

THE WRONG SPOON

By Sophie Masson

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“NOW REMEMBER, CLARA,” said Dr Bee as he went out, “while I am gone, you will need to stir all the sauces for the Christmas puddings and cakes. Stir twice for most sauces, the chocolate, the vanilla, the strawberry and the others. But you must only stir once for our super-duper extra special Christmas honeycomb caramel sauce, the one that will be served with the best and biggest pudding at the Mayor’s Christmas party. And you must use the right spoons for each one. Is that clear?”

“Oh yes, Dr Bee,” said Clara excitedly. It was the first time she was in charge of the sauces, on her own. She wanted to show Dr Bee that she was no longer just a learner. She was now really on the way to becoming a truly proper sauce-wizard, a saucerer, just like Dr Bee.

Dr Bee was the most well-known saucerer in all the country. His sauces were pure delicious magic. Sweet or savoury, they were legendary. And his Christmas sauces were the most loved of all. Clara was very lucky that he had taken her on as an apprentice. That’s what her parents said. That’s what her neighbours said. That’s what all her friends said. But Clara thought that if she was lucky, so was Dr Bee. After all, she worked hard. She watched everything Dr Bee did and she did exactly as he asked and she never ever complained. After work, she spent her time reading sauce recipes late into the night. Not Dr Bee’s. He had never written any of his recipes down. That was why no-one had been able to copy what he did. The secret was in his head, not in a book. Lots of people had tried to work out what the secret was. But so far no-one had.

Even Clara did not know. There was always a time, right at the end of each making, just after the final stirring, when Dr Bee sent her out, on some errand, to the markets, or anywhere else. Clara knew it was to get her out of the way. She had never tried to see what he did. Besides, she couldn’t. The door was locked. The windows were shut, the curtains drawn.

But even if she didn't try to see what he did, Clara still thought about it. At first, she was sure he had a magic ingredient. But she was the one who went to the markets and she knew what went into each sauce. That was no secret. Now, she thought maybe there was a magic word to say at the end of each sauce-making, a word he would teach her at the end of her apprenticeship. After all, he had said one day she would know his secret. She just had to wait.

Through the window she could see Dr Bee getting on the bus at the end of the lane. He was going to have a lunch meeting with the Mayor at the Town Hall and would not come back for a couple of hours.

Dr Bee had told her about the stirring, but there was no need. She knew it all by heart. She had done it many times. Each sauce had its own special spoon, each one of a different colour. Cream for the vanilla sauce. Dark brown for the chocolate sauce. Orange for the mango sauce. Pink for the strawberry sauce and so on. And of course, a beautiful honey gold for the extra special super-duper honeycomb caramel sauce!

Clara started with the ordinary sauces, and all went well. Just as she was about to start on the extra-special sauce, there was a knock on the door. It startled Clara, so that she dropped the spoon and it skidded across the floor and slid under one of the cupboards. "Oh blow," said Clara, "I will have to wash that spoon now!"

But first, she had to answer the door. So up she went and thanked the postman, who had a letter for Dr Bee, put it on the hall table and went back down to her work.

First, she had to get the spoon out from under the cupboard. That wasn't easy. She tried to pull it out first with her fingers then with another spoon and then with a long knife. Nothing worked. In fact the spoon just slid further back.

She pushed at the cupboard. Harder, and harder, till at last, it moved. She pushed again. Now she could see the spoon properly and if she bent down, she could reach it.

Wait! What was that, hanging from a hook on the wall, behind the cupboard? It was another spoon! A battered old metal spoon with a long handle. Clara had never seen it before.

She stared at it. What was it doing there? It was not beautiful and shining like the other spoons. It looked like the kind of spoon you found in a junk shop. The

sort of spoon no-one wanted. But Dr Bee had put it there. He kept it there, because...

Because it was magic! It wasn't an ingredient or a word that was Dr Bee's secret, it was a magic spoon! Clara was so excited that she didn't think. She took the spoon off the hook, and conveniently forgetting all about the honey-gold spoon, she went back to the stove. Well, it couldn't hurt, could it? She could stir the caramel sauce, just once, with the secret spoon. Then she would taste it and see if it was just right.

She dipped the spoon in—and nearly dropped it into the bubbling sauce. The spoon had jiggled in her hand! She stirred, once. She waited. Nothing happened, except for the hubble-bubble of the sauce. She took the spoon out. She better wash it and put it back before Dr Bee came back.

She had just put it back on the hook when suddenly she heard a noise behind her. She turned—and saw that the caramel sauce had bubbled so high that it was almost overflowing. She must take it off the stove! But as she took a step towards it, the pot gave a strange burping sound, and sauce came tumbling out of it, all down the sides of the pot, over the stove, and into the other sauces. And still it kept coming, a glowing golden fountain of honeycomb caramel, a waterfall of honeycomb caramel, a raging stream of honeycomb caramel!

