

Final Draft

“Calvin, this is the third time in a row you’ve been tardy.” Mrs. Cramer’s eyes glowed like the devil’s as Calvin walked into class.

“I am sooooo sorry, Mrs. Cramer. I’m ashamed of myself,” Calvin confessed, “but I have a good excuse.” He straightened the front of his state champion letterman’s jacket with his dark hands.

“Yes, you always do.” She crossed her arms and tapped her foot. “Well, I’ll tell you what. This time I’ll let the class decide if it’s an excused tardy or not. Why were you late this time, Calvin?”

Calvin’s high cheekbones and the shape of his nose hinted some Cherokee was mixed in with his African blood. “Well, I was trying to get back to school after lunch, you know the line was so long and I had to wait forever to get my big Mac,” rambled Calvin, his bubblegum crackling in his mouth like BBs falling on a hardwood floor. “Just as I was pulling out of the parking lot onto the highway this big ole semi smashed into a little yellow Volkswagen!”

Rolling her eyes playfully, Mrs. Cramer sneered, “Oh, really?”

Calvin looked at his shoes as he continued with his story, only allowing his eyes to peek at his audience once. “And I had to decide: Am I going to be late to Mrs. Cramer’s class again or am I going to try to rescue that poor little baby out of the back seat of that car?”

“So of course . . .” Mrs. Cramer interrupted.

“So of course I really didn’t have a choice, now did I? So I jerked open the car door, tried to untangle the kid out of his car seat. Oh, Mrs. Cramer, his little ole face was covered with blood, there was glass everywhere, and he was just screaming.” Calvin looked her in the eye for the first time to see how he was doing. “So I handed him to an ambulance medic that had just pulled up and then I just reached across the seat and grabbed that poor sobbing screaming Mama out of her seat and dragged her out onto the pavement ‘cause I was scared to death that ole gas truck was goin’ to explode any minute and...”

Suddenly Mrs. Cramer chuckled, “So what do you think, class? Excused tardy or unexcused?”

“Excused!” they all yelled in unison, laughing at Calvin’s latest heroic adventure.

“Thank you, friends,” mumbled Calvin humbly, nodding his head toward his classmates and heading toward his seat in the back. “Thank you Mrs. Cramer. I won’t be tardy tomorrow. Unless I see a robbery in progress or something...”

Janis Cramer, a thirty-year veteran of the classroom, taught creative writing and English at Muskogee High School and Mustang High School in Oklahoma. In 1987, she was a summer institute fellow with the Oklahoma Writing Project, where she is now the co-director in charge of inservice. She has also authored a self-published handbook, “How to Teach Writing (Without Killing Yourself Grading Papers),” which has sold over a thousand copies. Copyright 2002 National Writing Project. All rights reserved.