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Swagger

By

ERIC COBLE

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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“Originally commissioned and produced by Palm Beach Dramaworks.”

Swagger was produced by Palm Beach Dramaworks (William Hayes, Producing Artistic Director) in September 2018.

CAST:

JordanStephan Pineda
Leela..... Ariana Lobo
Daniel.....Robert Richards, Jr.

PRODUCTION:

Director Gary Cadwallader
Scenic Design.....Michael Amico
Costume Design..... Leslye Menhouse
Sound DesignBrad Pawlak

Swagger

CHARACTERS

JORDAN: A kid on the edge of becoming, 15.

LEELA: A woman on the edge of success, 30s.

DANIEL: A man on the edge of confidence, 30s.

PLACE: In and around Leela's shop.

TIME: Now.

PRODUCTION NOTES

All roles can be played by actors of any ethnicity or gender (with minor dialogue changes). Set and props are to be suggested and kept to a minimum for maximum flow between scenes. Update technology references as needed to keep the play current.

Swagger

AT RISE: *JORDAN, LEELA and DANIEL stand facing the audience in simple T-shirts and jeans. We can't tell anything about their personalities or professions by their clothing.*

JORDAN, LEELA & DANIEL (*to the audience*). So you must have seen the video.

LEELA (*to the audience*). If you can even call it a video.

DANIEL (*to the audience*). It's so jerky—and all the shadows.

JORDAN (*to the audience*). You can see the movement—the arms raising—the bodies—

LEELA. You can tell there's violence, the figures are clearly attacking.

DANIEL. You can't tell who's attacking who.

JORDAN. I've only seen it twice.

DANIEL. I must have watched it, like, twenty times.

LEELA. There were—there was a few weeks there where I couldn't stop watching it.

DANIEL. You can't tell what's really happening.

JORDAN. It's pretty blurry. And loud. And I just—I've only seen it twice.

LEELA. What you can see is the blood. The blood all over the ground is clear.

DANIEL. The blood at the end. And the body. That's what everyone remembers.

LEELA. That's what they keep showing on TV. With a warning about “viewers should be warned of disturbing images.”

JORDAN. And just to say it again, I don't know the girl who recorded it.

DANIEL. What are the chances, right, the girl with the phone just happened to be walking by—

LEELA. I don't know the girl with the phone. Never seen her before.

DANIEL. Just happened to be on her phone and recorded the whole thing.

LEELA. It's almost funny—one minute you're nobody and the next people are outside your house screaming and carrying signs and laying flowers—

DANIEL. And everyone thinks they know what happened.

JORDAN. Now everyone's talking all the time, on TV, on the street, they're all sure they know just how it went down.

DANIEL. You know, I wish she'd actually shot the video better—so you really could tell how it went down.

JORDAN, LEELA & DANIEL. 'Cause what you've seen? That's not the truth.

(Pause. They all stand there watching the audience ...

They collect themselves. Music?)

JORDAN *(pulling on a light jacket and sneakers, a backpack, getting ready for school)*. I've seen blood before—serious blood—back in sixth grade, at the zoo when they were feeding the tigers raw meat, and their lips and paws were just red. I was there with Tyler and Z; and Z was all like—*(Does a voice.)* “I'll give you a dollar if you hop in the cage with them for a minute”

And I'm like—“A dollar? Man, you gotta right-size your dare ratio, man.”

And he's like—"OK, a thousand dollars."

And I'm like—"See, now you gotta take your reality pills, 'cause I know you don't have a thousand dollars."

DANIEL (*pulling on a police shirt and equipment*). It's not the paycheck, man, what I like about my job is the balance between the routine and the weird. Most of my day is just walking or driving, talking to my partner and keeping an eye out. Talking to a guy about someone broke into his car last night, talking to a lady about the neighbors playing their drums too loud at midnight, just kind of regular—I don't wanta say "ho-hum," but regular stuff.

And then you get the call.

"There's an alligator in my kitchen—should I hit it with a broom?"

And then it's like, "HELLO! This is why I wear the badge!" My mom and dad and aunts and uncles, they got jobs in bakeries and offices and construction, and I'm like, "I bet you didn't have to face off with an alligator this morning!"

LEELA (*pulling on a nice, not expensive, stylish jacket and skirt and bracelets*). I've always had two things since I was little: A sense of style and sense for business.

I was two and my mom put me in this one dress with a belt and matching shoes, and I said, "NO."

I looked at my sister's clothes in the closet, she was one year older, I said, (*Pointing.*) "That belt, those shoes, that dress."

And I looked fabulous.

That, and when I was four I figured out I could do my brother's and sister's chores quicker than them and get them to pay me part of their allowance. So by the time I was five, I was the richest, sharpest-dressed kid in kindergarten.

(She snaps her fingers.)

