

Songbirds: 'Charity Begins At Home' Part 5

Characters

- Serena: Serena Lau is generous, compassionate, selfless, giving
Agnes: A bit thoughtless, self-centred, greedy and easily influenced
Fanny: Fanny Pong is nice but secretly mean, self-centred and greedy, she always puts herself first.
Steven: Fanny's little brother
Mother: Mrs Pong, Fanny's mother, a self-centred woman.
Mrs Lau: Serena's mother is a good-hearted woman.

Synopsis

In the hospital Serena is very upset that none of her friends have come to see her. Serena's mother goes out to check if she has a text from Agnes and when she realizes there isn't she phones Agnes who makes excuses. Serena's mother tells her daughter a white lie telling her that there was a text from Agnes.

When Serena returns to school she comes with a great idea – every student in the class to donate half their pocket money every week to a charity to help the victims of the tsunami disaster, 'Half Your Pocket Money Could Save A Whole Life.' Fanny is not impressed.

Scene 1: Reprise:

- Serena: (Crying quietly)
Mrs Lau: What is it Serena? What's wrong? Do you want me to call a nurse?
Serena: (Trying not to cry) They said they'd come.
Mrs Lau: I know they did sweetheart. Shall I call Agnes on her mobile phone and see what's happened?
Serena: No... no don't phone mum... I don't want them to feel that they have to come and visit me.
Mrs Lau: Agnes may have phoned or left a text message... Why don't I go outside and see if she's left a message.

(SFX: Ambient sounds outside the hospital)

- Mrs Lau: (To herself) Hmm... no message.... Better phone and see what happened.

(SFX: Pushing buttons as she dials Agnes' number on her mobile phone)

(SFX: Street sounds. SFX: Agnes' mobile phone starts ringing)

- Agnes: Hello..... Oh hello Mrs. Lau.... How's Serena?..... Um, well... what happened was that, um... we were going to come to the hospital... but the air-conditioning on the mini-bus had broken down and it's Fanny's time of the month and she started feeling faint and so

we had to get off the mini-bus and I had to take Fanny home... I'm sorry.... Tomorrow? Well... um... actually tomorrow might be a bit difficult as well.... I have a piano lesson after school... yes... Fanny?... um... I'm not sure but I think she said something about visiting her Aunt.

(SFX: Phone rings)

Agnes: Hi Fanny, it's me Agnes. Listen... Serena's mother called me and she wanted to know why we hadn't gone to the hospital to visit Serena. So I told her we were on our way and you felt faint and so we had to go home.

Fanny: So Serena's mother made you feel guilty again.

Agnes: Yes she did. (SFX: Fade)

(Fade up on....)

Fanny: And Serena's mother keeps phoning Agnes and making her feel guilty about not visiting Serena in hospital.

Mother: Huh! I hope Serena's mother hasn't been phoning you Fanny!
(Menacing) If she phones you let me talk to her.

(SFX: Fade up)

Serena: Please ring poor dear Fanny mummy and see how she is

(SFX: Telephone ringing)

Fanny: Well don't just sit there Steven... answer the phone you lazy idiot!

Steven: (Fed up voice) Hello..... Yes, hold on. (To Fanny) It's for you.

Fanny: Who is it?

Steven: (On phone) Who is it please?... (To Fanny) Mrs Lau.

Fanny: That's Serena's mother.

Mother: Right... I'm answering that. Give that receiver to me!

Mrs Lau: Hello... is that you Fanny?

Mother: (Unfriendly tone) No it's not, it's Fanny's mother... Fanny is where she should be at this hour... in her room doing her homework.

Steven: (Surprised) Is she?

Fanny: (In an angry whisper) Shut up Steven.

Mrs Lau: Oh I see. Of course. Well I don't want to disturb her.

Mother: Who is speaking?

Mrs Lau: It's Mrs Lau... Serena's mother.

Mother: And what did you want with my daughter?

Mrs Lau: Well Mrs Pong... actually I wanted to thank your daughter.

