

DOGMA

By Nadja Goldberg

CHARACTERS

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| FALAFEL | dog, trying to rise up in the pack |
| HUMMUS | dog, loves food |
| PITA | dog, smart, empathetic |
| BABA GANOUSH | dog, committed to solving family conflict, pack leader |
| AVALON | human, PETRA's older sister, passionate food photographer, seventeen or eighteen |
| PETRA | AVALON's little sister, fourteen or fifteen, moody |

SCENE 1

(Lights up on AVALON and PETRA sitting on opposite ends of a couch with a remote between, a bowl of stew in each of their laps. AVALON is taking pictures of the stew with her phone, experimenting with several angles.)

PETRA

(picks up her spoon and sets it down again)

Dad's stew is gross. Can't believe you're taking pictures of it.

AVALON

Oh my god, I start at the Institute for Food Photography tomorrow!

PETRA

Food photography isn't even a real talent, it's just annoying. Food is for eating.

AVALON

Hey, food photography is a highly skilled artform!

PETRA

(mumbling)

Yeah, so is my ass...

AVALON

(angry)

How can you say that?! I've been pursuing this for years. I reached a thousand followers on my Instagram food account. And I got *two* national awards: Best Salad Lighting and Best Cake Close-Up. And now I got accepted to my dream school, the most prestigious place to study food photography. *(takes a charged breath)* Stop trying to bring me down. I don't care what you have to say.

PETRA

You don't care about me at all. It's all about you and your stupid pictures of lasagna or toast or whatever. *(beat)* I bet you can't wait to get away from me.

(Beat.)

AVALON

You know, you're right. I can't wait to be somewhere where I'll be taken seriously.

(AVALON exits with her stew bowl, irritated. PETRA watches her leave, seeming sad. She remains on the couch, then in a fit of frustration takes the stew bowl and leaves. Enter dogs.)

HUMMUS

(sniffing the couch)

Falafel! Pita! Baba Ganoush! They spilled a drop of stew! Mmmm... (sniff sniff) beef, (sniff sniff) potatoes, and... mac n cheese?

(HUMMUS jumps up on couch and licks it)

PITA

Hummus, now's not the time.

FALAFEL

(runs to lick some stew)

Speak for yourself, Pita!

(PITA sits in upright dog-posture. BABA, as pack leader, stands or sits taller than the other dogs. FALAFEL and HUMMUS are sitting on couch.)

PITA

Do you guys remember the old days? When Petra and Avalon shouted less? *(beat)* And remember they used to turn the living room into a blanket fort... they called it the *Fuzzy Palace*, and Avalon taught Petra those songs she learned at school...

BABA GANOUSH

Yeah, and they played dress up in the fort with their Halloween costumes. I remember once when they wore dog costumes to look like us.

(PITA smiles.)

FALAFEL

(grouchy)

They never let *me* in the fort because they said I'd chew the blankets.

PITA

Falafel, it's understandable. You were a rowdy little pup.

HUMMUS

(eyes closed, reliving the memory)

Remember when they were such messy eaters? Delicious baby food all over the floor...

(HUMMUS' tongue flops out of his mouth with hunger, imagining the baby food.)

BABA GANOUSH

I wonder why they bicker so much now that they've matured.

PITA

Maybe it's a territorial conflict...

HUMMUS

(perks up)

Speaking of territory! I marked the huge oak tree at the park this morning. Right on top of Rufus's smell.

FALAFEL

Nice one! You show that Rufus!

BABA GANOUSH

Falafel, Hummus, stay focused!

FALAFEL

Why should we listen to you talk about humans... it's all a buncha baloney.

HUMMUS

(quietly to himself)

I love baloney.

BABA GANOUSH

Last time I checked, I was the head dog. If you wanna challenge me, I'll wrestle you right here, right now.

FALAFEL

(jumps down from couch)

You don't stand a chance.

BABA GANOUSH

Oh, really? We'll see about that.

(FALAFEL and BABA GANOUSH assume aggressive four-legged stances, sizing each other up and showing glimpses of their teeth.)

PITA

Stop it you two! We all know Baba Ganoush is the elder here and the strongest dog. He's been the unchallenged alpha since before you even grew into your paws, Falafel.

FALAFEL

(bitterly)

Well, Baba's turning gray. Maybe it's time for a change.

(BABA GANOUSH and FALAFEL exchange bitter glances.)

Baba, you might not be able to tell since you're getting old and blind, but I've been eating all my kibble *plus* sidewalk scraps and I'm getting big. So don't expect me to abide by your every bark and cling to you like some tick.

BABA GANOUSH

You know our number one rule is the pack comes first. With Petra and Avalon fighting, we, too, are becoming divided and weak. If you want a place to live and kibble twice a day, you should stop being such a selfish snot and do your part to keep us together.