JORDAN *(pulls on sneakers)*. One thing I have learned from Z and Tyler and some other kids is: it matters how you carry yourself. You want people to think you belong in this world, you gotta act like you belong in this world. And I don't mean be all ... *(Does a hyper-exaggerated cocky walk.)* Right? But you gotta present. You gotta walk in like, "I belong here." Even when you're not sure you do.

DANIEL *(puts on his badge)*. I think about it sometimes, you know? How people look at me when I'm wearing street clothes—jeans, shirt, whatever, and they don't know what I do—and then those same people look at me when I'm in uniform—I go into the hardware store close to my house, I buy some pieces for my bathroom sink, I'm in a sweatshirt and shorts—they just treat me like some regular schmo, and that's cool. I come in there on the way home from work, still in uniform, they all perk up and pay attention—they're trying to act casual, but it's different, they're watching me and themselves a little closer—all because of my clothes! *(Touches his chest.)* In here I feel exactly the same, but out there, I'm a whole new person.

JORDAN. There are times—I'm never gonna say this to Tyler or Z, but times when I get, like, shy. Like super self-conscious. Like meeting new people, 'specially adults who wanta have a conversation, like my Uncle Lee, I met him for the first time a year ago and he was all like, *(In Lee's voice.)* "Tell me about yourself, young man. Where do you see yourself in ten years? What's your passion?"

And I'm like, man, I just met you, I'm not talking about my passion.

So I just get all quiet. But then sometimes I feel dumb just

sittin' there all quiet, but then that makes me not want to talk even more, and then I feel dumber and ... Those are not my favorite times.

LEELA (*finishes getting dressed*). It matters, you know, not what style you have, but that you have a style, that you feel good going out in the world, looking however you look. Whether it's a T-shirt and shorts or a tuxedo, you wanta feel like you belong at the party, right? The party of life.

JORDAN. So some time back, maybe in seventh grade or something, I figured out even if I'm not feeling out-there, like confident, I can look like I know what I'm doing. I can let my clothes do some of the work for me, you know? So I started trying to figure out what I wanted my clothes to be saying when I wasn't talking ...

LEELA. When I figured out that was my gift—to make other people feel good on the outside and the inside—and that I could make some money doing it ... I knew a clothing store was where I was meant to be. My own clothing store—

DANIEL. Part of why I started thinking about clothes and what they say was because a new little store opened up on my beat—this store was this cool mix of the humdrum routine and the weird—

JORDAN. And a few months ago this new store opened up about a block from my school—

DANIEL. It kind of changed everything—

JORDAN, LEELA & DANIEL. Leela's Swagger.

(LEELA turns to face DANIEL in his uniform as he steps toward her. They are now in her store.

She folds and preps clothes putting them on shelves.)

LEELA. Hey, welcome to the Swagger!

DANIEL. Thanks.

LEELA. Looking to spice up your uniform? Or for off-duty?

DANIEL. No. Thank you. I just. This is on my beat. Wanted to stop in and say hello.

(Beat. LEELA watches him.)

LEELA *(holds out her hand)*. Well. I'm Leela. This is my store.

DANIEL *(shakes her hand)*. Officer Ford. Or Daniel. Yeah.

(Pause.)

DANIEL *(cont'd)*. It's a nice store.

LEELA. I'm still settling in.

DANIEL. Used to be a pizza place.

LEELA. I know. We had to redo the kitchen in back, add shelf space.

DANIEL. It looks good.

LEELA. Thank you.

DANIEL. You can hardly smell the pepperoni anymore at all.

LEELA *(grins)*. Yeah, that was gonna be our slogan.

DANIEL. Seriously?

LEELA. No.

DANIEL. Right, no, of course.

(Pause. They wait. Awkward.)

LEELA. Anytime you want a whiff of pepperoni, you come on in.

DANIEL. It doesn't really smell like pepperoni.

LEELA. It's OK.

DANIEL. I was just—

LEELA. It's cool. It's funny.

(DANIEL nods, uncomfortable. Gestures that he has to go. Nods. Hesitates. Leaves.)

And in walks JORDAN from the other direction, nervously looking around.)

LEELA *(cont'd)*. Hey, welcome to Swagger. “Style so sweet it'll make you stagger!” ... Which are words that will never ever come out of my mouth again.

(JORDAN grins. Slowly starts looking around.)

LEELA *(cont'd)*. Mens' stuff over here, women's stuff over there.

(JORDAN nods.)

LEELA *(cont'd, holds out her hand)*. I'm Leela.

(JORDAN shakes her hand, barely making eye contact.)

LEELA *(cont'd)*. You go to school over there?

(JORDAN nods.)

LEELA *(cont'd)*. Tell your friends if they want to look sharp to drop in after class.

(JORDAN nods.)

LEELA *(cont'd)*. They teach public speaking over in that school?

(JORDAN shakes his head no.)

LEELA *(cont'd)*. You're just quiet. Like my youngest daughter.

(JORDAN shrugs. Nods.)

LEELA *(cont'd)*. Well, let me know if I can help you with anything.

