

# The Richest Man in Meaanjin

The gate screeches shut, settling with a ‘tink’ under the latch with a distinct lack of commitment one way or another. The gate’s assailant is similarly undecided, shifting his gaze from the 199 stop sign to ripple over muted dumpling restaurants and dappled flower gardens guarded by brick and gravel, coming to rest on the school at the bottom of the hill. As if in answer, the school bell trills out the opening notes to the Mission: Impossible theme, time seeming to stretch as if to give the students one last chance to get to class on time.

The sound dampens as he turns away, taking in a whiff of frangipani before closing his shoulder to it all. He sets off at a comfortable pace, his shadow reaching high up the wall beside him in the early morning light. James had enjoyed a brief respite in his bed that morning, however was determined not to let Sun get too far ahead of him in its daily activities, prompting him to quickly roll his way to the door and take his first steps into the world. Armed only in his birks and a hastily equipped bathrobe, James takes a sharp (perhaps too sharp as he narrowly avoids a border collie on the corner) left into Granville St, ducking into a squat green cottage on his right.

“Heya jimbo”, he’s greeted by an assailant hidden somewhere in the back of the house. “Hey yourself, aren’t you late for work?”, he calls back as he enters the room. “Nah it’s Sov .. nty .. fi... James closes the door behind him, shifting his focus in its entirety to the rows of hangers and drawers filled by clothes before him. To his left, piles of T-shirts and long sleeves are immaculately folded on shelves, sorted by colour of course, whilst over his right shoulder hung everything from hand painted denim jackets to spartan gilets in two neat rows of hangers attached to the wall. Resting his gaze on a set of drawers comprised of thick timber immediately in front of the door, he steps out of his sandals and slips his robe onto the awaiting mannequin, before opening up the drawers and after a moment of hesitation, selecting a pair of white bamboo boxers as well as a pair of black briefs just for insurance.

Turning to his left, he discards several options on the floor before pulling on a light screen hemp sweatshirt, to match the tan shorts that he knew were in the drawers behind him. With a foundation established he decides on a necklace of wooden beads and his dad's old roar cap, faded Broich signature and all, to complete his look with some beaten Veja's.

Leaving shirts strewn behind him, James leaves Room 2 behind, heading towards the back of the house, he asks "So why aren't you at work?" once again to a young dark haired man fiddling with a Nescafe pod. "It's Sovereignty Day, the entire city is staying home to protest against the 26<sup>th</sup>. Coffee?" the man replies, finally managing to close the machine on the pod. James just blinks at him and they share a laugh as James exits down the back stairs.

Opening a shiny latch into the back neighbour's yard, he smiles at the father in the home's kitchen, receiving a mock salute in return as he heads up the driveway and turns right onto Spring Street.

He could have closed his eyes and let the aroma of guide him up the front stairs, strips of cream paint flaking away with each footfall. As his watch ticks over to 9:30, the front door is pulled open before him and James is greeted by a rotund mug, it's roughly painted blues and greens creating an image of the bottom of the ocean, filled to the brim with steaming coffee, two shots of milk and half a sugar. He takes the gift carefully, sharing a warm smile with the bestower, her frizzy locks shining a radiant orange and refusing to be held captive by a red bandanna. Her gaze follows him from behind thick red glasses as he silently nods his thanks and pads through the hallway to the verandah, assuming his designated seat overlooking the garden.

To James, it is in this moment that the world slows down, the earth stops rotating and each photon of sunlight pauses on its path to his face. Gazing out upon patches of banana and papaya trees burdened with unripened fruit and hearing only the clucking and bustling of the chickens in their coop, James draws this moment into himself, a place of serenity that he can return to throughout the day. No matter what he faces he can simply close his eyes and... "Are ya doing yoga today James?!", a woman's nasal tone slides through the deck, piercing his reverie like a magpie pierces bike helmets. "Not today thanks Janet", he responds, his calm tone giving nothing away. Downing the last dregs of his coffee, he sets his mug aside and rises, his gaze resting upon the horizon. Now the day begins.