Mother: What for?

Mrs Lau: Well... maybe Fanny has told you that my daughter is in hospital.

Mother: Yes.

Mrs Lau: Well Fanny and her friend Agnes were on their way to visit Serena this afternoon when I think Fanny became a but unwell herself and had to

return home and so I was just phoning to thank her for her efforts in coming to visit my daughter.

- Mother: I'm sorry Mrs Lau but I think it was ridiculous of your daughter to walk home in this weather... this is a heat-wave... Serena knew that... but she walked home and made herself sick and now look at it... poor Fanny nearly got sick as a result and I'm sure it's all been a big headache for you Mrs Lau. Serena has no right to upset her mother and everyone else just because she wants to walk home in the hot sun.
- Mrs Lau: Serena's been very upset by the tsunami wave disaster... she talks about it all the time.
- Mother: That's no excuse for making herself and other people sick.
- Mrs Lau: I know and I'm really sorry poor Fanny felt unwell to-day. Is she better?
- Mother: No she's not. But she's a conscientious girl and she's doing her homework despite being ill. I've told her she's to come straight home from school tomorrow.
- Mrs Lau: Of course... of course Mrs Pong, I understand.
- Mother: (Sarcastic) Well that's very good of you Mrs Lau.... very good indeed.
- Mrs Lau: I wouldn't have phoned only Serena begged me to call Fanny... she's very worried about her.
- Mother: Yes... well... perhaps next time Serena will think twice before going off on one of her silly walks.
- Mrs Lau: You have to understand Mrs Pong... Serena was trying... in her way... to feel what those poor tsunami people are feeling.
- Mother: And what's the good of that? Ridiculous! She makes herself ill and Fanny and gives you a big headache just so she can feel ill. Huh! I'm glad my Fanny's a sensible girl.
- Mrs Lau: Yes, well, I think I'd better go.
- Mother: Yes. Why not?
- Mrs Lau: (Ironic) It's been nice talking to you Mrs Pong.
- Mother: Good bye Mrs Lau.

(SFX: Puts phone back on hook)

- Fanny: (Applauding) Oh mummy, mummy... you were wonderful!
- Mother: Well, I'm not having that silly woman phoning up and disturbing my daughter with her nonsense especially when she's doing her homework.
- Steven: But she isn't doing her homework!
- Fanny: Shut up Steven.
- Mother: Silly woman, phoning you up like that... why can't she leave you and Agnes alone!
- Fanny: I think she will now after that.
- Mother: She's better or I'll be even more to the point next time.

Scene 2

(SFX: Ambient hospital sounds)

- Serena: Did you phone Fanny mummy?
- Mrs Lau: Yes Serena.

Serena: Is she better? Please, please say she's feeling better or else I shan't be able to sleep tonight.

Mrs Lau: I spoke to her mother.

Serena: Was poor Fanny too ill to speak?

Mrs Lau: She was doing her homework.

Serena: Oh thank goodness for that... Fanny is well!

Mrs Lau: Yes. Now try and get some rest Serena... the doctor said you were to keep calm and quiet.

Serna: And maybe I'll see her tomorrow... is she coming tomorrow mummy?

Mrs Lau: Rest Serena... you've been talking much too much... you need to rest.

Serena: And Agnes... is dear Agnes coming tomorrow too?

Mrs Lau: Shhhhhh.... Time to rest now... close your eyes and try to get some sleep if you can... I'll be here... right by your bed.

Serena: You know mum... when I'm better, I'm going to work really hard at raising more money for those poor people who lost everything when the big waves came and washed their lives away.

Mrs Lau: I know... poor souls... If a big wave came and washed you away Serena... it would be like my whole life had been washed away.

Serena: If a big wave came and you were swept away I'd swim after you and I wouldn't give up until I had pulled you back to safety.

Mrs Lau: Thank you Serena... I appreciate that. There now... I'll be doing some knitting here while you close your eyes and try to rest.

Scene 3

(SFX: Ambient sounds of school playground)

Agnes: Look Fanny... Serena's back!

