

A close-up portrait of a young Black man with short, dark hair. He is looking directly at the camera with a playful expression, sticking his tongue out. He is wearing a dark red, textured knit sweater. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Living Life

A Short Story by Thando Xaba

“As water reflects the face, so one’s life reflects the heart”

- *Proverbs 27:19*

Finally, the class ended. What a boring class it was! The beige and bare concrete that embellished the classroom didn't help keep him awake at all. What's even worse, he barely recalls what the lecturer was saying. He was lost in a world of fantasies for the whole class. These fantasies were primarily caused by Palesa, the famous Instagram model on campus. She sat three rows in front of him; in every class. Boy, was she beautiful. She looked like she worked on her beauty. You could tell she was not always like this. She toned her body thanks to her gym membership at the local gym. She had the perfect complexion thanks to the endless beauty products that sponsored her Instagram account. She dressed well and her presence was always felt largely because of her Chanel scented skin. She was undoubtedly the most beautiful girl on campus.

Make no mistake though, she was always with Jack, the male version of her. Jack always sat next to her; in every class. A terribly handsome man. The phrase "tall, dark, handsome" was for men like Jack. He was a soccer player but wasn't the typical soccer player. He looked more like he was an NBA player than the bench warmer for the PSL team based in the city that he played for. He too dressed well and had the ability to charm you with his eyes. He had a stare that could capture your soul. His stare felt like holding cold metal on a hot summer morning. He too had flawless skin and his body toned from the excessive soccer training. And to top it off, as much as he had won a

scholarship through the PSL team to continue his studies at the university, the team paid him so well that he drove a Toyota 86 to campus. If there were to be a competition of alpha males on campus, he would definitely be a contender for the most alpha.

They were a match from the heavens. And there he was. In shoes he bought at a discount from Mr. Price, wearing a jacket his mother bought him 4 years ago from Jet with torn jeans to match. The jeans were not torn straight from the store. They tore from the continual daily use because it has been his go-to jeans for the past 6 years.

People around him said that he did not lack confidence. Yet in his soul, he felt that he had none. As they walked out of the class, he felt lower than scum every time. Because every time, someone would comment on his clothing. He had created a mask to shield him from the sharp remarks of other students. However, the truth was that he simply did not know how to upgrade his wardrobe.

The last time he tried being fashionable, his sister told him he looked like a clown. He may have laughed it off but inside, the tears of a clown drowned him in dejected defeat. He took solace that he never was the cool kid. He took solace that his friends were also like him. He took solace that at least he wasn't

repeating the same modules for the third time like those who would remark about his apparel. He took solace in being one of the campus “rejects” and there was no need for him to try to prove himself to anyone. But in the dead of night, a pulse of pain and loneliness would throb in his heart.

“Palesa is hot, guys,” Tshepo, his church-going friend remarked as they exited the class. They made it outside and went to sit on a bench under a tree on the campus ground. They loved this bench because it provided them with a wide view of the whole campus. Their campus was relatively small so they could see everyone everywhere. They could see the pompous lecturers making their way from their offices to the lecture halls. They could see the students move about from class to class, some taking it easy behind lecture halls and some, the veterans, selling a textbook or two. This was their seat to relax before they went to their respective rooms in town. It provided them with the only social life they had.

They saw Jack and Palesa strolling towards Jack’s immaculate Toyota 86. He had lowered the car by a few centimetres and installed 17inch BBS rims, painted black to match the matte grey of the body of the car. On top of the windscreen of the car, he proudly printed the name of his team. This man was in a league of his own and so was the woman he was walking with.

“You know, money is the root of evil. Look at Jack with his tattoos”, said Sithembiso, his other pious friend.

“What? How does money and tattoos connect?” he asked his friends.

“Tattoos are marks of the devil. No right-thinking Christian would have their bodies vilified with such,” Tshepo replied.

“So you telling me because the man has tattoos and he has money, he is a spore of evil?”

“Exactly! That’s exactly what we saying,” Sithembiso nodded with unwarranted energy.

“Wow, judgemental much?” He mocked his friends.

“No brother, only God will judge the hearts of men. But we shall not lie to ourselves. To see clearly, we need to call a spade a spade,” Tshepo replied with an authoritative tone.

“Ya, but to remove the speck from your brother’s eyes you have to remove the log from your own.” He said.

“True, but our scales have fallen haven’t they Tshepo?” Sithembiso asked Tshepo.

“Yes, my brother, they have!” Tshepo replied with unnecessary enthusiasm.

“So having money is evil?” He asked his friends.

