

**the boy
who grew
a beard
by mistake**

by vernon howl



THE BOY WHO GREW A BEARD BY MISTAKE

The boy took his pile of toenails to the nearest priest / when the priest screamed the boy decided to eat the pile / when the boy grew up he took the priest's job as the priest and the pile of toenails was still inside him because he had never pooped it out / he wondered about the pile of toenails in his stomach every single day

Because he had a pile of
toenails in his stomach
the boy grew a beard by
mistake / the beard was
bright red and many
insects thought it looked
like a good place to make
a home / all of the
insects were atheists and
they didn't like that the
beard they called home
was the beard of a priest

The insects migrated
from the beard of the
boy who was also a priest
to the nostrils of the boy
who was also a priest /
from there they climbed
into the boy's brain and
they tried to tell his
brain to stop being a
priest / they said just be
a boy again and only a boy
/ don't be a priest
because religion is bad

The boy heard the insects' voices but he didn't know they were insects / he thought it was the devil talking to him / he thought it was the devil that made him grow a beard by mistake and not the pile of toenails in his stomach / he shaved off his red beard and it immediately grew back

The pile of toenails continued to fester and the boy's new beard grew twice as long in half the time / his beard was so long they kicked him out of the priesthood / The boy started his own religion dedicated to his long red beard because he knew it would grow out of his face forever

The boy's beard grew
until it hit the floor and
then it stopped growing /
his religion wasn't doing
so good because nobody
thought that a long red
beard was a cool thing to
worship / his only
follower was a lonely
helicopter pilot named
d.j. peppermill who
secretly wanted to be a
poet so he didn't use any
capitalized letters when
spelling his name

The good thing about having a religion whose only follower was a helicopter pilot that wanted to be a pilot was that the boy could get free helicopter rides whenever he wanted / he took d.j. peppermill up on the offer and when they got up in the sky his beard immediately got tangled in the helicopter blades / the helicopter crashed and d.j. peppermill died

The boy was so sad at d.j. peppermill's funeral that he decided to cancel his religion and shave off his beard again / he would never forget that brave dead helicopter pilot and he vowed to shave off all of the beards on all of the faces all over the world / he started a punk band called chum piss and all of their songs were about how shaving off your bread is cool

The boy felt that if chum
piss could get popular
then he would have a lot
less work to do manually
shaving off all the beards
because fans of the band
would do it themselves
and encourage others to
do so as well / chum piss
however was a flop and
adding insult to injury
the boy's beard grew
back faster and longer
and an even brighter
shade of red

The boy's beard grew
over thirty feet long and
it started to move on its
own like a giant worm / it
encircled the boy's
bedroom mirror and
turned his reflection red
/ the boy's reflection
said "have you seen the
skin around your eyes
lately?" / the boy was too
scared to look at the skin
around his eyes

When he got the nerve
to look he saw that the
skin around his eyes was
not his skin but the skin
of a hundred-year-old
tortoise named Jimbo /
so the boy put on ski
goggles to hide the skin
around his eyes / this
made the boy want to go
skiing really bad so he
pleaded with his red
reflection to release him
from the beard even for
just a little while

The boy did not expect to meet Jimbo the tortoise at the ski lodge but he was there waiting for him to return the skin around his eyes / Jimbo had replaced the skin around his eyes with peanut shells and he said "been using these peanut shells since 1981" / The boy told the tortoise he was sorry and returned the skin around his eyes

When the boy got back from the ski trip the beard was waiting for him and it reattached itself to his face / the end of the beard broke through the boy's bedroom window and hotwired a minivan and pulled the boy into the minivan and drove to Denver to buy legal weed for the mole with a sweat disease it had met in 1981 when the tortoise's eye skin fell off

When they got to Denver
they realized that the
mole with a sweat disease
had already cured the
sweat disease and wrote
a book about it and was
now a bestselling author
/ the mole scoffed at the
boy who grew a beard by
mistake and then dug a
hole and disappeared /
the beard was so
embarrassed that it fell
off the boy's face and
floated into the clouds

The boy wondered if he
was free of the beard
forever and he touched
his face as if to ask the
face if it was done
growing beards because
he had never meant to
grow one in the first
place / his face didn't say
a word but it did begin to
sweat big red drops that
tasted like sandpaper /
he bought the mole's
book about the sweat
disease in the airport
bookstore

But the mole's book was no good because the boy couldn't understand mole writing and it didn't appear to be about the same sweat disease that the boy had / the boy bought a plane ticket to a visit an archer he used to be friends with / this archer had never hit a target and didn't own any arrows / but he was a great listener and owned a picture of every sports mascot ever invented

