I AM
JACKIE CHAN

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MY LIFE IN ACTION

JACKIE CHAN

with Jeff Yang

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To my mother and father,

who brought me into the world,

and

to all my colleagues, friends, and fans,

without whose love and support,

I could not possibly be where I am today.

JACKIE CHAN

PROLOGUE: TAKING FLIGHT

'm standing in the sky on the roof of a glass and steel office tower in Rotterdam, Holland. There are twenty-one floors of air between me and the concrete pavement below. I am about to do what I do best.

I am about to jump.

My stuntmen tell me that the fall is safe—^well, not safe, but maybe a litde less than deadly. Of course, they've only tried the jump from the sixteenth floor . . . and, as I watched the test footage late last night, alone in our production offices, I realized that a sixteen-floor fall was too predictable.

Too . . . possible.

After all, my producer has been bragging to reporters that this will be the world's most dangerous stunt. And who would I be if I didn't live up to my press?

Not Jackie Chan.

So, against the advice of my director and my costars and the executives at the studio, I have decided to add five stories to the stunt.

That's sixty more feet of very thin air through which my forty-five-year-old body will be sliding.

A few more seconds of excitement for the cameras.

A few more screams from an audience starving for adrenaline.

The formula is simple: The more terrified my friends and family are, the more satisfied my fans will be. And they mean everything to me. They come to the theaters hungry for a hero, for someone who can laugh at disaster, who can make funny faces at death. Someone who can show them for real that the only thing to fear is fear itself.

But whoever said that never stood on a roof in Rotterdam. He never looked down over the edge of a skyscraper to see a foam target 250 feet below. From here, the mattress looks like a postage stamp. When I hold out both hands in front of my face, I can just about cover it entirely.

Sorry to contradict you, Mr. Whoever, but the only things to fear are fear itself, and hitting the ground at one hundred miles per hour with nothing between you and the emergency room but a few inches of foam rubber.

I'm tired.

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My heart feels like a rock in my chest.

My body screams at me about the abuse I've put it through over the last four decades. Parts of me I can't even pronounce are complaining about how badly I've treated them. And despite the mob of extras milling around the base of the building—hundreds of Dutch marines and firefighters and police, looking nervously up at the sky—I think to myself: Is this jump really necessary?

But the answer is there as soon as I ask the question: Yes.

Because this jump is special.

It isn't just for the fans and the critics and the box office charts.

This one is for the man who made it possible for me to stand here today, aching and shivering in the spodight.

This is for my master, Yu Jim-yuen, who was buried a week ago in Los Angeles.

My trip from Holland to California for the funeral brought production to a grinding stop, costing Golden Harvest nearly a quarter of a million dollars. They knew better than to tell me not to go, even if for them every wasted dollar is like a drop of spilled blood.

/ remember a frightened seven-year-old walking into the dark and musty halls of the China Drama Academy, holding his father's hand. Inside, he sees young boys and girls leaping and tumbling and screaming. Paradise —

"How long do you want to stay here, Jackie?"

"Forever!" answers the boy, his eyes bright and wide. And he lets go of his father to clutch at the hem of his master's robe. . . .

For the next ten years, I sweated and cried and bled under Master's hands. I cursed his name when I went to sleep at night, and I swallowed my fear and hatred of him when I woke in the morning. He asked for everything we had, and we gave it to him, under pain of injury, or even death.

But when we came of age, we realized he'd given it all back. With interest.

It was Master Yu Jim-yuen who created Jackie Chan, and I do what I do today—/ am what I am today —because of him. And so this leap is in his memory, a final act of gratitude. A last gesture of defiance.

Someone slaps me on the back, asks me if I'm ready. I nod, barely understanding. Another voice calls for quiet on the set, and suddenly the only sound is the wind and the blood rushing in my ears and my heart beginning to pound like a giant drum.

"Camera!"

"Rolling!"

"Action!"

And I suck in my churning stomach. Launch myself into the sky.

I fly.

I remember. . . .

THE YOUNG MASTER

was born on April 7, 1954, the only son of Charies and Lee-lee Chan. They named me Chan Kong-sang, which means "Born in Hong Kong" Chan.

I guess my parents weren't very original when it came to names. Or maybe they just wanted to celebrate their relief at making it to Hong Kong, as survivors of a breathless escape from the turmoil of the mainland. Hong Kong was the promised land, a place that offered safety and prosperity. A place where new lives could begin.

By the Chinese calendar, 1954 was the Year of the Horse.

According to superstition, the Horse is a sign of energy, ambition, and success. It's a good year to be born in if you're a boy—not such a good one if you're a girl, because tradition says that a female Horse will have trouble finding a proper husband—and my parents were happy that I came into the world under such a fortunate sign. Of course, my arrival in the Year of the Horse was hardly a coincidence; actually, it took an awful lot of stubbornness on my part to pull it off! Most babies are born nine months after being conceived. I, on the other hand, stuck around an extra three months, until my mother was forced to go to a surgeon to bring me into the world, kicking and screaming, by caesarean section.

Maybe it was my rebellious streak that made me refuse to join my parents on time, or maybe it was a premonition of what my future would hold. After all, while comfortably inside my mother, I had privacy, sleep, and all the food I could ever ask for, without having to fight or work or suffer. In

fact, I can honestiy say that those three extra months were the easiest time of my life.

Nothing like that waited for me in the world outside. Hong Kong in the '50s was a hard and resdess place, and my family's position there was at the very bottom of the social ladder, among the thousands of destitute migrants who'd fled to the British colony after the mainland's Communist Revolution. Still, as poor as we were, we felt lucky to have survived China's civil war, and especially grateful that my parents had good jobs in the strange new societ)' of the island. Many of our fellow refugees had arrived in Hong Kong with nothing but the clothes on their back and the memories of what they'd left behind. They lived in shacks in the island's

crowded ghettos, making paper flowers and cheap trinkets to survive, or turning to less socially accepted—and more dangerous—pursuits.

It was a bad time to be poor. (But then again, when is it ever a good time to be poor?) As the crowds of new immigrants grew, the colony's swelling population di\ided itself into two groups: the determined and the desperate. On the one hand, there were those who embraced the city's unspoken philosophy: Work hard and you'll survive, do well, maybe even get rich. But meanwhile, in the lower parts of the city, the lives of many of our fellow newcomers were filled with hunger, crime, and fear.

We belonged to the first group—the lucky ones. Soon after coming to the island, my father and mother had found employment with the French ambassador to Hong Kong, a kind gendeman with a warm and caring family. Dad became the ambassador's cook and handyman; my mother was the housekeeper. And so, when I was born, I found myself not on the tough streets of lower Hong Kong, but in a mansion on the exclusive slopes of Victoria Peak—the home of the wealthy, the famous, the powerful. And me.

I don't recall the house itself too well.

It was big, I remember, and very grand. In the front rooms, well-dressed Westerners (and sometimes Chinese) would chat and take tea or listen to