“The love of money is evil. Loving money is what leads men to be evil.” Tshepo responded.

“That is why my dear holy friends, you are both broke,” he mocked his friends.

They laughed it off and continued sitting at their favourite bench. The sun was at its zenith and so, they did not stay for long at the bench.

“Noh, guys it’s hot,” Sithembiso said.

“Like Palesa,” replied Tshepo.

They laughed at him as they packed their bags. They walked down towards the gate when a luxury sports car stopped in front of them. It was Lester. One of the cool kids on campus. He drove a beautiful silver 2009 BMW M3. His father was a wealthy man notorious for the many businesses he owned in town. But what made Lester stand out, he used his father’s legacy to chart his own path.

“Lovers! How are you, my king?” Lester shouted at him through his open window.

“Lester my brother, I am great, I am great, and you?” He replied crouching to the low window of the sports car.

“I am great, man. Hop in, I’ll give you guys a ride home. Plus we need to talk Lovers,” Lester told him in a calm voice.

The trio hopped in the sports car and felt extremely uncomfortable. They were not used to such luxury. For some odd reason, Lester had taken an interest in him. He would stand and chat with him once and a while. He did not consider Lester his friend but Lester sure acted like he was his friend. Why? What would one of the coolest of the coolest students on campus want from him? He was a nobody. He was an average student and had nothing worthy to boast about. And yet Lester, with all his fame, fortunate and flamboyancy found him worthy of his time.

“This is the devil’s music,” whispered Tshepo at the back seat. He saw Lester smirk at the remark. Lester was a man of many tastes. And on this day, his car stereo was blasting ‘Mother’ by Danzig. He guessed that the reason his friends would consider this the devil’s music was because of the lyrics.

“And if you want to find out what hell is like. I’ll show what it is,” yelled the rockstar through the speakers of the car stereo. He chuckled at the discomfort that was experienced by his religious friends. He knew this was going to be the hot debate when they go out to buy fries at the local fish and chips tomorrow. But luckily for them, Lester dropped them off first. He started with Sithembiso. But Tshepo took advantage and hopped out of the car as well. He couldn’t hold his laughter any longer. Lester chuckled and they drove off.

Moments later, they were outside the commune where he lived. As he opened the door to make his exit, Lester stopped him.

“Listen, we need to talk King. Look here, are busy today?”

He knew this was a rhetorical question. It was 12:45 on Friday and Lester knew that he had no plans.

“No, no I’m not.” He replied.

“Ok. I’ll be back exactly at 14:00. We really need to talk my brother. See you then.” Lester positioned himself back into his seat. He closed the door and Lester drove off. The curiosity of this conversation leeches on his soul.

“What does Lester have to say to me that’s so important? So he made an appointment to see me later? Me? A man of appointments!” He laughed at the idea and walked into the commune.

The commune was a typical commune. The main entrance was connected to the TV room. His room was directly opposite the TV room. He hardly interacted with the other residents of the commune. It was noon on a Friday. He could hear some of the residents laughing and planning their night in the kitchen. One of the residents was fast asleep in the TV room. He swiftly dashed into his room to remain undetected. He was not in the mood for “high conversations” as was the norm with his stoner housemates.

His room was a simple student’s room. The floor was an old musky carpet. No matter how hard he tried cleaning it, the muskiness always remained. The walls showed age and one of the walls was drywall. The room clearly was bigger but the landlord, obviously to make more money, divided the room into two. His room was furnished with a brown, wooden wardrobe, a desk and an old office chair with two floating shelves above it, and a single bed placed near a wide window that was covered with thick curtains. These were the type of curtains he found at his grandmother’s house. At least the ones at his grandmother’s were not stained. The stain was a tan-like colour. Clearly, the person that stayed here before him must have been a smoker. As this was the norm at this commune.

He plunged himself onto his bed, his mind wrestling with the idea that Lester had requested his presence later that afternoon. He wondered what he could want from him. He literally had nothing to offer to Lester. It was a puzzling thought he could not solve. The heat began to lead him into a great slumber. Not to miss his appointment, he set his alarm to wake him up at 14:00. Shortly after that, he passed out on his bed.

Lucky for him, his alarm came to the rescue. It woke him up exactly at 14:00 pm. He wiped the drool off his face and slowly rose from his bed. He was so exhausted he did not realise his bag was still on his back. He took the bag off and placed it next to this bed. And he sat. He sat patiently waiting for his time with Lester to arrive. He sat there waiting. Time took two tocks to tick. He patiently, and nervously, waited for Lester to arrive.

