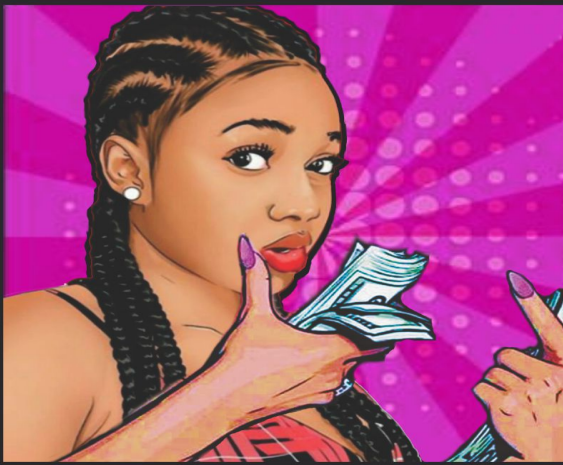
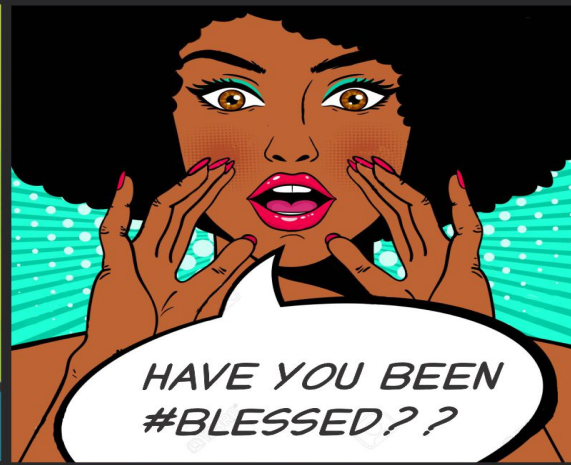


## #BLESSED CALLBACKS



JEN BRYSON MOORCROFT THEATRE  
IN COLLABORATION WITH  
CORNERSTONE ANTI HUMAN TRAFFICKING INSTITUTE  
PRESENTS

# #BLESSED



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## #BLESSED play synopsis

Set in East London, at a school that could be any school, #blessed follows the story of three girls: Precious, Lisa and Megan. Precious chose books and Lisa chose looks. Megan didn't have a choice at all. But when Lisa hooks up with local taxi driver, Skha, and decided to add him to her roster; things get a little complicated between the friends. Lisa's lifestyle is #goals and the other girls can't help but feel jealous. Studying and going to church just isn't as glamorous as parties, perfect poses and baecations. But all that glitters isn't gold...meanwhile, schoolboy Siseko is stuck firmly in the friendzone and falling in love is far too expensive...

*Have you been #blessed? The question is, by whom? #blessed interrogates the relationships between blessers and blessees (or sugar daddies and sugar babies on steroids) in youth aspirational culture in the Eastern Cape.*

Jen Bryson Moorcroft Theatre and Cornerstone Anti Human Trafficking Institute are proud to bring you their second social justice theatre production, somewhat of a prequel to *Hold For Release*.

### CHARACTERS:

1. Precious: A 16-year-old girl from a poor township background. Brainy and feisty. She considers herself a feminist/womanist. She is a natural leader with strong beliefs and also the unrelenting curiosity of a teenager. She attends an English-medium school in East London and is very ambitious. Her aspirations are to make a success out of her life – to ‘make it’ by her own talents and become a role-model to others.
2. Lisa: A close friend of Precious, a 15-year-old girl, with loads of charisma and attitude. She is wealthier and more sexually experienced than her friend. Although she exudes confidence, this is sometimes too forceful to be fully convincing. She is comfortable with her sexuality and loves socialising – her aspirations are for ‘the high life’.
3. Megan: Megan is a passionate, gentle 16-year-old girl, also a friend of Precious and Lisa. She has recently come to live in East London. She has a lot of anger built up from her past but usually hides it behind a kind and sweet nature. She misses her old life and community.
4. Ms B: She is the bubbly English teacher at the girls’ school, attractive and well presented. She has a close relationship with Precious. She is caring and professional and capable in her job. She encourages feminism and independent thinking in the girls. There is more to her than meets the eye.
- 5 Siseko: He is a classmate of the girls, aged 16. He is intelligent, well-spoken and sincere, tries to be cool but actually slightly geeky in a charming way. He also comes from a poor background, similar to Precious.
6. Skha: He is the taxi driver on the route to the girls’ school. He is a sugar daddy to Lisa. Skha is older than Lisa and quite smooth and sleazy, with a sense of humour. The other girls don’t trust him.