*(FALAFEL rolls his eyes angrily. Exit dogs.
PETRA enters and sits on the couch.
AVALON enters.)*

AVALON

You know, this lamp is perfect for my dorm.

PETRA

You can't take that lamp! It belongs here, at home! What am I gonna do without it? Light a candle?!

AVALON

This isn't the Middle Ages, Petra. Other lamps exist.

PETRA

Oh, so you're gonna take everything that's been part of our room for so long and leave me to replace it? You're such a selfish snot.

AVALON

What's your problem, Petra? I'm the one who's gonna be living on my own, I'll be too busy to buy furniture. You have to understand— I'm taking a full load of courses: Renaissance Food Painting, Menu Photography, Table Lay-Out, Evolution of the Human Diet, and— I'm so excited for this one— Dinner Literature, or more commonly known as Dinerature.

PETRA

(upset)

You always do this, Avalon. *(sourly mocking:)* You'll be too busy studying *dinerature* but of course I have nothing better to do with my time than shop for a lamp!

AVALON

You could maybe find a hobby.

PETRA

Are you serious?! That isn't what I need right now! *(beat)* Just go to college and make it rich with your photos of fried eggs.

(PETRA and AVALON sit silently for a moment, filled with grim anger.)

AVALON

Fine. I will.

(Exit AVALON, carrying the lamp. PETRA collapses into her arms on the table and cries. Exit PETRA. Enter BABA GANOUSH and PITA, who sit pensively on the floor, licking their paws or scratching their faces the way dogs do.)

BABA GANOUSH

(breaking the silence)

This is a serious problem. If Avalon leaves to New York and cuts off ties with Petra, it'll sever the entire pack.

PITA

I don't want to live in such a shattered family. But we can't just stop Avalon from going to college.

BABA GANOUSH

Yes, it's true most humans leave their homes come a certain age. But remember, pack members can establish new territory; that's what Avalon is doing. What's crucial is that she values her blood.

PITA

And she can't while she's having snarl matches with her sister. We have to find a way to make them get along again...

BABA GANOUSH

Well, Falafel's off *sleeping*, so we can devise a plan without him as a disruption.

PITA

You know, Falafel just wants to feel important. You can't blame him for being rebellious. *You* had to rebel against Couscous to become leader.

BABA GANOUSH

I respectfully assumed power when Couscous grew too old. How dare you compare Falafel's disgraceful behavior to my courageous leadership?

PITA

(frustrated)

I'm just asking you to understand where Falafel is coming from. Maybe you should include him in this conversation, make him feel like his bark matters. *(curt:)* We should get back to planning. We're trying to restore the relationship between Avalon and Petra.

BABA GANOUSH

Let's think about what bonded them when they were little.

PITA

Well... They used to sing and play dress up and build forts. They're much too old for that now, though.

BABA GANOUSH

Yes, Petra and Avalon's human issues can't be solved with a song or good food. But even though they're older, they're the same people. I mean, Hummus is middle aged and he still believes a giant palace made of burgers and fries exists somewhere...

PITA

That's it, Baba! A palace! We can reconstruct the Fuzzy Palace!

BABA GANOUSH

Hey, that's not a bad idea...

(Enter FALAFEL and HUMMUS. BABA and PITA stand up, surprised at the arrival of the other dogs.)

FALAFEL

What's not a bad idea? I thought we discussed plans as a group.

BABA GANOUSH

(sarcastic)

So now you're interested in the pack?

FALAFEL

It's not right to exclude me... or Hummus. Isn't that right, Hummus?

HUMMUS

Just make sure to bark at me whenever you find any food, especially clam chowder in a sourdough bowl... mmmm...

PITA

We're going to make a blanket fort. To remind Petra and Avalon of the old days.

FALAFEL

Are you serious? This has to be a joke. That was years ago. They won't care.

BABA GANOUSH

(frustrated)

Well, can you think of anything better to do? Huh?

FALAFEL

So now you suddenly give a bark about what I think...

BABA GANOUSH

Falafel, stop it with this attitude of yours. We have a real problem here. Do you have any suggestions or not?

FALAFEL

I don't. It's a waste of our energy to worry about the humans, anyways; it's not our job to clean up their problems.

BABA GANOUSH

That's the thing. Humans can get too caught up in their lives... It can take a dog to remind them of their loyalty to each other.

FALAFEL

Whatever.

PITA

Will you help us?

FALAFEL

(reluctant)

...Yeah, yeah, fine. When are we building this thing?

BABA GANOUSH

As soon as we can; Avalon's already packing her bags. How about tomorrow morning? We'll make it before they wake up.

(Lights out. Exit dogs. Lights up on a stage with at least three fuzzy blankets strewn on top of the couch to resemble a fort. Enter AVALON.)