And finally! A distinct roar from a sports vehicle announced itself outside. He knew it was Lester. He dashed out of his room pretty much the same he dashed throughout his life: unnoticed.

He ran across the open yard of the house and reached Lester's car in no time. Without waiting for an invitation, he let himself into the luxury sports car. He was met with silence. The car stereo was off and Lester seemed preoccupied with his phone.

He quickly remembered that even though Lester was a student at the university as well, Lester owned three different companies that were rumoured to generate over a million in profits.

Inasmuch Lester was the one who asked him for his time, he was actually on Lester's time. His child-like excitement quickly morphed into nun-like humility as he waited for his host to conclude what he was doing.

"Ok right, let's go." Lester later said and the luxury vehicle roared back to life.

As they were driving to an unknown location. Lester said that he sometimes wished he had a simple life like his. He found no offense to the statement because his life was simple.

"You know, I've seen things. I have tasted and indulged in luxuries that you dream of. I drive the car that is your wallpaper and yes boy, I've slept with most of the Insta baddies you follow." Lester continued talking.

As such as this statement got to him, he knew that this was true. There was no disputing the fact that Lester lived the life that he secretly envied. He envied his charm. He envied his looks. He envied his women. He envied his wealth.

But he didn't grow up like Lester. He did not grow up in wealth. He grew up in a household that gave more to the church than they did to the inheritance of their future generations. Lester was free. He wore expensive silk shirts from designer houses that he imported directly from France. His family, even in the wildest of wildest dreams, could never afford such opulence. Lester was wearing a Richard Mile. And rumour has it that he had 5 of them. That's not including the countless Rolexes that they say he gives away once every month to his top Twitter follower. He deeply envied the life that Lester lived. He envied it because Lester was free to live on his own terms.

"I like you," Lester continued his monologue, "I want to introduce you to my world. You, unlike the losers you call friends, have something to you. You are a rough, a very rough diamond but Lovers, you have something."

"Don't call my friends losers, Lester. They are my only friends at the end of the day." He responded.

“Okay, I respect that. But remember this Lovers, you are who you spend your time with.”

The German sports car came to a halt outside the local mall. He still did not know why Lester had asked for him. What was this conversation that was so important?

“Lovers, open the glove box,” Lester instructed him.

He stretched his hand to open the leather-coated glovebox. A click revealed what was inside. He could not believe his eyes. Unlike his father’s glovebox that had the Bible and the Book of Life for his car, this glovebox was jampacked with R200 notes. Neatly stacked and bundled together. The way it was so jampacked, a few bundles fell to the floor as he opened the glove box.

“Listen, each bundle is about 20k,” Lester said as he reached for the back of the passenger seat. He pulled out a duffle bag and told him to stack the money in it. He was dazed. He had never seen so much money. He didn’t know how to handle it. He was nervous. He gingerly packed the stacks of money in the bag. The shock was written all over his face.

“This guy!” Lester annoyed by the slow pace of the stacking reached over the glove box and with his arm scooped the money into the duffle bag. Some of it fell on the floor.

“Leave those on the floor. Let’s go.” Lester instructed him as he opened his door.

Still shook and stunned, he got out of the vehicle with the duffle bag. He had no idea how much money was in it. He held it firmly and tightly against his ribs. He could not move.

“Relax Lovers. It’s just money. There’s more in the boot but that’s for later. For now, we go shopping. Let’s go now.” With an air of superiority, Lester ushered him into the mall.

“Lovers, I like you. Being with you brings me back to Earth. I like that.” Lester said as they made their way into the mall.

“And I know you crave a life like mine. I don’t know whether it’s my life you want but I know you want something similar!” Lester continued. For someone drenched in wealth, Lester had the physique of a fitness model.

“So today, today you enter my world. Those no names you wearing do not guarantee entry into my world.” Lester told him as they walked into the first store.

The store was a sneaker store. The type he and his friends would walk past without even looking inside. But today, he was inside. He was inside with the coolest and probably the richest kid on campus. The shock continued to render him mute and emotionless.

“Ok, select three sneakers. Be quick though. We do not have much time.” Lester instructed him.

He looked at the sneakers. The most affordable ones were enough to replace his mother’s monthly salary. He did not know where to begin. It felt like each sneaker that he saw were nails that sealed his coffin of destitution. He wondered whether Lester was fooling with him. Perhaps Lester had begun a YouTube channel pranking losers from campus. He simply did not understand why this was happening. Why him? There are plenty of broke, simple Joes around. Why did Lester choose him?

