

# Where Angel Fears To Tread

ROBERT PERRIER



*Where Angel Fears To Tread*  
by Robert Perrier

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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

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edited by Anne Jones and Robert Whyte



Angel brushed away water from his face. The rain had stopped. He was in the dark, wet through, sitting on the park bench hidden amongst trees opposite Simone's town-house. Her lights were off. There was no sign of the Norton. He heard a car in the distance. He looked up, following it until it slid past on the wet road. As the tail lights disappeared, he sensed the after-taste of the Grange Hermitage he had shared with Calione. He shut his eyes to recall the flavour. Could it still be there after all this time? Surely it was his mind playing tricks, throwing up something it couldn't get rid of.

He blinked open his eyes. A shadowy silhouette in the distance was walking directly towards him. A child. A boy, as far as Angel could tell, with the street light directly behind him. The boy arrived at the park bench and sat on the opposite end to Angel. By the size of him, Angel thought eight or nine.

“What are you doing here?” said Angel.

“I'm scared of the dark,” said the boy looking straight ahead.

“This is the dark.”

The boy said nothing.

“How do you know I won't hurt you?”

“You wouldn't”

“How do you know?”

The boy didn't answer.

Angel breathed in through his mouth and pushed it out through his nostrils.

“What are you really doing here?”

“Nothing,” said the boy. He turned his head towards

Angel. "What are you doing here?"

Angel looked at the town-house.

"Same as you," he said. "Shouldn't you be with your mother?"

"I'm waiting for her to come home."

"When's she coming home?"

"Soon."

"That's good, because I've got to go."

"Where are you going?"

Angel turned to the boy.

"Will you be all right?"

"Yes," said the boy. "Will you?"

"Me?" said Angel. He looked back to the town-house.

"Yes. I think so. Thanks for asking."

Before crossing the road on the far side of the park Angel turned to look back towards the park bench. The boy was gone. Angel crossed the bridge. He walked through a part of Brisbane which had not yet completely sold its soul to Satan, who, in various guises, was selling apartments in just about every other inner-city nook and cranny, over the weatherboard remains of old Queenslanders. He walked behind the hospital, cut through the golf course, picked up the bicycle track on the other side and followed it to the footbridge. This took him over the freeway and railway lines and between two private schools on Gregory Terrace. He detoured through Roma Street Parklands, built by some saint with the power to convince the authorities to plant beauty's seed in a city's lonely heart. He walked through the pedestrian tunnel under the Roma Street railway station.

He noticed the four railway police harassing some poor kid so confused about his identity he had rings and bits of metal coming out of every orifice. The kid's girlfriend was sitting against the wall, bawling her eyes out. Angel walked past the Police Headquarters and the watch house where they had taken his DNA, then over the Grey Street Bridge. On the first arch a graffitist had sprayed in black WHERE IS BEAUTY? Underneath, someone else had painted HERE. But by tomorrow beauty would be grey-washed out of existence. Angel walked past the black snake-like skin of the western side of GOMA. *Art is anything you want it to be* screamed the Warhol banners. What a crock of shit. He turned right into Peel Street, past the hundred-year-old church with the protest signs and the multi-storey next to it which housed the drug addicts and drunks, the de-institutionalised and the homeless. He weaved his way through West End until eventually he reached his apartment. Another of Satan's handiworks. He took the stairs two at a time.

After a shower, he lay on his bed. All he could think of was Simone.

Angel opened his eyes with a start. He was naked in the same position he had fallen asleep in the previous night. He had no idea how long he had slept. It didn't feel like much. He got out of bed and showered. With a towel around his waist, he went to the balcony. The river was

still. Clouds floated in the blue like a Japanese painter's wash.

He looked at his old runners. He needed a new pair. Before leaving prison, Ainsley had been on to him about getting one of the new music pods. He went into town to get both. On the way home, he dropped into the State Library to google O'Hanlon.

