

The imaginary banquet

Once upon a time, there was a boy whose parents were the richest people in the city. His name was Hassan and he had every toy you can imagine and more.

The palace where he lived was like a toy museum, with thousands of different toys! But Hassan had a big problem, one that couldn't be solved by all the gold in the world: he was so lonely at home that he was bored to tears. He never had anyone to play with and he was tired of always being the one who won the games. Then one day, there was a knock at the door.

Who could it be? It couldn't be his parents; they were working, and besides, they had keys. Hassan opened the door and there stood a poorly-clad, starving boy.

"Hi, my name's Shacabac and my stomach's been empty for days."

"Then this is your lucky day because I was just about to sit down to lunch. Come in, come in, we'll have a great time!" exclaimed Hassan, who was thrilled to have someone to talk to.

Then he had a great idea; they could play the game, "The Imaginary Banquet".

Hassan and Shacabac made themselves comfortable at the dining room table. And while Shacabac's mouth started watering at the thought of food, Hassan rubbed his hands together in glee at the thought of the fun he'd have that afternoon.

"Bring out the first course!" ordered Hassan

Shacabac waited patiently, but his stomach growled loudly when he saw that the first course was nowhere in sight.

"Aren't you eating, Shacabac? This couscous and vegetables with a spicy sauce made from chicken broth tastes awful when it's cold!"

Shacabac didn't know what to think. He was dying of hunger and the rich kid was offering him nothing but a make-believe dish. But he decided to play along and pretended to eat the couscous.

"Bravo! And now for the second course!"

Shacabac waited anxiously hoping that this time the dish would be real. But how disappointed he was when he saw see that the chicken with curry and potatoes roasted with bay leaves and lots of tasty, aromatic herbs that Hassan had ordered was also invisible! Hassan, happier than ever, insisted that Shacabac finish every last morsel on his plate. And with each imaginary plate offered by the rich boy, the poor boy's empty stomach hurt more and more.

Shacabac refused dessert. He'd had quite enough of the fun and games! He had to find a way to end his suffering. He'd either put an end to the game or hunger would put an end to him.

"It's not that I don't want your chocolate, Hassan, but chocolate makes me very nervous!"

But Hassan was stubborn as a mule. So Shacabac made believe he was eating a piece of imaginary chocolate and...

Suddenly, he went into a terribly frenzy! His arms and legs started flailing about uncontrollably, finally knocking the most beautiful vase in the dining room to the floor.

"Hey, why have you broken the vase? Have you gone crazy?" shouted Hassan, in wide-eyed disbelief!

"I warned you," said Shacabac, playing his last card, "chocolate makes me very nervous!"

But Hassan, far from getting angry, burst out laughing. Not on account of the broken vase, but because until that day he had thought he'd never find anyone who would play along as far as Shacabac. Not only had he pretended to eat the make-believe dishes, but he even pretended that imaginary chocolate made him very nervous. In short, a magnificent performance! Hassan had lost a vase and was sure to get a sound scolding from his parents, but he had found the best playmate in the whole city.

"Thank you, Shacabac! I've spent the best afternoon of my life. As a token of my gratitude, I promise you that now we really will have a good meal!"

And that was the start of a solid friendship between Hassan, the richest and most bored boy in the city, and Shabacac, a poor boy who was a whiz at checkmating hunger.

Script: Dan Kirchner

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