

Songbirds: 'Charity Begins At Home' Part 1

Characters

Serena: Serena Lau is generous, compassionate, selfless and giving.
Agnes: A bit thoughtless, self-centred, greedy and easily influenced
Fanny: Nice but secretly mean, self-centred and greedy, she always puts herself first.
Steven: Fanny's younger brother
Mother: Mrs Pong. Fanny's mother is a mean, rather vindictive woman.
Collector: Charity collector in the street

Synopsis

It is high summer and the effects of the Asian tsunami are still being felt and charity organizations are still out in the street and on TV appealing for money.

School friends Serena, Agnes and Fanny have left school together and are walking along the street when a charity collectors shakes a collection can in front of them. Serena gives twenty dollars, all the money she has, and decides to walk all the way home to Lam Tin as a sort of penance.

Agnes is about to give twenty dollars too. But then under the influence of Fanny, who gives nothing, she reduces this to five dollars. Then Fanny and Agnes go to a cafe where they gorge on drinks and desserts. At home Fanny's mother lectures her on the necessity of putting number one first, i.e., her own interests. Her philosophy is 'Charity begins at home.'

Scene 1

(SFX: Ambient street sounds)
(SFX: The rattling of a collection money box)

Serena: Hey Agnes... Fanny... look... they're collecting for victims of the tsunami. I must give some money.
Agnes: Yes, me too.
Fanny: I've already given some money... last week when we collected at school.
Serena: I did too Fanny. But I want to give some more.
Agnes: I want to give some more as well.
Serena: Let's see... I've only got a twenty-dollar note.
Fanny: I can change it for you.
Serena: No it's okay Fanny... I think I'll put the whole twenty-dollar note in the box... after all... what would I do with these twenty dollars? ... buy sweets... or comics or some other things for myself that I don't really need? I'd rather give it to the poor people who have lost their family and homes.
Fanny: You mean you're going to put the whole twenty-dollar note in?
Serena: Yes Fanny.
Fanny: But you won't have any money left for yourself.

Serena: I know. But it doesn't matter.
Fanny: And how will you get home Serena?
Serena: Walk.
Fanny: Walk?! All the way to Lam Tin?! You'll die from exhaustion!
Serena: Don't worry... I'll be alright Fanny.
Fanny: I'm just worried that you'll get ill again walking all that way home in the heat.
Agnes: You know you haven't been well Serena.
Fanny: And the doctor told you to rest.
Agnes: You'll make yourself ill again if you walk home.
Serena: Last night on television I saw this little Indonesian boy... he had such big sad eyes... they said he'd climbed to the top of a tall tree with a friend... they were playing... then the big wave suddenly came rushing in and he looked down and saw his mother and father and his little sister all being swept away! I couldn't stop crying. Walking home is nothing compared to that.
Agnes: Yes I saw that little Indonesian boy too Serena. It was so sad. Okay, I'm going to give twenty dollars as well.
Fanny: But you can't give away all your money Agnes!
Agnes: But it's for a good cause Fanny.
Fanny: I know it is.... A very good cause... But I just think... well why doesn't one of you put a twenty-dollar note in for both of you... that would be ten dollars each... that's quite a lot.... And Serena won't have to walk home.
Agnes: Shall we Serena?
Serena: No, sorry Agnes... I want to put twenty dollars in just for myself... you do what you like. (To collector) Here you are.
Collector: Thank you Miss. But could you fold the note and put it in the box please.... We're not allowed to take money directly.
Serena: Yes of course.
(SFX: Sound of note being stuffed into box)
There.
Collector: Thank you very much.
(SFX: Rattling collection box again)
Agnes: I might put ten dollars in then.
Fanny: Yes Agnes, ten dollars is better... then you'll be giving to charity and you'll still have some spending money of your own... that's more sensible.
Agnes: Let's see. (SFX: Tinkling of coins as she rummages in her purse) But I've only got a twenty dollar note and... five, six... seven dollars in change.
Fanny: So give the change Agnes.
Agnes: You mean give the seven dollars?
Fanny: Yes... or you could give the five-dollar coin and keep the extra two dollars in case you want to use the Star Ferry or catch a mini bus or something.
Agnes: Okay then... I'll give the five-dollar coin.
(SFX: Coin dropping into the box)
There.
Collector: Thank you.