O'Hanlon was interesting because he wasn't. Working-class Catholic, UQ-educated in the years of free education and free love. He majored in political science, became an organiser with a trade union then married a developer's daughter. He rose to political prominence in the right faction and won a bitter pre-selection, which still raised hackles. He lived in a rambling refurbished Queenslander on a hill overlooking the bay.

As a political statement, O'Hanlon's maiden speech was pedestrian. He would be a humble local member, he said, without grand ambitions for greater office and his door would be open to everyone.

Back at the apartment, Angel wanted to try on his new runners but the lack of sleep from the night before was catching up on him. Angel woke up a couple of hours later in the early evening, did some stretches, put on shorts, singlet and socks. He eased each foot into the cushioned runners and grabbed a small backpack. He threw in a clean towel, a packet of dried fruit and nuts, some water and his new pod. When he arrived at the park opposite Simone's town-house his heart rate was a hundred and twenty-two and his pedometer read eight clicks. He checked his feet for irritation or soreness. None. Good

choice, he thought. By the time he stretched out the lactic acid, his heart rate was back to seventy-five. He sat on the bench. He selected a recording of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 14, clipped the pod to his shorts and put in the earphones.

He felt a tap on his shoulder. He stiffened, then relaxed as he took out the earphones.

"Did I scare you?" said the boy.

"Maybe."

"I wouldn't hurt you."

Angel let out a little chuckle. He wasn't putting the boy down, it was the way he said it, so matter-of-fact, as if he meant it. The boy sat on the end of the park bench.

"Waiting for your mother?" said Angel.

"Yes." The boy pointed to the tattoos on Angel's upper arm. "What are they?"

"What do they look like?" said Angel.

"Stars."

"They're crosses."

"Did they hurt?"

"No."

"What are they for?"

"To remember."

"What?"

"People."

"People?"

"Stories."

"Will you tell me one?"

"No."

For a couple of minutes, the two of them sat there, as

they had the previous evening, saying not much. Angel was about to put his earphones back in.

“What are you doing?” said the boy.

“Listening to music.”

“Can I?”

“You wouldn’t like it.”

“Please?”

“Okay.” He gave the boy the pod. The boy’s mug screwed up a little at first, but he kept listening hard and after a while, his features softened.

Angel heard the Norton before he saw it. It did a U-turn and pulled up outside the town-house. Simone got off. She put a rucksack on the fuel tank and rummaged through it.

The boy tapped Angel on the arm. Angel looked at him. The boy held out the pod. Angel heard Simone’s footsteps walking towards the town-house. He watched her go inside and the door close behind her.

Angel held up the pod.

“What do you think?” he said.

“Good,” said the boy.

“The man who wrote that lost his hearing. He was deaf. He couldn’t hear what he played any more, but the music was such a force inside of him it didn’t matter.”

“Why was he deaf?”

“His stepfather beat him.”

“Was he bad?”

“No. He wasn’t bad. His stepfather was bad. What time is your mother getting home tonight?”

“Is she coming home tonight?” the boy said, confused.

“How long have you been waiting for her?” Angel said.

“She’s in the hospital,” said the boy.

“What hospital?”

“I don’t know.”

“Don’t you go see her?”

“He won’t let me.”

“Who?”

“He’s not my real father.”

“Come on,” said Angel. “I’m taking you home.”

The boy led Angel to a parallel street at the back of Simone’s.

“Here,” said the boy.

Angel looked at the house then remembered the night Simone had laid the boy next to him on her bed.

The boy’s house was a large, well-kept Queenslander, built in downstairs with a three-quarter balcony above. Garden lights ran the length of a path splitting a manicured lawn. The porch light was on. Inside was dark.

“Where’s your father?”

“He never gets home till late. He’s not my real father.”

“I’ll see you inside,” said Angel

The boy bent down and grunted as he lifted a porcelain pot from its drip tray. He took the key and opened the front door.

“Here, let me put that back,” said Angel, holding out his hand for the key.

“I can do it,” said the boy. He put the key on the tray and grunted the pot back into place. Angel followed him into the house. The boy turned on the lights.

