

Excuse Us Ms. Colvin

by

B. J. Holmes

## Summary and Character Description

On March 2, 1955, 15 year old Claudette Colvin was arrested for refusing to give her seat to a white woman on a segregated city bus. Her courageous stance took place nine months before Rosa Parks took the national notoriety for doing the exact same thing. The question is, why wasn't Claudette acknowledged for fighting for her rights and justice for all? Do we owe Claudette Colvin an apology, or did she owe us understanding? This very short story will leave you to ponder over these questions.

Claudette Colvin - young pioneer of the 1950's civil right movement.

Mary Anne Colvin - Great-aunt, and guardian of Claudette Colvin who took on the role of her mother.

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A middle aged black woman is in the kitchen chatting on the phone with a friend about the recent victory of Browder vs Gayle that desegregated the buses in Montgomery, Alabama.

Mary Anne Colvin

Yes girl, everybody's talking about it. We can ride the bus now like decent human beings should. No more getting up for white folk, and paying at the front door of the bus and walking to the back door of the bus to get in. Rosa Parks sure got things started for us, and now this new young minister is picking up what she started and fighting for more rights for us.

(Joyful giggle)

They say the courts said treating us that way was what's called un-cons-ti...

(A pregnant teen enters the room)

Claudette Colvin

Unconstitutional!

Mary Anne

Ah, let me call you back Jean.

(She slowly lowers the receiver.)

Hi baby, I see you're up from your nap.

Claudette

Yes ma'am, and I see you and your friends are still singing praises to Miss Rosa Parks.

Mary Anne

And why shouldn't we – she deserves it!

Claudette

Um, and I don't.

Mary Anne

Claudette you need to stop it. Rosa Parks started a fire that can't be put out – you started a small flame that could be rubbed out between two fingers.

Claudette

Well, what about Browder v. Gayle, ma ma.

(She uses her fingers to count each name.)

There was me, Miss Susie, Miss Aurelia Browder, and Mary Louise. And I was the first in that bunch, that refused to give up my seat on the bus, and on December 17, 1956, the Supreme Court upheld the ruling, issuing a court order to the state of Alabama to desegregate all them buses.

Mary Anne

What does it matter who did what first, Claudette? What matters is it's happening, change is coming no matter who started it, and it's time you understand that. How far would we have gotten with you as the image of change for coloreds – a young, nappy headed pregnant girl.

Claudette

I guess I just don't pass the paper bag test. Isn't that right, ma ma?

Mary Anne

Being fast and sassy, don't earn you no brownie points either young lady! In fact, all it's got you is pregnant, and out of school. There's a bigger picture in all this, and you're not in it for a reason! Now, I'm headed out to the grocer's. What you could do is finish mopping this floor while I'm gone!

(Mary turns around and sees the hurt in Claudette's eyes.)

Mary Anne

Claudette honey, I'm sorry I spoke so harshly. I just want you to understand that God is the one that deserves all the glory – you and Rosa Parks, and Dr. King: as precious and valuable as you all may be, God used all of you for his purpose; just be glad you were courageous and gifted enough to be a part of it all. Your dad and I love you Claudette and we are very proud of what you've done, but in this case, it's ok to take the backseat; in fact, it makes you bigger than you will ever know.

(She kisses her.)

Now I'll be back in a few. I love you Claudette.

(Claudette smiles awkwardly. Mary Anne leaves and Claudette grabs the mop out of the bucket of soapy water to finish the floor. The phone rings, she puts the mop down, and she answers it.)

Claudette

Oh, Hi Kathleen... Yeah, of course I know about the ruling; I was a part of it, remember! Yes, I know that too; everything leads back to Rosa Parks, not me...Actually, I'm okay with it. She deserves it. She's a fine woman – she is strong, and prepared to continue what needs to be done.

(pause)

So what's been going on at school Annie?.. What! They're going together now! I knew all along James Lawler, liked Ruby... You know.., I've been thinking about going to New York for a while with my sister. Yeah, I know New York is a big city. I don't know, girl.

(She rubs her pregnant belly.)

I'll just have to see.

The End