

# About “The Crush,” in which true love thrives and then dies on a school bus

By Bob Ingraham, AKA “Jimmy”

**My short story, “The Crush,” follows this introduction.**

Following our marriage on December 27, 1966 and a brief honeymoon in Denver, Susan and I moved into our apartment in Kansas City, where she was teaching, and I enrolled in pre-journalism courses at the Kansas City campus of the University of Missouri. “The Crush” resulted from an assignment in the creative writing course I enrolled in, and it was selected for inclusion in a new student publication, curiously titled *Number One*.

“The Crush” is based on an incident that occurred on the school bus that I regularly rode between my home, in the tiny village of Arenas Valley, New Mexico, and school in Silver City, six miles to the west. It was a trip I took twice a day from 1949, when my family moved from New York to Arenas Valley, until 1957, when we moved into Silver City.

If memory serves, we kids had the same bus driver, “Chink” Tony, all of that time. Chink was not Chinese, although he did seem to have a slight “Oriental slant” to his eyes. In any event, we called him Chink because everyone else did. If his name had been Joe or Juan, we would have called him Joe or Juan. He was a quiet man, obviously more sedentary than active — evidence of a fondness for mashed potatoes and gravy? — given more to amusement than to laughter, but capable of an effective growl now and then.

Chink drove a taut school bus but was a patient realist. He knew that kids could be noisy, rowdy, and sometimes unruly. He cautioned us not to move about the bus too much, and to keep our talk and our laughter below levels that might burst human eardrums. But he simply didn’t abide fights or rudeness. Once one of my classmates decided to test Chink’s patience with one misbehaviour or another. Chink warned him to behave himself. The

boy ignored him. There was no second warning: Chink pulled the bus to the side of the road, stopped, opened the door, escorted the boy off the bus none too gently, and left him standing in the dust on the verge. We were at least a mile from our bus stop in Arenas Valley.

School buses were no more safe then than they are now, but I think people didn't worry much about that. Chink didn't. Once I asked him if I could sit on the steps by the door of the bus. I just wanted to see what the road looked like through the windows in the door. "Sure," he said. So I did, and I saw a lot of asphalt rushing past at what seemed like high speed. Very exciting. I enjoyed being the "doorman" at each stop. Chink even let me open and close the door.

Although elementary schools and high schools were separate institutions, our school bus was a "full service" vehicles, and we passengers ranged from first grade students to high school seniors. At the time of the events outlined in the *The Crush* occurred, when I was probably in sixth grade, I had eyes for just one of those students. Her name was Eileen Turner. She was about five years older than me, which means that she would probably have been a high school junior. But what does age have to do with love?

The narrative of *The Crush* departs from reality in some details, as fiction will inevitably do. While Chink remains Chink, Eileen Turner evolves to become *Gloria Jarvis*. I am no longer Robert, but *Jimmy*. Eileen/*Gloria* didn't live in Arenas Valley, but in nearby Fort Bayard, and I never rode my bike past her house. In the story, Eileen/*Gloria* and her friends threaten to carry me off the bus, while in reality they threatened not to let me off at my stop so I would have to ride another three miles to Fort Bayard. I supposed, in amused retrospect, that were threatening to kidnap me! If they succeeded, I had no idea how I would get home except by walking three miles, and I would have to explain why that happened, which I decidedly did not wish to do.

