

Swagger Like This

A full-length play

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“Swagger Like This”

Characters

Jonah.....	8 th grade boy.* He has a physical handicap, as well as a speech impediment.** He wants to be a rapper, and will do it.
Mark.....	30-something man. He is Jonah’s father, and tries everything that he can do to make Jonah ‘better’.
Kathy.....	30-something woman. She is Jonah’s mother, and is torn between wanting to protect Jonah, and wanting him to do what he loves.

Scene Breakdown

Act 1	
Scene 01.....	Jonah’s Bedroom. Tuesday evening.
Scene 02.....	The kitchen. Wednesday morning.
Scene 03.....	The kitchen. Wednesday afternoon.
Scene 04.....	Mark’s apartment. Wednesday afternoon.
Act 2	
Scene 05.....	Mark’s apartment. Thursday afternoon
Scene 06.....	The kitchen. Friday afternoon.
Scene 07.....	School’s Gym-natorium. Friday evening.

Setting

The play takes-place in Kathy’s House, Mark’s apartment, and the talent show at Jonah’s school. The house and apartment should be simple settings, but one should be distinct from the other.

Other Notes

Two-Acts.

Jonah raps all words which are in *italics*.

*Jonah is an 8th grader, but he could of course be played by an actor of any-age.

** Jonah has a problem with moving the right side of his body, and a speech impediment (not a stutter, but a problem with pronouncing letters ‘correctly’). The name of ‘MARK’ is chosen with the intention of making a soft ‘r’ sound, (making ‘Mark’ sound like ‘Mahk’) but it is, of course, up to those working on the script.

ACT 2, SCENE 01: LIVING ROOM OF MARK'S APARTMENT

MARK slams-open the door and stalks in, with JONAH following.

MARK

Sit down.

JONAH sits down.

MARK

I can't believe.. Do you know how worried I was? Do you have any idea?

JONAH

I forgot, I'm sorry.

MARK

You didn't come home on the bus, I called the school and they didn't know where you were. I thought you tried walking home, well, I didn't know. We need to know where you are. I'm getting you a cellphone. And you are going to pick it up whenever you see I call. Do you understand me, Jonah?

JONAH

I'm not retarded.

MARK

And when I did find you, you call that *rehearsing*? Is that what your friends do when you sing after school?

JONAH

We were about to cipher.

MARK

I thought you were better than that. I told her about settling down here-

JONAH

No one was hurt.

MARK

Yeah? No one? How about the cats you were shooting at with your guns?

JONAH

One gun, we were sharing.

MARK
Shooting at-

JONAH
A pellet gun!

MARK
They were guns!

JONAH
It didn't hurt it.

MARK
You're calling a cat an 'it'? Why the hell would you even do that?

JONAH
I guess I wasn't raised right.

MARK
Who are you? You're becoming like those kids who stand-outside the supermarket. Will I be getting calls from the police, next? You said you were just doing this to win the competition, this crew thing.

JONAH
I was.

MARK
And you need to shoot cats to win a competition?

JONAH
I need to know how to hold a gun.

MARK
You never need to learn that.

JONAH
Will you let me explain?

MARK
First your language-

JONAH
What language?

MARK

Mother-goose?

JONAH

I told mom that it was an introduction. That's how all crews introduce themselves.

MARK

I told her that it was nothing to be worried about. But your language, shooting guns, what's next? I don't know what to make of this. I don't know how to deal- What's next, Jonah? Shooting it at other people? Trying to sell cigarettes out of your locker? Sneaking out at night? (*JONAH laughs*) I'm serious!

JONAH

I think if I tried to sneak out at night, Mark, you'd hear me. (*Pause*) You're not listening to me. We needed to practice how we held the gun. '75' had one that his dad bought him. Gangsters have to know how to hold their guns. I have my crew. And rapping is rapping about the lifestyle. The lives of gangsters. So we have to live it to be able to rap about it-

MARK

So you're going to sell drugs, next? Call women 'bitches'-

JONAH

Of course not! But we need to do something that gangsters do!

MARK

So you're copying gangsters.

JONAH

We're being gangsters.

MARK

Who do whatever they want.

JONAH

Yeah.

MARK

And what you, as a gangster, want to do, is pretend to be them?

JONAH

Why can't you be happy for me?

MARK

Happy of what? That you have good aim?

JONAH

No-

MARK

I'm so proud of you! I'd offer you a drink, but I'm all out of Hennessy-

JONAH

Mark, I'm the crew's-leader now! Look, this paper says so! I'm their leader!

MARK looks at the paper.

MARK

It's just a school form, it's blank, Jonah.

JONAH

And the leader fills it out, and gives it to the secretary.

MARK

They *voted* on you? Had a general election?

JONAH

You never listen to me! They asked me to fill it out, there's a part that says 'leader', and I'm going to fill my name in! I'm the leader.