7. Rev Samuel: He is the pastor in the community. He tries to guide the girls on a good path. He is Megan's father who has recently come back into her life. He is helpful but strict and a bit of a mystery.

8. Mr M: He is Rev Samuel's friend. He is well off and unmarried. He is serious and a little intimidating. He develops a romantic interest in Megan.

THE STREET CHORUS - Mostly responsible for vocals and comic relief during the show.

THE 'BLESSED GIRLS' – Fancy girls who live a blessee lifestyle.

CLASSMATES – They are in the Ms B's English class with Precious.

POLICE OFFICERS

COMPETITION JUDGES

MEGAN'S MOM

Also: Extras for the street scenes and sound effects, verbal percussion.

## **SCENE A – A CHURCH SERVICE: “BLESSINGS”**

*ALL ON STAGE. Everyone is at church service in ‘church clothes’ (center stage). The offering is being taken up. Congregation puts money into offering bag. Street chorus sneakily takes money out while pretending to putting money in. Then Reverend speaks.*

REV: Thank you brothers and sisters. As we go into the week ahead, let us remember this: It is good to be blessed, but better yet, to be a blessing.

<b>SONG: The Lord Bless you and keep you (chorus)</b>
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*As the song starts, congregation greets pastor and slowly leaves. Street chorus asks for money from congregation, then gets shooed off to LEFT platform.*

Song continues:       The Lord bless you and keep you;  
                                   the Lord make his face shine on you,  
                                   and be gracious to you;  
                                   the Lord turn his face towards you  
                                   and give you peace;  
                                   and the blessing of God almighty,  
                                   the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
                                   be among you and remain with you always. Amen.

*MR M stays to chat to the pastor on Center Stage. Eventually they leave together, still in conversation. Attention shifts to the street chorus, who are making themselves comfortable around some bins and trash cans on stage left. Street chorus takes off nice coats etc and make themselves look more like beggars. The ‘blessed girls’ move towards stage left, removing ‘church clothes’ like hats, fixing hair, putting make up on, getting ready for a night out. The street chorus watches them.*

AMY of the street chorus: That pastor is always talking about blessings upon blessings, but you see those girls, they can get their own blessings without even the pastor to help them.

STREET CHORUS 2:       You think I could also find a blesser?

STREET CHORUS 3:       Someone would have to be blind to want to ‘bless’ you.

STREET CHORUS 2:       At least I still have Jesus.

AMY:                        Jah, and the offering basket was nice and full too.

STREET CHORUS 3:       *(They start taking out the money).* So we have lots of blessers too, you see.

*They start counting the money they collected from the church, occasionally fighting over it, as the ‘blesser girls’ finish off their makeup and outfits.*

**QUICK BLACKOUT**

*Immediately follows into Scene 1*

## **SCENE ONE – ON THE ROAD: “INTRODUCTIONS ARE IN ORDER”**

**Blackout.** ALL ON STAGE. Some move across the stage. Street chorus STAGE RIGHT. The sounds of cars and urban life. ‘Blessed girls’. Drug dealers. Builders. Chaos. Walking, shouting, hammering. Kids running to school... Supporting actors keep moving throughout the scene to create atmosphere and sound effects.

Above that, the voice of a typical high schooler. She is busy practising a speech. Initially it is in darkness – just a voice – and then slowly the lights come on to show PRECIOUS writing a speech and talking passionately to an imaginary audience. She is dressed for school with school bags. The sound of the cars and other atmospheric noises can be created from verbal percussion by the actors on and offstage and backstage helpers. So initially we only hear her voice against a vibrant South African urban background. Stones, planks, plastic crates also add to the sounds as the girl walks over and through the city waste. Maybe some road signs (Stop/Go) to show it is on the side of the road.

PRECIOUS: What would you do to get what you wanted? How desperate are you?

Desperate for money, fame, glory? Desperate to be popular. Desperate to escape.

Everyone I know is so desperately... desperate. Everyone I know wants something.

They say...everybody’s got their price. But no one’s found mine...just yet.

