

THE CHRONICLES OF JACK
WRITTEN BY MBASA TSETSANA

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CHARACTERS

JACKSON MAKHUBO (23, A SHY BUT AMBITIOUS YOUNG MAN. HIS DREAM IS TO MAKE IT IN THE PERFORMING ARTS IN JOHANNESBURG.)

NARRATOR (AGE UNKNOWN, A MYSTERIOUS BUT WISE SOUL. HE IS THE VOICE OF REASON)

DR. PAYNE (56, A PROUD, INTROVERTED MAN. HE IS THE HOD OF DRAMA AT THE JOHANNESBURG UNIVERSITY OF THE PERFORMING ARTS)

MOTHER (50, JACK'S MOTHER. A BOISTEROUS AND VIVACIOUS LADY, SHE IS VERY INTELLIGENT AND VERY SECRETIVE)

FEZI (21, JACK'S BEST FRIEND. SHE IS SECRETLY IN LOVE WITH JACK. HER LIFE LITERALLY REVOLVES AROUND HIM)

ACE (19, JACK'S CONFIDANT IN EAST LODNON. HE'S THE COOL CAT OF THE SCHOOL. THE LADY'S MAN)

THATO (21, JACK'S CONFIDANT IN JOHANNESBURG. HE IS CURIOUS AND QUEER)

MAX (LATE 20'S, A HOMELESS MAN AND CROOK. HE IS SNEAKY AND MANIPULATIVE.)

MAXWELL DLAMINI (LATE 20'S, A STUDENT LEADER DURING THE PROTESTS. HE IS THE EXTREME DEFINITION OF A COMRADE)

MR. D (EARLY 20'S, A FAVOURITE DRAMA LECTURER AT THE JUPA [JOHANNESBURG UNIVERSITY OF THE PERFORMING ARTS])

THE OTHER ROLES ARE TO BE PLAYED BY THE CHORUS MEMBERS OF THE CAST

ACT 1 - EAST LONDON, EASTERN CAPE

[There is some rubbish on stage. The Narrator walks on sweeping with a broom and whistling and does some old school dance moves. He suddenly realises that there's an audience.]

Narrator:

Oh! Sorry, I'm terribly sorry. I didn't see you there. My friends always tell me I'm stuck in my head. No man, not THAT one, the one up here. So, I've been told that life is full of ups and downs, but it's the downs that keep us up. Don't go through life, grow through life. In the end, it'll be OK, and if it's not OK, then it's not the end. I could go on and on forever. These are clichés that we speak to keep us safe in a bubble that I like to call ignorance and optimism. However, life isn't about ups and downs and striking while the iron is hot, is it? Sometimes, that iron burns the hell out of you and death reminds us that there is an end. We experience death in many ways, and that's what a dear friend of mine learnt. So without further a due, let me introduce you to the life of a young man named..

[A young man hastily walks across stage.]

Ace:

Jack! Hey Jack, wait up, please!

[The cast are in their high school attire and are excited about the school holidays. They enter from separate sides of the stage whispering, dancing and laughing. They open up a semi-circle and have a dance challenge.]

Character 3:

So like, guess who's been accepted at Rhodes University?

Character 5:

Who?

Character 3:

Hawu! Me!

Character 5:

I'm just kidding. Congrats my man!

Character 1:

Whoa! Who's ready for summer baby?

[They all cheer.]

Character 2:

Cape Town, here I come!

Character 1:

Cape Town? Really? You do know the Western Cape premier called us foreigners right?

Character 2:

Argh wena, why do you always have to academise and politicise everything?

Character 1:

Because everything in South Africa is political!

Character 3:

Jeez guys, we're on holiday! Lighten up.

Character 1:

That's the very problem with the youth today, you just want to lighten up on everything. And you wonder why this country is so crap!

[The students BOO him and tease him as he walks off.]

Character 3:

Yoh! And what crawled up his ass?

Character 4:

Simon!

[They all burst out in laughter and Character 3 is left perplexed.]

Character 4:

Didn't you hear? He was caught with Simon doing the nasty in the toilets at break last week.

