

## NARRATIVE 1.

# FIRST DAY OF CLASS

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As I looked around the classroom with the attendance sheet in one hand, suddenly, I became very wary of my identity in the classroom. *Who am I?* The truth was that, as a graduate teaching assistant, I was both a teacher and a student at the same time, which was something I've never experienced before in my life. *Am I a teacher? Or am I a student?* In the past, I had always been one or the other. I never had to juggle these two identities at the same time. What made things even more confusing is the fact that, at this point in my life, I am first a student, then a teacher. My current official occupation is a student, and the F on my US visa confirms it. However, now, with twenty-five students sitting in front of me, I am aware, all of a sudden, that I am a teacher. While I completely *understand* the student/teacher identity, something inside of me just wasn't computing. For some reason, it just felt weird to know that, after being in class yesterday afternoon as a student I am now a teacher, who this afternoon at 1pm would once again transform back into a student (for a split second, I felt like Cinderella).

Yet there was something else, besides this student/teacher dilemma, I was caught in. Something about a question a student had raised earlier, the one about my English, had gotten to me somehow. And then I realized what it was.

*I am an Asian teaching native English speaking students English composition.*

There was something extremely destructive, almost impairing, in that thought—the fact that I am a *foreigner* teaching native speakers how to write in their own language. It was as if my identity as a teacher had been stripped away from me, and all that was left was my foreignness—a complete stranger to this country. The thought made me feel like a hypocrite. I suddenly became very aware of the fact that I was not confident with my English at all. It had been years since I last read or wrote anything using academic English. What's worse, it had been nearly two decades since I last spoke with a foreigner in English. While living back home, I had gotten so comfortable with the fact that my English was *good enough* to cover the basics that I had often prided myself on my language skills. Yet, as I stood in the classroom now, all that self-confidence just flew right out the window. In front of my students, I felt like prey surrounded by a pack of wolves—like something you'd see on the Discovery Channel. I became

conscious of the embarrassing stutters I made, the various awkward moments of silence when I couldn't find the right words to express my own thoughts, and how they came off to the students.

Standing in that classroom as I reflected back on the months leading up to this point, it finally sank in. It was something that I had never imagined back home before I flew halfway across the world. Something I had not realized until this point. Something I was going to have to continue fighting against for the entire duration of my time here.

My identity was in jeopardy.