Serena: Okay... well I'd better start walking. See you tomorrow.
 Fanny: Okay, I hope you're alright...bye Serena.
 Agnes: Serena wait! Look you can't walk all the way home... here, let me lend you some money so you can use the MTR.
 Serena: No it's okay Agnes... thanks... I've made up my mind to walk.
 Agnes: But it's too hot.
 Fanny: Yes Serena... on TV last night they said we were in the middle of a heat wave!
 Agnes: I bet it must be about forty-three degrees!
 Serena: I may get hot Agnes... but at least I know that I have a home to go to, and a mother and father to welcome me home, and brothers and sisters to talk to and play with... not like those poor little orphans in Indonesia and Sri Lanka and Thailand.
 Agnes: But Serena, you've been ill.
 Fanny: And you'll get ill again if you walk home in this weather.
 Agnes: And to tell you the truth you still don't look good as though you've fully recovered from your illness last week.
 Serena: Thanks for your concern... I really appreciate it... but I've made up my mind, I'm walking home... don't worry... I'll be alright... Bye Agnes, bye Fanny... see you tomorrow.
 Agnes: Bye Serena.
 Serena: Bye.
 Fanny: (Pause) (In a weak voice) If you change your mind I can lend you some money Serena.
 Agnes: I don't think she heard.
 Fanny: She doesn't look well.
 Agnes: And she's going to get so hot and sweaty. It's ridiculous walking in a heat wave like this.
 Fanny: And with all the pollution it's hard to breath.
 Agnes: She's going to make herself sick again.
 Fanny: It's so hot... I can hardly breathe.
 Agnes: I know... I'm almost fainting with the heat.
 Fanny: Shall we go somewhere cool and have a cold drink... an icy watermelon juice or...
 Agnes: A slush puppy.
 Fanny: Shall we?
 Agnes: Come on then Fanny... what are we waiting for?

Scene 2

(SFX: Ambient sounds inside a fruit-juice cafe)

(SFX: Slurping up the last part of a drink through a straw.)

Agnes: Mmm... that mango slush puppy was delicious.

(SFX: Slurping up the last part of a drink through a straw)

Fanny: Mmm... that watermelon juice was nice too.

Agnes: This is a nice place.
 Fanny: I know... I always like coming here.
 Agnes: (Slight pause) I hope Serena is alright.
 Fanny: She'll get ill walking home on a day like this.
 Agnes: But she's so stubborn... when Serena decides to do something nothing will make her change her mind.
 Fanny: I'm worried about her.
 Agnes: Me too. Oh look... that girl over there is eating grass jelly... I love grass jelly.
 Fanny: It looks good.
 Agnes: I wonder how much it is? Let's see... (Looking down the menu list) grass jelly, grass jelly... ah, here it is... grass jelly fourteen dollars. (Disappointed) Oh, I don't think I've got enough money left.
 Fanny: Never mind... the drink was nice... we can have some grass jelly another time.
 Agnes: Let's see though... maybe I've got some extra coins in my pocket... Ah yes... a two-dollar coin. And let's see if I've got any in my other pocket..... Hey! Look what I've found! A hundred-dollar note!
 Fanny: Wow! Fantastic!
 Agnes: I wonder where that came from?
 Fanny: You must have put it there and forgotten about it.
 Agnes: Amazing. Right! Time for some grass jelly... and now I can have it with melon balls... and I'll think I'll have another mango slush puppy.
 Fanny: Mmm... I think I'm going to have a Fruit Fantasia.
 Agnes: What's that?
 Fanny: It's like a piece of every fruit... mango. Papaya, watermelon, lychee everything all piled up in a tall glass and covered in ice.
 Agnes: Sounds good.
 Fanny: And a papaya slush puppy.
 Agnes: I'm so glad I found that hundred-dollar note. (SFX: Fade)

 (SFX: Slurping up the last part of a drink through a straw.)

