

Curls and Splinters

by Doreen Tamminga

Running barefoot across the cool barn floor, Jolene looked back to see if her cousin was coming. Envy filled her eyes as Keisha flipped a long golden curl back over her shoulder. Her own hair was neither blonde nor brown, and, oh, so poker straight. With a frown, Jolene looked down at her own worn clothes, comfortably faded and perfect for farm-living. No, Keisha was obviously the city girl in her suede sandals with the white flower by the toes, and her pleated skirt with a matching top.

But still, it was not Keisha's clothes that caused a flame of envy to burn hot in Jolene's breast; for the clothes would get dirty and worn, and why, someday when Jolene was older and could get a job, she would save up her money and buy clothes just as nice as Keisha's. No, it was the golden curls that made Jolene frown. Try as she might to brush some shine into her own hair, even coaxing her older sister into curling it Sunday morning before church, it never looked like Keisha's. For even the stiff curls could not hide the drab plainness of her mouse-coloured hair. And by the time Sunday school was out, so were Jolene's curls, hanging limply down her back.

"Hurry up, Keisha!" Jolene called back as she climbed the worn wooden ladder to the

hayloft above. There the two girls clambered up some straw bales before arranging them to make a fort. Jolene had the best ideas and designed a tunnel leading to a secret doorway while Keisha eagerly helped. Then, tiring of their finished fort, the girls scrambled to the highest hay pile they could find to play king-of-the-hill. The prickly straw didn't seem to bother Jolene as she scurried nimbly to the top of the slippery pile and pushed Keisha back down. How she laughed as over and over Keisha slid back down, not once making it to the top. But pride goeth before...a fall, and in a moment of glee, Jolene stepped back a little too far, and catching her foot in the twine of a straw bale, went tumbling down, head over heels.

Quick as a wink, Keisha climbed to the top; she was king of the hill! Now it was her turn to laugh good-naturedly as Jolene got up and dusted herself off, but Jolene did not join in the laughter. Oh, she could laugh when Keisha tumbled down, but to be the one laughed at? That was not something that Jolene could take. Not even a smile tugged at her lips as she pressed them together in determination and scrambled furiously to where Keisha perched at the top.

Sunlight streamed through a crack in the barn walls outlining Keisha's curls in a bright gold as she covered her mouth and giggled.

The flame of envy burned brighter in Jolene's breast. "I'm going to get you!" she said angrily, and hoisting herself up the last two

bales, she pitched wildly forward and snatched at Keisha's ponytail.

"Don't!" Keisha cried as she lost her balance. Stumbling to gain hers, Jolene also wobbled, and suddenly they both went down as the whole straw pile eased over and with a great thumping and bumping came tumbling down.

"Ouch!" Jolene cried out, for as she reached out to the wall to stop her fall, a sharp splinter of wood pierced the palm of her hand. Pulling her hand free, she looked over at Keisha.

"Ooooooh. Ow," Keisha groaned as she pulled herself up. Then her eyes turned to the disastrous pile of hay bales. "Look what you did, Jolene," she said with raised eyebrows. "Your dad's going to be mad." But Jolene didn't seem to hear her, for she was busy inspecting her hand.

"What happened?" Keisha asked while leaning in for a better look. "Did you get a splinter? Ouch! You better get your mom to pull that out right away before it goes in deeper."

Jolene, who had been holding the painful hand close to her face, suddenly let it drop. "No!" she announced putting on a tough farm-girl attitude. "It will be fine. I'm not a *baby*, you know."

Keisha shrugged and turned to follow Jolene down out of the hayloft.

"Let's bike out to the back pasture," Jolene said, but soon wished she hadn't, for as she gripped the handlebars, the splinter

seemed to slide in deeper and bothered her more and more. Stopping by the back fence, Keisha called to the cows who just kept on grazing. Jolene had been peering at her hand, but when Keisha hopped back on her bike, Jolene's eyes were again caught by the sight of her cousin's golden curls. Even the sight of rough straw clinging to Keisha's ponytail could not ease her envy.

Arriving at the back pasture, the girls dropped their bikes by the pond. Collecting fallen pieces of bark, they floated them in the water, adding acorns for sailors and fashioning sails out of leaves. Normally Jolene would have been pleased with the way her boat caught the breeze and floated along the water's edge, while Keisha's kept flipping upside down. But, instead, Jolene inspected the splinter in her hand. Oh, did it ever hurt. *Stupid thing*, she thought, for it was starting to throb.