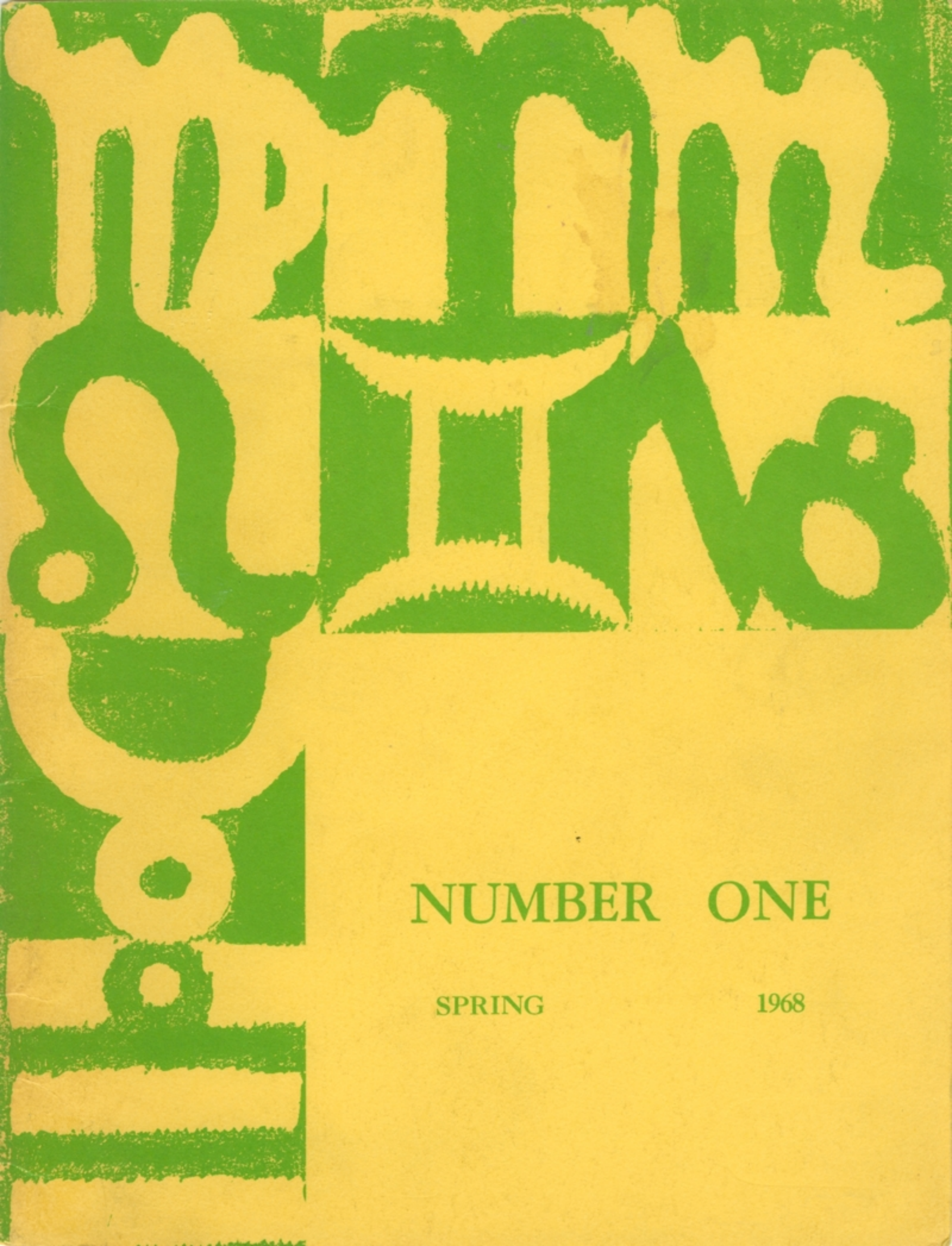
Other factual elements in the story include those sugar cookies, although it was more often my grandmother than my mother who baked them. There was a cottonwood tree in my life; I often climbed it with Ernest, my best

friend, who becomes *Jack* in the story. And I really did portray Leonardo Da Vinci in a school presentation, very convincingly if I do say so myself.

I did once join Eileen and her father, a forest ranger, and my older sister, Helen, who was Eileen's friend, for a long drive in a pickup truck through a wilderness area of the Gila National Forest. But if Eileen/*Gloria had* lived in Arenas Valley, I certainly would have ridden my bike past her house as often as possible. At least until the events on the bus, after which I never have wanted to see her again!

