

## **The River That Gave and The Girl That Took**

By: Isabella T.

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There once was a young girl named Agnes. Agnes had a home on the frigid winter streets, and she and her family had barely enough money to get by. One day her mother told her, "Agnes if you want to eat anything tonight, take this pan and go to the woods so that you may take some of the clay in the river there. We can sell the clay and buy some food with the few coins we may get." After hearing her stomach rumble like a bear roaring to be heard, Agnes promised her mother she would get as much clay as possible so that they could have some warm bread that night.

Following her mother's directions, Agnes stumbled upon a river. This was no ordinary river, no, this river went on for miles. It looked like it stretched across the entire world. Young Agnes, hearing her stomach rumbling again, stopped looking at the sight of the mighty river and started to collect the clay near the riverbanks. Knowing she did not even have a home, she muttered to herself, "Oh, how I wish my family could receive a miracle that would allow us to eat every night and not live on the streets." After Agnes said that there was a loud rumble. Then, Agnes heard a booming voice. The voice said, "Young one, I hear your pleas and I am here to grant your wish. Look to the side of the river, and you shall find gold there. You may come here every day until your desires are fulfilled." Agnes, filled with happiness and fear, asked the voice, "Who are you? Are you my guardian angel?" The voice replied with a laugh, "No, I am the spirit that lives in this river." Agnes thanked the spirit as she dug up the gold and put it in the pan where she was originally collecting clay.

The sky was an ocean full of stars by the time Agnes returned to her spot on the street. Her mother and father were curious about what was inside the pan because Agnes had hidden it under a cloth. Agnes' father asked her, "Darling, what do you have in the pan that seems to be sparkling?" Her mother asked, "Did you return with the clay? Your brothers and I are starving!" Agnes whispered back, "It's gold!" Her parents were astonished when learning how their daughter found this gold. They then went to the nearest shop to sell it. With the money they had gotten, Agnes' parents took the whole family to a restaurant to eat like kings.

The following week, Agnes came to the river every day until her family had enough money to buy a house. Her desires had been fulfilled. She and her brothers were finally able to attend school and her father had gotten a job. Yet, a new feeling had overcome Agnes. Although she had enough, she wanted more. Every day after school, she would drop her brothers at their house and go back into the woods taking more gold each day. One evening, Agnes was completing her routine of taking gold from the river, as usual, but today was different. There was a bigger rumble, so big it felt like the whole earth was shaking. Then Agnes heard a familiar voice. "Young one! Have you or have you not gotten all that you have desired? Soon you are to learn your lesson. You may take every piece of gold you find, but you must walk through the street

you used to live on to go back home.” Agnes, not paying attention to the river's spirit, took all the gold she could find and walked home through the street she used to live on.

While walking through the street, she noticed something. There were so many homeless children on the street, begging their parents if they could have food that they couldn't afford. Every time she walked by each crying child, she saw herself. She used to be one of them, yet here she was taking all this treasure without giving back? She hung her head down with shame the whole way until she got home. When she arrived home, her mother asked her, “Darling, have you brought home some more gold? I am thinking to buy a new dress today to wear tomorrow for dinner.” Agnes told her mother, “No mother, I have not found any gold by the river today.” Her mother replied with an annoyed face, “Oh, well I guess I must *repeat* an outfit.” It felt wrong to fib to her mother, but she wanted to do the right thing.

The next day, Agnes dropped off her brothers at their home and went back to the road they used to live on. She still had her school bag filled with gold, so she went to each family and gave them each a share of the treasure. The thanks that each family gave, and the happiness of the children was enough for Agnes to go back to the river to get more gold to give away to each of them. When she reached the river, it was gone. It was like it never existed. Agnes thought she took the wrong route, so she wandered around the area for a while and realized that the sun was no longer in the sky, instead a sea of stars took its place. She looked up to admire the sky and realized that there was something written there with the stars. It read, “I said you were soon to learn your lesson, and here you are.” Agnes had not realized it, but she had learned a valuable lesson: Charity should always overcome the feeling of greed. Agnes went home, never to return to the woods to search for the river, but always returning what she had to the poor and needy.