What was even more embarrassing for him is that he felt out of place. This store had two other customers. And by the attitude of the staff, those customers were regulars. Lester was also given the same treatment. He, however, was viewed as the help. He felt shame, shock, and sheer shyness smother him. Perhaps his envy was now manifesting. Envy was a sin according to his pastor. Perhaps this was the divine punishment for his envy and coveting of another man's woman and life.

"Patricia!" Lester yelled out for one of the store assistants.

"Lester! Hi, how can we help you today?" Patricia responded with a crystal clear smile.

"What a beautiful female, damn." He thought to himself.

"Look, help my friend out. First time here so, you understand?" Lester told Patricia.

"Oh yes, I do. So, friend of Lester, what is your style? Patricia asked him with the same crystal clear smile.

The beauty of this woman left him lost for words. He did not know how to respond. He didn't even know what to respond. What was the style he is looking for? What style would he prefer? Which style would Lester approve of? What if he chose wrongly and they laughed at him? The weight of the bag started to dig deeper into his shoulder as he pondered about which style would suit him.

“You know what, Patricia? Hook him up with the last three sneakers that I bought.” Lester told Patricia impatiently.

“Okay, Lester no problem,” Patricia responded and swirled towards the back.

“I’m . . . I’m . . . a size 8.” He said sheepishly.

“Patricia!” Lester yelled, “He’s a size 8!”

Moments later Patricia returned with the three boxes. He wondered what was inside. What was Lester’s style? The man never wore the same clothes twice. The beautiful boxes, wrapped

in black with a large white question mark on top, were shrouded in mystery.

“I’ll pay cash. Lovers, pull out 6 stacks and give them to Patricia.” Lester ordered him.

Still feeling nervy, he pulled out the 6 bundles of R200 notes and gave them to Patricia. She remained professional but she was so courteous that you’d be mistaken that perhaps she was flirting.

“No need to count, I know how much it is. The change I should keep, as usual?” She asked with the same crystal clear smile.

“But of course! I’ll see you soon, bye-bye now.” Lester said.

He took the plastic bag containing the three mystery sneakers. He carried the bag with the same hand that was carrying the duffle bag. He was surprised at how casual the transaction was. He had just witnessed a man purchase three sneakers for the price that one could use to buy a decent second-hand car. On top of that, it seemed as if this was a daily occurrence for Lester. It wasn’t the spectacle that his parents would make it to be.

Whenever his parents had enough money to spoil them, he and his siblings could feel it. The spending was tangible. It was not as casual as this. The spending of his parents had a slight sense of intensity. A slight sense of monetary masochism. It pained their parents for recklessly spending their yearly bonuses, yet provided them with pleasure for seeing their children delight in material goods. But not in this case. In this case, this was like a daily grocery run for Lester.

“Shoes say a lot about a person. And those plastic, vinyl things you wearing are saying quite a lot. But anyway, we going to the last stop. It is 3:15 pm now. We should be done before 4.” Lester told him as they walked to the tailor’s store.

The store reeked of wealth and opulence. You had to be somebody to enter this store. The air was thick with scents and fumes from the upper class. They choked him. Lester noticed and told him that he did not have to say a word. The tailor was the best in town and he would know what exactly to make for him. In this case, he knew what to get from him from the already made outfits.

He told him to sit at the corner of the store. The corner store had a luxurious and lush leather seat placed there. Lester motioned

him to sit on it and wait a while. He went to the leather seat with the duffle bag under his arm and the plastic of sneakers in his hand. The air around him thickened as he approached the leather seat.

He never thought he'd ever enter this store. Even if he won the lottery, he still would not have entered the store. Yet Lester, walked into the store like it was his second home. He saw Lester talking with the tailor. They kept pointing at him. The tailor kept analysing him from different angles. The tailor's stare was calculated and calibrated by years of experience. Without even measuring his dimensions, the tailor walked to the back of the store and returned with four different outfits. Lester motioned that he come forward to have a look.

"These are yours," said Lester. As he began to unzip the carrier bag, Lester interjected," don't open them here. You'll see them when you get to my place. Just leave the duffle bag as is to the man and let's go."

"Wait, what? We are going to your place?" He thought to himself as he placed the duffle bag gently on the marble countertop of the tailor's cashier desk. His nerves had settled a bit and he was able to carry the carrier bags with his outfits with

ease. It was still, however, a shock to him that Lester would do this with him. More accurately, do this for him. They waved their goodbyes to the tailor and walked out the door.

