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He was an ordinary kind of saint, but a proper one, a serious one. Eleven miracles last count.

A bit scruffy, but. Dirty fingernails, shaving cuts, used to wear a western shirt with the arse hanging out of his jeans. And barefoot half the time, even in winter. Funny bloke...I mean funny ha-ha...hilarious stories. Heaps of times I've had to stop the car, I was laughing so much.

That's what Thommo reckoned happened the night at the bridge. He told the one about the sheep and the BMW and Thommo cracked up—lost it—spun out on the gravel and rolled seven times. The ute was totalled. But when they finally cut them out of the wreck there wasn't a scratch on Thommo, and he's only got cuts and bruises.

I was on that night, and I remember thinking 'oh, shit' and running through the scrub and flashing the torch through the squashed-up windscreen slot and there's the pair of them hanging upside down, Thommo red in the face, still giggling, him grinning at me and wagging his bloody hands on either side of his head like a vaudeville minstrel.

That was about the third stigmata episode—the first I saw myself. He was accident-prone, you might say. No sooner had the scars healed than there'd be something else: an argument with a barbed-wire fence, an accident with a bit of roofing iron; once it was a psycho bullock at the saleyards, another time a splash of acid at Morris's Engineering. When he held you by the hands—he often did that—you'd never know if you were going to feel weeping sores, or band-aids, or scratchy scabs. And there were often three dark patches on that western shirt—two under the arms and a smaller one down the side.

But the visions were harder on him, I think. And on Julie and the kids. Well, she had to do all the driving for starters—we had to take away his licence—and they lived a good twenty minutes out of town. Mostly it was just a bit of a vague-out, like my cousin's epilepsy. His eyes would half-close and twitch, like someone dreaming, then after a bit they'd open wide and his jaw would start working like a landed fish, then he'd snap back and say 'sorry mate, the angels again...' and keep on with the story. We were used to it; we'd just wait it through. Actually, sometimes you needed those pauses to think about what he'd just said, and how he'd put it. Like I said, a proper saint; miracles and parables.

Other times it was hairier. Not many people saw those. Towards the end he'd know when a big one was coming and he'd stay home and sit under the canoe tree on the bend of the river, and drop in a line. 'Praying to my personal cod', he called it. And he'd just sit there waiting. Then it would come and he'd be thrashing about in the dust and sweating, gibbering and screaming, sometimes vomiting or pissing his pants, and the parrots would explode screeching out of the riverbank trees, and up at

the house the dogs would start whining and yapping and running round in circles getting tangled in their chains.

I know all this from the time I had to talk to him about Tommy Jackson's GBH. He hadn't been around for a while, and the case had finally been listed. So I go out there, and Julie says he's not in and look it's not a good time right now but would I like a cuppa and she clears a space in all the books and papers covering the kitchen table and I sit down and then all hell breaks loose. Well, all heaven, I suppose.

In the lounge the telly suddenly goes fuzzy and Cathy and young Frank both start crying and run in and bury their heads in mummy's lap, and the rooster starts crowing and the dogs start howling and a mob of plovers goes overhead creaking frantically and Julie shuts her eyes and crosses herself and says 'Thank God' under her breath, and when things quieten down after a minute she tells me about the visions. And she has a bit of a quiet cry, too, but makes me promise not to say anything. If you ask me, she was a bit of a saint herself.

Anyway, in a while the dogs start up again, but a normal, 'ah, there you are, boss' kind of barking, and five minutes later in he comes with his hair slicked back and clean jeans, bare-chested and looking, I don't know, a bit shiny, or blurry, like the contrast and the vertical hold need adjusting. And then he's laughing, with the kids hanging off his arms and legs and bouncing up and down.

'Summoned to be a witness, eh?' he says.

'Story of my life, mate.' I say.

And he looks at Julie in a funny kind of a way, his eyes still laughing, but somehow there's a thousand acres of love in them, too, and a sort of embarrassed apology, and something else, something like an animal in pain, something a bit desperate, a bit frightened.

I got that look the night he was arrested. We had both cars and the bullwagon; people were milling around in the headlights drunk and aggro, angry faces flashing blue in the dark beyond, kids throwing bottles at us out of the blackness. It was pretty serious. Geoff and Sandy are helping him into the back of the van. He turns and sees me, looks down at Tommy Jackson, the crumpled shadow at my feet, and then he looks back at me again and I have to turn my head.

...

It didn't take long to get my transfer approved. And the city's alright, really. A nice quiet suburb. Middle class. You know, leafy. BMWs. But no sheep. No blackfellas, either.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by David Hansen.*