zach's mother watched the glass as it bobbed through the back door. 'I've been meaning to ask you, Sophie, what sort of present you think Milly would like. Jack's carving that chess set for Billy although Billy won't be able to use it until he learns to levitate.'

Sophie sighed. 'He's been practising and Milly's very patient with him, but ... well, nothing's happened yet. As for a present, Milly told me she used to have doll called Victoria. She named it after the queen. I know she's a bit old for dolls but this one was special because her mother made all the clothes. It was the last present her mother gave her before ...'

'Oh, dear! What happened?'

'I don't know. She never talks about it.'

'You really think she'd like a doll? I could get some pictures of Victorian costumes.'

'Yes, I think she'd like it, Mrs Brinkley, and I think it would be a very nice thing to do.'

Zach's mother smiled. 'Thank you, Sophie.' She hesitated. 'I'm truly sorry about all that business with your father, dear. I got a bit grouchy when he blamed Zach for you nearly drowning. Everything got on top

of me. The doctors were telling me Zach would sleep for years because he had some dreadful disease! My husband *told* them he was loaming but would they listen?'

'Dad's all right now, Mrs Brinkley, but I think you'll have to accept that he thinks the Brinkleys are weird. It's because of me, you see. I'm the one they had to cart off to a psychologist when I was swoppopitying, but as I'm his only daughter, he needed someone else to blame.'

Zach's mother sniffed again. 'I suppose you're right, dear. In fact, that's a shrewd observation.'

'Oh it isn't mine, Mrs Brinkley. Astra worked it out. She's good at understanding people.'

'Is there anything that feral angel *isn't* good at?'

Sophie smiled. In spite of the difference in their ages, it was as if the older woman and the young girl shared a secret.