MISE EN PLACE

by

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Commissioned by Plan-B Theatre for Play at Home

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Characters

JASON  Eight years old.
AMIRA  One year out of high school. A culinary school student.
ERIC   Dad. A customer service representative.
SILVIA  Mom. Administrative assistant at a local university.
JESUS  One of Jason’s classmates.

Time:    Now.
Setting:  A modest home.
JASON sits on the floor with his back against a sofa in the living room. HE’s eating celery with peanut butter on it from the jar, while playing with random toys and found objects. On the floor are two sets of paper clips and old school-style erasers facing each other like opposing armies.

A Sponge Bob figurine (the kind you’d get with a McDonald’s Happy Meal) is on one side, and a Mighty Morphin Blue Power Ranger is on the other side. A network television cooking show plays in a room down the hall. Like many imaginative eight-year-olds, JASON provides dialog for the battlefield combatants.

JASON/SPONGE BOB
You have a lot of friends in fourth grade, but this is America!

JASON/BLUE RANGER
You got lunches and stuff, but we like learning!

JASON/SPONGE BOB
Jesus listen to yourself, that’s crazy talk! Right guys and Sheila?! (He mimics crowd approval).

JASON/BLUE RANGER
I told you, it’s not Jesus, it’s “Hay-zeus!”

JASON/SPONGE BOB
You’re not Jesus, and I don’t speak Mexico!

JASON/BLUE RANGER
It’s Spanish! Bad move Sheila! We fight now! (Mimics crowd approval)

JASON/SPONGE BOB
Jesus is a guy and Mrs. Brown calls you “Isa” during attendance!

JASON/BLUE RANGER
Grandma said Jesus was in labor for us. That’s why Jesus was a girl!

JASON/SPONGE BOB
More crazy talk!

JASON/BLUE RANGER
I have to be home by 3:30!

JASON/SPONGE BOB
Okay, Mom said no guns! Chaaarge! (Mimics the sound of armies charging at each other)
JASON/SPONGE BOB

(Repeatedly banging the Sponge Bob toy against the Blue Ranger) You’re going down!

Pow! Boof! Bam! Uppercut! Aaaah! Take that Jesus!

JASON/BLUE RANGER

Ugh-Ow! Bam-Pow! Judo-chop! Rematch at 5:30! Attack!

Hearing footsteps coming from down the hall, JASON quickly stands up, reaches behind the sofa and finds a baggie. He stuffs a half-eaten piece of celery in his mouth, puts an uneaten piece back in the baggie, and hides it behind the sofa cushion. He sits and tries to quietly chew and swallow the celery and continue playing army.

AMIRA

(Off stage) What an idiot, he ruined the raspberry coulis. (Entering the room) Hey, hold it down! Gosh, now I’ll have to rewind. What are you doing?

JASON

(Lowering HIS head and mumbling) Nothing.

AMIRA

What are you eating?

JASON

(Trying to speak) Nothing!

AMIRA

(Walking over to JASON) Open your mouth. (He doesn’t do it) Open your mouth!

HE opens his mouth, and SHE sees that HE has been eating celery.

AMIRA

Jason, I told you not to eat anything in the fridge on the top shelf!

JASON

Don’t yell at me, I was hungry!

AMIRA notices the jar of peanut butter on the floor.

AMIRA

You used my peanut butter! I told you I was going to practice stir fry cooking!
JASON
Mom told you to practice mindfulness!

AMIRA
I’ll show you mindfulness!

*SHE rushes towards JASON, and HE runs away from HER using the sofa as a barrier! JASON runs around and over the sofa to escape. SILVIA arrives home from work. SHE grabs JASON and stands between HIM and AMIRA.*

SILVIA
What’s going on in here?

AMIRA
I put food aside for school. He ate my celery and double dipped it in the peanut butter!

JASON
I was hungry and I said I was sorry!

SILVIA
You guys know we’re trying to be careful and not waste any food.

JASON
Sorry momma.

AMIRA
Sorry. I was just stressed out.

SILVIA
*(To Amira)* What do you need for your Zoom cooking demonstration?

AMIRA
I want to do stir fry with a peanut sauce, but I don’t have a protein.

JASON
I didn’t know you could use crunchy peanut butter-

AMIRA
Well you should have asked me first, because-

SILVIA
Okay-okay get past that. Dad will be home soon, hopefully he’ll get you a protein.
JASON
Momma, can I go back to playing?
SILVIA
Sure, go ahead. *(He starts to move away)* Wait, give mom a hug first.
*THEY embrace and HE sits on the floor to play.*
SILVIA
What are you playing?
AMIRA
What does he ever play but make believe? He was fighting with Jesus this time.
SILVIA
Be nice to your little brother.
AMIRA
Is it okay if I go to the kitchen *(Looking at Jason)* to make sure nothing else is missing?
SILVIA
Yes, you may. *(To Jason)* What are you playing?
JASON
*(Holding up the Blue Power Ranger)* Jesus thinks she knows what’s good for us and-
SILVIA
She?
JASON
She’s a girl at school. Her grandma told her that Jesus was in labor for people, so Jesus must be a girl.
SILVIA
O-kay.
JASON
Jesus and his army, that’s the yellow and lavender crayons side, wants to learn more.
SILVIA
*(Humoring HIM)* That’s very interesting!
JASON
She said that where she’s from, the poor don’t get the same learning as us. Oh, and we have better lunches.

