

Oh?

An ambulance ran him over while he was trying to cross the street.
Crushed his chest like a cardboard box.

I gasp.

...That's right and here's the real kicker: the son-of-a-bitch didn't even stop to pick him up!

I gasp again:

You know, I say, It's strange — I also had a friend who was run over by an ambulance.

A friend?

Well yeah, a friend.

While crossing the street?

That's right.

What about his chest?

Crushed it like a cardboard box.

Boris becomes somber. But then he shakes his head:

Hey enough talk about cardboard... this is a wedding, not a funeral!

I nod.



Boris pulls some appetizers onto his plate and looks at me:

So, what's it like being from *there*? he asks.

Sorry?

What's it like being an American?

I don't know... I've never thought of it... myself... in those terms.

Never thought of it?

That's right.

Let me get this straight... You were born in America, right?

Right.

You lived there your entire life, right?

Right.

And you've never thought about what it means to be American?

Well, actually it's not that important to me. And besides, I've only been an American for six and a half years.

What are you talking about? How can it not be important! It's your culture... your traditions... your language.

I know but...

Do you smile in public?

Yes...

Do you respect peanut butter?

Well, yes...

And you speak English without thinking, don't you?

I do...

There you go!

Where?

That's what it means to be American!



Boris stops to shove a spoonful of food into his mouth. As he chews, he seems to be thinking about something that is at once pleasant and unpleasant. Finally, he speaks up:

Yeah I studied English in school, he says, I used to know it pretty good, but now I've forgotten it all. No practice.

That's too bad.

You can say that again, all that effort... But you know how it goes... other things come up that are more important and the next thing you know it five years have gone by, then six...

Then six and a half...

...Yeah, and you look up one day to see that all this time has passed and what do you have to show for it? Nothing. As if you never had anything in the first place.

I know what you mean.

Hey can I ask you to do something...?

Why not.

You speak English, right?

I try.

I'm just wondering... Can you say something for me?

In English?

Yeah, just so I can hear how it sounds from the lips of a native speaker.

Like what?

It doesn't matter... anything.

I don't know...

Just the first thing that comes into your head.

Well, I'll do my best....

Boris looks at me excitedly, but I remain silent:

Go ahead! he says, Say something!

I don't know what to say. I can't think of anything.

Just say the first thing that comes into your head.

That's no good... it should be something more significant.

Okay then say the first significant thing that comes into your head.

That'll take too long. I need you to give me some sort of topic...

A topic?