In broad strokes, the events on the bus as outlined in *The Crush* really did happen, although the dialogue is mostly made up, except for my final, embarrassing words to Eileen/*Gloria*, who really did entrap me and then released me at her pleasure, not mine, just in time for me to get off the bus, as fast as I could, at my stop and not at Fort Bayard!





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# The Crush

*Robert P. Ingraham*

A new girl rode the school bus one afternoon. She was a lot older than the eleven or twelve years that Jimmy and most of his friends were. He figured, because she was bigger than him and carried lots of books, that she went to high school.

Her hair was long and blond, and it sort of bounced when she moved her head. Her eyes were blue, and she had long, black eyelashes. Her nose was small and upturned. A dimple showed on her right cheek when she smiled. Her shoulders were straight, and she had slender arms and legs and small hands and feet. She was wearing a bright yellow dress which had lace sleeves, and shiny black shoes.

Jimmy didn't really see these things individually. He first saw her when she stepped into the bus. First he sucked in a breath and held it. Then, when she swished by him and he smelled her perfume, he turned pink. Then he turned around in his seat to watch her walk down the aisle.

The bus had started on its trip, and Jimmy, still watching her and straining to hear what she and her friends were laughing about, suddenly jumped as

someone hit him on the shoulder.

"Whatcha lookin' at, Jimmy?! Ya look like a dope!" said Pete, one of his buddies.

"Watch out who ya hit!" cried Jimmy, angrily.

"I saw you lookin' at that new girl when she got on the bus," Pete continued. "She your girl friend? Huh?"

"Heck no, she ain't my girl friend," said Jimmy. "Besides, why would I like her? She's too old. An' girls are stupid anyway!" And with that, he turned around again and reached across the back of his seat to yank once—hard—on the pony tail coming out of a small, brunette head. The little girl screamed, and Jimmy swung back around to Pete and socked him on his arm and attempted to trip him.

"Hey, you kids!" roared Chink, the bus driver, "Sit down and behave or you'll walk!" He meant it, and Jimmy was left alone.

Soon his classmates were involved in other high jinks, and Jimmy ventured another look toward the back of the bus. The girl was still laughing and talking, but somewhere around Brewer's Creek the



girls got quieter, and the new girl opened a book and studied it for a few minutes. Jimmy watched her. And suddenly she looked up, glanced around the bus, and then looked straight into Jimmy's eyes. Quickly he looked away, but not before she smiled. And before he could scramble around and sit down the right direction, his face had turned from normal to bright pink, from bright pink to red, and from red to scarlet. He didn't move the rest of the way home.

Jimmy was one of the first kids off the bus, and as he pretended interest in Pete's dog, which always greeted the bus, he watched the new girl get off the bus and walk around the corner and down West Street.

He walked home slowly, but his pace quickened as he neared his house because he smelled fresh sugar cookies. The front door slammed, and Jimmy ran straight to the kitchen where he found his mother just filling the cookie jar. He hugged her around her waist and earned a sugar cookie, steaming fresh with jelly in the middle. He wolfed it down while nodding yes, he'd had a good day at school, and making that-sure-is-a-good-cookie sounds. While he was finishing a second cookie, he managed to talk.

"Gary Fletcher fell on his head today," he said.

"Oh dear!" his mother cried, "Again?"

"Yeh," Jimmy said, "but the nurse didn't call his mother this time."

"Well, that's good," his mother said. "He mustn't have been hurt too badly."

"Naw, he wasn't. But he sure cried a lot."

"Well, don't you think you would have cried if you'd fallen on your head?" she asked.

Jimmy didn't say anything for a few seconds, and then he changed the subject: "Mrs. Clemons told us we're going to put on a play for PTA next month."

"Oh?" said his mother.

"Yeh, well, it's not really a play. Each of us kids has got to play somebody important in hist'ry, and the parents have got to figure out who we are," he said.

"That sounds interesting," his mother said. "Who are you going to be?"

