

Tyler's New Coat Version I  
(Original draft, mildly edited)

The next day of school, Tyler wore a big boxy jacket of the type the fancy catalogs call a "barn coat," which really just means made out of a stiff canvas. Around here, it's standard work clothes up at the sand pit and at McKinney's Heavy Equipment. Tyler's coat was **stiff and tan and** too big for him. It had grease stains too, but no one made any objections. Fredda and I stood outside my room looking in waiting for the second bell to ring, after he'd gone in with the others, and she said, "What do you think?"

I said, "I think it's his dad's old work coat—"

"Back when he used to work."

"— and I am just fine with that."

"Me too," said Fredda.

Actually, what worried me more was his smile. He still had that stupid lip spread grin with the eyes rolled up.

Tyler's New Coat Version II  
(Tightened)

The next day of school, Tyler wore a big boxy canvas jacket of the type catalogs call a barn coat. It's standard work clothes up at the sand pit and at McKinney's Heavy Equipment. Tyler's coat was too big for him. It was stained, too, but the stains were grease, not blood. Fredda and I stood outside our rooms as the kids filed in, waiting for the second bell to ring.

She said, "What do you think?"

I said, "I think it's his dad's old work coat, and I'm just fine with him wearing it."

Actually, what worried me was his smile. He still had that fixed lip-spread with his eyes half rolled.

Tyler's New Coat Version III  
(Slightly different cast of characters, setting up different things)

The day after the disturbance with the shirt, Tyler came to school wearing a boxy canvas jacket, the kind lifestyle catalogs call a barn coat. Standard work clothes around here. It was stained, but with grease, not blood. It had "McKinney" embroidered on it, so I figured it was from one of Tyler's father's employed periods.

The first day Tyler wore it, before I even finished taking roll, the vice-principal came by and asked me to step outside. He jerked his head toward Tyler and wanted to know if I was okay with the barn coat.

"Why not?" I said.

"I think it was his dad's," said Chauncy.

"As long as it gives him some comfort."

"Comfort isn't our job," said Chauncy. "This is high school."

I bit the inside of my cheek. Chauncy is the best administrator we have, but he's old-fashioned about a lot of things.