Fanny: She looks a lot thinner.

Agnes: (Calling) Serena! Serena! Over here!

Serena: Agnes... Fanny.... My dear friends, I've missed you so much.

Agnes: We've missed you too Serena.

Serena: Fanny... how are you? Agnes said you became ill the day you tried to come and visit me in the hospital.

Fanny: Yes I was ill.

Agnes: She was Serena... we were on the mini-bus on the way to see you and it was so hot... the air-conditioning had broken down and I saw Fanny turning very pale and then she nearly fainted.

Serena: Poor Fanny. My mother said she spoke to your mother.

Fanny: (Guarded) Oh yes.

Serena: And she told me you were ill in bed. I was so worried.

Agnes: And we were worried about you Serena weren't we Fanny.

Fanny: Yes... yes of course we were.

Agnes: We kept saying... 'I wonder how Serena is?' didn't we Fanny?

Fanny: Yes, all the time.

Agnes: And we really wanted to come and see you only... well poor Fanny was so ill and I... well... I had to... you know... come and go and do all sorts of things to help.... So I'm sorry I didn't come and see you

Serena... I really wanted to but we.... Well we did pray for you Serena, didn't we Fanny.

Fanny: Oh yes. We used to agree on a time at night and then we'd both look at our watches and pray at the same time.

Agnes: (False laughter) Two for the price of one. (Stops laughing) so as to speak.

Serena: That must be why I got better then... it was the combined prayers of my dear friends... what strength there must have been in those prayers.

Agnes: You look better.

Serena: Yes... I just needed to rest really and drink a lot of fluids.

Fanny: You've lost weight.

Serena: I'm too thin... like a chopstick.

Fanny: Perhaps I should walk home in the sun.

Agnes: Don't say that Fanny! We don't want another one of us getting ill.

Fanny: But look... you can see... it's such a great way to lose weight.

Serena: While I was lying in bed in hospital... I kept thinking about all those poor people who lost their loved ones and their homes in the tsunami.

Agnes: Yes, poor things.

Fanny: But that was a long time ago now Serena... more than seven months ago.

Serena: If you lose a brother or a sister or a mother or a father... seven months... seventy months a lifetime isn't long enough to make you feel better.

Agnes: If I lost my mum I'd cry non-stop for at least two weeks... no, month... maybe even three months before I stopped... then I'd be sad... for years and years... maybe for ten years or even longer.

Fanny: Don't think of such things Agnes. Your mother is alive and healthy.

Serena: And so were the mothers of Aceh and Sri Lanka and Phuket and all the other places.

Fanny: Come, come Serena... what happened was sad... but life goes on. There are so many other things to think about.

Serena: Like what?

Fanny: Well.... We have our schoolwork of course and our families... but then there's... well... shopping to look forward to and maybe... a nice boy will smile at us or talk to us.

Agnes: (Giggling) That would be nice.

Serena: I can't think about those things... not now... maybe later.

Agnes: Wouldn't you like a nice boy to smile at you Serena?

Serena: It wouldn't matter if he did or he didn't because I wouldn't notice.

Agnes: I would. (Sighs) But it's never going to happen... not while I'm fat.

Serena: You're not fat Agnes.

Fanny: You're plump, that's all.

Agnes: 'Plump' what a depressing word.

Serena: You're pretty Agnes, anyone can see that.

Agnes: Thanks Serena.

Serena: But listen, I've been bursting to tell you my new idea.

Agnes: What new idea Serena?

Serena: Well, while I was in hospital I kept thinking about the poor people who had lost so much in the tsunami.

Fanny: (A bit dry) So you said.