Character 5:

Bloody fagats. They disgust me. They should be sent to some island so they can do their nasty satanic shit on their own.

Character 3:

Wow, so in like 5 minutes, politics and homophobia have come up.

Character 5:

Hey! I'm not afraid of gay people. All I'm saying is that it's unnatural and shouldn't be allowed.

[Character 4 attempts to break the tension.]

Character 4:

Soooooo... What's everyone doing over the December break?

Character 1:

I have to go see my dad in Durban.

Character 4:

Yoh! You're half Xhosa and half Zulu? That has to be the worse mix ever!

[Everyone laughs and character 1 leaves. Jack enters with Ace.]

Ensemble:

Aaaaaace! Aaaaaace!

Ace:

Hola, how's it guys! Everyone seems to be looking fresh for the holidays, especially the ladies. Damn!

[The ladies go crazy over him. A shy Jack retorts]

Girl 1:

Ace, like, why do you hang out with that guy? He's so, well, so yah.

Ace:

Don't judge a... A...

[Jack helps him out.]

Ace:

A book by its mother!

[Jack whispers in his ear again.]

Ace:

Oh! Ok. Yah, don't judge a book by its cover. Jacko over here is South Africa's next Khaya Mthethwa. Jack, show them what you can do.

Jack:

I'd rather not. I didn't warm up my voice properly.

Ace:

Come on, look at all these hunnies. They're just dying to get their claws into you. Come on Jacko, don't let your boy down.

[Jack hesitates but eventually agrees. The student's attention has already left him when he belts out a song.]

Loud Girl:

OMG! That was like, the greatest thing I have heard since Michael Jackson!

Character 1:

What do you know about Michael Jackson?

Loud Girl:

Don't judge a book by its cover, right Jack?

Jack:

(mumbles)

Uh... Yes, books are great for knowledge and boosting your vocabulary. And...

(Ace signals to Jack to keep quiet)

Ace:

Now what do you haters have to say about Jacko.

(a big and burlish Girl 1 walks up to Ace.)

Girl 1:

I say, if he had to do it again, he'd croak.

Ace:

Is that a challenge?

Girl 1:

Can our president read?

Ace:

What?!

Girl 1:

Yes, yes, it's a challenge?

Jack:

Hi. Hello. I don't like being bet on like a piece of meat.
I'll sing when I want to sing.

Girl 1:

Scared huh?

Ace:

Listen, if stupidity was a sickness, you'd be stone dead.
Jack, let's go.

(The rest of the students roar out in laughter.)

Scene 2: The Park - East London

(Jack and Ace walk out laughing about the previous stunt they
pulled on girl 1.)

Fezi:

Jack!

Fezi!

How could you?

Fezi:

You slept on me!

Ace:

Okay, it seems you guys are about to get in on like Marvin
Gaye, so that's my queue to leave.

(Jack and Ace do a complicated and long handshake. Fezi is
clearly annoyed. Ace leaves.)

Jack:

What's up?

Fezi:

You... **SLEPT** on me!!!

Jack:

Nah Fezi. You've got the wrong guy here. I slept on my bed,
with my pillows, mattress, duvet...

Fezi:

That's Jack for you. Forever making jokes.

Jack:

Come on Fezi, lighten up! I just had the best performance of
my life!

Fezi:

And as always, everything has to be about you.

Jack:

What are you talking about?

Fezi

(sighs)

Never mind.

Jack:

Oh snap! It's your... I'm so sorry. I've been so busy.

Fezi:

It's the second year in a row Jack.

Jack:

I'm so sorry. I totally forgot. I've just had more pressing
issues on my mind.

Fezi:

More important than your supposed best friend's birthday?

Jack:

OK look. I know that this may come to a surprise to you, but the world doesn't revolve around Fezi.

Fezi:

You're such an ass!

(Fezi storms off. The narrator comes on whistling and raking this time.)

Jack:

Fezi! Come on, it's just a birthday!

Narrator:

She's right you know?

Jack: Excuse me?

Narrator:

You're an ass. An incredible one at that.

Jack:

What the... Who the hell are you?

Narrator:

It doesn't matter who we are, what matters is the plan.

