

SWAGGERBACK: PHOENIX - PART I

A One-Act Play by C.M. Lozano

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Running Time: Approx. 20–25 minutes

Recommended For: High School | College Theatre | Community Theatre | Professional Theatre

Cast Size: 2–4 featured roles, expandable with student extras

Jack, a middle-aged man rebuilding his life after a painful divorce, decides to attend college for the first time. Struggling with loneliness, regret, and the crushing fear of starting over, he finds an unlikely companion in **ChadGPT**, an overly polite, British-accented AI butler who guides him through small but meaningful steps toward renewal.

Orientation, exhaustion, tiny acts of courage...Jack ‘tip toes’ towards his own rebirth.

Part I of the *Swaggerback Phoenix* cycle, this one-act is a quiet, humorous, and deeply human portrait of a man rising from the ashes one small choice at a time.

Cast

- **JACK** – late 30s–early 60s. Exhausted, gentle, wounded, sardonic. A man whose life has collapsed, now trying to rebuild piece by piece.
- **ChadGPT** – An AI voice assistant with the personality of an English butler. His voice should be calm, crisp, and politely supportive, with occasional deadpan humor. Warm, formal, overly precise, unintentionally hilarious. [ChadGPT may be performed as a voice, offstage actor, or pre-recorded audio.]
- **STUDENT** and **STUDENT 2**/*student extras for Scenes 4 and 6*

PERFORMANCE & DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Swaggerback: Phoenix - Part I is a quiet, minimalist play.

Its power comes from restraint, space, and attention to small human gestures.

Silence is as important as sound. Pauses are not gaps to be filled, but moments to be trusted. Scenes should be allowed to breathe, without rushing emotional beats or manufacturing momentum.

The setting is intentionally spare: a downsized living space that once held two people and now holds one. Other locations: hallways, classrooms, restrooms, outdoor benches—are representational and may be suggested through lighting, sound, and minimal props. The overall environment should feel transitional, intimate, and slightly cocooned.

The play explores renewal after loss, mid-life courage, and the quiet strangeness of starting over. Transformation here is not dramatic or triumphant; it occurs through small, ordinary choices made when no one is watching.

Jack should not be performed as “broken” or overtly inspirational. He is simply tired and trying. ChadGPT is not traditional comic relief; his humor emerges through politeness, precision, and sincerity rather than *exaggeration or mockery*.

If a moment feels like it is being “performed,” it is likely being overplayed.

Trust stillness. Let the audience lean in.

-C.M.Lozano

Setting

A minimalist, downsized living space, a place that once held two people, now emptied.

Other locations are representational and may be suggested through lighting and minimal props (hallways, classrooms, restrooms, bench areas, campus exterior).

Sound Design

ChadGPT may be heard through a phone speaker, voice-over, or offstage actor.

His tone is crisp, warm, slightly comical, and never mocking; delivered in a polished English accent.

Subtle ambient shifts may mark transitions (weekday hum, campus murmur, quiet evening).

Swaggerback: Phoenix - Part I is available for performance by high schools, colleges, theatre festivals, and independent theatre companies.

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Minimal technical requirements and a small cast make this play ideal for black-box theatres, acting showcases, one-act competitions, or classroom performance units.

SCENE ONE

A downsized living room. A TV dinner on a tray.

JACK sits, shoulders low, watching a streaming menu flicker.

JACK (to self)

I'm tired of this.

He gently pushes the tray away. Retrieves a trash bin. Dumps the half-eaten meal inside.

JACK

Should've just... taken the plate to the trash.

Not the whole trash to the plate.

He sighs. Turns off the TV. Kneels dramatically. A faint sunset glows through the curtains.

End scene.

SCENE TWO

A small bedroom. JACK holds a tie awkwardly, as if it were a foreign creature.

JACK

Which one do people even wear anymore?

God... I don't even know how to tie one.

Hey, Chad...

He taps his phone

CHADGPT (V.O., warm English butler)

Good morning, sir. A pleasure as always.

How may I be of service?

JACK

Chad, how do you tie a tie?

My ex-wife used to do it.

...Every time...

CHADGPT

Of course, sir. A very human predicament.

Is this for your **college orientation** today?

JACK

Yeah. First step.

Trying to look like I belong there, I don't know...

CHADGPT

A noble pursuit, sir.

Let us attempt the Four-in-Hand. It is dignified without unnecessary flamboyance.

They go through the motions. JACK fumbles, retries, finds something that looks like a knot.

CHADGPT

Splendid, Sir. Quite respectable.

Courageously asymmetrical.

JACK

(laughs under his breath)

Yeah... good enough.

He stares at himself in the mirror longer than expected, searching for courage.

End scene.

END OF PREVIEW

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