

Our Spoons came from Woolworths 13 (by Barbara Comyns)

Sophia's renewed happiness with Charles, when a legacy paid their debts and made it possible to have their son Sandro home again, was ruined when she discovered she was pregnant by Peregrine, who couldn't cope with the idea and suggested an abortion. Sick with worry, she was determined to have the baby, and decided she would tell Charles the truth after it was born. She was taken aback when Charles was nice about the pregnancy. For the next seven months her money lasted, and she almost forgot the problem, though Charles started to neglect her. After the baby, Fanny, was born, Peregrine became a regular visitor. But the money has run out.

Episode 13

Charles was out more and more in the evening. I began to feel dull and unwanted and wondered if having two children had made me grow ugly and unattractive. I asked Peregrine if I had changed for the worst, and he told me I was still beautiful and that he still loved me. I was awfully grateful to know someone did.

Then he told me he had no real work. He thought it was only a matter of time till he got another post on a newspaper, and when he did he hoped I would go and live with him and bring the children. When he had gone, I lay in the bath – always my best thinking place – and thought very carefully. I had been feeling very fond of Peregrine lately. It was partly to do with Fanny and partly because he had been kind when I was lonely. Charles did not seem to want me any more, so perhaps it would be a relief to him if I told him I was leaving. Maybe I could even do it without telling him about Fanny. I had been a coward about this right from the first. Recently we had drifted very far apart. I couldn't object to him leaving me alone in the evenings, or complain about all the money he was spending when we hadn't even enough for food. I felt my treatment was just about what I deserved. So I came to the conclusion it would be best for us to go to Peregrine.

The next day a man came and cut the gas off. Later on the light was cut off, then the telephone, but we could still get calls in. There was nothing to cook with, and no more hot water, so I was unable to wash the children's clothes. I tried washing the nappies in cold, but it wasn't a success.

Now everything was so uncomfortable Charles hardly came home at all. In the afternoon I used to take the children on Primrose Hill and fill the pram with sticks, which were very useful to boil kettles on. When Peregrine came to see me he was very grieved to see the sad state we were in. He said he wished he could help but was almost penniless himself. I told him if he really wanted us I would gladly go to him, but we couldn't wait too long or we might starve to death.

After that things got rapidly worse and I began to feel ill. It started by my hardly ever going to sleep at night, and in the daytime I would suddenly start to shiver until my teeth chattered, and sometimes I fainted. One good thing, I never felt hungry now. I couldn't feed Fanny any more, but the milkman was kind and let me have milk although we owed him quite a lot. I hardly saw Charles now. Often he didn't come home for several days.

One morning the people who had had Sandro to stay when I was in the

nursing home having Fanny telephoned to say they had heard I wasn't very well and wondered if I would like to send Sandro to them for a week or two. I was pleased, because I was so worried about his food. He had been living on eggs and tinned soup supplied by the kind milkman.

Charles took him there, and to my surprise, he came back early that evening. I thought it was kind of him, and felt more cheerful than I had lately. He didn't talk much. He seemed to be thinking deeply. Then he said, 'We can't go on like this. Could you go and stay with your brother?'

I was rather surprised and told him my brother had ignored me since the visit I'd paid when Sandro was a baby and I'd so overstayed my welcome. In any case, we hadn't got enough money to pay my fare anywhere and no one would want me with two children.

We both sat in separate huddles on the divan. It was nearly dark, and I felt frit of what he would say next. For some time we were quite silent. Then he said, 'I expect you have realised I don't love you any more. I loathe this domestic life. The children don't mean a thing to me. I don't feel like a father and have never wanted to be one. I may be inhuman and selfish, but I must be, life is so short and the young part of our lives is going so quickly. I must be free to enjoy it and not be weighted down by all these responsibilities.'

I said, 'Did you often go to *Peter Pan* when you were a child?'

'You are crazy! What on earth has that to do with it?'

