

**TWELVE-YEAR-OLD SHAI HATES EVERYTHING** about moving to America from Israel. She's determined to come up with a plan that will get her back home. Maybe she can go back with her grandparents when they come to visit. Or maybe she can win the drawing competition that's offering a plane ticket to any destination in the world as the grand prize. Meanwhile, though, she's stuck in seventh grade at an American school, where she has to communicate in English and get used to American ways of doing things. Worst of all, she faces antisemitism up close for the first time.

But she also finds support and friendship where she least expected it and starts to see her new life with different eyes. Maybe home doesn't have to be the place she's always lived. Maybe home is a place in the heart.



# NOT SO SHY



**NOA NIMRODI**

**KAR-BEN**  
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I dedicate this book to all those who  
call more than one place home.

And in memory of Rachel Nimrodi,  
my mother-in-law and second mom,  
who always focused on the good.  
You are in my heart forever.

## CHAPTER 1

# NOSES, DISASTERS, AND SNICKERDOODLES

Ema bangs another nail into the wall with her pink sparkly hammer. She's excited that it's easier to hang things here since the houses are made of wood, not bricks. Both my parents think everything is easier here in America.

*Bam!*

I can't stand the pounding and the echoing through the half-empty house, and I can't stand the ceramic heart she just put up that says, "Home is where the heart is." My heart is twelve thousand kilometers away.

I wish she would cool it down with that hammer—I can't concentrate. I need to concentrate. Planning how to kill your father's boss is a serious matter.

I grab my sketchbook, stomping my feet hard as I walk past Ema so she'll know I'm annoyed with her banging. But the ugly beige carpet swallows the sound effect and ruins the drama.

I sit in the backyard on one of the new lounge chairs. Why is the grass fake? Green is a hard color to imitate. The weather feels fake too, like somehow an

air conditioner has been installed in the sky. How can it be so cool in August?

I browse through my sketchbook—it's mostly butterflies. Butterflies are my specialty. My favorite thing about them is that they don't have noses. I mean, I'm pretty good at drawing almost anything, except noses.

I've researched possible natural disasters in San Diego. Earthquakes. Fires. Tsunamis. I draw Abba's boss buried under rubble. Next, I draw him caught up in flames. Good job avoiding the nose. He doesn't deserve to have a nose anyway. It's all his fault that we're here now.

Motek runs outside and jumps into the swimming pool. A week ago, when we left Israel, he was taken in a big cage, the Lab half of him crying, the Dalmatian half barking like crazy. He knew even less than we did about where we were headed. Now he thinks he's a dolphin. I watch him swimming laps.

What's the use of having a pool at home if you don't have friends to invite over? Making friends was never a problem for me, but what if nobody understands my accent here? Maybe I won't talk. But how do you make friends without talking?

Motek climbs up next to me and shakes off the water from the pool, causing the orange flames on my drawing to spread. I'm such a horrible person. Abba's boss must have children who love him as much as we loved

Abba before he made us move here. Why did he have to hire Abba? Couldn't he find some molecular biologist in America to develop non-browning avocados?

I go over the fire flames with a blue marker, turning them into butterfly wings. Motek shakes off next to me again. Now the blue butterflies are smeared all over the page.

“Die, Motek!” I yell.

“Ahemmm . . .”

I turn around. A girl about my age is standing next to our fence. Silky skin, long black hair almost as long as mine but perfectly straight. She's dressed as if she's just gotten off the stage of some quirky musical. Striped colorful socks pulled up to her knees, red skirt with white polka dots. Kind of cool, but not the type of cool that *cool* kids would consider cool. She's holding a plate of cookies in her hands. Her purple bra strap is showing. Of course, she's wearing a bra, like most girls my age. It's just me that's flat as pita bread.

“Hi,” she says, adjusting her bra strap. Oops. I guess I was staring.

Motek barks at her. I should open the gate and let her in, but I'm afraid Motek will run out and never come back. I wouldn't blame him.

“Die, Motek!” I yell again.

The striped-socks girl stares hard at me. “You're telling your dog to die?”

“Oh—no.” I feel my face growing redder than her skirt. “*Die* means ‘enough’ in Hebrew.”

“Oh.” A smile spreads across her face. “A Hebrew-speaking dog. That's awesome. You all just moved here, right? I'm Kay-Lee.”

“I'm Shai,” I answer, aware right away that it sounds like I'm saying that I'm shy.

“It's okay, I'm used to shy people. My sister is also shy. What's your name?”

“Shai is my name. And I'm not actually shy.” This is going to be tough. My name has the wrong meaning here, and on top of that, I realized at the airport that the right spelling is causing the wrong pronunciation—the guy checking our passports called me Shay, so I'm guessing I'll have to correct every teacher at roll call.

“Oh, sorry. Cool name.”

“Thanks,” I say, hoping my *th* sounds okay. Sticking your tongue between your teeth is not a sound that exists in Hebrew.

“Is it short for Shyleen?” Kay-Lee asks.

“No.” Ugh. “It's not short for anything.”

She pulls the cookie plate closer to her body and shifts her weight from one foot to the other. I've made her uncomfortable, and it makes me uncomfortable too. I was never like that in Israel, not even with people I'd just met. I hold on to Motek's collar and open the gate for Kay-Lee.

“Shai means *gift* in Hebrew,” I say. I better get used to having to explain my name. I don’t tell her the story of being born on Rosh Hashanah and how my parents decided that I was their gift for the new year. I’m afraid I’ll mess up the whole story in English. Too bad you can’t cover up accents with butterflies.

“My sister and I made some snickerdoodles for you and your family,” Kay-Lee says.

Did she call the cookies sneaker-poodles? English is weird.

She points up to the window of their house. “That’s my sister, Zoe.”

I look up. Kay-Lee’s little sister looks like Dora the Explorer. Gili is going to love this girl. I wave to her. She half smiles and backs up a little. But I can see she’s still there, looking at me.

Motek is barking at Kay-Lee. She’s holding tight to the cookie plate.

“Why is Motek barking like that?” Ema comes outside, followed by Gili. That’s when she notices Kay-Lee.

“Welcome to the neighborhood,” Kay-Lee says to my mom, handing her the cookie plate. “My sister and I baked these cookies for you. They’re gluten free and non-GMO.”

Gili and I look at each other. My English is better than hers, but I don’t understand any more than

she does what Kay-Lee just said about those poodle cookies.

“Tank you,” Ema says. Oh gosh, her accent is worse than mine.

Kay-Lee introduces herself.

“I’m Gili!” my sister volunteers.

“Hi, Gill-ee,” says Kay-Lee, echoing the hard G.

“I would love to meet your parents,” Ema says.

Kay-Lee’s smile shrinks. Her mouth is now as tiny as the polka dots on her skirt. “It’s just me and Zoe and my dad now,” she says. “And my grandma.” She bends down and pulls her socks above the knees. Her polka dot mouth opens just a little and closes, like she can’t decide what to say next. “Well, I have to go now,” she finally says, straightening her skirt. “See you.”

“Thanks. For. OMG-cookies,” Gili yells after her. She almost sounds American already.

“You’re welcome.” Kay-Lee turns around and laughs, like the whole embarrassing no-mom situation never happened.