 Agnes: Mmm... that was delicious.

 (SFX: Slurping up the last part of a drink through a straw)

 Fanny: Yes... very nice. Oh look Agnes.
 Agnes: What Fanny?
 Fanny: They sell waffles.
 Agnes: Waffles... mmm.
 Fanny: Look (Reading) Belgian waffles with ice cream, strawberries and chocolate sauce.
 Agnes: Yummy. Yummy. Shall we have one?
 Fanny: One each?
 Agnes: Why not?
 Fanny: And how about having some apple tea to go with it?
 Agnes: Sounds good... after all I didn't know I had this hundred-dollar note so why not spend it. (SFX: Fade)

(SFX: Slurping the last dregs of her apple tea)

Agnes: Mmm, that was most refreshing.

(SFX: Slurping the last dregs of her apple tea)

Fanny: Very nice.

Agnes: And now I guess I'd better be getting home... mum will have dinner ready and she gets upset if I'm late.

Fanny: Yes, same here... and mum said she was steaming a garoupa tonight.

Agnes: With ginger and spring onions?

Fanny: Yes.

Agnes: Mmm... my mum makes that too... I love it. (Slight pause) Oh no!!

Fanny: What is it?

Agnes: Talking about my mum has made me remember something!

Fanny: What Agnes?

Agnes: That hundred-dollar note!

Fanny: What about it?

Agnes: She gave it to me and asked me to do some shopping on my way home... she wanted me to pop into the supermarket on my way home. Look... here's the shopping list she made out... onions, carrots, peppers, soya sauce, rice, oil, washing up liquid... oh my goodness and I've spent it all! Oh Fanny, what am I going to do?

Fanny: You'll just have to tell her the truth, tell her what happened... it was an honest mistake.

Agnes: What, you mean tell her that I spent her hundred dollars on mango slush puppies and grass jelly and apple tea.

Fanny: You must have some money left.

Agnes: Let's see.

Fanny: Look... you've got lots left.

(SFX: Coins clinking)

Agnes: Well there's a twenty-note and... five, ten... eleven, twelve, thirteen dollars and fifty... sixty cents.

Fanny: There, you see, you've still got over thirty dollars left.

Agnes: But look at all these things she wanted me to buy.

Fanny: Well just get as many as you can with what you've got.

Agnes: If only I had another seventy dollars... or even sixty or fifty.

Fanny: Just buy what you can with what you've got... if you buy the cheapest of everything you might even get most of what was on the list!

Agnes: If I had another fifty dollars I think I'd be alright.

Fanny: Yes, well... but....

Agnes: Fanny....

Fanny: Better get going.

Agnes: Fanny you don't think you could... ?

Fanny: (Interrupting) Look those people want our seats. This place really gets packed out doesn't it and no wonder... everything is so good here.

Agnes: Fanny could you....

Fanny: I'm just going to dash to the toilet... don't bother waiting for me... I'll see you tomorrow... Bye Agnes.
Agnes: (Disappointed voice) Bye Fanny.