The boy looked through the archer's archive of sports mascot pictures and he looked until he found one of the zero-year-old baby that did jumping jacks / the baby mascot lived in Japan and was the mascot for a sports team that only played games on the boardroom tables of large corporations / he asked the archer if he could take the picture and the archer said okay

The boy lived the next seventeen years in Japan searching for the baby mascot / he went door to door with the picture saying "have you seen this baby mascot? I think it does jumping jacks as it roots on sports teams that only play games on the boardroom tables of large corporations?" / all of the Japanese people who saw the picture of the baby mascot turned to stone

The boy felt bad about turning so many people into stone but he knew if he could find the baby mascot that he could learn how to grow a beard on purpose because the mascot was still age zero and thus didn't know what it was like to do anything by mistake / as the boy grew older he thought that he only knew how to do everything by mistake

When the boy finally found the baby mascot he was no longer a baby but an adult and he was the only living person in Japan / the baby mascot was no longer a mascot either / he said "what are the odds that I would be the last person in Japan that you would show that picture to" as he himself turned into stone as well

The boy started to cry and his tears wouldn't stop so they decided to make a pond in the middle of the board room where the boy had turned the baby mascot who was really just a person into stone / many multicolor carp appeared in the pond and began to play sports but there was no mascot to cheer them on so they stopped and said in unison "where are all the mascots?"

The boy explained to the carp how he had turned all the people to stone and that mascots were just people / the carp laughed at him and told him that all the people who dress up like mascots aren't real mascots and that if he wanted to find a real mascot he should go to the mascot jungle in Poughkeepsie, Mississippi where they all lived

The boy thanked the carp in the pond he had created with his tear's in the Japanese corporate boardroom where he had turned the last living person in the country into stone and he went to the airport to buy a ticket to Poughkeepsie, Mississippi but all of the people at the airport and all of the pilots were stone so he went back to the pond and asked the carp for help

The boy asked the carp
if they could help him
swim from Japan to
Poughkeepsie, Mississippi
to find the mascot jungle
/ the boy wasn't sure if
the baby mascot who did
jumping jacks would be
there but he didn't have
any better ideas / the
carp agreed and they
fused themselves to the
boy's body so that he too
was a fish and together
they swam across the
ocean

When they got to the
closest river to the
mascot jungle in
Poughkeepsie, Mississippi
the carp detached
themselves from the
boy's body and wished
him good luck / the boy
was horrified to see that
the zero-year-old baby
mascot was being roasted
over an open flame by
the other mascots in a
ritualistic cannibal
ceremony

The mascots were pretty mad when they saw the boy spying on their ceremony and they all charged him at once / this allowed the baby mascot to escape the roasting spit over the open flames and run to safety / the boy tried to grow his large red beard to fend off the charging mascots but he could not grow a beard on purpose

The boy told the horde
of angry mascots to stop
and he said "I've got
hands but these are not
helping hands" / the boy
showed the Phillie
Phanatic the palms of his
hands / "I've got method
but no purpose" / "I can
do anything I want to and
the things I choose to do
are the things I hate the
most" / all the mascots'
heads sunk into their
bodies at once until they
were all large furry balls

The baby mascot doubled back and saw the field of balls née mascots / he thanked the boy for saving his life and the boy asked him why he was the mascot they had decided to roast over an open fire / "they hate me because of my youth" the baby mascot said / the boy said "you're lucky you weren't around to hear what I said to the other mascots"

"Why is that?" the baby mascot asked the boy /
"because it was too sad and that's what caused the mascots all to die" /
"they aren't dead" the baby mascot said /
"these furry balls are just seeds that we need to plant to grow the new mascots who will rule the new world" / there was at least a million furry balls strewn out in front of them in the field

"This happens every time
the world needs to reset"
the baby mascot said /
the boy said "I just
wanted you to teach me
how to grow a beard on
purpose" / "you will learn
how to do that by
planting these mascot
seeds" the baby mascot
said / and then the baby
mascot turned into an owl
with an orange for a head
and flew into a tree and
exploded confetti on the
head of a roach

The boy didn't know what he meant by the world needing to reset but if the world resetting also meant that he could learn how to grow a beard on purpose then he was determined to plant every single one of the mascot seeds / as soon as he started to plant the seeds the roach with confetti on its head said "you're doing it wrong"

"You'll never finish" the roach said / "you'll die before you plant even 1% of those seeds" / it was true that it had taken the boy a whole day to plant only three mascot seeds as the mascot seeds were nearly the same size as the mascots they had evolved from