Keisha noticed Jolene's pain and came over to where she stood. "Let me see it," she asked reaching for Jolene's hand.

"No, it's fine," Jolene said pressing her thumb tightly against it, shoving the splinter in deeper. Then, abruptly, she turned. "Let's go home," she said.

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Poking around in her mom's sewing drawer, Jolene looked for a needle to help get out the splinter. Instead, her eyes lit on her

mom's sharp sewing shears. The special scissors that were kept sharp for cutting fabric.

"I have an idea," Jolene said suddenly, forgetting about the splinter for a moment. "Let's play hair-dresser."

Keisha turned to her with interest. "Okay!" she said.

"I'll be the hairdresser first," Jolene said quickly. "You sit here," she ordered and shoved the sewing chair behind Keisha.

Obediently Keisha sat, and with a wild gleam in her eyes, Jolene grasped Keisha's ponytail with one hand and snatched the scissors out of the drawer with the other. One big satisfying *SNIP!* and Keisha's curls lay in a golden heap on the floor.

Jolene's triumphant smile faded at Keisha's horrified gasp, and the two girls stared for a moment at the pony-tail lying on the floor. Dropping the scissors to the floor, Jolene turned and fled.

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"It's going to hurt," Dad said as he pressed the needle and tweezers against the skin of Jolene's hand.

Tears filled Jolene's eyes, but she squeezed her mouth and eyes tightly shut. There had been enough tears that afternoon. Tears from Keisha, and tears from her. Tears of anger and tears of repentance. She still wasn't sure if Keisha had forgiven her. After all, how could Keisha? Jolene certainly would not

have spoken to Keisha again if Keisha had done the same to her.

Mom was away right now, driving Keisha home. She hadn't wanted to stay the night anymore. So now Dad was trying to get out the bothersome splinter. The skin on Jolene's hand was an angry red and had grown swollen around the spot where the splinter had pierced the skin.

"Boy, you sure managed to get this in deep," Dad murmured as he pressed hard against her hand with the tweezers. With a final burning pain, he pinched, then, "A-ha!" he said as he pulled out the long thin piece of wood.

Laying the instruments on the table, Dad sat back with a sigh and looked at Jolene.

"Why *did* you cut Keisha's hair?" he finally asked.

For a moment Jolene just stared at him, and then her chin trembled and the whole story came sobbing out: how her hair was so poker straight and Keisha always looked so pretty, and no matter how she tried to curl her hair it never looked nice and, oh, how she wished she could have golden hair too, or at least curls and, oh, how ugly she was.

By this time Jolene was on Dad's lap and crying against his shoulder.

"Jolene," Dad said, lifting her face. "Look at me. The only thing that is ugly about you, is the character that you have shown today. Envy is an ugly thing that starts festering as it grows deeper and stronger inside you."

“Just like my splinter went deeper and hurt more?” Jolene asked lifting up her sore hand so that she could see the bandage.

“Exactly,” Dad said. “That splinter should have been pulled out the moment it went in, and you need to do the same with envy. When an envious thought comes into your mind, push it out. Don’t think about it for one more moment.”

Jolene was watching Dad’s face as he spoke. “That’s hard to do,” she said, “but, I know, you are going to tell me to ask the Lord to help me.”

Dad smiled. “You’re right again. He will pull out those seeds of envy every time they are planted, if you ask.”

Jolene slid off Dad’s knee. Already her hand was starting to feel a little better. But she still had one more worry. “Do you think Keisha will ever forgive me?” she asked.

“Well,” Dad said. “Soon the skin will grow again on your hand and your hand will heal. You can heal your relationship too with Keisha

by confessing your sin and asking her forgiveness.”

“I already did,” Jolene told him.

“That’s good,” Dad said, “but you have to give her time. Your hand won’t heal in a day, and neither will your friendship. Keisha may need time to see that you’re truly sorry. In the meantime, you must pray and work at keeping your heart clean from sin. Then you will have a beauty that shines out from the inside: not the beauty of golden curls, but the joy and love that spills from a new heart and puts a sparkle in your eye and a happy expression on your face.”

*Whose adorning...let it be the hidden man of the heart...even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. 1 Peter 3-4*

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