As they walked back towards the car, he felt a weird but liberating emotion. It was similar to that of the fear of God. For at that moment, a man he greatly respected showered him with gifts and mercy. This man called Lester took the time to show him a life that he dreamt of. He thought perhaps Lester saw his Facebook posts about wealth. That somehow those posts were talking about him. And he found it in his heart, and pocket, to show him this world. Whatever the motive was behind Lester's generosity, this did not matter to him. What mattered was that for a day, he could say he lived like his hero.

"Put the stuff in the boot. But bring the leather bag a bit forward. We gonna need it later tonight." Lester instructed. He promptly followed the orders. He closed the boot and hastily went to the passenger door. He hopped in the car and sat in anticipation. Lester was on his phone with the same intense concentration as before. At that moment, he remembered once more that Lester was a busy man. He waited patiently for Lester to finish on his phone.

“Ok right, let’s go,” Lester told him.

“So we really going to your place?” He asked.

“Yes, King. I am taking you to Pudica tonight. So I need you to be sharp. At least your hair is decent. But your scent King your scent. That cheap supermarket stuff won’t work. We don’t have time to visit the boutique across town to get you a signature scent. So for tonight, I will borrow you mine.” Lester told him with a surprising calmness.

“Pudica? I am going to Pudica? Me? What!” He thought to himself. Pudica was an extremely exclusive and highly expensive club. Pudica was the place that every who’s who made a point to visit. For A-list celebrities and A-list influencers, going to Pudica was a pilgrim that one had to undergo at least once in their lifetime. You simply cannot be an A-list somebody in the country if you have never been to Pudica. Pudica was like The Vampire Room of South Africa. And Lester was taking him there.

He chuckled as he thought of telling his friends. He could hear Tshepo giving him a sermon about the place. After all, Tshepo

did say that Pudica was the devil's playground. And his 2IC, Sithembiso, added on to say that the devil wields his fork and stirs the souls of those who go to Pudica like potije on an open fire. Tonight, he was going straight into the fire. And he was excited.

After a few twists and turns, they were at the gate of the exclusive estate that was in the city. This estate was reserved for the very important. It was rumoured that the President had a house in the estate. Like many of the day's adventures, this was the first time for him to enter the estate.

"My brother," Lester greeted the security guard. The security guard was heavily armed and well built. He waved to Lester and opened the gate. Lester smiled at him and drove into the lavish estate. Inside the estate, it felt like they had entered into a small town. It seemed as if the estate had everything. Even a school was present in the estate.

"So that's where the rich attend," he made the remark as they passed the school. Lester smiled and continued driving.

A few moments later, they arrived at Lester's house. It was a palace. The long driveway was clean even though it was made of hard concrete. Near the garage, there was a fountain. Lester drove around the fountain and parked in front of one of the garage doors. He searched for the remote control that opened the garage door. A few clicks of the remote later, the door rose. It rose gradually, creating great suspense.

He looked at Lester. He was on his phone again. He looked at the garage door as it opened. He noticed other sets of tires in the garage. He wondered what other cars Lester had. Perhaps this was his parents' house. Nevertheless, as a car guy, he was eager to see what was inside.

The door made a loud thud as it opened fully. He was in complete awe. There were four other cars in the garage. On the far left, there was a blue Golf 7 GTI Clubsport Edition. Next to it was an Aston Martin Vantage. He was not sure what year was the model because Lester had heavily modified it with a dark beige Liberty Walk body kit and had installed custom tail lights on it. On their far-right, there was a black G-wagon that had received the Brabus treatment. The car's presence could be felt. And next to it, surprisingly, was '95 Honda Civic. It too was black. He thought that perhaps Lester was inspired by The Fast

and The Furious for purchasing the car. And in the middle of the 4 cars, he parked his M3.

“As you take the stuff out the boot, take the leather bag and place it in the back seat of the G-Wagon. We going with it to Pudica. Don’t worry, the doors are opened.” Lester instructed him.

He did what he was told and took the items out of the boot of the M3. He walked over to the G-Wagon and opened the back seat of the car. The smell of rich, clean leather overwhelmed him. He was stunned by the sheer luxury in the car. And he was excited by the fact that he will be in it later- going to Pudica!

He smiled at the thought and felt a sense of euphoria flow through him. He closed the door of the G-Wagon and saw the door leading to the house open. Obviously, Lester left it open so he can enter the house. Suddenly, he felt nervous. He felt the Earth below him lose its firmness. He didn’t know what to expect. He was excited but nervous at the same time. Not to waste any more time, he rushed to the open door.

For some weird reason, he decided to close his eyes before entering the house. He opened his eyes once he left the transition

from the smooth marble flooring of the garage to the smooth wooden flooring of the home. There was a large note on the wall, adjunct to the door, that stated:

“REMEMBER TO LEAVE YOUR SHOES BY THE DOOR!”