Jack:

That's exactly what I've been trying to tell Fezi.

Narrator:

But you're going about it the wrong way. Listen son.

(He puts the rake down and sits next to Jack.)

Narrator (cont'd):

We all have priorities, I absolutely understand, but we should disregard, disrespect or have disputes with the people we care about and who always have our backs.

Jack:

Excuse me for a second, but who exactly are you?

Narrator:

As I said, it doesn't matter who we are, what matters is the plan. And you need a clearer, less selfish plan.

Jack:

Selfish? I'm the most selfless guy around.

Narrator:

Says the supposedly non-selfish person.

Jack:

What should I do?

Narrator:

Talk to her not at her.

(Jack goes into a deep thought. The narrator gets up and leaves.)

Jack:

What should I...(realises Narrator is gone)... Great.

(Fezi walks back onto the scene)

Fezi:

Jack listen...

Jack:

No you listen Fez. I'm sorry about earlier. I know I've been very selfish. It's just that I've had so much on my mind.

Fezi:

I understand. But that doesn't mean you need to treat everyone like they're the enemy.

Jack:

I'm not. I really am not. I just feel like nobody understands.

Fezi:

Jack, if everyone is saying the same thing, clearly it's you that needs to do the changing.

Jack:

That's why we always fight! You preach like my mother. I already have one, OK? For once, just be a friend.

Fezi:

That's all I've ever been to you Jack. I care about you. More than you can imagine. I'm scared for you.

Jack:

Why? It's just Johannesburg. The city of gold!

Fezi:

But...

Jack:

That is where my dreams will come true.

Fezi:

Or come crashing down.

Jack, I understand, but...

Jack:

That's the problem, you don't. None of you do!

(Jack exits in a fury.)

Fezi:

But I... I love you.

Scene 3: Jack's Home

(Jack is pacing frantically. His mother enters with groceries.)

Mother:

My child, please put these away for me. My legs and feet are killing me.

Jack:

Would you like a cup of tea or a massage?

Mother:

Just a cup of tea will do my child.

(Jack makes a cup of tea for his mother.)

Jack:

So how was your day mom?

Mother:

You know, the usual. Shopping, paying bills, visiting your aunt. And you, how is this application to Rhodes going?

Jack:

That's what I need to talk to you about.

(He hands his mother her cup of tea.)

I have to leave tomorrow... For Johannesburg.

Mother:

(The mother spills her tea out of shock.)

Johannesburg??! Tomorrow??! No, no, NO!!!

Jack:

But mama, it's a great opportunity. I've even been offered a full bursary.

Mother:

I don't care if you won the powerball!!! You CANNOT leave tomorrow. You will be going to initiation school in a week.

Jack:

Why?

Mother:

Why??! Because it's part of who you are. Your tradition. How dare you ask me why?

Jack:

Mom, most black fathers aren't at their homes. If they are at home, they have blesees or other female partners. I mean look at Thando? He has 15 siblings! Siblings from 15 different mothers and one father.

Mother:

You won't talk about a\our culture and you elders like that in my house.

Jack:

Mom, going to the mountain isn't what it used to be. Boys go in, and come out alcoholics, thinking they are the head of their households and beat their own mothers.

Mother:

Eh wena Jack!

Jack:

I'm sorry mom, but it's the truth. I can't and I won't do it.

Mother:

Oh Lord, what did I ever do to you to deserve this?

(She starts to cry.)

Jack:

And besides, hospitals are safer mom.

Mother:

Get out! Get out of my house you devil of a disrespectful child!

(Jack leaves tentatively)

Blackout

Scene 4: The Park - East London

(Jack sits waiting. Fezi walks in.)

Jack:

Thanks for coming.

Fezi:

What's wrong?

Jack:

My mother. She just went all crazy on me for nothing.

Fezi:

It's never nothing. No sane person would go off at another person for nothing. What did you do?

Jack:

I kind of told her that I'm leaving for Johannesburg tomorrow.

Fezi:

Wait... What? What happened to January?

Jack:

It's my bursary. They want me to train during the holiday for a show we'll be doing for parents at orientation.