Serena: And I was thinking of ways to try and help them.
Fanny: But so many people have helped them... we've all given so much.
Serena: But that was in the beginning, with the first shock... but now people are beginning to forget and we mustn't... villages still need to be rebuilt... fisherman still need boats... babies still need milk.
Fanny: And maybe we need something too... a chance to, well... get on with our lives without always having to have gloomy thoughts about those faraway people.
Serena: Compassion fatigue.
Fanny: I'm sorry?
Serena: That's what it's called.
Agnes: What what's called?
Serena: After a disaster... an earthquake, a fire, famine, tsunami we all feel sorry for the victims and we give... but we get tired of giving and feeling sorry... we get 'compassion fatigue' that's what it's called.
Agnes: Compassion fatigue.
Serena: Yes, and I've thought of a wonderful way of dealing with compassion fatigue.
Agnes: What's that Serena?
Serena: (Enthusiastic) A campaign!
Fanny: (Groans) Oh no, not another campaign.
Serena: Yes I know there have been a lot of campaigns on the radio and television... but they're all done by other people.. those campaigns are good but somehow distant from us. What we need is our very own campaign so that we feel really involved again.
Agnes: So what sort of campaign Serena?
Serena: How much pocket money do you get a week Agnes?
Agnes: About a hundred and fifty dollars a week usually.... A hundred from my dad and fifty from my mum.
Serena: Is that the same for you Fanny?
Fanny: Something like that.
Serena: I get fifty dollars.
Agnes: Is that all?!
Serena: I don't need any more. Anyway... my idea for a campaign is for each of us to give half our pocket money every week to the Red Cross.
Agnes: Half our pocket money?! Every week? You're joking Serena!
Serena: Why not? It would be a real sacrifice and we could find ways of supporting each other... sharing things instead of buying new things.
Fanny: Like what?
Serena: Well... if a classmate wants to buy a new hairbrush for example... I'd give her my hairbrush ... or if a classmate wanted to go to see a film someone could lend her a DVD.
Agnes: And if she was hungry and wanted to buy something to eat...?
Serena: Someone could bring something to eat from home... a cake or something.
Agnes: I wouldn't mind a slice of cake.
Serena: We're always thinking about things and buying things.... I mean we're always buying things... things we don't really want... things we don't really need... it's so shallow, so meaningless... but this way we'd be doing something that had meaning and we'd be doing it together...

we'd become like brothers and sisters helping our poor brothers and sisters in other countries. (Pause) So... what do you think?

Agnes: Um... what do you think Fanny?

Fanny: It's a nice idea.

Agnes: Yes, a nice idea.

Fanny: But....

Agnes: Yes, a nice idea but.

Serena: But what?

Fanny: You can do it Serena.

Agnes: Yes, you can do it Serena... although you must make sure you leave yourself enough money to catch the MTR home this time.

Serena: Of course I can do it... but half of fifty dollars every week isn't much.

Fanny: Better than nothing.

Serena: Yes... but if we all gave half our pocket money every week... just think, there are forty students in our class alone... if we each gave an average of say...

Agnes: Sixty dollars?

Serena: Okay, say sixty dollars... forty times sixty dollars is....

Agnes: Don't look at me... I'm hopeless at maths.

Fanny: Two thousand four hundred.

Agnes: Wa! Fanny! You're a human calculator.

Serena: Just think what the Red Cross could do with two thousand four hundred dollars... that money could feed a baby for a whole year!

Agnes: Really?

Serena: I think it's a wonderful idea... and look.

Fanny: What's that?

Serena: Yesterday I painted this poster... I'm going to ask Miss if I can put it up.

Agnes: (Reading) 'Half your pocket money can save a whole life.'

Fanny: I don't think Miss will let you put that up.

Serena: We'll see... oh look, there's Miss now, excuse me a minute... I just want to go and talk to her. (Calling) Miss! Oh Miss! (SFX: Fade)

Agnes: She hasn't changed.

Fanny: Huh! Give half my pocket money! No way!

Agnes: I know.

Fanny: I'm not going to! Are you Agnes?!

Agnes: I don't want to... but she makes me feel guilty.

Fanny: It's too much.

Agnes: Maybe Miss will stop her.

Fanny: She should so!

Fanny: Hmm... we'll just have to wait and see.... wait and see.

The End