

Where Angel Fears To Tread

ROBERT PERRIER



Where Angel Fears To Tread
by Robert Perrier

ISBN-13: 978-0-6485191-2-6
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Cover: *David with the Head of Goliath*, Caravaggio 1610
Cover, internal design and typesetting by h.a.r.p.o.
Body text Sabon 13/17

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Thanks to Joan Wilkinson and Tim Ransome.

Previously by Robert Perrier
En Passant CD 2012
If Not the Shadow short-listed for the 2014 Finch Memoir Prize
Breath by Breath CD 2015
The Weight of Love CD 2018

Previously published by h-a-r-p-o.com.au
Black and White Night Owls by Jordon Rothstein
Eccentric Voices: A scrapbook of Brisbane cultural history 1965–1995
edited by Anne Jones and Robert Whyte



He was tired. The kind of tired that never lets you sleep. He shut down the bike in the car park of the club where it all began. Calione had told him Brisbane would never be the same again. That was the first lie. The city was never going to be any different. Just different people pulling the strings.

He ordered four Glenfiddich doubles and lined them up in front of him. By the third, he felt his mind numbing. He picked up the fourth double and turned on the bar stool just as four big men in suits came in the front door as if they owned the place. They sat at a nearby table. A waiter put a jug of beer and four glasses in the middle of the table.

A woman in a tight high cut white dress with a red satin shirt tied at the midriff walked by. Bigsuit One grabbed her by the wrist and pulled her onto his lap.

“You look like you could do with a bit of this” he said pushing his pelvis into her and turning to his mates. She tried to twist away from him.

“Don’t worry about him, love. What he’s got won’t hurt you,” said Bigsuit Two.

“You’d need tweezers to find it,” said Bigsuit Three. They both laughed and took a swig of their beers. Bigsuit One wasn’t enjoying the gratuitous commentary.

“Let me go,” said the woman. She tried to twist away from him again and struck out, hitting him in the face with her free hand.

“Fucking bitch,” he said and smacked the woman with the back of his hand, catching a half-full glass of beer on the way through. Her head snapped back. The glass

shattered on the ground.

Angel got to his feet. They felt like lead.

“What do you think you’re doing?” he said.

Bigsuit One turned to Angel, squeezing the woman’s wrist even harder, wagging his tongue as she squirmed.

“Russ, settle down,” said Bigsuit Four.

Russ’s eyes were red with rage, matching his face. They fixed on Angel.

“Doing?” said Russ. “You mean this?” He let go of the woman’s hand and slapped her again with the full weight of his torso behind it. She fell to the ground.

Angel grabbed him by the collar with his left hand and twisted, raising him to his feet. Russ’s face squeezed tight as he saw Angel’s right fist come towards him like a freight train.

“More like this,” said Angel.

A veil fell over Russ’s eyes. Blood burst from his nostrils and his head fell back. Angel let go and let him fall at the feet of the woman. She stepped away from him as if he was a pile of vomit and retreated into the arms of friends.

One of Russ’s mates pulled a gun and pointed it at Angel. Another held up police identification and called into the two way.

“Seven-o-one, seven-o-one. Officer down.”

Two of them together grabbed Angel, bent his wrists, twisted his arms behind his back and took him to the ground. Angel was belly down, his face squeezed side on against the floor. He tried to lever himself up but was forced back down by the sole of a boot on his neck with a big man’s weight behind it. Sirens were closing in like

sonic walls.

They cuffed his wrists behind his back and hauled him off to a paddy wagon. Everything went quiet. Angel felt a hand on his shoulder turning him around. Two uniformed coppers on either side pinned his arms.

Plainclothes Detective Russ stood in front of him, his nose smashed flat, blood on his face and shirt. Russ drove his fist into Angel’s stomach and shaped for another. Before the punch landed Angel’s left foot swung in an arc and sank into Russ’s groin. The momentum lifted the big man’s lower body and jerked his upper body forward. Angel lifted both legs off the ground from the hip, twisted his body and swung his right foot around into Russ’s head as if it was a soccer ball. He heard Russ’s jaw crack. Russ dropped to the ground like a sack of grain.

The cops had Angel down on his face, knees in the back, cuffing his wrists and ankles together. They threw him into the wagon with such force the mesh left a bloody grid on the side of his head. The vehicle took off at high speed, throwing Angel around the van in every direction as it took corners, surged forward and screeched to a halt. Angel was unconscious before the trip had finished.

When he came to at the watch house, they fingerprinted him, swabbed him for DNA and threw him into a bare cell. It was silver bright and smelled of disinfectant. A single bed was attached to the wall with hospital sheets and a blanket folded on top.

Angel’s head hurt. He felt his swollen face. He felt a sharp pain in his left wrist. He took his shirt off. He dug his fingers deep into the small bones around the wrist. It

was fractured, but not badly. As long as he was careful and kept it still, it would heal. He made a sling with his shirt and rested his arm in it. The more the pain swamped his energy to ignore it, the more he felt the white-hot surges of hate rising from deep inside him. He hated everyone and everything. He hated the cop for hitting that woman. He hated his copper mates who came to defend the shit of an excuse for a human being. When he really thought about it, he hated all cops. They were all crooked, like his drug-dealing murderous prick of a father, no less bent than the dealers, pimps and addicts they were supposed to lock away. He hated Calione for getting him into the whole sham and Calione's untouchable clients who ordered hits like meals. More than anything, he hated himself. For losing control.

He lay back on the bunk, good hand behind his head, the broken one on his abdomen. He closed his eyes and concentrated on breathing until the pain and the hateful thoughts began to dim. He pictured Simone sitting in the lobby chair at the Adelphi, wet to the bone. Then he saw himself sitting on the edge of the hotel bed listening to her body moving in and out of the shower. Each image folded into the next until that very morning when dawn broke over the curve of the river. During the previous night, he'd told her things he'd never told anyone. But he didn't tell her everything. When the time had come, he couldn't tell her. Now she had merged into every memory he had. The curve of a river. The sound of a shower. Rain. The smell of metal. The silence of rust.

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Frank Angel has twenty-two crosses tattooed on his upper arm, one for each person he has killed. Between kills, he lives in Brisbane, in a Highgate Hill penthouse, listening to Bach, looking at the paintings on his walls, reading the books in his library. A one-night stand with an art gallery attendant becomes a full-blown catastrophe when he tells her everything about his criminal life except the most important part — he kills people.

Where Angel Fears To Tread is the debut novel by Robert Perrier.



Robert “Bomber” Perrier lives in Brisbane, having lived in Melbourne, Albury Wodonga and other great cities of the world. After studying theatre at the Victorian College of the Arts he helped create the *Flying Fruit Fly International Children’s Circus*, taking up the position of Artistic Director from the outset. In 1984, on behalf of the company, he won the *BHP Pursuit of Excellence Award* in Arts and Literature.

Author photo by Mark Crocker

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h.a.r.p.o. was created by Robert Whyte and Anne Jones in 2018 to publish the kinds of books they wanted to read, focussing on *Brisbane Noir*. h.a.r.p.o. also known as *How About Resisting Powerful Organisations* is a revival of the name Graham Cathcart and Bomber Perrier used for radical cultural activities in the early 1970s. For the h.a.r.p.o. story, catalogue and ordering details for both retail and trade, see www.h-a-r-p-o.com.au

ISBN 978-0-6485191-2-6



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Where Angel Fears To Tread by Robert Perrier
RRP \$24.95
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