Fezi:

Jack! How did you expect your mother to react? You're her one and only child!

Jack:

I'll be back for the holidays though.

Fezi:

That's not the same. And what about going to the mountain and being a man?

Jack:

I've never believed in that stupid custom. Look at my dad? He went to the mountain, but still, he wasn't man enough to stay and take care of us.

Fezi:

That leaves room for you to be a better man Jack.

Jack:

It's done and decided Fezi. No point in nagging on. Tomorrow, I hit the road.

END OF ACT 1

ACT 2

SCENE 1: PARK STATION - JOHANNESBURG

SONG AND DANCE: PATA PATA

(There is a guy sleeping under a blanket. 3 guys run on with trolleys and convene around a perplexed Jack who has 2 bags of luggage)

Guy 1:

Ola my laaitie. Jozi? Hillbrow? Melville?

Guy 2:

Or are you looking for cabs? Woza, put your bags in my trolley and we can go.

Guy 3:

Voetsek wena, I saw this boy first.

Guy 1:

Saw him first for what? For who? Don't come here with your first come first serve bullshit.

Jack:

Whoa, whoa gents. I'm fine. I'm being picked up.

Guy 1:

Picked up? Ah, so he has money this one. What? You're too good for a cab? Too good for us?

Guy 2:

Come one laaitie, we're struggling here man. Help us out.

Jack:

I'm sorry, I don't have any money on me.

Guy 3:

(takes out swiping machine)

No worries my brother, we also take debit and credit cards.

Jack:

Guys, really. I'm fine.

Guy 1:

Oh. Hayineh. You don't want to support a fellow brother neh?
Don't come crying to us when Max gets a hold of you.

Jack:

Max? Who's Max.

Guy 2:

Don't say we didn't try help you.

Guy 3:

And don't say we didn't warn you.

(The 3 guys disperse and leave just as quickly as they came.
Jack takes out his phone and dials a number. He sighs. He
presses the phone again.)

Jack:

Great. Battery dead.

Max:

(shuffles under his blanket)

I can help you with that.

(Jack is perplexed and looks around, not knowing where the
voice is coming from.)

Jack:

Hello?

Max:

Hi.

Jack:

Excuse me?

Max:

You're excused.

(He sits up.)

I said I can help you out with your problem-nyana.

Jack:

No thanks. I'm fine.

Max:

No, you're not. You're in Johannesburg with luggage. You don't know where you need to go, and you have a dead battery. Let me help you.

Jack:

Listen. I don't mean to offend you, but I don't think you can help me out. Directions? Sure. A charger, I don't think so.

(Max busies himself under his blanket and produces a charger.)

Max:

You were saying?

Jack:

What the... Yoh. Ok. I'm sorry. May I PLEASE use the charger.

Max:

Sure.

Jack:

Thank you so...

Max:

If you can do something for me.

Jack:

(sighs)

What?

Max:

Don't worry. I don't want your money. I have an infection on my leg. Just run over to that guy. Yes, that one over there and tell him Max sent you.

Jack:

Whoa, whoa. Sorry, did you say Max?!

Max:

What did those 3 baboons tell you about me? That I'd rape you?
Steal your clothes and kill you?

Jack:

Uhm... I... Listen, thanks, but I think I'll wait.

Max:

It's 6am in the morning my boy. These tsotsi will start to notice that you're helpless and alone. Trust me, I won't hurt you.

Jack:

And my bags?

Max:

Don't worry, I'll watch them for you.

(Jack is cautious and untrusting.)

Max (cont'd):

What could I possibly do? Run away with your luggage? I told you, I have an infection on my leg. I can barely make it to the toilet.

Jack:

Alright. But please, watch my bags.

Max:

I'll protect them with my life.

(He winks at Jack. Jack goes off stage. Max slowly gets up. In a hurry, he takes Jack's bags and runs off stage. Jack returns.)

Jack:

So the guy didn't know what you were..

(He realises that Max is gone. He looks under the blanket.)

Max? Max? Maaaaaax!!!! Shit!

(Guy 1 walks back on with a trolley)

Guy 1:

What did we tell you? Come, I'll help you get where you need to go.