I couldn't explain, so I said, 'All right, Charles. I see how you feel. I'm not the feeble, suffocating kind of woman you think me, and of course, we will part. I'll make my plans, so don't worry.'

Charles suddenly kissed the top of my head. 'I don't really think you're suffocating. You're sweet, and I feel guilty about you and the children. Sometimes it's almost made me hate you. I've been unfaithful to you, but I don't love any woman. I never will again. I must be free.' We looked at each other and he was gone and I was alone in the flat with Fanny.

I felt all shivery and my throat was sore, but I must be gone before Charles returned. I went to the telephone to get in touch with Peregrine, but remembered it was cut off. I collected a few clothes and toilet utensils and put them in a case, and took a large fluffy shawl which I carefully wrapped around Fanny, and I picked her up very gently so that she did not waken, and we left the flat for ever.

Peregrine was now living in Chelsea, with relations he had told me, so I walked to Swiss Cottage to get a bus. Unfortunately, I had only twopence in my bag and couldn't have a very long ride. We got out at a very dreary place called Chippenham. It was getting late, and some men were singing in a depressing, drunken way. I was glad when we reached Notting Hill Gate. I sat on the steps of the station with Fanny on my knee for a time. I was tired and my throat was sore. I went on and tried to hurry, because Peregrine's relations would think it queer if I arrived in the middle of the night. My arms became so tired. I tied Fanny round me in the shawl, but it came undone. I only succeeded in catching her just before she reached the pavement. I was overcome by horror in case she had been killed. I leant against the wall shivering and holding her so close she awoke and started to cry. When I reached Fulham Road I discovered I'd lost the case. I must have dropped it when the shawl came undone. I felt insecure without it, and no money in my

bag, awfully like a tramp.

At last we came to King's Road and were nearly there. Peregrine lived in a road opposite the Town Hall, I remembered him saying. I saw the Town Hall and there was Felix Street. The houses looked so pretty. Number Seven had a mauve door. I lifted the beautifully polished knocker and gave a small knock. I became braver and gave a large knock. There was the click of high heels and the door opened. The tall woman who opened the door seemed vaguely familiar.

I said, 'I'm sorry to be so late, but could I see Mr Peregrine Narrow?'

The woman looked surprised. She said, 'Mr Narrow has gone to bed. If you are a model, he is not using models just now. Good night.'

She began to close the door, and I cried out, 'Please don't shut me out. Tell Mr Narrow it's Sophia. Tell him I've come.'

I heard Peregrine shouting something, and he suddenly appeared wearing the dressing gown I'd worn when my clothes had got all wet. He said, 'Good God, Sophia! What are you doing here?'

I took his hand and said, 'Do be pleased to see me, Peregrine. I've come sooner than we expected. Do tell this woman about me.'

She didn't seem to like being called this woman. She said, 'My dear Perry, tell this little model or whatever she is to leave the house at once.' And to my amazement, he said, 'Yes, of course, dear. Sophia, go home like a sensible girl. I'll come and see you in the morning.'

It was like a nightmare and he was looking so scared. I suddenly realised this woman was his wife, so I said 'Is this hideous old person your wife? I suppose you have gone back to her because she is keeping you.' I was so angry and hurt I would have said a lot more, but the 'hideous old person' ordered Peregrine to open the door, which he did without looking at me, and I was put outside rather quickly.

I stood by the mauve front door for a minute or two. I wanted to smash that beastly woman's face to a pulp. I guessed Peregrine was having a pretty grim time inside, and was glad. After the anger passed I felt so tired and afraid. There was nowhere to go at all, but I walked away. After a time I found myself by the river. I hadn't the energy or will-power to jump in. I was burning and freezing cold at the same time, and was glad of the warmth that came from Fanny.

For a long time I must have wandered about without knowing where I was going, but eventually found myself in Fleet Street. In a dark side-turning I discovered quite an inviting doorstep and thought I'd better sit there till morning and I could think better. I was shivering so much my teeth made awful clicking noises and the pain in my throat was terribly fierce, so I sat there to wait till the morning came.