



Corridors of the Night: A William Monk Novel

By Anne Perry

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Anne Perry, that incomparable novelist of life in Victorian England, has once again surpassed herself, with this twenty-first installment of her *New York Times* bestselling William Monk series. In *Corridors of the Night*, nurse Hester Monk and her husband, William, commander of the Thames River Police, do desperate battle with two obsessed scientists who in the name of healing have turned to homicide.

The monomaniacal Rand brothers—Magnus, a cunning doctor, and Hamilton, a genius chemist—are ruthless in their pursuit of a cure for what was then known as the fatal “white-blood disease.” In London’s Royal Naval Hospital annex, Hester is tending one of the brothers’ dying patients—wealthy Bryson Radnor—when she stumbles upon three weak, terrified young children, and learns to her horror that they’ve been secretly purchased and imprisoned by the Rands for experimental purposes.

But the Rand brothers are too close to a miracle cure to allow their experiments to be exposed. Before Hester can reveal the truth, she too becomes a prisoner. As Monk and his faithful friends—distinguished lawyer Oliver Rathbone and reformed brothel keeper Squeaky Robinson among them—scour London’s grimy streets and the beautiful English countryside searching for her, Hester’s time, as well as the children’s, is quickly draining away.

Taut with intrigue and laced with white-knuckled terror, *Corridors of the Night* is Anne Perry at her magnificent, unforgettable best.

Praise for *Corridors of the Night*

“[A] suspenseful, twisting narrative.”—*Historical Novels Review*

“Anne Perry has once again evocatively and meticulously conjured up Victorian London. . . . This is one of her best as she continues probing . . . the dark impulses that haunt all human souls.”—*Providence Journal*

“Pulls no punches and depicts Victorian London in all its corrupt glory.”—*Bookreporter*

Praise for Anne Perry and Her William Monk novels

Blood on the Water

“One of Ms. Perry’s most engrossing books . . . gallops to a dramatic conclusion.”—*The Washington Times*

Blind Justice

“[Perry’s] courtroom scenes have the realism of Scott Turow.”—*Huntington News*

A Sunless Sea

“Anne Perry’s Victorian mysteries are marvels.”—*The New York Times Book Review*

Acceptable Loss

“Masterful storytelling and moving dialogue.”—*The Star-Ledger*

Execution Dock

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From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

Review

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About the Author

Anne Perry is the bestselling author of two acclaimed series set in Victorian England: the William Monk novels, including *Blood on the Water* and *Blind Justice*, and the Charlotte and Thomas Pitt novels, including *The Angel Court Affair* and *Death on Blackheath*. She is also the author of a series of five World War I novels, as well as thirteen holiday novels, most recently *A Christmas Escape*, and a historical novel, *The Sheen on the Silk*, set in the Ottoman Empire. Anne Perry lives in Scotland and Los Angeles.

From the Hardcover edition.

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chapter

The small gas lamps along the walls of the corridor flickered as if there were a draught, but Hester knew, it being well after midnight, that all the doors were closed. Even the windows on the wards would be shut at this hour.

The girl stood motionless. Her eyes were wide, her skin as pale as the nightgown that hung just past her knees. Her legs were matchstick thin and her feet bare and dusty. She looked terrified.

“Are you lost?” Hester asked her gently. She could not think what the child was doing here. This was an annex to Greenwich Hospital. It backed onto the Thames, well downriver from the huge Port of London and the teeming city beyond. Did she belong to one of the other nurses, who had sneaked her in rather than leave her alone at home? It was against the rules. Hester would have to make sure no one else found her.

“Please, miss,” the child said in a hoarse whisper. “Charlie’s dying! You gotter come an’ ’elp ’im. Please .??.”

There was no other sound in the night, no footsteps on the stone floors. Dr. Rand would not be on duty until the morning.

The child’s fear vibrated in the air. “Please .??.”

“Where is he?” Hester asked quietly. “I’ll see what I can do.”

