



RAPID READS

ADVANCE READING COPY

WILLIAM KOWALSKI

# JUST GONE





When Jamal and his sister Chantay arrive at Mother Angelique's inner city homeless shelter, they are hungry and scared. Their mother is dead and they are on their own. Angelique is fascinated by Jamal's stories of a man named Jacky Wacky, who protects the abandoned children of the city—and punishes those who harm them. A God-fearing woman, Angelique doesn't believe the stories at first. But strange things happen whenever Jamal is around, and she is ultimately forced to admit that the world may contain stranger truths than her faith can explain.

**William Kowalski's** first novel, *Eddie's Bastard*, was an international bestseller. *Just Gone* is his fourth title in the Rapid Reads series. In addition to being a writer, William is a part-time independent adult educational consultant, specializing in designing and delivering curricula to adults who are unemployed, undereducated and struggling to survive. He lives in Nova Scotia.

This is an advance reading copy of the uncorrected proofs and is not for sale.  
Changes may be made to the text before publication, so all quotations for review must be checked against the final bound book.

**ADULT FICTION**

Publication September 2013

9781459803275 PB • \$9.95

9781459803299 EPUB • 9781459803282 PDF



RAVEN BOOKS *an imprint of*  
ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS  
[www.rapid-reads.com](http://www.rapid-reads.com) • 1-800-210-5277

ADVANCE READING COPY

# JUST GONE

ALSO BY WILLIAM KOWALSKI:

*Orca/Raven*

The Barrio Kings (2010)

Something Noble (2012)

The Way It Works (2010)

*HarperCollins*

Eddie's Bastard (1999)

Somewhere South of Here (2001)

The Adventures of Flash Jackson (2003)

The Good Neighbor (2004)

*Thomas Allen Publishers*

The Hundred Hearts (2013)

ADVANCE READING COPY

# JUST GONE

WILLIAM KOWALSKI



RAVEN BOOKS

*an imprint of*

ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS

Copyright © 2013 William Kowalski

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system now known or to be invented, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Kowalski, William, 1970-  
Just gone / William Kowalski.  
(Rapid Reads)

Issued also in electronic formats.

ISBN 978-1-4598-0327-5

I. Title. II. Series: Rapid reads  
PS8571.O985J87 2013 C813'.54 C2013-901876-X

First published in the United States, 2013  
Library of Congress Control Number: 2013935303

**Summary:** Angelique's work at a homeless shelter takes a turn when she meets seven-year-old Jamal and a mysterious character named Jacky Wacky.



*Orca Book Publishers is dedicated to preserving the environment and has printed this book on Forest Stewardship Council® certified paper.*

Orca Book Publishers gratefully acknowledges the support for its publishing programs provided by the following agencies: the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund and the Canada Council for the Arts, and the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council and the Book Publishing Tax Credit.

Design by Teresa Bubela  
Cover photography by Getty Images

ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS  
PO Box 5626, Stn. B  
Victoria, BC Canada  
V8R 6S4

ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS  
PO Box 468  
Custer, WA USA  
98240-0468

www.orcabook.com  
Printed and bound in Canada.

ADVANCE READING COPY

*To Come*

## CHAPTER ONE

I used to work at this shelter downtown. It was a place for women and children who were having a rough time. We didn't allow men inside.

Don't get me wrong. I got nothing against men in general. It's just that in my line of work, I didn't meet too many good ones. The good men mostly stayed away from our place. They had business elsewhere, I guess.

I used to hope I would meet a good man. In fact, I longed for it. But not for



the reasons a woman normally does. I didn't need any doings with men. It might be fun and games for a while, but when a woman spends enough time with a man, she ends up with a child. There were already enough children in the world who had no one to take care of them and nowhere to go. And there were enough women who got left high and dry. I did not want to be one of those.

So I gave up my life to help women and their kids instead. Mostly the kids. I decided a long time ago it was my mission in life to pick up where other people left off. That was my real purpose—to take care of the little ones who could not take care of themselves.

Saturday nights at the shelter were always crazy. I worked the door. When you work the door, you have to be on your toes. You never know who's gonna come walking in, or who's gonna be following them.

Sometimes a lady might show up with a black eye and a crying baby. A few minutes later the man who gave her both might walk in, demanding to see her.