Jack:

You think I'll trust you after what just happened?

Guy 1:

UngumXhosa?

(Jack is perplexed.)

Jack:

Ewe.

Guy 1:

Nam. And you know that we look out for each other. Trust me ntwana yam.

Jack:

Trust. Right.

Guy 1:

Uyaphi?

Jack:

Johannesburg University of the Performing Arts.

Guy 1:

You should've said so from the start! It's like 5 minutes-anyana away.

Jack:

And my luggage?

Guy 1:

Already sold by now and has new owners ntwana yam.

Jack:

Ah shit.

Guy 1:

Let's go!

Blackout

SCENE 2: JOHANNESBURG UNIVERSITY OF THE PERFORMING ARTS

(Students are in their movement attire, stretching and warming up.)

Jack:

This looks like a place I can learn to love.

Dr. Payne:

Alright. Listen up. Can I have the first years to my left and the returning students to my right. Great. 2016 was a difficult year for all of us. But that doesn't mean we need to repeat the same mistakes that we made last year, this year.

Focus. Attentiveness. Passion. Dedication. Do all four of these and 2017 will be a breeze for you. Attend your classes, and ask if you do not understand something. But remember my cardinal rule, the worst actors act! So understand your characters and do your best work. When I call your name you can leave. Layla Brown, Sthembiso Mkhunjulwa, Ayabonga Zulu, Damien Harry, Thando Dlamini, Nomthandazo Pityana, Nonhlanhla Rogers...

(The students disperse and leave the stage in groups. Jack is left standing alone in front of Dr. Payne.)

And who are you?

Jack:

Jackson Makhubo sir.

Dr. Payne:

It's Doctor.

(He looks through the list.)

No Jackson Makhubo here.

Jack:

That's impossible Sir.

(He takes out a letter from his pocket and gives it to Dr. Payne who then reads it.)

Dr. Payne:

Ah. Bursary boy. Xhosa hm? I hope we won't be getting any problems from you. I know how you Xhosa boys are after you've been to the mountain.

Jack:

I... I'm not... I haven't been sir. So you won't get any trouble from me.

Dr. Payne:

Good! Get your bags and follow me.

Jack:

I... I don't... I was...

Dr. Payne:

Speak boy! You'll fail dismally if you keep on stuttering and don't take ownership of your voice.

Jack:

I was mugged Sir.

Dr. Payne:

My, my, my. The third Easten Cape boy in a row. What's his name, Max is it?

Jack:

Yes Sir... Doc! Can you help me get my stuff back?

Dr. Payne:

Do I look like I frequent with likes of Max? Come, let me take you to your res. They'll need my signature to let you in.

Jack:

Thank you Sir.

Dr. Payne:

Doctor!!!

**SCENE 3: JOHANNESBURG UNIVERSITY OF THE PERFORMING ARTS -
CLASSROOM**

(The Narrator hums a melody as he prepares a class with chairs. He stops to hum a particular part of the song, smiles, and continues to prepare the class. A disorientated and disheartened Jack walks in.)

Jack:

Oh, sorry, I'll just wait outside.

Narrator:

No, please, take a seat. I'm almost done

Beat

Do you have a class in here?

Jack:

Sorry? Uhm, yes, yes I do.

Narrator:

(Looking at his watch and whistles)

Well you're very early. One hour to be exact.

Jack:

Well I don't exactly have anything to keep me occupied. I'd be packing, but...

Narrator:

But what?

Jack:

Hey! Don't I know you from somewhere?

Narrator:

Me? No my son. Everyone in Johannesburg looks the same. You probably saw another hard working black man that looks like me.

Jack:

Deep.

Narrator:

(Putting the last two chairs down and sitting close to Jack)

So what's got you down in the dumps?

Jack:

The easier question to ask would be, what HASN'T got me down in the dumps.

Narrator:

What's wrong?

Jack:

Argh, it's a long story.

Narrator:

(Looking at his watch again)

Well, we've got 54 minutes and 28 seconds. Seems like enough time to me.

Jack:

Yoh. Where to start. I got a bursary to study here and I was so happy. So very happy. But, my friends and family back home weren't as excited as I was. And I just don't get why.

