

Burning Desire

By Charlotte Booth



Life as a hair curler is a sad one. Well mine is at least. When I was originally given to Mery-Neith by her mother I was viewed purely as a thing of beauty. This of course is not always a good thing. A thing of beauty is to be looked at, fondled and admired. A thing of beauty is rarely used for the function for which it is made. This has been my lot for many years.

Mery-Neith was fascinated by horses. Watching them, riding them, drawing them. She couldn't get enough, so when her mother handed me to her, wrapped in a piece of leather and placed in a small wooden box I thought her squeal of delight would shatter my tiny bronze ears. She ran her finger along my back many times a day, made little whinnying noises, as if they were coming from my own mouth, and galloped with me around the house. I think sometimes she longed for me to be a real horse. Whilst the attention was nice it was not my reason for being. I was designed to curl hair, to make women feel beautiful and glamorous. Perhaps only after twelve birthdays Mery-Neith was too young for such a grown up gift.

Every day, when she finished playing with me she bid me good night, wrapped me up in the leather and put me carefully back in the box. There I would lie in the dark, listening to the muffled sounds of the house and pray for the day when I would be used to curl hair. With hindsight, I didn't realise how wonderful my life was. The day finally came when Mery-Neith wanted to use me on her luscious blue-black hair. I was so excited when she took me out of the box and I realised her intentions. I had spent many months in my dark cocoon since the last time she handled me, that I hardly recognised the young woman who was preparing herself for a party.

Her childhood friend, Iset, also grown up, was there and she was the one holding me by the tail and asking Mery-Neith how she wanted her hair "Just curly around the face, I think," she said looking into the see-face imagining how it would look. "Any more and we will be here until Re finishes his nocturnal journey! You know I'm as hairy as a mountain lion."

I wanted to tell her I didn't think she looked like a mountain lion. I wanted to tell her I thought she was beautiful. Instead I waited. Little did I know my purpose in life was to cause me so much pain: both physical and emotional.

Iset, still grasping me by the tail pushed my front legs into the lamp and held me there. I could feel my whole body burning and then when I thought I couldn't take any more she removed me from the flame, "I think that's hot enough," she said wrapping my mistress's hair around my curling blade. After the initial smell of burning hair, the curl that emerged was beautiful. It was perfect. I felt so proud. Then the process started again, and again and again.

Secret Life of Objects

Mery-Neith's hair was almost done. We only had the hair over her forehead to do. I was pleased about this as I didn't realise the heating process would be so painful for me. I was heated in the fire one last time by Iset, who was animatedly telling a story about when she met her future husband. She started to curl the short hair at the front of Mery-Neith's head when she laughed at some witticism she had made. Her hand slipped and my red-hot curling blade pushed against my mistress's forehead, searing the skin. She screamed and examined the blistering welt in the see-face. I was thrown to the floor whilst Iset ran to get Mery-Neith's mother. I was distraught at hurting my mistress, although I did feel Iset should have been concentrating harder whilst wielding red-hot metal.

That was the last time in many years I was used for my true purpose. Mery-Neith never again wore her hair curly, preferring it straight or covered with a wig. When she unwrapped me from the small piece of leather, which was not that often, she always touched the scar on her head with sadness before putting me back into the box.

18th dynasty hair-curler from the Petrie Museum, London.