“Where’s your room?” said Angel.

“Downstairs.”

“Get ready for bed. I’ll say goodbye before I leave.”

The boy looked at Angel a little unsure.

“I promise,” Angel said.

The boy disappeared downstairs. Angel went through the rest of the rooms. On the desk in the study, there was a photo of James Haversack in a rugby jumper. There was another shot of him sitting on the front end of a Ferrari.

On top of a pile of papers was a bill from a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre in the mountains outside Maleny. Angel read the letter attached, addressed to Ms Teresa Strange. It outlined the rehab rules surrounding access to the patient. The letter was signed Simone Laverne, Counsellor.

Angel turned off the lights and went downstairs. The boy was in his bed.

“Your mum’s called Teresa.”

The boy nodded.

“What time does your father leave in the mornings?”

“Early.”

“Before school?”

“It’s holidays.”

“Right. I’ll meet you at the park at nine in the morning on Tuesday. We’ll go see your Mum.”

“Will you be at the park tomorrow?” said the boy.

“You shouldn’t be walking the streets at night like you do. I’ll see you Tuesday. At nine.”

As Angel put his hand on the front door, he heard a car pull up in the driveway. It sounded like two people, a

man and a woman. Keys fell onto the ground.

“Keep your hands away from there,” said the woman. They both laughed.

Angel left through the back door. He climbed the fence and dropped into Simone’s back courtyard. A cell phone call tone rang inside. The kitchen lights came on. He crouched behind a potted fig tree. Simone picked up the phone, spoke briefly then listened. She had on Spanish leather boots, a light woven bolero and a white buttoned shirt. After listening briefly, she put the phone in her handbag, slung the handbag over her shoulder, turned off the kitchen lights and disappeared.

Angel heard the Norton turn over and the bike accelerate down the street. He walked to the back door and peered into the dark through the glass. Nothing. Somewhere in the distance, a dog barked.

Angel arrived at O’Hanlon’s house on Sunday morning as the dawn spectacle was reaching its climax. The sun was shooting rays, gold and silver, through gaps in the sea clouds. The tide was out. The air smelled of mudflats.

He parked the bike halfway down the hill in line of sight of O’Hanlon’s security gates. Just before eight an Audi four-wheel-drive backed out, two teenage girls in the back, O’Hanlon in the passenger seat on the phone, his wife driving. Angel followed. The Audi was driven expertly through the bayside suburbs to a restaurant on

the Redcliffe Peninsula.

The waiter ushered the family to a reserved table at one of the bay windows. Angel walked in as they were being seated. He chose a table towards the back of the restaurant near the rest-room, ordering a plate of bacon and eggs and a short black. After the family finished their meal, O'Hanlon got up and walked into the rest-room. Angel followed him in. Just as O'Hanlon got his dick out, Angel stood beside him at the pedestal.

"What have you, Calione and Haversack got to do with each other?" said Angel.

"Do I know you?" said O'Hanlon.

"I'm Angel. Calione said you wanted to meet me. What's the job?"

"How do I know there won't be any fuck-ups?"

"I don't fuck up. Don't you trust Calione?"

"In politics you don't trust anyone."

"How do you get anything done?"

"Politics is not about getting things done. It's about power. Getting it and keeping it. Someone is blackmailing me. I need them to disappear."

"For how long?"

"For good."

"Disappearing someone for that long costs a lot of money."

"I don't care how much it costs," said O'Hanlon shaking out his willy.

"There won't be any fuck-ups. I'll prove it to you. Very soon you're going to wake up on that pedestal. The cost of the job will be on a piece of paper in your top pocket.

If you still want the job done, let Calione know and I'll meet you here again next Sunday for the details."

"What the fuck are you talking about?" said O'Hanlon, pulling up his fly and turning. Quicker than the vibration of a bee's wing, Angel's right hand moved to O'Hanlon's neck.

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## Where Angel Fears To Tread

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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

h a r p o

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](http://www.h-a-r-p-o.com.au)

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