There were actually
1,213,466 mascot seeds
in the field and at that
rate it would take almost
404,489 days to finish
the task which equals
over 1,108 years which is
much longer than a human
being is capable of living
/ "I don't wanna live even
one more day if I can't
learn how to grow a
beard on purpose" the
boy said as he stomped
the roach dead

The bottom of the boy's shoe had confetti and roach blood on it and he licked the confetti and roach blood and immediately began to hallucinate / he saw a vague ghost in front of him and he knew the ghost's name was orange wind because the translucent aura had a name tag that said "orange wind"

The boy asked orange
wind if he was real or
just a hallucination from
licking the confetti and
roach blood which the
boy assumed functioned
like a psychedelic drug
and orange wind said "no
everything is real" / the
boy said "please help me
I'll do anything you ask" /
orange wind grew one
thousand sizes larger
until its name tag was
just a speck in the sky

The ghost turned into
the entire sky itself so
massive until it touched
the horizon like a
sundown / "I'll help you
now" orange wind said /
"but you must promise to
stop doing things you
hate and to stop killing
things that turn into
other things" / the boy
agreed and orange wind
shot 1,213,466 lightning
bolts into the ground
creating 1,213,466 holes

Then orange wind howled
and all the mascot balls
rolled into a hole /
orange wind kicked up a
massive tornado and blew
dirt and rain all over the
field / when the storm
was done every seed had
been planted and orange
wind was gone / the boy
picked up his name tag
off the ground and stuck
it on his own chest / he
wanted to write down a
name but he remembered
that he didn't have one

The boy just crossed off "orange wind" so that the name tag read "orange wind" / The boy didn't think this was much of a name so he sought out the nearest library to find a book on names to pick a new one / luckily he had time because the mascot seeds weren't going to grow into whatever they were going to grow into overnight

It took many years for the seeds to grow and the boy used that time to decide that his name would be 𐄂, which is a symbol called "the ogonek" but he realized in explaining this that people would only know and refer to him as "the ogonek" and they wouldn't just think about the wordless symbol itself when they thought about him or addressed him

Tending the mascot seed farmland was so labor intensive that the boy didn't have time to correct all of the people calling him "the ogonek" / the farming had become his life's work and his story had become so famous that a fictionalized television show called *The Ogonek Chronicles* had been produced and become a massive hit

Each episode of the television show began with a voiceover that said "one day all of the mascots on earth died and became seeds... now one man has been called forth to farm these seeds to save mankind... this man is... the ogonek" / the show was entering its thirteenth season when the boy caught wind of it and he was not happy

The boy , sued the television channel and production company and he won several million dollars which he used to enhance production on the mascot seed farm / the boy , truly felt that with this new technology whatever was going to bloom from the mascot plants was going to bloom soon / he liked the way the words "bloom soon" sounded together

Because of the lawsuit money with the tv people over the stolen rights to his story as well as for defamation in being referred to as "the ogonek" the boy , had enough free time on his hands to write and record a soulful pop ballad called "Bloom Soon" which he released as a single on his birthday

The lyrics of the "Bloom
Soon" went: "bloom soon
/ not yet / never worry /
always wet / haven't
wanted / haven't said /
words are scary / some
are dead / don't have a
name / never did / bloom
soon / call me kid"

He released the single with the pseudonym "kid" which he decided should just be his real name or at least the name that he was okay with being called / the song was extremely profitable and the boy , who was now called kid made even more money to improve the technology on his farm with fancy robots overlooking the crops and played "Bloom Soon" over and over on the ukulele

Kid was practically an old man now and that's why it was funny and cool that he was going by the name kid / in his head he sometimes referred to himself as the boy or as the priest or as the boy who grew a beard by mistake or as the boy , or any wordless symbol you can stumble upon randomly and fail to understand completely

Kid the boy became
obsessed with furthering
his career in the
international pop star
arena and would stop at
nothing until "Bloom
Soon" was topping the
charts in every country
on earth / he
re-recorded the song in
every single language
except sign language
because he was afraid of
using his hands to talk in
the event he might need
them to fight or eat with

This is how "Bloom Soon"
looked in Spanish:
"Florece pronto / todavía
no / nunca te preocupes /
siempre mojado / no he
querido / no he dicho /
las palabras dan miedo /
algunos están muertos /
no tienen nombre / nunca
lo hice / floreció pronto /
llamame niño" / the song
was called "Florece
Pronto" in Spanish

Eventually kid became
the biggest and most
famous pop star on the
planet and "Bloom Soon"
even replaced "Happy
Birthday" as the
preferred song of choice
at people's birthday
parties / But the
celebrity and fame came
with a hefty price tag
which was the
destruction of his mascot
seed farmland

