

Our Spoons came from Woolworths 11 (by Barbara Comyns)

Charles made Sophia have an abortion, and she suffered physically, but above all mentally. Angry and unhappy, she started to have an affair with sympathetic Peregrine. Her little boy, Sandro, was sent to the country while she was ill, to stay with an aunt of Charles, and she's afraid she won't get him back. Peregrine has borrowed a car, and with a reluctant Charles, they're going to see Sandro.

Episode 11

When Sunday came it was a beautiful spring day and we started off early. Peregrine was a good driver, but sat rather forward and crouched over the wheel and talked a lot about driving as if he wasn't really used to it. This seemed rather feeble to me. Then I felt unkind to criticise him after all his kindness. He had even thought to bring a camera so that I could take a few snapshots. It was a long journey and the car was small and old and didn't go very fast. The sky clouded too.

These relations of Charles lived near Evesham and we rather lost our way, but at last we found ourselves outside a charming half-timbered house with gables. Although it was only one o'clock, they had not waited lunch for us, and when a sour-faced maid eventually showed us into the dining-room, they did not seem at all pleased and you could tell they did not like the idea of giving three extra people lunch, although it wasn't wartime or anything, and I had written to warn them. They hardly spoke to us while we tried to swallow our cold beef. It was fortunate the helpings were small, because they kind of stuck in your throat.

When we had finished, I asked Charles's aunt if I could see Sandro now. I had asked before, but she said he was resting after his lunch, but this time she said she supposed I could. The night nursery was upstairs on the right. I found it and saw the nurse lifting him out of a cot. He was still only half awake and when he saw me he started to cry. The nurse said children don't like to see strangers when they wake up. I told her I wasn't a stranger, but his mother. I saw they had cut all his hair off unevenly. His skin showed. His beautiful red-gold curls had all disappeared. The nurse said 'Madam' liked short hair for boys and had cut it herself. Poor little boy! He was only two and looked like a convict.

When he had woken up properly, he recognised me and climbed on my lap and was most affectionate; but I still felt there was a great lump in my chest. Charles came in, and after looking at him for a few moments, Sandro remembered him and started to laugh. He had always thought Charles rather funny. The nurse said it was time for his walk and dressed him in his coat and a horrible white tam-o'-shanter. Instead of the brown hardy little boy we had sent away, we now had a polite, white-faced child smothered in clothes and lacking hair. Peregrine was shocked when he saw him too. I told him I wouldn't use the camera after all.

The afternoon wasn't a great success. Sandro was sweet, but Charles was bored and cross, and Peregrine was very angry and nervy because these people were so rude to us. We decided it would be better if we went home directly after tea. I gathered Charles had mentioned how frightful Sandro's

hair was, and his uncle had said, 'There are enough long-haired people in your family' and had given him a shilling to get his hair cut. As soon as we started to put on our coats, Sandro began to cry and say 'Don't go, Mummy, don't go,' which made it very hard to leave him. I suddenly remembered there was a bar of chocolate in my pocket, so I gave it him in the hope it would stop his sad crying. But the aunt saw and pounced at once. She said: 'Surely I knew chocolate would give him a temperature, and was almost as bad as poison for a child.' So we went away and the last thing we heard was Sandro crying, and I cried too.

I spent the journey planning how to get Sandro home again. If I gave up my present job we would have no money to live on at all. Charles had not earned a penny since Christmas. Maybe I could start sitting again, but that was so irregular, and Charles didn't like looking after Sandro while I was out. The only answer to the problem was for Charles to get a job in some studio, so I thought tomorrow, when he had got over this dismal day, I would try and persuade him to look for something. It was a very long time since he had tried. Perhaps jobs were better now the depression was lifting, but in my heart I knew Charles would never take a job in a studio, however attractive it sounded.

Just at this time Charles's mother suggested paying us a visit, and on Sunday evening she came to dinner. After dinner Peregrine came. I hadn't seen him for two days, so he didn't know Eva would be there. At first she was quite pleased to have an interesting-looking man to talk to, and I left them together while I washed up, but when I came back with the coffee he was just saying Sandro looked far from well, and he didn't think her sister fed him properly, and it was about time Charles found some work and kept his wife and child. I was horrified. Perhaps he thought he was sticking up for me or something, but I knew it would make a lot of trouble, and it did. Eva drew herself up and said, 'Sophia had no right to marry my son, but as she forced herself on him, she deserves all she gets. She worked for her living before she was married and it won't hurt her to work now. My son is a genius and deserves some consideration.' Peregrine said, 'Who on earth gave you the idea that Charles is a genius?' Eva was so angry she was kind of gobbling like a turkey cock. Charles came in and Peregrine said he must go. I walked to the door with him and held his hand against my face for a moment to show I wasn't cross, and he was gone.