He looked down at the floor and indeed, there was an area dedicated to shoes. Lester had left his shoes there. He promptly took off his shoes and left them at the dedicated area too. He felt embarrassed as there were noticeable holes in his socks. He decided to take them off too. Rather walk barefoot than in embarrassment he thought to himself.

He looked around the house and he was in complete awe of all he saw. The walls were large and broad. Each second wall had a large painting attached to it. These were definitely not purchased at Mr. Price Home. On top of the paintings, there was a tiny downlight that allowed a guest to consume the art. These artworks were beautiful. He saw one painting that had the signature brush strokes of Frank Morrison. These artworks alone, he thought, could amount to the cost of the cars in the garage.

The house seemed to be open. The two rooms he saw were divided by a tiny step. Lester emerged from the second room and motioned that he sit on the lounge. The sofas were a rich leather, coated in brick red. Lester held two cups of coffee as he joined him in the lounge.

“Ok right, let’s talk,” Lester told him as he gave him his cup of coffee.

He took the cup of coffee and waited in anticipation of the conversation. The whole day was leading to this moment. The day was lived through the premise of this surprisingly important conversation. He took a sip of the coffee and immediately thought Lester had a tiny Mugg ‘n Bean store in his kitchen the way the coffee was so rich and creamy.

“Tell me, Lovers. Why do you want to be rich?” Lester asked. He was relaxed on the leather sofa.

“Well, to be honest, I want money to live like you Lester.” He answered. He was shocked by his brutal honesty.

“Why? Do you know why I wanted to be rich in the first place?” Lester asked.

“Because you live free Lester. I mean, you spent the equivalent of a second-hand car on just shoes. I only but wonder how much you left behind at the tailor. That’s a life I crave. And no, I don’t know why you wanted to be rich.” He answered. He looked straight into his cup of coffee. He couldn’t look Lester in the eye as he answered him.

“Well, let me tell you why I wanted to be rich. I wanted to be everything my father is not. The man is loaded with money. Sources tell me that he is close to breaching R800 million. Yet, he does not show it. The man still drives the same old Toyota Camry he bought cash in the '90s. That was the first car he bought cash. He still lives in the same house that he got through the government subsidies of the Apartheid days. He still takes his morning walks, still eats the same food, and still dresses in the same clothes. Yet he has built all the community halls in the townships, he has built three of the swimming pools in town including the one in the CBD, and he is one of the three investors who own this estate. That is my father’s life. Not mine.” Lester said. He sipped a bit of his coffee and continued.

“I wanted to be rich to live in the fast lane. Not that I enjoy it that much but it is the life I chose. So I used my father’s legacy to chart my own course. I used the fact I share the same surname with one of the richest men in the country to create my own pools of wealth. I am not ashamed of this. I wanted to be rich so that I can live life the way I want. The way I want to live life is like this. Have money to buy expensive clothes. Have money to buy high-end sports cars. Have money to impress Insta baddies who care about their lifestyle more than they do for their pride. This is my life and this is why I wanted to be rich. So tell me Lovers, is this why you want to be rich as well?” Lester asked him as he took another sip of coffee.

For the first time, he was presented with a question that he had never bothered to ask. Why did he want to be wealthy? What did wealth mean to him? Why was it important for him to make money? Why did he envy Lester’s life? When he knew Lester’s life was a bit too fast for him? Why did he want to be rich?

“Let me tell you a story,” interjected Lester,” the story of Jack and Palesa. You see, most people see Jack and Palesa now. They see the celebrity couple. They see the “dream team”. You know why this is the case?”

“No, no I don’t.” He replied.

“Because they worked to be where they are today. Jack was 28 when he was doing his first year. At the time, he had accepted that his dream of being a soccer star was good and dead. And being 28 in the world of sports is as good as retirement. He decided that he was still young enough to go back to school.

Imagine the embarrassment of sitting with kids 10 years your junior. Kids who enjoy different kinds of music, different kinds of entertainment altogether. Yet, he pulled through. He joined the university soccer team. He would train with the team as hard as he did train throughout his life. He boarded the last bus every night. Until fate would have it that, The Rangers had a friendly with the university. He played his heart out. The manager of The Rangers loved him and offered him a 4 year contract right on the spot. At age 28, this was a dream come through. And that’s when he got his first tattoo on his thigh that says ‘good things come to those who wait- and work’. ” Lester said.