When he returned home from a tour of Bulgaria which was the last place on earth "Bloom Soon" or "Цъфтят скоро" topped the chart he found that the A.I.-controlled farm equipment had become sentient and rebelled / whatever had bloomed from the mascot plants had been eaten by the robots and the entire field was flooded with their metal carcasses and a river of green vomit

The boy screamed for orange wind or the confetti roach or baby mascot or Jimbo the tortoise the owl who had an orange for a head or d.j. peppermill or a new friend he hadn't met yet to materialize and show him the way / but he would have to wait forever for that because the only person who was going to help him now was himself

This is what his
reflection in the green
vomit river told him /
The reflection went on to
say "you really let your
ego get the best of you
and you make me sick
which is no easy task
seeing how my home is
already a river of green
robot vomit" / The boy
apologized and his
reflection said "I bet you
don't even remember
chum piss"

But the boy did
remember chum piss /
chum piss was the punk
band he had formed to
play songs about how
shaving off your bread is
cool and they were a
colossal dud who couldn't
even get a single fan /
The boy told his
reflection this and his
reflection said "so what?
I know you're not too
stupid to know that being
popular has nothing to do
with being good"

"What bloomed from
these plants before the
robots ate it?" he asked
his reflection / "I don't
know because I only
arrived after they
started vomiting it up
and it clearly
decomposed inside their
robot stomachs" the
reflection told him /
Just then the sun began
to set and his reflection
in the green vomit river
began to fade away

It made a sound like
"shhhhhhh" before it
disappeared completely /
The boy wasn't sure if it
was shushing him or if it
was trying to say a word
that began with "sh" like
"she" or "sherbert" or
"shellfish" or
"shapelessness" / If the
word had been "she"
perhaps his reflection
was starting a sentence
in reference to the boy's
mother

Maybe it was trying to tell him that his mother was still alive inside a cave on a mountainside somewhere but that she was in great danger of being eaten alive by a grizzly bear / this was just one of the possible sentences but it was arguably the most pressing sentiment if true / so the boy solicited 1,000,809 drone pilots

There are 1,000,809 mountains on earth and he paid each drone pilot one thousand dollars each to search all of their mountainsides for signs of his mother / this completely drained all the money he had made from writing and recording the most popular song in the history of the earth / by all accounts his mother had died in childbirth but he had to make sure

"I was far too young during childbirth to personally recall whether she lived or died" the boy said of his mother who was named yachtface / He promised the drone pilot who could rescue yachtface from the jaws of a bear an additional thousand dollars on the condition that they also killed the bear and brought him the decapitated bear head

By the end of the first week ten drone pilots had delivered him bear heads / the boy was kicking himself for not including in the contract that they also safely return his mother in addition to killing a bear as these ambitious but dishonest drone pilots had clearly just sought out a bear to decapitate to get another thousand dollars and perhaps didn't scan any mountainsides at all

The boy felt terribly guilty for the deaths of these ten innocent bears so he scheduled a parade in their honor that he called "the parade for the ten innocent bears" / after a while when no more drone pilots returned he just assumed that his mother had in fact died in childbirth and this whole endeavor had just been a terrible waste of resources and time

Just as he was about to
commit suicide someone
grabbed the poisoned
rooster out of his hands
and threw it out the
window / it was his
mother yachtface and
she had the most
tremendous and neatly
trimmed red beard / "you
were going to boil that
poisoned rooster and eat
it so it would kill you
weren't you son?" she
said

The boy sat in stunned
silence mesmerized by
his mother's beard / he
wondered if she had been
the bearded lady a
traveling sideshow or if
she was just a bearded
lady for free / she said
"is this what you want?"
as she stroked the red
beard / "I don't know"
the boy said / "I thought
so but now I'm not sure"

Yachtface moved closer
to her son until her
beard was touching his
torso / the beard
became many red worms
and dug themselves into
the boy's body / they
slithered into his
stomach and feasted on
the pile of toenails /
when they had eaten
every last toenail they
spontaneously combusted
and the boy's mother fell
to the ground beardless

There was so much blood
and the boy was not going
to survive / he looked at
his mother yachtface and
he said "why did you
abandon me?" / "I didn't
abandon you" / "I was
that thing on your face
you were always trying to
get rid of until you finally
did" / the boy who grew a
beard by mistake hadn't
realized that the beard
he had grown by mistake
was actually his mom

Yachtface told him that nobody can grow a beard on purpose / she said that everything in fact was preordained / she rubbed some of the blood from his belly onto his face so that it looked like a beard and helped him over to the mirror / she told him to look into the mirror and try to do something on purpose

The boy tried to grow a
beard and he did / he
grew a great blackish
beard that covered up all
the blood / his mother
smiled as he passed away
in her arms

THE END