I do not believe in violence. But I kept a cosh under the counter, just in case someone showed up who did. This cosh was a piece of plastic pipe about a foot and a half long. It was filled with BBs and sealed at both ends. I had the janitor of my building make it for me on the sly. Sometimes I had to use it to persuade people to see things my way. For a small woman, I could swing that thing pretty good.

One Saturday night a long time ago, a teenage girl and a little boy came in. You couldn't tell at first if they were brother and sister or mother and son.

I remember the boy for two reasons. One is that he was covered in rat bites. They were fresh too. You tend to remember that kind of thing.

The other reason I remember that boy is because he was one of the most beautiful children I'd ever seen. All kids are beautiful to me. But this little one just seemed to glow. It was like he had some kind of special light in him.

I took one look at his bites and decided I was not going to bother with the paperwork.

"Uh-uh. No way. You got to get him to a hospital," I told the girl.

She was maybe fourteen, he was maybe seven. They were both so thin, they looked like they'd just crawled out of some concentration camp. The little boy was wearing shorts and sneakers, nothing else. No shirt, no socks. There were bites on his stomach and his arms. There was another one on his right cheek that I could tell was going to scar up bad.

And he had other scars that were not rat bites. It looked to me like that boy had

been hurt more than once in his short life by people who were big enough to know better. But if he was in pain, he gave no sign of it. Nothing was going to dim his light.

"We can't go to no hospital," the girl told me. She mumbled so bad I could hardly hear her. "They gonna split us up."

"What do you mean?" I asked her.

"They already tried once to take him away. They ain't takin' him again."

"Who is this boy to you?"

"He my brother," the girl said.

"Where's your mama at?"

"Gone."

"Gone where?"

"Just gone," said the girl.

Some folks at the shelter did things by the book. When we got a new intake, I was supposed to get her name and address, if she had one, plus some other information. But this time I just did what needed to be done. I took them back into

the bathroom and I sat the little boy on the sink. I got down the first-aid kit and took out the disinfectant. He didn't make a peep when I started washing his bites. His sister stood there and watched.

"These bites are dirty," I told her. He might have rabies."

"What's that?"

"Girl," I said, "are you serious? Rabies is a disease. Rats got it. And they can give it to people. You want your brother to get sick? He needs a shot. He needs to be seen by a doctor."

"Jacky Wacky ain't gonna let me get no rabies," said the little boy.

"You shut up about that," said his sister.

"Jacky who?" I said.

"Jacky Wacky," said the boy. "The magic man who looks out for us kids."

"He always talkin' 'bout Jacky Wacky," said the girl. "He crazy."

"I ain't crazy. You crazy for not believing in him," said the boy.

"Now you just stop it," I said. "We don't allow bad talk here. Only nice talk. What all are your names?"

"Chantay," said the girl.

"Jamal," said the boy.

"Well, Chantay and Jamal, you can call me Mother Angelique. You two come on out here. I'm gonna give this boy a shirt out of the donation box, and I'm gonna get you something to eat. You hungry?"

They looked at each other all big-eyed. I don't know why I even bothered asking. They were always starving when they came through that door. Every single one of them.

"Come on," I said.

I found a T-shirt that fit the boy. It had the number eleven on it. Then I went back in the kitchen and got two meals out

of the fridge. These were nothing more than balogna sandwiches, a bag of chips and a juice box on a Styrofoam plate. Chantay and Jamal looked at me like I'd just delivered a four-course meal. They sat at one of the tables and ate everything in about two seconds. Meanwhile, I had left the front door unattended, which I was not supposed to do, so I went back and sat there in case anyone came in.

I had every intention of calling the paramedics to have them come look at that boy, but I got distracted when someone else showed up. It was a woman in tears. She was followed a few minutes later by her boyfriend. He was all hopped up on something and feeling mean. Things got crazy for a while. I had to dial those three magic numbers, 9-1-1. After the cops came and took him away, I remembered Chantay and Jamal. I looked for them, but they

were gone. They must have slipped out in all the confusion.

There was nothing I could do about it. So I said a little prayer for them, like I do for all the little ones who are lost in this world, and then I forgot about them.

Don't think less of me for it. It wasn't because I didn't care. It was just that there were so many kids like them out there. I can only do so much. The rest of it I gotta give up to the higher power. Nothing else I can do.