He didn’t know about the trials and tribulations that Jack went through. Like his friends, he thought Jack had been playing for the team since forever. The way Jack is well built, one would never assume Jack was in his early thirties.

“But that’s not the end of the story, is it? During his first year, there was another person who went to university as a second chance in life. We now introduce Palesa to the story. She was 25 at the time. Her story is that poverty. She comes from the depths of Lesotho and was a rural girl. In fact, she is still a rural girl. She is the Sotho version of a ‘Yebo Baba’. Brother, Palesa used to go to her knees whenever she offered me a drink or something. I thought she did this as a way to seduce me but I learned that she did this with every male she encountered.

You see, Palesa’s story is a sad one. She was plunged into marriage at the age of 14. At the age of 16, her parents died in a freak accident. And unfortunately for her, the boy she married was an abusive prick. He was ruthless so the stories say. How Palesa survived brother, I don’t know.” Lester said. He took a large swig of his coffee and placed the empty cup on the oak coffee table, placed at the centre of the sofas.

“But as luck would have it, the bastard died,” Lester continued with the story,” she was 24 when he died. They say that for a year, Palesa had enough to survive on her own. She lived off the land. She had a small herd of sheep, a small flock of chickens, and a pretty sizable garden with all kinds of vegetables. But the local chief was a greedy man. He overlooked the needs of the villagers for his own financial gain. The chief sold off his land to

developers who later converted the land into a resort. So obviously, Palesa and them were forcibly evicted from the village. It was a sad year for her.”

He still looked straight into his coffee. He wondered what Lester was telling him was true. Palesa does not seem like the type of girl who had such a background. But interestingly enough, he recalls how Palesa’s nails are never long. Unlike other Instagram models, Palesa always, without fail, had short nails. Perhaps years of working hard manual labour taught her this lesson.

“However, as a way to placate the villagers, the chief offered them a tiny amount of the initial deposit paid by the developers,” Lester continued, “ with the amount Palesa received, she got herself a passport and migrated to South Africa. She did not waste time. She enrolled with the university. She had it tough Brother.

She slept at the city hall, the train station, and the car parks of the mall. She even slept at the school library. That year was tough for her but she worked hard. Both at school and at any place that offered any money. She worked hard King and her hard work was awarded with a bursary that changed her life. She could now

afford to stay on campus, buy herself proper food and buy herself proper clothing.

Mind you, Palesa has always been clean. Always. You would not know that she was living at train stations and bathing out of basins at garage restrooms. She has always been clean. And her years of hard labour kept her body in great physique. It was at res where the younger girls introduced her to Instagram. And that's when she began her journey on Insta and became the influencer she is today. Brother, she still kneels when giving Jack food. But now, she does that only to Jack."

He never knew this about Jack and Palesa. He thought, like his friends, that Jack and Palesa came from wealth. That they met on campus because wealth attracts wealth. He did not know, nor ever conceive the thought, that Palesa and Jack was a love story of tears and sweat.

"Drink your coffee before it gets cold and I'll finish the story," Lester said as he motioned that he drinks his cup of coffee.

His coffee was now as cold as cooldrink. He took one long, deep swig of the coffee. He finished the cup of coffee and placed it on the coffee table as well.

“Now here is the interesting part about Jack and Palesa,” Lester continued with the story,” Jack and Palesa met in the first year. They met before Jack got signed by The Rangers. They met before Palesa got the bursary. They met in the trenches of their re-make of their lives. They met whilst they had nothing material to offer. Jack told us that he wanted to bring Palesa home to help her with her homeless situation. But his parents refused.

They were skeptical of the Lesotho woman who had no relatives and no home. Their paranoia and fear were extreme. His father would claim that officials would come to his house and land in big trouble. How? Where? Here? You can also imagine the embarrassment he felt as a 28-year-old at the time living at his parents' home. At 28, he found someone he loved but couldn't bring home because his parents said no. Your girl is Sam right?”

“Yeah, it is.” He replied. How did Lester know about Sam? He made it a point to keep his life as private as possible. Especially his love life. Even his friends didn't know about Sam. How did

Lester have this information? Was Lester stalking him as he was stalking Lester?

“That’s good girl Brother. Why would you want to forsake her for these girls I entertain?” Lester asked him.

“How did he know Sam?” He thought to himself. He thought that perhaps Sam was the one who put Lester up on this. That perhaps Sam envied Lester and found a way to persuade Lester to make him more like Lester. He even thought that perhaps Sam was one of the many women that Lester had on his phone.

“Jack never entertained the girls that threw themselves on him. He never wanted this life. As far back as I know him, Jack never wanted to be in the fast lane. The same with Palesa. And together, they now are able to create a life they desire.