Eva was telling Charles what a dreadful man he was when I returned. She gave me a reproachful glance and said, 'I'm sure that man is in love with you. He is a snake in the grass.'

She returned to the country quite soon, so there was no more trouble of that kind, but things became very strained between Charles and me. I was fretting for Sandro all the time. I kept telling Charles I must have him home, and he would go all remote and say he was better where he was, and I would hate him. But when my sister Ann asked when Sandro was returning and said 'Isn't Charles ever going to get a job?' I pretended I wasn't worried and Charles would be selling his paintings again soon and Sandro was much better where he was. Although I criticised Charles myself, I couldn't bear other people to do so, even Peregrine. It was queer because I didn't love him; in fact, I almost hated him now.

Peregrine and I still met for lunch nearly every day. Once Charles spent the

weekend with James and I stayed the whole weekend with Peregrine. That weekend was my highest peak of happiness with Peregrine. After that I was not so happy with him. It was not his fault, but I sometimes found him oppressive, like a thunder-storm, and I would get irritable with him. I was feeling very nervy and depressed because it was five months since Sandro had gone away. I told Peregrine I would leave Charles and live with him, if he would take Sandro and me to another country where Charles's family would never find us. He said he would make enquiries about jobs abroad. That is as far as we got, and I felt disappointed in Peregrine for taking the matter no further. He seemed to love me, but would do nothing about the future. Now, looking back, I realise he was very romantic and sentimental, but at forty-seven he hadn't the energy or initiative to take on new responsibilities.

One evening early in June Ann came round looking important and mysterious. She had received a letter from a lawyer to say we had each been left one hundred and fifty pounds – a Great-Aunt Nelly had died and left the little money she had to her neices.

I was so overcome I put my head in my hands and cried with awful tearing kind of sobs. It was the wonderful relief. Now I could get Sandro home and all our petty debts could be paid. Charles came in just as I was wiping the tears off my face with my skirt. His thin face became rather set. He thought there was going to be more trouble, but when Ann and I told him the news he said we must all go to the Café Royal to celebrate. I asked if he had anything to celebrate on. He said, of course he hadn't, but he was sure Ann would lend him two pounds, and to my surprise she did.

We had a lovely evening and Charles and I were happy together for the first time for months. I told him that I was planning to give my job up and fetch Sandro home as soon as I received the money, and he said if I couldn't be happy without Sandro I had better have him home. So I wrote to Charles's relations that evening, telling them I would like to have my child home again.

A few days later I had a reply. They seemed very annoyed that I wanted Sandro. They said it was most selfish of me to want him when all I had to offer was a pokey little London flat. They also said we led a very 'Bohemian' life, not at all suitable for one of tender years; but if I was so rich I could afford to give up my work, the least I could do would be to pay them for all the months they had kept Sandro.

Charles, to my great surprise, said he would write them a 'stinker'. This seemed to work, because it was arranged that Charles would go to Birmingham and they would meet him there with Sandro in about two weeks' time. After this I began to feel really happy. I was happy to be with Charles now there was no reason to feel resentful towards him. I loved this after all our unhappy times together.

The only thing that was wrong was my conscience. I just didn't want Peregrine any more. I knew I must quickly tell him the truth so I agreed to go to his studio. He started to kiss me, but I jumped away and said, 'Peregrine, I don't love you any more and I don't want to be an adulteress any more either.'

I was quite horrified at myself for saying it like that, but it came out so quick. After that everything was grim. He put his head in his hands and cried. I longed to escape, but I thought the least I could do was to try and cheer him

up, but he just went on being miserable. I rather had an idea he was enjoying himself in some strange way.

The next week was ghastly. I began to feel quite ill. There was one good thing that happened. Francis put Charles in touch with a man who was about to start a small gallery, and it was arranged that Charles would look after it in the afternoons. The salary would be only one pound a week, but some of Charles's paintings would be exhibited, so there would be a chance of them selling. I was so surprised at Charles taking the work, but he seemed almost eager to, but that might have been because now he wanted to please me.

2087 words, incl. intro.