Scene 3

(SFX: Door opening and closing)
(SFX: Background sound of TV in the background)

Fanny: Hello mum.
Mother: Hello Fanny. How was your day at school?
Fanny: Fine. I got twenty out of twenty in the spelling test.
Mother: Did you?! Well done. And as a reward I've steamed you a lovely big garoupa.
Fanny: Mmm... delicious.
Mother: (Louder voice) Turn the television off now Steven and come and sit at the table.
Fanny: Mmm... the fish looks lovely mummy.
Mother: Yes and I got it half price.
Fanny: Really?
Mother: If you go down to the fish market later you can get some real bargains. Well the fishmongers want to get rid of everything and they're prepared to sell at a lower price.
Steven: Wa! I've just been watching pictures of that big wave on TV.... It's amazing... one minute all these people were on the beach walking about or lying down or swimming and the next minute this huge wall of water comes in and wham it just sweeps them all away.
Mother: I know... it's terrible and I feel sorry for all those poor people but really it gets on your nerves the way you can't move without somebody somewhere asking you for money.
Fanny: I know... they were collecting money outside the MTR and in the streets... you know, shaking their boxes and bags and cans at everyone.
Mother: It gets on your nerves.
Fanny: I know.
Mother: I mean I gave them something when it first happened... whatever I could spare... you know... but it happened a long time ago and they're still shaking those collection tins in our faces.
Fanny: I don't know when they're going to stop!
Mother: I mean it's not as if I haven't got my own family to feed... I mean I feel sorry for those people but I've got children too and I've got to feed them... I mean I'm not going to leave myself without enough money to buy my own kids food am I?
Fanny: Of course not, Mummy.
Steven: Hey Fanny... Stop taking all the best bits.
Fanny: Shut up Steven.
Mother: Fanny got twenty out of twenty in her spelling test today... she's entitled to take the best pieces.
Fanny: (Sneering tone) Serena gave twenty dollars to someone collecting in the street.

Mother: Silly girl... And that money probably goes straight into the so-called charity collectors' pocket.

Fanny: I wouldn't be surprised.

Mother: There're a lot of crooks out there.

Fanny: And then she didn't have enough money to catch the MTR or even a mini bus so she had to walk home.

Mother: Walk home? In this weather?!

Fanny: She said she wanted to.

Mother: She lives in Lam Tin doesn't she?

Fanny: Yes.

Mother: How can she walk all that way?

Fanny: She said she wanted to... to help the poor Asian children who lost their families in the tsunami disaster.

Mother: Walking home in the heat and making herself ill isn't going to help anybody!

Fanny: I know... I tried to tell her but she wouldn't listen.

Mother: Silly girl...what help will she be giving anyone if she gets herself ill and has to go to the hospital... that will only be making matters worse.

Fanny: (Laughing in a condescending way) And you know what Agnes did Mum?

Mother: Tell me?

Fanny: Well... her mother gave her a hundred dollars to do some shopping on her way home and do you know what she did?

Mother: What?

Fanny: She forgot her mother had given it to her and she spent it all on sweet drinks desserts!

Mother: No! Oh dear... she's going to be in trouble when she gets home.

Fanny: (Laughing) I know.

Mother: I hope you didn't give her any money?!

Fanny: No I didn't.

Mother: Agnes made the mistake so Agnes has to face up to it.

Fanny: She did try to ask....

Mother: What? To borrow money?!

Fanny: Yes.

Mother: I'm sure she did... that's what people are like... spend, spend, spend and then when they run out they ask their friends. It's all very well for Serena to make these noble gestures and for Agnes to spend her mother's money but they shouldn't go asking you for your money.

Fanny: Don't worry mum, I didn't give either of them any.

Steven: Hey Fanny... leaves some for me.

Fanny: Shut up Steven.

Mother: In life you've got to put your own interests first Fanny... that's my philosophy... always put number one first. If you don't... people take advantage of you and you end up with nothing. Charity begins at home Fanny... that's what I say... it's all very well rattling those collection boxes and bombarding us on television with calls for money, money and yet more money for all the poor people... But who is asking?... all the pop stars and film stars and celebrities... they're all rolling in money.... so they're the ones who should be giving money... not us the hard working people with families to raise. No Fanny... never

forget... put yourself first... always look out for number one, never mind everybody else... charity begins at home Fanny, at home.

Steven:

Mum! Fanny's eaten all the fish... I've hardly had any!

Fanny:

Shut up Steven.

The End