The child gulped and took a deep breath. “?’E’s this way. I left the door stuck. We can get back, if yer ’urry. Please .??.”

“I’m coming,” Hester agreed. “You lead the way. What’s your name?”

“Maggie.” She turned and started to go quickly, her bare feet soundless on the chill floor.

Hester followed her down the corridor, around a corner, and along another passage even less well lit. She could only just see the small, pale figure ahead of her, glancing backwards every few moments to make sure Hester was still there. They were going away from the wards where sick and badly injured sailors were treated, and farther into administrative areas and storerooms. Hester did not know the hospital well. She had volunteered to do temporary night duty as a favor to Jenny Solway, a friend who had a sudden illness in her own family. They had served together with Florence Nightingale in the Crimea. That was almost fourteen years ago, but the experiences they had shared—on fearful battlefields, including Balaclava, and in the hospital in Sebastopol—forged their lasting friendship, still strong although they went years without meeting.

Hester caught up with the child and took her small, cold hand.

“Where are we going?” she asked.

“To ’elp Charlie,” Maggie replied without turning her head. She was tugging at Hester now. “We gotter ’urry. Please .??.”

One more turn in the corridor and they reached a door that was flush with the wall and appeared to have no handle. A piece of cotton knotted to make a short rope was wedged to stop the door from closing completely.

Maggie let go of Hester's hand, slid her thin fingers under the fabric, and eased the door open.

"Ssh!" she warned. Then she stepped sideways through the crack and beckoned for Hester to follow her. When Hester was through also, she replaced the rope and then pushed the door closed again.

Hester went in a step behind Maggie. They were in another ward, smaller than the ones for the sailors, but holding six cots. The night lamps on the walls showed that there were small forms in three of them, lying still, as if asleep.

"Where are we?" Hester whispered.

"This is our place," Maggie replied. "Charlie's over there." She took Hester's hand again and pulled her toward the farthest bed near the doorway of the ward. It was closed, and Hester had lost her sense of direction to know even which way it faced.

Maggie stopped beside the bed, where an ashen-skinned boy about her own size lay propped up against the pillows. He turned toward her very slightly and tried to smile.

"Charlie," Maggie's voice wobbled a little and there were tears on her cheeks, "it's going to be all right. I got one o' the nurses ter come. She's gonna make yer better."

"Yer shouldn't a' done that," he whispered. "Yer'll get into trouble."

She lifted her chin up a little. "I don't care!" She looked at Hester. "Yer gotta do sumink."

Hester's heart sank and she felt a moment of panic. The boy looked desperately ill. Maggie was probably right that he was dying. Was this a quarantine ward? How could she hope to get enough information from a young child to have any idea what was wrong with him, or how to help?

The first thing she needed to do was to reassure him, gain his confidence. She moved forward and stood by the side of the bed.

"Hello, Charlie," she said very quietly. "Tell me how you feel. Are you hot? Sick? Shivery? Do you hurt anywhere especially?"

He stared at her for a moment. His face was so pale his skin looked almost translucent, the shadows around his eyes like bruises. "I don't really 'urt," he whispered. "Just a bit achy."

"Have you been sick?" she asked.

"Yesterday."

"Very sick, or just a little?"

"Quite a lot."

"Have you eaten anything since then?"

He shook his head.

“Drink anything? Water?”

She reached forward and touched her hand to his forehead. He felt hot and dry. She turned to Maggie, who was staring at her, eyes filled with fear.

“Can you go and fetch Charlie a drink of water, please?” Hester asked.

Maggie started to speak, then changed her mind and went off to obey.

“Please, miss, don’t tell ’er I’m dyin’,” Charlie said almost under his breath. “She’d be awful upset.”

Hester felt a sudden ache in her throat. She was a nurse—she was used to people dying—but these children alone, with no parent to comfort them, were different. They were so small, and lost. She did not normally lie to patients; if you did, then sooner or later they stopped believing you, and if that happened, much of the power to help was lost too.

This was different.