AVALON

(infuriated)

Petra!

(Enter PETRA, sleepy from having just woken up.)

PETRA

What.

AVALON

I've had it with you. I have *had it* with you. All my stuff to pack was laid out on the floor. Now I have to take this whole thing down.

PETRA

Quit blaming everything on me! I didn't do this.

AVALON

Like hell you didn't do this. For weeks now you've been rude and dissing my new school, something I really care about! Besides, who else knows how to make the Fuzzy Palace? You're such a liar.

PETRA

Yeah, well...

AVALON

Petra, I'm gonna miss my flight! Help me clean this up.

(PETRA sighs, frustrated. She starts to help AVALON move the blankets. Enter PITA and BABA GANOUSH, on a separate side of the stage from the sisters.)

PITA

We have to do something; her flight is today!

BABA GANOUSH

Pita, we tried.

PITA

Doesn't mean we're done! You're the one who always says the pack comes first. You can't just give up; you're our leader.

BABA GANOUSH

I'm sure you've noticed that I don't have the same command as I used to over this pack. Falafel won't listen to me, Hummus cares about nothing but food... We don't have what it takes to keep the pack together.

(PITA and BABA GANOUSH sit in defeated silence, watching PETRA and AVALON fold blankets.)

AVALON

There's a beautiful gallery at the Institute for Food Photography, full of famous shots taken by my *idols!* I hope one day, one of *my* pictures will hang on those walls. Maybe it will be of something fancy and French... or maybe a classic pizza portrait.

PETRA

Can you *shut up* about your stupid college?

AVALON

(stunned)

Petra, why are you being so mean?

(PETRA suddenly realizes the way she's been rude to her sister. She breathes heavily for a long moment, thinking about how AVALON is about to leave, and regretting her behavior.)

PETRA

(distressed and guilty, speaks in a quieter tone)

I- I'm sorry. *(long beat)* I'm so sorry. I-I don't want you to leave. I guess I like having you here. It probably doesn't seem like it... I don't know... I'm not trying to be mean... I just- *(pause, Petra takes a breath)* I miss the old days, you know? I mean, like when we spent hours playing together on the weekends. And then you became a teenager— well, we both did. And you got wrapped up in food photography and... I don't know Avalon. *(beat)* It- it seems like you don't care about me anymore.

AVALON

(surprised)

Petra... you know that's not—

(FALAFEL runs on stage and "bites" the blankets, likely shown by grabbing them with his hands. He tugs on the blankets. AVALON laughs slightly.)

AVALON

(scratches FALAFEL's head and back)

Falafel! C'mon boy you're acting like a puppy. *(PETRA smiles.)* Falafel used to do this all the time when we built the Fuzzy Palace.

PETRA

Yeah... I sorta remember that.

(FALAFEL sits by the other dogs, panting.)

AVALON

Hey, remember when I taught you songs from school?

PETRA

Sometimes they still get stuck in my head.

AVALON

Me too! And remember I always told you to snatch cookies from the kitchen? I did that so that you'd get in trouble with Mom instead of me.

PETRA

Damn, the cat's out of the bag.

(The girls laugh, stop folding blankets, and sit down on the couch.)

PETRA

Things were so simple back then, back when you weren't leaving for college... we just had fun together.

AVALON

I'm sorry.

PETRA

What?

AVALON

I'm sorry for focusing more on taking pictures of food than spending time with my sister. You know, I miss the old days too. *(checks watch)* Oh shoot, I gotta make my flight.

(AVALON stands up. PETRA stands up.)

PETRA

Don't go to New York. Please?

AVALON

I have to go, Petra. You of all people know how much food photography means to me.

HUMMUS

(confused)

What kind of food?

BABA GANOUSH

Sh! We did it, they're reconnecting! *(beat)* You did it, Falafel.

PITA

You were a rowdy pup out there.

BABA GANOUSH

Smart work. You'll make a good alpha someday.

FALAFEL

Yeah, I guess I did it. It's nice, to see them start to get along. It's worth it.

PETRA

I- I'm really gonna miss you...

AVALON

Aw, hey, I'll miss you too!

(PETRA and AVALON embrace. After a moment, AVALON, pressed for time, tries to pull away, but PETRA is hugging her tight. AVALON gives in and hugs her sister.)

AVALON

I'll be sure to visit.

PITA

Did you hear that? She'll *visit!* That's amazing!

BABA GANOUSH

The pack is secure. And it's quite a mighty pack we have. You were right, Pita— I shouldn't have given up. *(puts a paw on FALAFEL's shoulder)* Falafel, I think we owe much of this to you— I'm proud of you, buddy. And Hummus, well *(jokingly stumped)* ... you did good, too.

HUMMUS

Who's hungry?

END.