

Our Spoons came from Woolworths 12 (by Barbara Comyns)

Sophia inherited one hundred and fifty pounds from a Great-Aunt, and was able to give up her job and get her little boy Sandro back from Charles's relations. She finished her affair with Peregrine. Charles even got a part-time job himself.

Episode 12

Charles had gone all the way to Birmingham to fetch Sandro, and I should have been feeling overcome with happiness, but I wasn't. I was feeling scared to death, because I was going to have another baby and it was Peregrine's. At first, in all the excitement of the money and everything, I hadn't noticed anything wrong. I'd forgotten all about periods, but when a second month passed I realised what had happened. Charles and I had been so happy lately, and now it was all ruined. I thought perhaps it would be best to tell Peregrine today, while Charles was away. I was rather hoping I would feel better when I had told him. My brain had been feeling so numb lately I couldn't think what to do about the future at all.

I went to the public 'phone in the hall and dialled his number. He said he would love to come to lunch. When he arrived he seemed to think I'd changed my mind about him. He kept saying how pleased he was to see me. I thought 'If he really loves me and wants the child, the best thing will be for me to leave Charles and try and start a new life; it can't be much worse than the one I've had up to now.'

I just said, 'I'm going to have a baby and it's yours. It's about two months old now.'

He looked very startled, rather like a frit hen. Eventually he said quite brightly, 'You could have another operation, couldn't you?'

I said, 'No, I couldn't.'

So he thought again, and suggested I should let Charles think it was his.

I said, 'Charles simply hates babies, and can't afford to keep his own, so I don't see why he should keep yours.'

I must have sounded rather fierce, because he put on a very sad face, then put his face in his hands, and said, 'Perhaps it will be born dead.'

After this my one idea was to get rid of him now. So I pretended I was going out. He said, 'Let me know if there is anything I can do to help' and walked away into the sunshine.

I lay on the divan and cried till I was sick. Then suddenly I went to sleep.

When I awoke I felt quite calm. I looked at the clock and saw that Charles would be home with Sandro in an hour. I had £150. With this I could run away. Maybe I could start a small business – but if I took Sandro with me Charles's family would track me down and take him away. On the other hand I could let Charles think it was his child, born rather early. When it had arrived I could tell him the truth. The only thing about this was the £150 would have been used up by this time and I would have nothing to run away with if he didn't want me after he knew the truth.

I found myself hoping I would have a miscarriage. I felt I almost hoped the poor baby would be born dead, as Peregrine wished. Then I was horrified. I thought 'I've murdered one child. What a wicked woman I've grown into!

What has become of me? I used to be quite good once.'

Then Charles and Sandro came home. Sandro was so excited he kept running round the flat, chatting away so fast we couldn't understand what he was saying. In the end he discovered his old toy cupboard and pulled everything out. Most of it was junk, but he seemed very pleased to see it again. I bathed and put him to bed, and thought how shocked Charles's aunt would be to see him sitting up in bed eating raspberries and cream well covered in sugar.

When we had eaten our supper, I told Charles I was going to have this baby, but instead of being overcome with dismay, he was nice about it. I was so surprised tears came in my throat. He said perhaps it would be a girl, he would quite enjoy having a daughter, and that he was going to make a great fuss of me this time to make up for all the sad times before, and I felt more wicked and guilty than ever.

We decided it would be a good idea to move again. We had had some unhappy times in our present flat and thought it would be best to start again. I couldn't help feeling, 'If I'm going to leave Charles in about seven months, it's hardly worth moving now,' but I was getting rather cowardly and kept hoping some miracle would happen, and Charles and I wouldn't have to part at all.

I had a great longing to have our own bathroom and not have people always banging on the door. With very little trouble we found a most suitable garden flat. It was rather small, but really self-contained. There was a pretty little bathroom with hot water and every convenience. The kitchen was tiny. You could prepare and cook a whole meal without moving a step.

The flat was in Belsize Square, so we were quite near Primrose Hill. We moved at the end of July, and as soon as we were straight we had a party, so that all our friends would know where we were living. Bumble Blunderbore, whom we hadn't seen for a long time, came. He brought a 'great woman' with him, who really was great. She was quite six feet tall and very beautiful in a totem-pole kind of way, with huge staring eyes, like head-lamps. He was full of how inspiring she was to sculpt. Peregrine was at the party too. I made rather a point of only having him to the flat when other people were there.

A few days after the party we did a thing we had never done together before – we went away for a seaside holiday. We went to Walberswick. Charles painted most of the time and I lay in the sun and got very brown, and Sandro discovered the sea for the first time. We were away for a fortnight, and the change did me a lot of good. Often I forgot that the coming baby wasn't Charles's, and I began to feel quite placid. When we returned I bought a radio. Now I was home so much it was a nice thing to have. Another wonderful thing we had was our own telephone. Now Sandro was home we couldn't go out much in the evening, but people often came to see us, and I was quite happy.

Charles's family were deeply shocked when they heard about us having another baby. Paul, Charles's father, wrote and said he would cancel all future help, but as he had only given us twelve pounds in the last three years, we didn't worry. Eva said I had no consideration for Charles. I must control myself and put a stop to all these babies, and in this case, I felt her remarks

were quite justified.

The winter came, but we had as much coal as we liked this year. It was lovely to have a fire all day and not go out to work, and to always have enough to eat, clean sheets every week, plenty of hot water – to have all these things at once was almost too good to be true. In the afternoons Charles went to the gallery and he was happy there. He made a number of new friends, and used to go out with them in the evening rather often. It became very near the time the baby was due. Charles had forgotten all about dates, so I didn't have to lie about it. The confinement would just about use the rest of Aunt Nelly's money. Sandro was to stay with some of Charles's new friends. I was very glad because I never wanted Sandro to stay with any of my in-laws again.

I had a more difficult confinement this time. The baby took a long time coming and I was so tired I didn't care what kind it was; but after I'd been asleep I didn't like to ask in case there was some mark on it to let people know it wasn't my husband's child. Then Charles came and told me it was a very pretty girl. She had long black hair and pink cheeks with dimples in. I couldn't help loving her.

When I came home, Charles became restless and after fidgeting about for some time he suddenly said, 'I've just remembered I have to meet a man for dinner. It's too late to put him off, so do you mind dreadfully if I go?' 'Of course,' I said, 'Do go,' so he hurried off, like a child catching some extra play. The next evening he came home straight from the gallery, but after that he often did not come till nine or ten, and sometimes it was one o'clock. Sandro was most interested in the new baby. He used to ask if she was a princess. We called the baby Frances Charlotte, but quite soon she was called Fanny.

Eva came to see her and said, 'That baby is not at all like Charles. None of my babies looked like that.' So I said 'As a matter of fact, she resembles my family.' When I'd been at home ten days Peregrine called. I'd felt very wretched about him not coming to see his beautiful daughter, but the last few days I'd almost forgotten all about him. He was so contrite I forgave him, and he was deeply impressed by Fanny's beauty. After that he came nearly every afternoon. He was completely fascinated by Fanny.

When she was six weeks old I cashed a cheque for five pounds, and that was the end of my banking account. Then I had to ask Charles for money. He only earned one pound a week and spent much more than that in the evenings with his new friends. He must have started to borrow money, because he sometimes gave me a pound, but I could only pay for a few days' food with this. I told Peregrine all my money had gone, but he said "What a pity!" and nothing else. Perhaps he hadn't got any himself. I began to feel frightened and depressed, and thought 'This is my punishment for being an adulteress.' Then I remembered I was even poorer before I was one, so perhaps it was a punishment for something I had forgotten.