"Some guy who invented things and painted pitchers. Lee—Lee—Leonardo Davinchy. Or something like that."

"That's Leo-nar-do Da-vin-chee, his mother cor-

rected. "You should have a lot of fun portraying him."

"Yeh. There was a new girl on the bus this afternoon," he said.

"Oh?"

"Yeh," he said. "But she was old. But she smiled at me!"

His mother smiled at that, and said, "Do you know her name?"

"Uh-uh," he grunted. "But she walked down West Street after we got off the bus."

"Oh, I bet I know who she is," his mother said. "Mr. Jarvis—he's a teller at the bank—told me this morning that he and his family have moved into the old Winston home over by Mrs. Heath. And he has a daughter in high school—I think he called her Gloria."

Gloria! Jimmy turned pink. Gloria! A nice name! But to his mother he said "Oh." And then, "Can I have another cookie?"

"No, it would ruin your supper," she said. "Now go out and play."

Jimmy didn't mention Gloria again. But his mother and dad noticed some changes in him during the following weeks. He talked less of football and Bobby Petersen's squirrel and disliking arithmetic. He spent more time washing his face and hands and keeping his fingernails clean. His shirt was tucked in every day when he came home from school. And he became very interested in not missing the school bus. In fact, he was ready for school before breakfast on most days, and he always left as early as possible after breakfast.

On weekends he showed more interest in riding his bicycle about the neighborhood than in playing football or climbing the cottonwoods in back of Jack's house. He usually rode around the West Street area. He'd seen Gloria several times while on these rides. Once she was reading a book on her front porch. One Saturday afternoon she was watering a flowerbed, and the next afternoon he watched her washing the family car.

Usually he rode on the other side of the street from her house, up and down and up and down the sidewalk. Once in a while Gloria would notice him, and one day she actually waved to him. Another day, when Gloria was nowhere to be seen, Jimmy



bravely rode on the sidewalk right next to her house. Suddenly, she stepped out of the front door, just as he was passing, and called "Hi there!" Jimmy almost ran into a tree.

During the week, after arriving early at the bus stop, Jimmy always waited at the corner, watching for Gloria. She was always with some of her friends, and Jimmy usually kept well away from her and wore himself out with wild sixth-grader games of chase, gourd throwing, and statues. He never looked silly in statues.

But once the kids got on the bus, Jimmy always quieted down and tried to watch Gloria. Of course he didn't want the other kids, especially Pete, to notice, so he did his share of arguing and taking things and being a noisy sixth-grader.

By and by, he got more used to being around Gloria. She often smiled at him, and a couple times he even managed to smile back before he got embarrassed and had to look away.

And then one day, after thinking more of Gloria than of arithmetic and reading that afternoon, Jimmy ran for the schoolbus and waited impatiently for the older kids to get dismissed. Finally they started getting on the bus, and Gloria was among them. Jimmy watched her walk to the back of the bus and sit down, and then he made his plans.

No sooner had the bus pulled away from the curb than Jimmy got up from his seat and walked to Chink. "Hey Chink?" he said.

"Yes, Jimmy," Chink sighed, "what do you want?"

"I lost a pencil this morning. Can I look for it?"

"Yes," Chink said, "but don't take too long. I don't like you kids running all over the bus while it's moving."

"Thanks, Chink," said Jimmy, and he was off, looking carefully under each seat, and paying close attention to how close he was getting to Gloria. He stole many glances at her; in fact, he looked more at her than for the "lost" pencil. He got to Gloria's seat, and since she was sitting in the last seat, he couldn't go any farther, so he turned to go back. A voice, Gloria's voice, stopped him.

"Hey, little boy, what are you looking for?" she said. Her voice was musical.

He was already bright red when he spoke, not to Gloria, but to his shoes: "I, uh, I lost m' pencil. This

mornin'. Well, see you around." And he started to leave.

But her voice stopped him again. "No, don't go," she said, "what color was your pencil, blue?"