Ladies and gentlemen of the Young African Scholar Fund Committee...ladies and

Gentlemen...I would like to take this opportunity...ugh!

*(She struggles to find the words, crunches up her page in frustration)* ladies and gentlemen...how to explain...?

It’s not like I want the world

I just want this damn bursary

So my Aunt won’t look at me with these blueblack stressed out eyes

When I tell her school fees have gone up

It’s not like I want the world.

I’ll get the world for myself thank you very much

But have you seen these township schools with their 5% matric pass rate? People have a better chance of winning the lotto than matriculating. I’ve gotta stay at my posh city school with their sky-high fees and sky-high results.

So please ladies and gentlemen of the bursary committee. I'm sure you've seen many like me.

But I promise you... none ever as desperate.

*(She stops talking and jumps up from the curb because a boy of similar age to her, SISEKO is eavesdropping).*

SISEKO: Who ya calling desperate?

PRECIOUS: No one.

SISEKO: But you do know you're talking to yourself?

PRECIOUS: No.

SISEKO *(looking under his shoe)*: Because, I don't see anyone else around!

PRECIOUS: I'm not crazy. I'm just practising for an oral, stalker!

SISEKO: Stalker? This is the road to school, not your bedroom...

And what oral is this? Did I forget it? When's it due?

PRECIOUS: Well, seeing as you can't mind your own business...it's a speech I'm trying to write - a speech for this scholarship competition.

SISEKO: *(relaxing)* Oh, for the Young African Scholars Fund? I'm also entering! I haven't started prepping my speech though. Am I late?

PRECIOUS: You're also entering? Really? *(surprised)*

SISEKO: You saying I'm not smart enough?

PRECIOUS: No, smart enough...I just thought you were loaded. I mean look at your watch... *(some brand name)*

SISEKO: No man, it's fake. I've gotta pretend. I need the bucks too.

PRECIOUS: You pretend good.

SISEKO: Let's not tell anyone OK? You know how kids are.

PRECIOUS: Especially at our school. Those rich kids...

SISEKO: I'll win the scholarship and then I'll be the rich kid!

PRECIOUS: I guess...Siseko, I hope if I don't win, that you do. I mean, I hope I win rather than you...but if I don't...

SISEKO: Yeah, I get you...(they fist pump)...friends.

PRECIOUS: See you at school...

*SISEKO walks off. PRECIOUS watches him leave and then when she is sure he is gone, she continues with her speech.*

PRECIOUS: Now where was I? How do I convince these old rich bags of air to give me their money...? *(Looking at her notes)* Ladies and gentlemen of the young scholarship fund...(ad lib)...

*ALL walking across the stage suddenly notice that it starts raining. They run off, the builders pack up their things etc.*

*The sound of rain (verbal percussion off stage) starts and two animated teenage voices get louder as the two friends LISAKHANYA and MEGAN join PRECIOUS. They get interrupted by the STREET CHORUS.*

*The two girls carry umbrellas and try to crouch under it to protect themselves from the rain. Lisakhanya has the slightly shorter skirt, PRECIOUS has the most books.*

STREET CHORUS: Hey, you got some food? I prefer KFC but anything will do...(Ad lib)

LISAKHANYA: *(jokingly)* I'm sorry we've gotta walk today ladies, I left my GTI (or car of choice) at home. *(Giggles, then silence)*

MEGAN: Same here, my Merc is being serviced today and your BMW *(or car of choice)*...?

PRECIOUS, *(hatching a story)*: Umm...It's at the carwash?

<b>SONG EXCERPT: CARWASH (three girls and street chorus)</b>
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STREET CHORUS: You gonna be late for school if you keep this up....And what would you know about school? Etc...

LISA: Whatcha doing Precious? You can't be studying already?

MEGAN: I swear she's getting ready for the next grade.

PRECIOUS *(hiding her notes)*: Nevermind...Let's get going ladies! I'm getting soaked. We don't even need the carwash today!

LISA: We need a car!

MEGAN: Or three.



PRECIOUS: I can't wait to get my licence.

MEGAN: Pu-leeze. Talk to the hand because your brains are up your bum! What's it gonna help if you have a licence but no car. That's never gonna happen until she is about 300 years old!

LISA: My Mom doesn't even drive and she is 300 years old!

PRECIOUS (*getting worked up*): But that's not us!

LISA: She's got my Dad to drive her around.