“Oh no no no, stop!” shouted Clara, running for the mop and the bucket. But try as she might to wipe it up, the sauce just kept coming and coming, the pot was not burping any more but roaring and whistling as more and more sauce poured out of it. All the other sauces were ruined and the stove and the floor was covered in thick gooey hot honeycomb caramel sauce.

“Ow! Ouch!” shouted Clara as she tried to wade her way through the sea of sauce to get the magic spoon. She thought if she could only use it to stir the sauce again, maybe it might stop going mad.

Spoon in hand, she splashed her way back to the stove. She dipped the spoon in—and this time, it fairly danced in her hand, so that she dropped it, and it fell right into the sauce, deep deep within it.

There was a rumble, and now it wasn't just a fountain or a waterfall or a stream that came out of the pot, but an explosion, like a volcano of sauce, hitting the ceiling. And then the pot began to move, and jumped off the stove, sending plumes of honeycomb caramel into every corner of the room.

“No, no, no,” moaned Clara as the pot began to dance its heavy messy way across the kitchen, towards the stairs. She had to stop it getting out. She ran through the mess and up the stairs. She closed the door up the top and locked it.

Bang! Bang! The pot was bashing at the door. Clara grabbed some chairs and pushed them against it. Thump! Thump went the pot, and now there was sauce seeping under the door, thick, gooeyness spreading over the floor and down the hall. The smell of caramel was overwhelming.

All at once, there was a crash as the door burst open and the pot came bouncing into the room, sauce puffing out of it like golden steam coming out of an engine. Clara ran. Ran as fast as she could, down the hall, out of the door, out of the gate, and down the road, with the pot hot on her heels. She could hear it bouncing and burping and burbling behind her, and smell the sweet gooey caramel running in rivers, in lakes, in seas, down the road, down the hill, towards the town. She had to get to the Town Hall! She had to find Dr Bee!

And as she ran people turned to look, surprised first, then amused, then scared, as the sauce flowed through their gardens and over their fences and lapped at their doors and windows. Cats jumped up trees, meowing; dogs barked their heads off; birds nearly fell out of the sky in amazement. Anything that was left by the side of the road—bins and bicycles and baskets and toys and tools, all of them were swept into the sticky golden sea, as the pot bobbed along in Clara’s wake.

She reached the town. The pot was still coming. And so was the sauce. It stopped traffic and made workmen stare, spread over parks and came out of the mouths of statues instead of water.

But there was the Town Hall! At last! Clara ran as fast as she could, so fast that the pot could not keep up, though she could hear it thumping along in the distance. Red in the face, puffing and panting, she burst into the room where Dr Bee and the Mayor were having lunch.

“Excuse me, young lady,” said the Mayor, very crossly, “but what do you think you are doing?”

Clara took no notice. “Oh, please Dr Bee, come quick! Something really bad has happened, and it’s all my fault, and I’m so sorry!”

Dr Bee was not cross. He did not argue. He did not ask questions. He just followed Clara into the square where a crowd had gathered, watching as the pot bounced and burped and sent fireworks and fountains of sauce into the air. Dr Bee

took a step towards it. The pot bounced towards him. But Dr Bee didn't stop. When he reached the pot, he held out his hand. He said something, though no-one could hear what it was.

The pot stopped bouncing. It stopped burping. It stood still as still as Dr Bee walked towards it. And as everyone watched, Dr Bee rolled up his sleeve and put his arm into the pot. Clara held her breath. Would the pot explode again, and Dr Bee be covered in a fountain, a volcano of his extra-special super-duper honeycomb caramel sauce? Or worse still—what if he fell in?

But Dr Bee did not fall in the pot. And he did not get covered in even a trickle of sauce, except on his arm. He pulled something out. Nobody saw what it was, except Clara. Nobody would have known what it was, except Clara. But as soon as he did, the pot began to hum. The sauce that had spread everywhere vanished. Soon, there was nothing left of the mess, anywhere. And the pot stood in the square, quiet as quiet, looking just like a real, a normal, a proper pot.

Dr Bee looked at Clara. She looked at Dr Bee. "I'm so sorry," she said, and hung her head. "I know you will want me to go now. I have ruined everything. I've ruined Christmas. I've ruined the Mayor's Christmas party!"

"Oh no," said Dr Bee. "You just used the wrong spoon. Just like I did at your age, when I was an apprentice." And he smiled.

"Does that mean you don't want me to go?" Clara whispered.

"Of course, I don't want you to go," said Dr Bee. "You're coming along nicely, but you still have a lot to learn. Like using the wrong spoon—at the right time. Now let's get this wretched pot home, somehow."

"I know," said Clara. "Why don't we give everyone a bottle of caramel sauce as a Christmas present? Then we can empty the pot, and we can take it home on the bus."

"Good idea," said Dr Bee. "Besides, I think we might be a bit over caramel sauce, don't you?" He laughed, and Clara laughed with him.