

Washing Jean Jackets in West Jeff

Bo Fisher

“Cotton washes his jean jackets with rocks. He told me always to wait for the Laundromat lady to go out for her cigarette before going in. There’s a deli across the street from the Laundromat on Lewis that you can wait outside, he says. But it has to be the one on Lewis. Cotton says that when he washed his jean jacket at the Laundromat on Forte, the man who runs the place called Dad, and I don’t know what Dad did but I know Cotton didn’t go to school for the rest of the week. I know mom left not long after that.

“When Aunt Denise gave me my jean jacket for Christmas, Dad told me not to wash it like Cotton does. If I did, he said, I’d meet God just as Cotton did. I said that sounded boring, but Cotton told me I didn’t know who God was. He said that He wasn’t a person I wanted to meet. He told me all of this the night before he left for Wyoming.

“My name’s Quinn. Dad is Cotton Morris Sr. and that girl who ran away is, well, I don’t know her name. She don’t go to my school. But I can help you find her if you promise not to tell Dad. She didn’t do nothing, anyway. She was just curious, is all. She’d seen my pockets sinking all heavy and stuff and I guess thought I was funny looking. That’s what she said, anyway, that I was funny looking, standing there with rocks in my pockets and my jean jacket slung over my arm.

“I wanted my jean jacket to look just like Cotton’s. He said it was important, too. If I went to school wearing that thing the way it was, all dark blue and stiff and stuff, he said I’d get beat up, that nobody wore them like that. If I was lucky, he said, they’d just steal it. Cotton told me it was stupid to ask Aunt Denise for a jacket, said

he was going to get me one anyway, that the Goodwill was just out of them, is all. He said he was just waiting for the right opportunity.

“But anyways, I was standing there at the deli on Lewis waiting for the Laundromat lady to go outside for her cigarette, when this girl comes up and tells me I look funny. Wants to know about the rocks. And I tell her, and now she wants to help, or at least to watch, I don’t remember which. She told me I looked stupid not wearing the jacket and I told her I didn’t want to, that something bad would happen if I put it on. So she took it from me and put it on herself. She said nothing bad ever happens to her, so I figured she’d be fine wearing it. Underneath my jean jacket she wore a long sleeve, white turtle neck and she had on these tan shorts. Her hair was really long and she didn’t wear it in a ponytail like most the girls at our school. Cotton always told me that the ones that didn’t wear their hair in ponytails were the ones that would get you in trouble. She didn’t do nothing wrong, though.

“After standing around for another few minutes or so, the lady finally came out for her cigarette, and like Cotton said she would, she walked down to the back alley to smoke. So we went in. Cotton always said to pick a washing machine close to the door so that it doesn’t take so long to run out when the Laundromat lady comes back in. We went to the second row of machines, though, because the girl wanted to. She didn’t say why, but Cotton always told me not to ask a girl why she does the things she does. He said if she’s still around you’re still winning.

“She couldn’t get the jacket off by herself, though, and so I helped her with it. She was a little red in the face then and sighed, said maybe she should just leave. I shrugged, didn’t ask her why, and so she stayed.

“Once it was in the machine I put two big rocks inside the jacket and four littler ones on top of it. Before I could turn the machine on, though, she stopped me and asked if I’d hold her hand. Cotton never said anything about holding hands, but he did tell me that if a girl like her, who doesn’t wear her hair in a ponytail, ever asks me to do anything for her, to say, No. So I said, No. She got red in the face again and this time started to leave. But right when I turned the machine on, and after I thought she was gone, I felt her latch onto my arm and pull me back from the noise. I thought the glass on the machine might break. Cotton said that if that ever happened, he told me to just run, and that he’d get me a new jean jacket. Do they have jean jackets in Wyoming? He’d have to come home to give it to me, don’t you think?”

“She asked me if that was enough, and I said I didn’t know, that Cotton said it would always depend on how big the rocks were or how many I used. She asked who Cotton was, and just as soon as I got ready to answer, I remembered Cotton told me to never tell anyone who didn’t already know, that he was my older brother. He never told me why, and I don’t think she would’ve known him anyway. Like I told you already, she don’t go to our school, my school.

“I was ready to tell her to forget it, when she let go my arm and grabbed my hand with both of hers. Cotton always told me not to let Dad find out about any girls, neither. He snuck one in one night through his bedroom window and when Dad caught them, well, I don’t know what happened, but Cotton didn’t go to school again for another week. Didn’t come out of his room that long, neither. Mom just brought him his dinners and came out covering her face. Cotton told me that now that he was gone, I had to be extra careful because now dad would actually start

paying attention to me. I thought this was a good thing until I remembered what he said to me about meeting God, and all of a sudden I imagined a small room and hours of reading scripture with no break.

“But I didn’t let go of her hand. I looked down at her and saw her looking at the machine, saw her jump a little every time one of the rocks hit the glass, her mouth open a little bit, sweat collecting at her forehead. I remembered what Cotton said about kissing girls. He never mentioned kissing girls who didn’t wear their hair in ponytails, but he did say that when I did, it was more fun to catch them off guard. More fun for them, too. He also told me never to ask them permission neither, that they didn’t like that. But I wondered if girls without ponytails expected to be asked for permission first.

“She asked me if I knew when the Laundromat lady was coming back in. When I didn’t answer, she looked up at me and stopped shaking for a little second. I thought that as good a time as any. Then I heard the screaming. I stuck my head around the corner of the row, and there I saw the Laundromat lady, her eyes big and scared. The girl opened the machine door and grabbed my jean jacket and ran. I followed her outside and that’s when I ran into you. I guess she still has it. I didn’t even get to see if it worked. Cotton said it would, but that I’d have to do it once a week until it gets as good as his. I won’t, though. I promise.

“Cotton always told me that if this happened you guys would understand. He always told me to tell the truth and to tell you who Dad was, and he said you guys would understand. I’m sorry. I’ll try to pay for the machine. But Cotton said you’d

understand. He said you wouldn't tell Dad. Was he right? Will you not? Was he right?"