PRECIOUS: It's not the same!

LISA: You think we won't be as pathetic?

MEGAN: (*sarcastically*) Waiting for a man with a fat wallet and a fancy car? No car licence required, only his credit cards! And lots of them too! (*She high-fives LISA*). You think we will be different?

PRECIOUS: Sure as hell I will. (*The tone changes*).

MEGAN: And me.

LISA: And I!

PRECIOUS: And myself! We're feminists, ladies. We're African violets. (*She does a proud salute but they ignore her and take the umbrella away*).

LISA: You can keep your feminism – I'm taking this here umbrella!

PRECIOUS: No man, I'm freezing! What happened to sharing...?

LISA: With the less fortunate? (*She offers umbrella, laughing*).

PRECIOUS: Hey watch who you call less fortu... (*she makes a grab for the umbrella and LISA is left umbrella-less as the other two join hands and celebrate*).

LISA: Well, since I have everyone's attention...(*she takes out a mirror and preens herself in it, fully aware of her beauty and the power of her beauty. In the background drums start slowly, rising to a climax as she speaks. STREET CHORUS listening, on instrumental and vocals...*)

They say beauty is in the eye of the beholder

So you better hold onto your horses.

Because that beauty, is me

And the beholding has a price.

My game is the finer things in life

A Louis Vuitton handbag dropped casually in

My penthouse among the stars

I'm not there yet

But it's only a matter of time

I have ambition by the bucketload

And Rome was not built in one day

Nobody ever reached the top except through

One small step for man

One giant leap for womankind.

...In designer heels, of course.

I don't need umbrellas. I don't get soaked in the rain. I'm over that shit.

*She leans over and ties her shoes slowly, peering over her shoulder at the audience. When she gets no reaction, she pulls her skirt a little higher.*

What's the point of having ambition

Beauty

Aspirations

If you're too afraid to use them?

*(In a cold defiant tone, pointing to herself)*

Nants' itender *(Here is my tender).*

*(In the background we hear her two friends calling...)*

PRECIOUS: LISA? No man, stop with this! You can have your umbrella back.

*(LISA ignores them. The sound of a car stopping. An older man in casual clothes, SKHA, walks*

*up to her.)*

LISA: (to herself) Aahh...time for a new Minister of Transport perhaps?

SKHA: A girl this beautiful should not be unaccompanied...

*(She is suddenly shy, as if it wasn't premeditated.)*

LISA: Oh, I'm with my friends...*(she isn't entirely convincing)*

SKHA: But don't you want to come with me instead and get out of this cold?

LISA: Er...I can't. I've got school. *(half-heartedly)*

SKHA: Aaah come on mabhebheza, *(baby)* it's just a lift, I promise to window shop and not buy.

LISA: I don't know...

SKHA: *(He brushes it off and then reaches for her.)* Just for today. I've got the hot seat ready just for you. You deserve love and attention.

LISA: Mmm...I guess it's OK, if you're gonna behave like a gentleman. *(She follows him offstage, then dashes back to the other girls).*

LISA: Tell them I'm sick OK?

PRECIOUS *(outraged)*: How many times a month they gonna swallow that?

LISA: Doesn't matter. *(She flashes imaginary notes at them)* Akhonto emnandi ngathi yindoda enemali *(There's nothing better than a man with money)* Nothing is for mahala! *(She struts offstage after Skha).*

MEGAN: Looks like she got her BMW after all – even if it is only a Toyota Avanza!

PRECIOUS: *(angrily)* It's not right. She was saying she doesn't need a man!

MEGAN: Well, saying and doing are two different things. But the proof is in the pudding and she's eating it!

PRECIOUS: She's supposed to be our friend! Shame on you! Did I hear you trying to get her to stop? I don't think so! *(They start fighting with the two umbrellas, in a jovial manner. The verbal percussion takes up the fight sounds with taps and drums and it turns into a bit of a street tap dance. BLESSED GIRLS joins in*

*with the fight.*

*Eventually PRECIOUS flicks away MEGAN's umbrella with her own. MEGAN shrugs and walks forward, weaving her soliloquy in and out of the rhythms of the verbal percussion. PRECIOUS in background helps with tapping of two umbrellas on stones.)*

*(Moment with mom)*

MEGAN: These are the stuff dreams are lost on.