(JORDAN steps away.

They all face the audience.)

ALL *(to the audience)*. I swear I had no idea what would happen.

LEELA *(to the audience)*. See, here's the thing: when I was little we moved around. A lot. Like so much that when I started at this one school—maybe fourth grade, I was like— *(Crosses arms, pouts.)* “I am not even gonna learn anyone's names, 'cause I know I'm gonna move in a few weeks and what's the point? I'm not even gonna learn where the bathrooms are.”

And of course that's where we stayed for two years and I made my best friends, and I knew those bathrooms very well. And mostly it was a money thing for my mom and dad, but there were a bunch of reasons we just kept packin' up and next apartment, next apartment—so when my girls were born, I said, “Uh-uh. We're puttin' down roots and we're staying.” Except my landlord raised the rent and we had to move. And that's when I knew—I knew—we had to have our own house. And the way to save up enough for that was for me to run my own business, and I went to the bank and I got the loans and I signed the papers and ordered the clothes and redid the old pizza store and this shop is

mine. And me and my girls are still livin' in an apartment. But I worked it out—two more years running the Swagger and I'll have enough saved up for a down payment on a decent place in a decent part of town. All I gotta do is keep my store running.

DANIEL (*to the audience*). All I gotta do is keep this neighborhood running. But there's been more robberies lately, so we gotta keep a closer eye—we're thinking it's a gang of kids stealing stuff—and I'm not having that on my watch. But every day when school lets out, there's just this flood of kids all pouring out—and most of 'em are great kids, but there's just so many—and I feel like I gotta keep an eye on them all, memorize every face and name I can—it gets a little tense sometimes, you know? But I like walking the beat, going shop to shop, talking to people. My partner, Patrice, she likes the car—cruising around on patrol. Actually what she likes is, I gotta say this, is when we get a 10-33—an emergency call, a robbery or someone in a fight—and she's driving, and she gets to crank up the siren and floor it. She's a good driver, but when I'm in the passenger seat—I got this inner ear thing I think, like high speeds make me want to throw up?

So she's like, (*Does her voice.*) “WHOOOO! Gonna get a bad guy!!”

And I'm like, (*Nauseous, white knuckling.*) “Ooooo we don't—we don't have to go this fast—watch it watch it watch it!!”

And Patrice just laughs at me.

JORDAN. Z just laughs at me. He's like, “Why don't you just talk to people, man? You gotta go for what you want, be bold!” And so like this one time, him and Tyler and me, we all went into Swagger after school—

(JORDAN steps over to LEEEA in the store.)

LEEELAA *(to JORDAN, Z and Tyler)*. Gentlemen, how can we make you spectacular today?

(JORDAN looks back, clearly his friends expect him to speak up.)

JORDAN. We're just looking.

LEEELAA. You've come in here before, right?

(JORDAN nods.)

LEEELAA *(cont'd)*. Thanks for bringing your friends.

JORDAN. I like your clothes.

I mean, not your clothes.

I mean, not not your clothes, I like your clothes, the clothes you wear—but not like—

(Turns to his friends.) Shut up.

LEEELAA. You wanted to share The Swagger with your friends.

JORDAN. Yeah. Exactly. Right.

LEEELAA. Feel free to look around.

(JORDAN nods, turns away, mentally kicking himself. LEEELAA turns away.)

JORDAN steps away from the shop.)

JORDAN *(to the audience)*. And when we get outside, Z's like, "I like that place. They got good stuff ... " And he pulls out these new red and black shoelaces—

(As himself.) "Dude. Did you pay for those?"

(As Z.) "Did you see me pay for these?"

(Himself.) “When did you take those??”

(As Z.) “When you were all ‘I like your clothes, not your clothes, these clothes, your clothes.’”

(Himself.) “You can’t just steal stuff from her!”

But he just laughs and keeps walking.

(As Z.) “I told you, you gotta take what you want in this world. The world owes me and I’m gonna collect.”

(Himself.) “But if a cop stops you—”

(As Z.) “Man, my brother’s friend got arrested. He said every cop is ‘Arrest First, Ask Questions Later.’ That’s not gonna happen to me.”

(DANIEL steps into the store as LEEELA turns to face him, she’s a little concerned.)

DANIEL. Hey.

LEEELA. Hey, Officer Pepperoni.

DANIEL. It doesn’t—there’s no smell, I didn’t—

LEEELA. I’m jokin’ you.

DANIEL. How’s it going?

LEEELA. Could be better. I’ve had some little bits of shoplifting, you know, stuff walks out.

DANIEL. Did you report it?

LEEELA. No, it’s been just little stuff.

DANIEL. You gotta report it—you got theft insurance, right?

(LEEELA hesitates ...)

DANIEL *(cont’d)*. Tell me you got insurance on this place.

LEEELA. I got fire insurance, the big stuff—but see I’m trying to save money up pretty fast, so I don’t buy any insurance I don’t have to—