MARK

If it's not discussed, Jonah, then-

JONAH

Do you see this hat? Do you see me? Crew members wear this hat, Mark. I ciphared against Sigmund at lunch, he couldn't even start his round, he had to leave the cipher because he was crying. I spit gangster, Mark. But I couldn't just spit real gangster, the leader needs the swagger: and I looked heartless with '75's' gun. Then he told me to fire it. Said I had this choice. I could be the leader, or I could put down the gun. I could be branded the leader, or as nothing. I fired. And I earned my brand. I'm part of my crew. And I am going to spit in front of the entire school, and we're going to win. And I'll lead them there.

MARK

Jonah.

JStor. JONAH

You're not competing. MARK

Excuse me? JONAH

You are not going to leave either your mother or I's house unless you're at school. MARK

You don't tell a gangster what to do! JONAH

MARK takes out his cellphone.

Who are you calling? JONAH

Your mother. MARK

What's she going to do? JONAH

Tell you exactly what I'm telling you. MARK

I have to compete tomorrow. JONAH

You're not. MARK

I have to! That's what I've been doing everything- JONAH

Then you should have made better choices! MARK

You don't need to call her. JONAH

MARK

Really? You'll tell her?

JONAH

No. She's going to be here soon.

MARK

Tonight's my night.

JONAH

I e-mailed her today.

MARK hangs-up.

MARK

You what?

JONAH

She said she'd pick me up here after practice.

MARK

Why does she need you-

JONAH

I asked her.

MARK

What did you say?

JONAH

I don't talk to narc's, Mark.

MARK

What did you *say*?

JONAH

I am competing tomorrow. I'm going to be holding the gun.

MARK

Jonah, you're not competing, or spitting with your crew. I promise you that. You're not going to be taken-advantage of by your crew-

JONAH

They're not taking advantage of me.

MARK

How would you-

JONAH

Because they don't try to guilt me into doing things that I don't want to do-

JONAH runs-over MARKS next line.

MARK

Are you blind, too?

JONAH

-Because they don't listen to me say that all I want to do it be a rapper and tell me to go to science! Because what they want from me, is what I want to give them: and I spit like a camel, Mark, but you don't want to listen.

MARK

When else would you have fired that gun, Jonah? You weren't guilted into that?

There is a knock on the door.

KATHY enters.

MARK

Kathy...

JONAH goes to hug KATHY.

KATHY

Stop.

JONAH

You came.

KATHY

You shot at a cat?

JONAH

It was a pellet-

KATHY

You're grounded- (*overlapping with JONAH*)

JONAH

Mom! (*Overlapping with KATHY*)

KATHY

You're not seeing those thugs and you're not competing tomorrow.

JONAH

No!

KATHY

Excuse me?

JONAH

I am the leader of my crew. I am not going to abandon them.

KATHY

You are going to school tomorrow, and you are coming back on the first bus home. You will do your homework, you will clean your room, and you will help me in the kitchen with dinner. You will do this every day for the next month and I am being generous, generous because I am allowing you to keep your rap posters. But if you are late in coming home from school, your room is forfeit, do you understand me, Jonah?

JONAH

JStor.

KATHY

Jonah, do you understand me?

JONAH

Yes.

KATHY

Are you ready?

JONAH

Yes.

KATHY

Get your bag and wait for me in the car.

MARK

This is my night!

KATHY

I'll be out in a second. Go, Jonah.

MARK

Jonah! Stay!

KATHY

The school called. Said you were frantic, that you didn't know where Jonah was.

MARK

He was at the park, shooting at-

KATHY

I believe you heard my response to that-

MARK

It should have been *our* response-

KATHY

You gave that up today, Mark. I get a call from the school because you lost our son-

MARK

He wasn't lost!

JONAH

I need help with my bag!

KATHY

I get a call from my neighbor, Ruth, who watched a man in a car stop by the park, yell, and grab Jonah.

MARK

He was shooting at cats!

KATHY

If she didn't recognize you, it would have been the police that she called.

MARK

This is *my* night with him!

JONAH
Can we just go?

KATHY
And this morning, I got an e-mail.

MARK
What did he say?

KATHY
So I'm taking him for tonight.

MARK
What did he say?

JONAH
I'm in the room!

KATHY
And, though this is against my better judgement, you can pick him up and drive him into school tomorrow morning.

JONAH exits.

MARK
Kathy-

KATHY
You still don't understand? Alright. Scientific method. A hypothesis, Mark: This competition was his dream, and dreams are *never* wrong, no matter how much you think he owes you. Experiment: He's not competing tomorrow, so the memory that he is going to have is you telling him that he shouldn't do it every step of the way.

MARK
Don't be a bitch-

KATHY
You're the scientist, Mark. Does this experiment prove you're a good father?

END OF SCENE