SILVIA
So why are you fighting with Jesus?

JASON
Because we want a longer recess.

SILVIA
But you like to learn, don’t you?

JASON
Yes, but I like recess better. More recess would be awesome.

ERIC comes home from work and enters the living room.

ERIC
(Offstage) Hi, I’m home!

JASON
Dad!

HE rushes over to give his DAD a hug.

SILVIA
How was your day?

ERIC
My hours aren’t going to be cut further, so it was good, but I wasn’t able to-

AMIRA burst into the room in tears.

AMIRA
Dad, I don’t have everything I need for my demonstration! What did you bring me?

ERIC
The local pantry was a little limited today-

AMIRA
What am I going to do? My demonstration is tomorrow!
ERIC
It’s okay, I got green beans, black beans, spinach-

AMIRA
Did you get a protein?
ERIC
No, but I get paid tomorrow and-
AMIRA
(Fighting back tears) What am I going to do?
SILVIA
Let mom hug you. (They embrace)
JASON runs out of the room to HIS bedroom
ERIC
Where’s he going?
SILVIA
Probably back to his room to play.
AMIRA
He was pretending that Sponge Bob was fighting with a Power Ranger named Jesus.
ERIC
What?
SILVIA
It was about more recess.
ERIC
Should we make an appointment with the school-
SILVIA
He’s okay, he’s just highly imaginative.
JASON returns to the living room with a box.
ERIC
What’s in the box?

JASON
Amira let me have her kitchen toys when she got too big to play with them.

HE dumps the toys on the coffee table and out falls a plastic drum stick, T-bone steak, broccoli, carrots, a ham, a plate of rice, a plate of mixed vegetables, corn on the cob, salt and pepper shakers, two frying pans, two baked potatoes, a bottle of ketchup, a spatula, soup ladle, a knife, fork and a spoon.

AMIRA
Can you please take your toys out of here?

JASON
They’re not for me they’re for you! I thought you could practice for your demonstration.

ERIC leaves the room.

AMIRA
Mom!

SILVIA
Come on, it’ll be fun! We’ll take turns being a chef. You go first.

AMIRA
Seriously?

ERIC returns with a big, white bath towel. HE wraps it around AMIRA’s waist.

AMIRA
Dad, No!

ERIC
It’s a chef ‘s apron!

SILVIA
It’ll be fun Amira, be a good sport. Please?

AMIRA
(Sighing) Okay.

SILVIA
This will be fun! We’ll be your audience.

*THEY all sit on the living room floor.*

AMIRA

*(Sighing)* Today we’re going to make chicken stir fry.

*SILVIA, ERIC and JASON applaud enthusiastically.*

AMIRA

You guys, it’s not a sporting event! *(They quiet down).* First, we’re going to put some *(Grabbing a tiny frying pan and the ketchup)* olive oil in a pan and turn on the stove *(She pretends to pour oil in the pan and turn on an imaginary stove)*. Next, we’re going to use this steak for our protein, *(She picks up the plastic knife and fork and pretend to be cutting)* but we’ll need to trim the fat off the steak. Once that’s done, you’ll need to season the steak with salt, pepper, garlic salt if you have some, and a little cinnamon…

*SILVIA’s cell phone rings and SHE moves to the back of the room to answer it quietly.*

SILVIA

Hello? Oh, hi Mrs. Brown, how are you? Good…Oh, gosh, he’s so forgetful, thank you! Yes, I’ll remind him about the History of France work sheet…Oh, okay, it’s due on Friday. That was so very nice of you to call, yes, we’re hanging in there, thanks for asking. It sounds like Jason has met very interesting little girl at school…Yes, I guess she calls herself Jesus, it’s so cute-What? He said she sits right next him and…

*The doorbell rings.*

ERIC

I’ll get it. Why don’t you stop for minute before you saute.

AMIRA

Whew! Thank you Jesus.

JASON

Maybe it’s Jesus! She said she’d stop by around 5:30!

*ERIC opens the door and there is no one at the door, but there’s a grocery store bag on the ground. HE picks it up and brings it inside.*

JASON

What’s in the bag dad?
ERIC
Well, let’s see. (Taking items out of the bag) Whoa! Flank steak, red wine vinegar, green peppers, scallions, fresh pea pods, sour dough bread, and Captain Crunch cereal?

AMIRA
O.M.G! Who’s it from?

ERIC
There’s isn’t a note or a card. Weird.

JASON
She’s awesome!

ERIC
Who’s awesome?!

JASON
Jesus!

AMIRA
(Amazed) Jesus.

SILVIA
(Continuing HER conversation) Are you sure? I’m sorry, of course you are. Jason has quite the imagination… yes, he is, and we love him. He wants to be a scientist or a writer… yes, I guess we will. Thank you again for calling, we really appreciate it. Bye now.

ERIC
Who was it?

SILVIA
Jason’s teacher, Mrs. Brown.

ERIC
What did she want?

SILVIA
Jason left his notebook at school. Who was at the door?
ERIC
We don’t know, but whoever it was left food that Amira can use for her demonstration. Weird huh?

JASON
I’ll bet it was Jesus.

SILVIA
Yeah, it probably was.

END OF PLAY