Elvis Died at the Florida Barber College

At ten years old, I could not figure out what it was that this Elvis Presley guy had that the rest of us boys did not have. He seemed to be no different from the rest of us. He was simply a man who had a head, two arms and two legs. It must have been something pretty superlative that he had hidden away, because he had every young girl at the orphanage wrapped around his little finger. At about nine o'clock on Saturday morning, I figured a good solution was to ask Eugene Correthers, who was one of the older and smarter boys, what it was that made this Elvis guy so special. He told me that it was not anything about Elvis's personality, but his wavy hair, and the way he moved his body. About a half an hour later, the boys in the orphanage called down to the main dining room by the matron were told that they were all going to downtown Jacksonville, Florida to get a new pair of Buster Brown shoes and a haircut. That is when I got this big idea, which hit me like a ton of bricks. If the Elvis haircut was the big secret, then Elvis's haircut I was going to get. I was going to have my day in the sun, and all the way to town that was all I talked about. The fact that I was getting an Elvis haircut, not just the simple fact that we were getting out of the orphanage, made me particularly loquacious. I told everybody, including the orphanage matron I normally feared, that I was going to look just like Elvis Presley and that I would learn to move around just like he did and that I would be rich and famous one day, just like him. The matron understood my idea was something that I was really excited about and said nothing. When I got my new Buster Brown shoes, I was smiling from ear to ear. Those shoes, they shined really brightly, and I liked looking at the bones in my feet, which I had never seen before, through a special x-ray machine they had in the shoe store that made the bones in your feet look green. I was now almost ready to go back to the orphanage and practice being like the man who all the girls loved, since I had my new Buster Brown shoes. It was the new haircut, though, that I needed to complete my new look. We finally arrived at the unassuming, unembellished barbershop, where they cut our hair for free because we were orphans. Even though we were supposed to slowly wait to be called, I ran straight up to one of the barber chairs and climbed up onto the board the barber placed across the arms to make me sit up higher. I looked at the man and said, with a beaming smile on my face, 'I want an Elvis haircut. Can you make my hair like Elvis's?' I asked. The barber, who was a genial young man, grinned back at me and said that he would try his best. I was so happy when he started to cut my hair, but just as he started to cut, the matron, who had been watching me and had a look as cold as ice, motioned for him to come over to where she was standing. She whispered something into his ear that caused the barber to shake his head, like he was telling her, 'No'. In response, the matron walked over to a little man sitting in an office chair that squeaked as it rolled around the floor and spoke to him. It was the little man who then walked over and said something to the man who was cutting my hair. The next thing I knew, the man who was cutting my hair told me that he was no longer allowed to give me an Elvis cut. 'Why not?' I cried desperately. The kindly barber stopped by the matron did not answer, but from his expression, I could tell that he wished he could cut it as I had asked. Within a few minutes, it wasn't an Elvis haircut, but a short buzz cut that the barber had given me. When he finished shaving off all my hair and made me smell real good with his powder, the barber handed me a nickel and told me to go outside to the snack machine and buy myself a candy bar. I handed him the nickel back and told him that I was not hungry. 'I'm so sorry, baby,' he said, as I climbed out of his barber chair. 'I am not a baby,' I said, as I wiped the tears from my eyes. I then sat down on the floor and brushed away the hair that had accumulated on my shiny new Buster Brown shoes. My head was no longer in the clouds, and I got up off the floor, brushed off my short pants, and walked sullenly towards the door. The matron was smiling at me sort of funny like. The barber upset by the matron said to her, 'You are just a damn bitch, lady.' She yelled back at him at the top of her lungs, before walking toward the office, as fast as she could. To show his anger, the man hit the wall with his hand and then walked outside where he stood against the brick wall, smoking a cigarette. I understood right there my haircut was something that had been out of the power of the barber and then I slowly walked outside to join the man. He looked down, smiled at me, then he patted me on the top of my bald as a coot head. It was a fact of my life that I was not gonna have hair that was anything like Elvis's anytime soon. I then looked up at the barber with my wet red eyes and asked, 'Do you know if Elvis Presley has green bones?'