

The Boy's Hair

An allegory of creative struggle and autonomy

Once there was a boy whose hair grew and grew. His hair grew so much his mother thought he looked like a girl. "You're not a boy!" she said, "You're a girl!"

"I am not a girl," said the boy. "Lots of boys have long hair!" and he showed her a picture of a Rock Star. The Rock Star was a young man with very long hair.

The boy's hair grew and grew. It grew so long he had to wind it around and around his waist so that it would not drag on the ground as he walked. His father said, "We must cut your hair. It is too long! It will trip you up when you walk and your clothes won't fit if you tie it around your waist."

"My hair is not too long!" said the boy to his father, and he showed his father a picture of a girl from India with very long black hair tied up and plaited and wound high above her head. She wore her hair proudly like a fine hat. And the boy did the same. He wound and plaited and tied up his long hair so that it towered high above his head like a massive crown.

"Now my clothes will fit and I won't trip up when I walk," said the boy.

The boy's hair grew still more. It grew upwards and it grew downwards and it grew outwards on both sides of his head. Every day the boy wound the newly-grown hair into the knot on top of his head until it became taller than his own self and wider than his outstretched arms.

On hot days it was a parasol, shading the boy from the sun. On rainy days it was an umbrella protecting him from the rain.

Birds landed on the boy's hair and built their nests there. Squirrels and lizards jumped up there out of the way of cats. Spiders swung their delicate threads onto his hair, and wove their lovely webs all over it to catch their fat flies. The hair became a village of creatures and things.

But then ...

The hair, with its birds, its nests, its spiders, its flies, and the dust and the dirt that had fallen onto it, began to smell.

Soon it smelled so strongly that the birds flew away. The squirrels and lizards began to run up trees instead of up to the boy's hair to escape the cats. The spiders swung themselves away from the hair and their webs became cobwebs. The boy's mother and father could not go near him and even the boy himself found his hair too unpleasant to bear any longer.

The boy's mother said, "You must cut your hair. It is not practical. It cannot be washed when it is tied up and wound round and plaited as it is, on top of your head. It cannot be washed even when it is untied and unwound and not plaited. It would take too long to wash and too long to dry and whole days would be lost in the washing and drying of it. You must cut your hair."

So the boy's father took a pair of scissors and began to cut the hair. He cut and he cut and, as he cut, the hair began to fall into a bucket the boy's mother had placed at his feet. When the boy saw his hair fall into the bucket he began to cry and whispered, "My beautiful, beautiful hair!"

The boy's tears fell for a long time; so long, indeed, that they filled the bucket and covered the hair.

After all his hair had been cut and all his tears spent, the boy sat staring sadly downwards at what was left of his crown. The tear-darkened hair moved gently beneath the water, and the water washed off the dust and the dirt.

A weaver bird flew down and perched on the side of the bucket. "What beautiful, shiny thread!" the bird exclaimed. "My wife would very much like that for our nest. May I take a thread or two?"

The boy gave the bird five strands of the hair and watched the bird fly off to his nest and weave the strands into it. The nest glistened and shone with the woven hair. It looked like a golden jewel.

The boy jumped up. He took the bucket and asked his mother for a loom which she gave to him, and for the next thirty-five days the boy wove the hair into a ream of cloth, the colour of the sun and the texture of satin.

Whilst the boy wove, the birds came down to watch him. "Here are some feathers", one of the birds

said to the boy. "Will you weave them into your cloth?" And the boy did so. The cloth looked beautifully patterned.

Two squirrels came up to the boy. "I have some chestnut-coloured fur and my friend has some grey. Will you weave the fur into your cloth?"

"Yes," said the boy, and he wove the chestnut fur into one side and the grey fur into the other side of his yellow cloth. The cloth looked splendid and colourful.

A spider came down to the boy. "Here is a spool of my own silver thread", she said. "Will you weave this into your cloth?". The boy did so and then, as the spider's thread was still sticky, the spider brought the boy a small box and said, "in here are the wings saved from the flies I have eaten. Stick them on the thread and your cloth will look like coloured lace."

The boy stuck the flies' wings onto the spider's thread, and their latticed, prism-like surfaces flickered and shone like a rainbow.

The ghosts of the dead flies floated up to admire their wings, and murmured and exclaimed to themselves about how wonderful it all looked.

On the thirty-fifth day the cloth was complete. The boy's father build a glass box to put the cloth in. "It is too beautiful," the father said, "to use as a bedspread or a table cloth or a curtain. We will hang it on the wall like a painting."

Together the boy and his father hung the cloth where it could be seen by all who passed the house. The boy's mother opened the windows and the door and the sun looked in and nodded to the cloth, and smiled its approval at the boy.

People from all around came to see the cloth. Animals brought their families and friends to see it. Insects flew down and crawled up to see the cloth, and chirruped and buzzed with excitement.



The boy's hair still grew and grew. The boy cut it and gave it to the people, the animals and the insects who wanted to make cloth of their own.

Through the years, many beautiful cloths were made and, as the boy turned into a man, he continued to cut his hair and give it away.

Time passed and the man changed, growing older, his hair becoming grey. The cloths became bolder in colour. Dark metal-hued streaks and flashes of bright white were mixed with the gold of the fabric so that the cloth seemed like sweet music stabbed with discords, like a fury against the passing of time. Time continued and, as if accepting this, the hair quietened. The colour faded into a gentle silver and the cloths that were woven became delicate and shadowy.

Soon the hair grew completely white. Now the man no longer cut his hair. He was very old. He was over a hundred years old, and he could not walk very far or talk very much, but instead sat each day looking at his old weaving that still hung on the wall.

The old man's hair grew longer around him. It grew and grew. And the old man sat and sat and looked and looked at the weaving.

One day the old man stopped looking. He shut his eyes, closing inside his mind many pictures of the colours and the patterns of his weaving. And, similarly, as his head drooped, his moon-white hair enclosed his body, quivering as if tended by invisible hands. In the quiet, the hair reflected the light of all things, like a song for the eternal.