

Hello! My Name Is \_\_\_\_  
Tumi Fabiyi

Shivering, I clung to my mother's skirt as she spoke with the vice principal of my new school. I watched as children ran to the entrance of the brick building, their cheeks a rosy red in the late September cold, each with their own colourful jackets and gloves. Shivering, I blew a puff of warm air onto my gloveless hands. I frowned. Coming here was a mistake.

"Come on in!" the vice principal said, her voice was laced with the kind of false enthusiasm that came with years of tolerating little children - It irritated me to no end. "I'll show you around!"

Slowly, I stomped the snow off of my soaked sneakers and followed them through the wide halls. As we walked through the hallways, I noticed the school's library. The area full of bookshelves and tables was surrounded with green walls embedded with large window panes. As I peered into the glass windows clouded with the grubby fingerprints from the years past, a little smile tugged at my lips. Just beyond the glass there was a menagerie of unfamiliar books to explore. An excited thought sprouted in my mind. This place couldn't be that bad if it had good books! Soon, my thoughts grew into a hope for future possibilities, and my smile widened.

I was quickly snapped out of my thoughts by a sudden cascade of children bustling down the hallway. All of them laughing a little too noisily for my liking. Startled, I rushed to my mother's side and watched in shocked silence. Mouth agape with incredulity, I stared at the horde of children in disbelief. They were loud - so, so loud. The children where I came from were never like this. My smile crumpled into a shocked frown, and disbelief turned into disdain. To me, they were so improper, so strange. How could I possibly deal with people like that *every* day?

As I continued my walk through the school, a sinking feeling began to grow in my stomach. The acute realization that I was stuck in what felt like a desolate wasteland surrounded by unfamiliar people and unfamiliar things was starting to set in. I had never felt so lonely. The new people, the new places, the new *cold*, it all gave me such a horrible feeling of uncertainty. Everything here was so different, everything here was so wrong. I desperately wished I could just go home.

The sound of my mother's soft voice startled me out of my thoughts. "How are you going to introduce yourself?" She asked in Yoruba, her gentle chocolate eyes carefully studying my anxious face, "I don't think anyone will be able to pronounce your name as it is, we might have to change it."

Suddenly, I began to panic. My name? I hadn't even thought about my name! How could I make friends if no one could even pronounce my name? Terrified thoughts swirled in my head, each one adding to the image of my impending doom. What if they couldn't understand my English? I spoke with such a heavy accent, what if they made fun of me for it? My little heart began to pound and I tightened my grip on my mother's hand. How was I going to do this?

"I'm not sure," I worriedly replied, also in Yoruba. "Don't worry, I'll figure it out."

The idea of my name bounced around in my head as we walked. My full name is Oluwatumininu or Tumininu for short. Obviously, it was far too difficult for 2nd graders to pronounce. I mentally crossed both of them off my list. I considered using my middle name Elizabeth, but the thought of that alone made me grimace. It was far too unnatural for me and I doubted I'd get used to it. The sinking feeling returned to me. I couldn't mess this up, the name I chose now would affect me for the rest of my life. It had to be perfect. How was I going to decide?

I sighed as the synthetic voice of my vice principal rang throughout the halls. Were all the adults here like this? "This is your new teacher! " She chimed, "Mrs. Keaner!"

Mrs. Keaner smiled at me. She had short brown hair styled in little wisps and tufts that bounced with every movement she made. Her eyes were bright and held a kindness that I knew was genuine. The sight of her bright smile calmed my anxious mind. She seemed like the type of teacher that was beloved by her students.

"Hey you!" Mrs. Keaner said energetically, "Ready for grade 2?"

Her smile faltered as she watched my eyebrows furrow and my frown worsen. Despite her kindness, a part of me hoped that this was all a mistake. I hoped that soon my mother would pack our bags, book the first flight to Nigeria and take me back home. That soon all would be right with the world, and I could forget that this ever happened. But the bigger part of me, the smarter part of me knew that that was impossible. A wave of crushing hopelessness washed over me, as I choked back a sob. I willed the tears welling in my eyes not to fall and stared down at my feet.

I felt Mrs. Keaner's warm hand on my shoulder. Gently, she took my trembling hand and guided me to the door of her classroom. I whipped my head around to see my mother and the vice principal talking further down the hallway. Without her I suddenly felt so vulnerable and frightened. I didn't want her to go. Noticing my sudden agitation, Mrs. Keaner knelt down to face me.

"It's okay," she cooed softly, "I know it's scary at first, but you'll get used to it."

"I wanna go home," I sobbed quietly, as tears spilled from my eyes, "I don't like it here."

Mrs. Keaner gave my hand a gentle squeeze. "I understand you miss home," she said gently, "but why don't you try it out for today, you might find you like it here. What do you say?"

I considered what she said for a moment, wiped my eyes, then made my decision. "I'll try."

I looked up into her soft eyes, and an overwhelming feeling of safety washed over me. "Come on," she said, encouraging me. "Everyone's waiting!"

As I walked through the door of my second grade classroom, the sinking feeling in my stomach was replaced with butterflies. At once, 20 pairs of little unfamiliar eyes turned their gaze to me, each of them sitting criss-cross applesauce, on a puzzle piece carpet. All I could focus on

was the deafening sound of their whispers resonating in my ears. None of the children looked like me, each of their faces a colour of cream that I never saw back home. Their eyes all in unrecognizable shades of blue, green and hazel. I had never seen people so different from me before. It made me feel uneasy. Shakily, I squeezed Mrs. Keaner's warm hand again for reassurance.

Mrs. Keaner led me to the front of the class and began to speak. "Hello everyone, this is your new classmate," she announced, "and she comes all the way from Nigeria!"

An excited murmur began to arise amongst the children, and as the classroom erupted with energetic exclamations of "That's so cool" and "Where's that?", a small smile crept onto my previously sullen face, and I relaxed.

'They like me!' I thought, 'They really like me!' I felt a little bubbly feeling rise up deep inside my chest.

Perhaps this wouldn't be so terrible after all. Even though they were different and quite strange, maybe I could befriend a few of them - maybe.

I raised my head and looked at the class. That little bubbly feeling had grown into confidence. With a small grin splayed across my face, I summoned all the previous knowledge of American accents I had from my diction lessons, then repeated the name I had chosen in my head over and over again. Speaking English like this would be a little strange, but I could do it. I knew I could. Confidently, I stared at the unfamiliar but friendly faces, and spoke.

"My name is Tumi. It's nice to meet you."