Do not envy those who dream differently from you but mourn with those who have

None left at all.

*(Pointing towards where Lisa left)*

Most of us are parcels at the Lost and Found, waiting for, but never found.

So no offense to you *(pointing to audience and PRECIOUS)*

But I'm not like you.

I was living the African dream when this man vaporated out of thinly transparent air to bring me here.

To streets of dirt and rain.

I dreamed of my father

That he would fetch me – the knight in shining armour

Tall dark and handsome...

I guess I got lucky with one out of three...can you guess which one?

*(She takes out a bar of chocolate and starts eating it.)*

And now I'm here, with him, to learn, like I can suddenly find

Jesus overnight. *(She notices him).*

*The Reverend approaches Megan. Everyone else greets the Reverend as he approaches. THE BLESSED GIRLS try to look more holy and less flirty.*

Speak of the devil...

REV: My lovely daughter.

MEGAN: Hi...sir...(awkwardly embarrassed)

REV: We missed you at choir practise yesterday.

MEGAN: I was busy...I'm sorry. Did you follow me?

REV: I hear these things about you. The company you keep...it's not suitable...

MEGAN: My friends? What's wrong with them?

REV: What's right with them? You are a Christian and as such – their shame can taint you too...

MEGAN: Their what?

REV: This Lisa...the whole community is in uproar over her. Yet they say you are one of her best friends.

MEGAN: Yeah. She's one of the few kids at school who's actually nice to me.

REV: It can be a lonely path being righteous.

MEGAN, *with teenage attitude*: I don't want to give up my friends! I only have two of them!

REV: In the car now, there is something important we must do.

MEGAN: I can't believe this.

REV: Show some respect. This is why your mother sent you to me.

MEGAN: But...sir...Dad? What about school...

REV: We cannot talk about it now. Later, you too will see the light.

MEGAN: In that case...PRECIOUS...can't say I didn't try... sorry... *(She shrugs at her friend).*

PRECIOUS: See you MEGAN. Goodbye Reverend. *(MEGAN bows her head and is guided off. PRECIOUS stares after her in the background.)*

PRECIOUS *(to herself)*: Ah man, with all that drama, I'm late for school too!

*She starts running but runs into the teacher, white and mid-thirties with many bags, who is walking towards her.*

MS B: PRECIOUS – whoah – slow down. You’re a mess! I saw you on the side of the road. Do you need a lift to school?

PRECIOUS: Sorry Ma’am...yes please!

MS B: And where are your cronies – LISA and MEGAN?

PRECIOUS: *(unprepared)* They...LISA is sick and MEGAN got caught in the rain.

MS B: Well, if she was caught in the rain surely school is closer than home? As for LISA...sick again...you really think us teachers are gullible! I would phone her parents but they are so strict that I shudder to think what they would say if they knew...

PRECIOUS: Please don’t... *(she reaches up to her)*

MS B: I know you are covering for them. But if I wish you girls would just pull it together...you’re..

*(Both say it at the same time, MS B is passionate, PRECIOUS defeated)*

MS B and PRECIOUS: Feminists....African violets.

PRECIOUS: I know.

MS B: Don’t give me that lip. *(She starts rummaging through her bags)* You girls have the chance to make so much out of your lives – as Maya Angelou said, you are ‘the hope and the dream of the slave’ but you are so fickle. And after I helped you with that Young African Scholar Fund application, you just throw it all back in my face!

PRECIOUS: *(desperately)* Oh, no, I wouldn’t! It’s not like that at all!

*(MS B takes out an African violet flower and presents it to PRECIOUS)*

MS B: Good. The African violet is the colour purple of African feminism –

beautiful, deep, and strong – just like you. *(A slow backing **STREET CHORUS ‘ooh’** sounds starts from the wings and continues until the end of the scene.)*

PRECIOUS: *(surprised)* Thank you. Just, just, give me a moment.

MS B: *(suspiciously)* But you’re coming right? I’ll wait in the car. Don’t make me come find

you.

PRECIOUS: I just want to dry off first.

MS B: *(Gives her a hug and then walking offstage, trying to be positive)* It's stopped raining, you know. It always does.

PRECIOUS: *(Holding the flower up to the audience and speaking directly to them in a sad and desperate tone.)*

Thank you, Ma'am. *(To audience)* If it has stopped raining, then why am I still drowning?

**END OF SCENE 1**