"Uh, yeh, blue, I guess," said Jimmy, very quietly.

"Well," said Gloria, "I found a blue pencil this morning, and I'll bet it's yours!"

"Uh, uh, yeh, sure!" said Jimmy, trying to sound surprised and happy.

"Well," she said, "if you want your pencil, you've got to look at me before you get it, or don't you want to look at me?"

"Uh, sure, why not?" Jimmy whispered. Slowly, his face moved upward. His eyes met Gloria's eyes.

"Little boy," she said, "I want you to tell me something. OK?" Some of the girls around Gloria began to chuckle.

Jimmy didn't move. Even his partly open mouth didn't move. He just got redder.

"Why look at that, Gloria," said one of her friends, "I think he's *blushing*!" And suddenly the chuckling gave way to shrieks of delighted laughter.

And then, when the girls got quieter, Gloria was saying to Jimmy, "Why do you watch me so much? And you're always riding your bicycle by my house, and I *know* you don't live very near me. "Do you like me or something?"

Jimmy didn't say a thing.

Gloria spoke again: "Well, do you know what? I like you too!" And then she said, "You're *real* cute! But why don't you *talk* to me?"

Another girl said, "Look there, I think I see a dimple! Hey, little boy, is that a dimple? Is it? Aw, come on, smile, let's see your dimple. Please? Pretty Please?" The other girls took up the "Smile, please, pretty please" chorus, and slowly Jimmy's mouth began to curve at the corners until it was a big, quivering smile, and the back of the bus was filled with a gale of laughter.

"Oh, you *are* cute!" said Gloria. "Say, would you like to kiss me?"

Jimmy's eyes widened, and then he was moving, but not fast enough, for he was met with a tangle of girls' arms and legs and more laughter.

"Well," said Gloria, "if you won't kiss me, then I'll have to kiss you, won't I?" She pursed her lips and moved toward Jimmy. He plunged against the



arms and legs again, and almost got through, but he was grabbed and held tightly, stretched across the aisle, his shirt pulled out and his hair in his eyes and his face red and sweating. And still, he struggled.

Looming above him, Gloria said, "Look at him, girls, isn't he simply ferocious?"

He struggled harder.

All the girls agreed that he was very ferocious, certainly more ferocious than Superman and lions and tigers, and probably more ferocious than Godzilla or King Kong.

And then, soothingly, Gloria said, "Don't worry, we'll let you go. All you have to do is say, 'Oh! I am so ferocious!'"

The girls, grouped in a circle around him, looked down at him and chuckled.

Jimmy looked up at Gloria. He looked up at the other girls one by one. He closed his eyes and attempted to throw off all the hands that pinned him to the seat.

"Little boy," said Gloria, "you'll just wear yourself to a frazzle doing that!"

Jimmy puffed for breath.

"Little boy, what's your name?" said Gloria.

"His name is Jimmy, I think," volunteered the girl who held his right leg.

"Jimmy," Gloria whispered, "if you don't say, 'Oh! I'm so ferocious!' we'll have to carry you off the bus when we reach our stop."

Jimmy looked at her for a couple seconds, struggled briefly, and then said, very rapidly, "Oh. I am so ferocious."

"No, no, no, Jimmy! You can do better than that!" informed Gloria. "Say 'OH! I am so FEROCIOUS!!!!'" She sort of growled "ferocious" and she said each word slowly, like it tasted good. "And you'd better hurry, because we're almost to the bus stop."

A surge of panicky movement almost freed Jimmy, but the girls held on, and then suddenly the bus began to slow down and the brakes started to squeal. Jimmy tensed his muscles, scowled, took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and the words burst from him: "OH!!! I AM SO FEROCIOUS!!"

In the next instant about ten girls were holding their sides and laughing, and Jimmy was free and running down the aisle. He was first off the bus, and for the first time in weeks he didn't wait to watch Gloria disappear around the corner.