“I won’t.” She made too big a promise, without hesitation. “I don’t intend to let you die if I can help it.”

“But will you look after ’er?” he asked. “An’ Mike? Please?”

It was not a time for equivocation. “Yes, I will. Are you the eldest?”

“Yeah. I’m seven. Maggie’s only six, although she acts like she’s everybody’s ma.” He gave a weak smile, a little lopsided.

“Do you know why you’re here in hospital?” It was time to be practical.

“No.” He shook his head a fraction. “Summink ter do wi’ me blood.”

“Are they giving you medicine for it?”

“They keep putting a big needle in me arm. It ’urts a lot.”

“Really? Yes, it would hurt. Does this needle have a glass tube on the other end of it?” She was picturing the major new invention called a syringe, which could transfer liquids into the flesh—or, for that matter, take them out.

He nodded.

“Do you know what was in the glass part?”

He was looking paler and she could hardly hear his voice when he answered, “Looked red, like blood.”

Maggie came back with a mug full of water. Hester thanked her for it, then took a sip. It smelled and tasted fresh. She put an arm around Charlie. She could feel his bones through his nightshirt. She eased him upright and helped him to very slowly drink a little of the water. When he had taken all he could she laid him back down again, then as carefully as possible straightened the sheets around him so they were smooth. He was

gasping for breath, exhausted. She looked at him and was very afraid Maggie was right.

If he died, how was she going to help Maggie, who looked not much stronger herself? It was probably only fear and the need to believe she was doing something to help her brother that kept her upright on her feet, albeit swaying a little. Hester would have suggested the child sleep for a while, but she knew that if Charlie died when she was not there, the guilt would be with Maggie forever. It made no sense, but she would believe that she could have done something. In her place Hester would feel the same.

“How old is Mike?” she asked quietly.

“Four,” Maggie replied. “?’E’s not so bad. Maybe ’e’ll get worse when ’e’s older.”

“Maybe not. Do they put the needles into him, too?”

“Yeah.” She nodded.

“And you?”

“Yeah.” She nodded again. “But mostly Charlie. Can’t you do summink, miss?”

Hester still had little idea what was wrong with any of them. A misjudged treatment could be lethal. There was a stage in an illness when there was nothing more anyone could do. A small boy could take only so much “treatment.”

“What is the doctor doing to help him? Tell me all you know, Maggie. I need to do the right thing for him.”

The tears spilled over and ran down Maggie’s cheeks. “?’E don’t do nothing, miss. ’E comes and puts a needle into Charlie, an’ ’e gets sleepy an’ sick. ’E just lies there. Can’t even speak ter me an’ Mike. Please, miss .??.?”

Hester knew that Dr. Rand went home at night. After all, everyone had to sleep. But there was supposed to be a senior nurse on duty all night. Where was she? Sometimes there were emergencies that only a doctor could deal with, and a messenger would have to be sent to waken him. But this was a hospital for those who were extremely ill, or so badly wounded that often there was nothing that could be done for them except ease their distress, or at the very least, not leave them to die alone.

That was all too often what military nursing had been during the Crimean War, not so very long ago. Hemorrhage, gangrene, raging fever—these were things she had been used to coping with because scores of men, even hundreds, were wounded in battle. There were too few doctors, and usually too little time. That was one of the reasons the two Rand brothers, Dr. Magnus Rand and his elder brother, a chemist, Hamilton Rand, had been so pleased to have Hester, another Crimea nurse, fill in for Jenny Solway. Her experience was of great value.

Where on earth was the nurse in charge here? Hester did not dare leave Charlie to look for her. Was she ill herself? Or passed out drunk somewhere? It had been known to happen.

“Do you know what his illness is called?” Hester asked Maggie.

Maggie shook her head no.

“Do you have the same illness?” Hester persisted.

Maggie nodded.

“What does the doctor do for you?”

There was little time. In the bed beside them Charlie was lying motionless, his face white and his breathing shallow. But she had to find out all that Maggie could tell her before she attempted to help.