Narrator:

People don't just get upset with other people for no reason.

Jack:

Thanks Fezi!

Narrator:

Excuse me?

Jack:

Nothing. What you said just reminds me of something someone back home said.

Narrator:

Well in that case, you had very wise people around you then.

(This gets a chuckle out of Jack. The narrator chuckles too.)

Jack:

I'm just wondering if I made the right choice by coming here.

Narrator:

Young man...

Jack:

It's Jack. And I'm hardly a man.

Narrator:

Well, Jack. There's no use in crying over spilt milk. You must never think of the glass as being half full or half empty. What you need to focus on is that it can be refilled. You're here now, and you can't change what's happened. What's more important is what you are going to do now that you're *here*.

Jack:

I... I don't even have clothes! It was stolen from me this morning.

Narrator:

I know people that have come with nothing but the clothes on their back to Johannesburg, who now manage stores, write for popular soaps and dramas and even act in them. Let me tell you a story. A very popular actress went through a major downfall in her life. She still had her job, but had no roof over her head. So for the longest time, she was incredibly depressed and slept in her car. Now, she's written a book, which she turned into a play and directed, and has performed internationally as an actor on TV and theatre.

Jack:

Such things only happen in movies.

Narrator:

No son, movies are based on truths, sometimes painful, sometimes good. The lady I'm talking about is a South African acting gem, Pamela Nomvete.

Jack:

No way!

Narrator:

Yes way! So you could either sulk, mourning your yesterdays and focussing on your troubles, or you could get up, do and be. Life is a gift, but *living* is a choice. You've got the potential. That's why you got the bursary.

Jack:

Yeah. You're right!

Beat

Are you sure we haven't met?

Narrator:

All black people look the same son.

(Jack and the Narrator chuckle. Students start to walk into the class. The narrator hums his song and exits)

(A group of students are beatboxing and rapping. It's a rap challenge and the students watching go crazy. Mr. D enters.)

Mr. D:

Alright, alright. Stop showing off! Sit down and take out your scripts.

Ensemble:

Oh! Mr. D!

Mr. D:

I told you, I don't like that nickname. Call me Mr. Dube, hell, call me by my name, but please don't compare me to a...
Please don't call me Mr. D.

Student 1:

Alright cool.

Beat

Mr. D.

Mr. D:

I give up. So, the script that we'll be dealing with and performing at the end of the term is called Waiting for Nelson. New guy, please read David and Shorty, please be Ever.

Shorty:

But Sir, how do you expect me to not call you Mr. D when you call me Shorty?

(The student's laugh)

Mr. D:

OK, OK Short!

Beat

Before we start, new guy, please introduce yourself?

Jack:

Uhm... Hi everyone. I'm Jackson Makhubo and I'm from East London.

Student 2:

Yoh! ANOTHER Xhosa!

Student 3:

Voetsek wena!

Mr. D:

Alright you two, that's enough. Jackson, welcome. Glad to have you.

Thato:

He doesn't look like a Jackson. He looks more like a Jack.

All:

Jaaaaaaack! Jaaaaaaack!

(A feint chant is heard. Struggle songs are sung and cheering is heard)

Thato:

Hashtag...

Shorty:

Fees Must Fall.

Mr. D:

Hayi maan. When is this nonsense going to stop? Alright, pack your bags and leave before they interrupt our class again.

Jack:

(Confused)

What's going on?

Thato:

The Fees must Fall protests my man. They've intensified.

Jack:

Fees must what now?

Thato:

What rock have you been hiding under?!

Beat

Oh. Right. East London. Come, I'll tell you on our way out.

**SCENE 4: JOHANNESBURG UNIVERSITY OF THE PERFORMING ARTS -
LIBRARY LAWNS**

(There is a gathering of students at the lawns. The vibe is abuzz. They start singing)

SONG: MY MOTHER (WAS A KITCHEN GIRL)

Jack:

What's going on here?

Thato:

Just keep quiet, relax and watch.

(A student walks to the middle of the gathered students)

Student:

Amandla!

Ensemble:

