

FINDING CATHCART

Book Five of Zach's Story



Wendy Milton

Finding Cathcart

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Zach's Story Continues...



One could be forgiven for thinking Zach Brinkley attracts trouble. So far, he's escaped from a would-be murderer (*Angel of Fire*), gone to the aid of a tunnel dwelling ghost (*Sophie's Return*), been pursued by a vengeful spirit (*Nemesis*) and kidnapped by terrorists (*Spooks*). Enough for one boy? In this story, Zach meets Mr Cathcart, a long-term resident of a peaceful, local rest home. Mr Cathcart has amnesia and Zach remembers what it's like to be in hospital without any knowledge of how he got there. He feels sorry for the old man. Where did Mr Cathcart come from? What will happen if he and his friends unlock the secrets of the old man's past?

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Our lives are touched by the past. Sometimes things that happened before we were born affect our fate. Do events from the past affect us by design, or is it mere coincidence (randomness) that shapes our destiny?

Zach Brinkley wasn't born in 1952. Neither, for that matter, were his parents. How could an event of 1952 shape Zach's destiny? The event, terrible for the person whose life it almost destroyed, occurred at Her Majesty's Theatre in Bottleneck Bay at approximately eight o'clock on a cold, stormy night in August. The theatre was packed with people who'd come to see The Great Waldo, a magician of international renown. But there was more to this magician. Codenamed Cathcart, The Great Waldo had been recruited as a secret agent by Australian Security. He travelled abroad, liaised with allied security forces and met secretly with dissidents and Western sympathisers.

Let us return to that stormy night in 1952, when the unfortunate agent Cathcart realises his cover has been blown.

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It was bitterly cold. Had the heating gone again? In spite of the cold, he was sweating beneath his robe. Was he nervous? Why? He'd done this hundreds of times. It wasn't the act that was making him jittery but a premonition and the premonition was made worse by the storm. He'd been visited by harbingers of doom recently, but never one as strong as this. His heart was racing. His palms were wet. How could he go on like this? He had to pull himself together.

That was when he heard the cough . . . heard it clearly, in spite of the theatre curtain and the music and the hubbub of voices. It was so familiar. *He* was out there. They were *both* out there. It could only mean that what he'd feared most had happened. They knew! How they'd found out he wasn't sure, unless . . . Could he have been betrayed?

In the final minutes before curtain call, self-preservation kicked in. He was calm and thinking clearly. They didn't *know* that he knew they were there. They'd be expecting him to complete the first half of his performance, then go to his dressing room. Was that where they planned to kill him? In the dim light of the wings, he signalled to a stagehand. 'Last minute change. We'll do the trunk first.' When the stagehand demurred, he added, '*Just do it!*' There were only thirty seconds to go. He watched as three men

carried the trunk onstage. His turbaned assistant, arms folded, stationed himself beside it. Then the house lights dimmed and the curtain rose.

He walked on to tumultuous applause. Bowing deeply, he gestured towards the trunk. His assistant was revolving the trunk to demonstrate that it was solid. Soon the assistant would be handcuffed, bound, blindfolded and placed inside the trunk. The lid would be padlocked. Once the padlocks were in place, The Great Waldo would climb onto the trunk and hold up a black, three-sided screen extending from his raised hands to the floor. The music would suggest something weird was about to happen. After several seconds the screen would drop. There would be gasps from the audience. It would be his assistant standing on the trunk! *He* would be inside the trunk, handcuffed and bound.

That was how it was supposed to work. This time, when the padlocks were removed, the trunk would be empty. The Great Waldo would have disappeared.