“Maggie?” she prompted.

“?E pricked me wi’ the needle too.” She took a deep breath. “It hurt something awful.”

“Do you know what was in the little bottle at the end of the needle?” Hester asked. “What color was it?”

Maggie shook her head. “I didn’t want ter look, an’ ’e told me not ter, but I did, just quickly. I think it were blood.”

Hester felt a chill run through her. So Magnus was taking blood? What for? Was Hamilton Rand testing it for something? He was a brilliant chemist, almost visionary in some ways. What was he learning from these children’s blood?

Maggie was staring at her, waiting, her eyes full of hope.

“Get me another cup of water,” Hester said to her. “Please.”

Maggie turned and went immediately.

Hester leaned forward and pushed the sleeve up a little on Charlie’s thin arm. She took the skin between her finger and thumb. It lifted away as if there were no flesh over the bone. At least she knew something to start with. “When did you last go to a bathroom to pee?” she asked.

Charlie blinked slowly. He seemed a little embarrassed. “Long time ago.”

“Can you let me look inside your mouth? Please?” He dropped his jaw obediently. She bent and peered inside. His skin was pale and almost dry, even his tongue. Now she knew at least one thing seriously wrong with him. Dehydration, when it was bad enough, could kill, especially a child as slight as he was. Water might not be all he needed, but it might keep him alive long enough to find a proper solution.

Maggie came back, running so quickly she almost tripped. She steadied herself without dropping the water, though the mug she carried was full to the brim.

Hester smiled at her, and very gently lifted Charlie up again so he was cradled in her arms and his head was nearly upright. He opened his eyes, but it was Maggie he looked at. He smiled at her hazily, and then seemed to drift off.

Hester put the mug to his lips. “Drink a little more, Charlie,” she urged him. “Just a sip.”

For several moments he did not move; then, as he tipped the mug very slightly, he took a mouthful. He

swallowed it and coughed. After a few seconds he took another.

Maggie was staring at them as if she were seeing a miracle. Hester ached with grief for her, because it was almost certainly useless, but she could not bear to tell her so. Her eyes were bright and she was so intent on Charlie, she was hardly remembering to breathe.

It took half an hour, but sip by sip, Charlie drank all of it. Hester felt a sense of triumph as if she had climbed a mountain. She laid Charlie back in the bed and pulled the blanket up over him again. He lay completely still, and almost straight away he was asleep.

Maggie's smile was so wide it must have hurt her cheeks. She was too full of emotion to speak. She knew it was only the beginning.

Hester stayed with them. Mike, the younger brother, was lying quietly and did not do more than stir and turn over when she touched his brow and then his arm. He looked more like three than four, but she knew that poor or sick children were often small for their ages.

An hour later she woke Charlie and, sip by sip, gave him another glass of water. Maggie helped. She refused to go back to her own bed, even though she was swaying on her feet with exhaustion. She agreed to sit down beside Hester, then at last, somewhere near dawn, she crumpled up and slid onto her lap, sound asleep.

About an hour later Hester laid Maggie gently into her own bed, and then went to look for the nurse who should have been on duty there.

She tried all the nearby storerooms and cupboards, rooms with sinks, taps, and places for laundry and rubbish, but there was no sign of her. Either she had not come to work in the first place or she had been and gone again almost straight away. Had she been ill, lazy, or on some emergency of her own? Or simply an assignation? It wouldn't be unheard of.

From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

David Boggs:

In this 21st one hundred year, people become competitive in each and every way. By being competitive today, people have do something to make them survives, being in the middle of the crowded place and notice through surrounding. One thing that at times many people have underestimated the idea for a while is reading. Yes, by reading a publication your ability to survive improve then having chance to endure than other is high. For you personally who want to start reading a new book, we give you this particular Corridors of the Night: A William Monk Novel book as beginning and daily reading reserve. Why, because this book is usually more than just a book.

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Joanne Starks:

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