

The Foreigner

by
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I was born in the United States; this is very important to know, because people have called me a foreigner, but I am not a foreigner. I was born in the United States. When I was two years old, my father, who had custody of me at that time because of my mother's death, did move to another country, which was Saudi Arabia. My father was the secretary to a United States diplomat for many years. I lived as best as I could in their country, and grew up speaking to the people, but I was never very happy. I stayed in Saudi Arabia until I was eighteen years of age, and then returned to the United States on my own, because my father could not bear to leave that country. I believe it was because my mother was dead, and he had loved my mother, and the country of my birth only represented that loss to him. My mother was of Egyptian birth, and so I look much like her which was also a problem. I often asked him why he never had another wife. I was young and I would have accepted his new wife as my mother—but he said it was impossible. I left for the United States, and my father lived on in Saudi Arabia for another five years before he died; his body was returned to America where it was buried next to my mother. I don't remember her at all.

It is not until I speak that people think of me as a foreigner.

It is something I have tried to correct. I think my patterns of speech are influenced by the teachers who taught me English in that country. I think they were not American teachers, and learned English from other people. But my father also made me speak Arabic, and to learn this in school and to speak it to the people in that country. And so this is the way I have learned to speak, and my accent is not American, which brings me sorrow, because for long years I had dreamed of returning to my home country. I do not blame my father for my feelings; he was a good man and was good to me as his son. But the circumstances have made a problem for me, and that is why I am here tonight. I wish to learn correct speech, and to correct my accent so I will appear as a native.

I will say that I do love America, but I have had difficulties since returning from overseas. I have been beaten by a man because he thought I was a foreigner. Please remember, I am not a foreigner, I am an American. But this man did not perceive me to be an American, and laughed at my accent and struck me and told me he did not want

foreigners in his country. He cursed and was obscene when he spoke of foreigners. I told him I was not a foreigner, but this seemed to anger him more, and he struck me several times. I was bleeding. This happened in front of a store, and the storekeeper came out of the store and saw me on the ground and asked me if I wanted for him to call an ambulance. I was crying, and couldn't speak to him. I was ashamed to be crying. I think that he thought I did not want an ambulance, and so he returned to the store, but I could not properly speak because of the crying. I think I may have needed an ambulance, but I walked home and I was perhaps not too badly injured.

And I have had difficulties, too, because people do not care to be with me sometimes because they are afraid of me. Perhaps this will seem odd that a man can be beaten and feared for the same reason, but I think it is true. I think people see me as a terrorist or a religious man with crazy beliefs who will kill them without warning. This is not so. I do not think foreigners often kill people for no reason, no matter the country. I do not think their fears are real. And because I am truly an American, I do not think they should fear me, even though they think me to be a foreigner. I am not a foreigner, I am an American. I would like to speak to women and to children and not have the woman and the children fear me. I would like to speak to people and not fear that they are cursing me in their thoughts or waiting to strike me because of their beliefs.

I cannot also find a good job. I have been told that my language is not proper for many jobs, and that I need to have a job that does not involve my speaking. I tell people that I have been the son of a professional man and that I am as equally capable of speaking as any other man, but they tell me that people do not want to speak with someone who is not like them. They tell me I make people uncomfortable when I speak to them, because I am not like them in their speech. I tell them that I am an American, too, and this should not be a problem for them, but they still do not employ me. So I am also here tonight so that I may correct my speech and find a good job. I have had to save money for this class and I do not have a good job. I have a job with the Port Authority, and I think it is because the people who come to the Port Authority are often foreigners and my patterns of speech do not matter in my job. But I do not want to keep this job.

I have been in the United States now for five years and I have not very much enjoyed my life in the United States. I think it is because people think I am a foreigner because of the patterns of my speech, and now I am hoping this will change and I will also sound like an American. I do not blame my father for living in another country, or my mother for dying, or the people for being afraid. I wish to live as an American and not have any more difficulties. I have known very many people in Saudi Arabia, but I do not wish to go back to that country. I am an American and I wish to live in America. I do not want to say that foreigners are bad and unwanted in the United States. Because I am an American who has been treated like a foreigner I mostly understand the difficulties the foreigners receive from the people who do not understand that they are people, too, and should not be treated badly because they are foreigners.

And so that is why I am here tonight and thank you for letting me give you my introductions to this class and thank the class for listening to my speech. I hope to sound much better to you in many weeks. I would have liked to have grown up in America, as I should have grown had not my father moved to another country when I was two years old. I think that once I sound like an American I will also be considered

an American and my life will be more enjoyable. But it is important to know that I am not a foreigner. I am really an American. I am an American.