

# The Man With X-Ray Eyes (by Robert Bee)

On Friday morning, Joshua Holliday awoke to discover he had X-ray vision. Not immediately, but when he opened the morning newspaper in his Balmain home. On the front page was a story about a spectacular light seen in the sky the previous night. Witnesses agreed the object landed somewhere in the inner Sydney suburbs.

A creaking floorboard overhead made him look up. He saw his wife, Hilda, with cigarette drooping from her mouth, hair curlers askew, rummaging through his bedside drawers and taking a \$50 note from his wallet. Now that was odd. Their bedroom was upstairs and he was downstairs, in the hall.

At that moment, realisation struck him like a bowl of cold porridge. He had X-ray vision.

Struggling to contain his excitement, he gazed through the ceiling to the wooden box under the double bed. Inside, the strange green rock he had recovered from his backyard at midnight glowed iridescently, as if a neon light was buried within it.

Joshua was not the brightest of men. His continuing thirty year marriage to Hilda, despite her latent penchant for husband beating, was proof of that. But he didn't have to be Einstein to realise that his new found power was connected to that green rock.

Movement above, confirmed by a quick glance through the ceiling, told him Hilda was coming downstairs. Fearful of another beating for not having her breakfast ready, Joshua dashed into the kitchen, placed two slices of bread in the toaster and switched the kettle on.

Unfortunately, he wasn't fast enough.

After his beating, Joshua's day went from bad to worse. At the bank where he worked, his X-ray vision both confused and embarrassed him. Finally, when confronted by Mrs Baggaley-Brooks, the branch manager, his eyes and mind strayed and he accidentally called her Mrs Baggy-Boobs.

He was fired.

Joshua nervously reached for the front doorknob. He stumbled across the threshold as the door opened suddenly. Hilda towered above him, her face dark with menace. She knew.

"You pathetic little man," Hilda growled. "Sacked! What will I live on now?" She dealt him a painful thump across the ear. "Idiot! I'll teach you."

Hilda took another arcing swipe at Joshua's ear. He ducked beneath the blow, dodged past Hilda like a frigate around a battleship and fled down the hall to the back door, which he slammed desperately behind him.

Looking back through the wooden door, he saw Hilda angrily pull his 9 iron from the closet and head purposefully down the hall. He had never seen Hilda so enraged. Joshua looked frantically about him, panic rising.

The yard was enclosed by high jasmine and choko covered fences. He knew he could never climb them in the moments remaining. Joshua regretted not having some power other than X-ray vision. Like the ability to leap tall buildings in a single bound.

The back door burst open.

"Don't move, you miserable worm," Hilda ordered, the club in her white fisted grip.

Joshua yelped in fright, turned and fled to the garden shed. Skidding inside, he slammed the door and securely bolted it. Like a shunting engine, Hilda hit the door at full speed with her shoulder, then showered it with a flurry of blows from the 9 iron. The door held firm.

"I'll get you, you can't get away that easily," Hilda called as she withdrew to the house and slammed the back door.

Joshua breathed out with relief. He looked around and took stock of his situation. The metal shed was a good temporary refuge. It was bolted firmly to concrete, able to withstand any attack Hilda could launch. With his X-ray vision, he could watch her in the house and be prepared for her return. One thing was certain. He had to get away. For good.

Joshua kicked aside a bag of mouldy potting mix, sat on a tarpaulin and began to make plans. He realised now that his X-ray vision could be very profitable if used wisely. He could be a very rich man. Without Hilda. All he had to do was escape.

Suddenly, the thought of X-ray riches reminded Joshua of the mysterious green rock under the bed.

He must take it with him. Imagine if he could harness the rock's enigma to attain the powers of speed and flight. A regular superhero. Look out world, here I come.

He checked Hilda's whereabouts. She was in her nightgown, preparing for bed, obviously confident of catching him at her leisure.

"Good," Joshua boldly told himself. "Let her try. She'll have to go out sometime, and when she does, I'll grab the rock, a few things, and I'm off."

Secure in his fortress, Joshua went to sleep between the folds of the tarpaulin. He dreamt of a new Hilda-less life as a wealthy man.

On Saturday morning, Mrs Hilda Holliday awoke to discover she was more powerful than a locomotive.

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