

It Ain't So Awful, Falafel

By Firoozeh Dumas

I was born in Abadan, Iran. When I was in second grade, we moved to Compton, California. We stayed two years. For fourth grade, we moved back to Iran. Fifth grade, back to Compton. Now we're moving to Newport Beach, there's no graffiti on the walls or overturned shopping carts on the sides of freeways. You don't see any stores with broken windows. There are trees everywhere and the city looks like it has just come back from a visit to a beauty salon.

As we get out of the car, I see an older lady standing in the driveway, and she seems way overdressed for daytime. She reminds me of Mrs. Thurston Howell III on *Gilligan's Island*. My mother introduces herself as my dad tries to unload the vacuum cleaner, which by now is sticking so far out the window that it almost hit the tree next to the driveway when we pulled in.

"I am Nastaran Yousefzadeh," she says, making the whole sentence sound like one word. "Dees eez Zomorod Yousefzadeh," she adds, pointing to me.

I smile. I can tell the lady's getting nervous. She has no idea what my mother just said. She has this strained expression, like she's trying to smile but only half her face is cooperating. My father, holding the vacuum cleaner, joins us, and the lady finally says, "I'm Mrs. Mavis, your landlady. Hello, Mr. You- You-Yous . . ." Her voice trails off, which is fine, since we never expect anyone to get past the first syllable of our last name. Two points for trying, Lady Mavis.

Then she gives him a key and shouts, "DO NOT LOSE THIS POOL KEY!" She pauses, looks at each of us, and continues, "If you do, you

must pay fifty dollars, that's FIFTY DOLLARS, for a replacement." Then, for reasons I cannot understand, she repeats herself, but this time, loudly and slowly, "DO. NOT. LOSE. THIS. POOL. KEY."

I so badly want to ask her, "ARE. WE. ALLOWED. TO. LOSE. THIS. POOL. KEY?" but I don't. My mom stands there smiling like a statue. My dad, still clutching the vacuum cleaner, keeps nodding his head and repeating, "Yes, yes." He does this when he's nervous, which is often. I just roll my eyes and walk through our new front door.

Our home is a "condo" short for *condominium*. I figure this out when the landlady gives us a binder, *Rules for Condominium Living*, which we also have to return when we move out. Apparently there is no fine for losing the binder.

"Zomorod," my dad says to me, "read this and tell your mom what it says." My mom hasn't learned much English. I always encourage her to try, but she says, "*Az man gozashteh.*"

It's too late for me.

That's the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard, and I tell her so. This always makes her mad. She says I should be a nicer daughter. But I am a nice daughter! I just don't want to be her translator for the rest of my life.