

Our Spoons came from Woolworths 10 (by Barbara Comyns)

Sophia met Peregrine Narrow, an older man who fascinated her. After a happy summer in the Abbey Road flat, winter brought bad times again, and Sophia discovered she was pregnant for the second time. Charles said she must get rid of the baby, and much against her will, she agreed.

Episode 10

Charles kept asking people's advice on how to get rid of babies. He was getting desperate. I felt dreadfully sorry for him, but angry too. Then he heard about a doctor who did illegal operations for twenty-five pounds. I rather hoped he would be unable to raise such a large sum of money, but he went to five of our richer friends and told them we were behind with the rent, and would be turned out if we didn't pay at once, and they all gave him five pounds.

I don't feel much like writing about the actual operation. It was horrible and did not work at all as it should. I couldn't go to hospital, because we would have all gone to prison if I had. Eventually I became better. But my mind didn't recover at all. I felt that I had been cheated from having my baby. I felt I had been weak. I should have left Charles and had the baby somewhere. If I'd just become a tramp with Sandro surely someone would have taken us in, but instead of that I had murdered it.

While I had been ill Sandro had had to go away. He stayed with a married sister of Eva's who lived in the country. We did not, of course, tell them the truth about my illness. When I recovered and suggested bringing him home, they wrote and said he could stay there for a few months and be a companion for their little girl. Charles was very keen on this suggestion and I could hardly refuse to let him have a good country holiday, instead of the very haphazard life he led with us, but I had an uneasy feeling about him being so far away, as if he would never come back to me again.

Just at this time I was offered a job in a commercial studio. The pay was two pounds ten shillings a week, more than I had ever earned before. That finally decided me to let Sandro stay away for a time.

I was glad to have a regular job. It took my mind off my miserable feelings. The first day there, I had to walk to work because we had no money. Charles promised he would bring some in time for lunch, but of course didn't, so I became rather hungry. When it was time to leave I had to walk home, getting more and more hungry on the way, and angry too. When I arrived home I saw Charles through the window. He was sitting reading with a tray of tea-things beside him. He looked so comfortable, I became even more angry, and dashed in like a whirlwind and picked up a chair and hit him with it. He did look startled. It was the first time I had done anything like that, and he was disgusted with me. I was ashamed of myself too, but felt too tired to apologise, so just went to bed and wished I was dead.

But I didn't die. The next morning there was a letter from Peregrine saying he was returning that day and would call round after dinner. I was glad, because everything had been so miserable. I felt things might be better now he had returned.

When I told Charles he said he was going out that evening, so I would have

to entertain him alone. Charles and I were still on bad terms with each other, but it didn't seem to matter any more.

That evening, when Peregrine arrived he seemed pleased to see me and after a few minutes asked where Charles was. I told him he was out. Then he said he would go and say goodnight to Sandro, who was very fond of him, so I told him Sandro was out too and would be for several months. Then he noticed how thin and awful I was looking and asked what was the matter. I didn't like to tell him in case it made him hate me, but he was so insistent that eventually I did tell him, and it did not make him hate me, but he seemed rather shocked and kept muttering 'If only I'd known' over and over. It was a great relief to get all this misery and guilty feeling off my mind, and no one could have had a more kind and sympathetic listener to load their misery on. I even told him about hitting Charles with the chair, but it didn't seem to matter any more.

Very soon Charles was home again, with his sketch book under his arm. He was very pleased with the drawings he had done and showed them to Peregrine, but he didn't seem interested; he seemed kind of distracted and left almost immediately. Charles said he was 'a surly bugger.'

The next day at lunch-time the man who swept out the studio told me in a loud whisper that a Mr Narrow had called for me, so I went out and there he was. He said he had come to take me out to lunch so that I didn't throw any more chairs at Charles.

We went to an Italian restaurant and had a beautiful lunch. I'd quite forgotten how sad I was and chattered away, but he wasn't bored, because he said he would fetch me for lunch almost every day in future to make sure I had at least one good meal a day. I didn't tell Charles in case he came to the restaurant every day to get a free lunch too.

I began to think of Peregrine all the time, but this didn't make me unkind to Charles. I was much nicer to him than usual, and let him draw me as much as he wished, even when I had masses of work screaming to be done.

One morning James 'phoned and asked us to have dinner with him. I said Charles should go, but I wanted to have an evening at home to have a great tidy up. When I told Peregrine this at lunch-time, he said, 'Don't go home. Come and have supper at my studio.' I rather felt it would be deceitful to do this, but I wanted to very much, so I said I would, but I must leave early so that I could at least make the flat look as if it had been cleaned, and have a smell of polish about. Already I was getting a scheming mind.

When I left work that evening Peregrine was waiting outside. It was pouring with rain and he looked like a dreadful wet piece of seaweed. I felt almost suffocated and wished I'd gone home to do my cleaning.

At his studio everything became more cheerful. He had left the gas-fire burning and the table was laid and had a bottle of red wine on it, and some daffodils, too. I felt ashamed of my unkind thoughts as he helped me off with my wet coat. My frock was damp, too, so he made me put on his dressing gown. It was red silk with white spots, and I draped it round me in a fashionable kind of way and felt quite grand. The supper was mixed grill – bacon, mushrooms and the inevitable sausages. It didn't go very well with the wine, but we drank it all the same.

When we had finished eating and drinking, we just talked. I sat on the floor very near the fire, and he sat in a chair behind me and I leant my back

against him. Then we became silent, and Peregrine came and sat on the floor beside me. Then he began to kiss me; at first I was shy and scared, although I realised now I'd been wanting him to do this for quite a long time. I forgot about being shy and kissed him back. Then I knew I had never loved Charles. I felt I was being carried away in a great, fierce, misty flood.

Some time later, when I realised I had been unfaithful, I didn't feel guilty or sad; I just felt awfully happy I had had this experience, which if I had remained a 'good wife' I would have missed. I felt quite bewildered. I had had one and a half children, but had been a kind of virgin all the time. When I went home I hurriedly put myself to bed. I'd just got in when Charles returned. He asked if I'd done my great cleaning, and I found myself answering, 'Oh, no. I didn't feel very well and went straight to bed when I came in.' He said I did look a little feverish. He hoped I wasn't sickening for something. And even then I didn't feel ashamed of myself.

There seemed to be unlimited chances of seeing Peregrine. For one thing, Charles went away to stay with his father for a week. Also he joined a sketch club and went there two evenings a week.

On the whole, I was very happy at this time. It was beautiful to be in love, and to have someone care so much for me. I didn't feel guilty towards Charles, because it was his own fault in a way. If he hadn't made me destroy my baby this would never have happened. Peregrine talked about us living together, but it seemed impossible. I didn't like to leave Charles while he was earning no money, but the main reason was I was afraid Charles's family would take Sandro away from me if I left him, and put the poor child in a ghastly orphanage or somewhere dreadful.

I had begun to miss Sandro a lot. At first it had been a relief to know I had not to worry about him while I was out all day, and to know he was having plenty of good food and country air, but I felt depressed in case he was forgetting me. He had been away three months now.

I told Peregrine how much I longed to see Sandro, but where he was staying was such a difficult place to get to, and it was so far away I wouldn't have enough money for the ticket in any case, so he said he would try to borrow a car and take me down there. I felt so happy about this. A few days later he told me he would have a car the following Sunday. I told Charles and at first he said he didn't want to come in case I made a scene about leaving Sandro behind, but I promised I wouldn't, so he agreed to come. I bought a little Beatrix Potter book for a present. He loved books and never tore them like most children do.