The reason they wanted to be rich was not to be in the fast lane or to live a lavish life. Their reasons were to be comfortable and live without pain. Palesa recently launched her agency that aims to help immigrants who are struggling to find permanent residency in the country. Jack also launched his organisation that aims to help young boys interested in professional soccer get the

necessary training, connections, and support to make it in the big league. That's why they wanted to be rich." Lester said looking directly at him.

He sat wondering why he wanted to be rich. He sat wondering how Lester knew his girlfriend of 4 years. As his thoughts continued, Lester interrupted his train of thought.

"Listen, go upstairs and get ready. We have to leave now. And no, Sam isn't cheating but she did suggest that I take you under my wing just for a day. Seems you forgot we are in the same class as her and it so happened we were in the same group for the semester assignment. Your girl is a good girl King. Trust a man who spends a quarter of his wealth on baddies." He said.

He felt relieved that Sam wasn't actually one of Lester's many trophy women. He got up from the leather sofa with a lot on his mind. Lester directed him to the shower upstairs. He further instructed that he use all the lotions and soaps on the counter. Lester told him that they were numbered so he won't be confused. In the room opposite the bathroom, was the changing room. Lester told him that his outfit, from head to toe including tonight's fragrance, was on the centre table in the room.

“Now look, when you apply the cologne, don’t be shy to really apply it. This isn’t those chemical bombs in cans you’ve been using. Apply it generously on your skin before wearing the clothes. Ok right, go freshen up so we can leave.” Lester said.

He went upstairs and went into the bathroom he was directed to. It was tiled with clear white marble tiles and everything else was gold. The door handles, the facets, the mirror frames, everything was made of solid gold. The lighting fell soft on the eyes and created an ambiance that felt like swimming in a natural stream deep in the mountains.

He took time to read each product’s instructions before he hopped in the shower. Then it hit him. What is he going to shower with? He looked around the bathroom and saw that Lester had actually placed a box with all he’ll need to shower.

The box was sealed with plastic and had a note that reminded him to use the products in the extent order that they were placed.

A sense of appreciation overwhelmed him. He appreciated Lester. He appreciated his girlfriend. He appreciated his life. He appreciated his friends, as pious as they are. As he hopped in the

shower, the feeling of appreciation and gratitude overwhelmed him. He felt happy.

After he was done with the shower, he dried himself with the towel that was in the box as well and went over to the changing room opposite the bathroom. There was his outfit. Neatly placed on top of the centre table.

He remembered that Lester told him to apply the cologne directly on his skin and to apply it generously. He was not sure where on his body but he applied it anyway. He noticed how he did not choke him up as he normally would applying his Axe. He then put on the silk shirt and silk pants. He felt like he was Pablo Escobar's son. The clothes felt like honey on his skin. The silk rested gently and perfectly. How the tailor was able to be this accurate without measuring him, was truly remarkable. He noticed that Lester laid out suede loafers for him. He wondered what happened to the sneakers they bought? He did not think too much of this as at the end of the day, it wasn't his money.

"Looking sharp Lovers!" Lester exclaimed as he came walking down the stairs.

“Now the final touches,” Lester said. He placed a gold Cuban necklace around his neck and he took out his hand and placed a Rolex Daytona on his wrist.

“Now, you are me,” Lester said with a smile.

They headed out the door that led to the garage. He remembered that Lester said that they are going to Pudica with the G-Wagon. The car’s presence could be felt. It overshadowed all the other cars in the garage.

“Your things are at the back. Everything on you, keep it. Remember this day Lovers. Remember what we talked about. And most importantly, when this day ends and you’ve seen my life, remember who you are,” Lester told him as he pressed the engine start button.

The car roared to life. The car stereo came to life and was playing DJ Maphorisa’s Izolo. How befitting was the song for the moment. The rugged bassline made him feel like he was in an action movie. Infused with the clothes he was wearing, he felt like wealth.

Perhaps like the song, the next day he will have to apologise to Sam for almost making a woman pregnant. Perhaps he will find excitement in the fast life like Lester.

But like what Lester told him, perhaps this was merely the beginning of the movie. This was the beginning of the self-actualisation of knowing why he wanted to be wealthy. Like Jack, the meaning of wealth for him could be to live out his inner childhood dreams. Or perhaps like Palesa, money could be to live a life without pain. The words of Lester ringed in his word that he should know who he was. Especially going to Pudica where souls get lost according to his friends.

For what it was worth, he knew this was the beginning of a new self. He was excited to discover it.