

Title: *Girl, Serpent, Thorn*
Author: Melissa Bashardoust
Genre: Fantasy Fiction

Reviewer Name and Grade: Ashley L., 8th Grade

Date Reviewed: March 2, 2021

The plot: A princess, Soraya is cursed to be poisonous to the touch, lives her life concealed apart from her family, and the public. Only safe in her garden. The day comes, her twin brother weds and takes the throne with his bride, Laleh. Soraya must choose to either stay unseen or to step outside. Bewildered by her curse, she craves answers which result in visiting a demon below the kingdom's dungeons. When she finally goes outside, she meets a handsome young man (Azad) who doesn't fear her curse but understands her. They go to the dungeon together, but the demon requests to only speak to Soraya. The demon hints to her that her mother is lying to her about how she got the curse and makes her question how she was cursed. When the mother found out she visited the demon she was furious and told her the demon was lying. She forbade her from ever going back but her brother behind their mother's backs permitted Soraya to go and find some information about the demon or divs and her curse. She returns to the div with Azad and the demon tells her that she would only lift her curse if she found her a special feather. Soraya agrees and she and Azad travel to see an executed fire priest ask him where she would find the feather. The fire priest told Azad that it was in the fire temple underneath the fire and the feather would lift her curse. She returns home with some obstacles and goes to get the feather with difficulty and lifts her curse. Then Azad kisses her and then suddenly Azad turns into the legendary leader of the divs. Azad then flies away and sabotages her brother's wedding and tries to reclaim his past throne. Soraya must find a way to defeat Azad. She is the only hope for the kingdom.

The time period: probably in the 15th century, because there wasn't much technology, trains, etc. They also traveled by boat and had many ancient myths and legends.

Main character descriptions

Soraya: a strong female lead that is stubborn and fierce by nature, but is clouded by confusion and anger.

Azad: a manipulative, blood-thirsty, and evil "king" who is merciless and bathes in blood.

The demon below the kingdom: Parvaneh: a misunderstood, truly kind, and interesting parik.

Did the plot (for fiction) or presentation of information (for nonfiction) keep you interested?

It did keep me interested.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

It was a little slow in the beginning but, then it became just the right speed.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

Grade levels 7-9 are appropriate for this book.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

A reader that likes a strong female lead, plot twists, and LGBT.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

Read the whole book, it might be slow at first but, it gets interesting as it goes on.

3 stars: It was okay; I had hoped for better.

I would rate this book a solid 3.6 out of 5 but, there's no option for that. I loved Soraya's confidence growth and her character development. The plot was decent, but I didn't like the third-person narration. It sometimes switched to the first person which made it confusing. The author did a divine job with the third person narration though because it's often rare and few people can write a good third-person book. The book is truly unique and doesn't follow a plotline of most fairy tales where a handsome young man or prince saves the princess but, rather, a strong female lead who saves her skin and others. I loved the plot twist where Azad turns back into a monster and he has already deceived Soraya. I recommend this book to readers who like a strong female lead, foreshadowing, plot twists, or LGBT.

Reviewer Name and Grade: Allie H., 7th Grade

Date Reviewed: August 23, 2021

Melissa Bashardoust's novel *Girl, Serpent, Thorn* is the story of a princess named Soraya who is cursed to be poisonous to the touch. This means that any animal or human that comes in contact with her skin would die, but the curse does not include plants. Soraya's curse is kept secret, and Soraya spends all of her time either in her room, on the balcony tending to her large collection of roses, or moving throughout the palace using a system of tunnels. When she finds out her twin brother, Soroush, is going to marry her only childhood friend, Laleh, Soraya is told that there is a div, (meaning a demon) being kept in the palace dungeons. Soraya thinks the div may know a way to lift the curse, so she sneaks away to talk to it. From there, everything goes downhill. The div, named Parvaneh, tells Soraya that her mother, Tamineh, has been lying to her about how she was cursed. Soraya was always told that one day when she was still a child, Tamineh was walking in the woods near her village, and she came across a woman trapped in a net on the ground. She freed the woman, and then the div who trapped her found Tamineh. The angry div cursed Tamineh so that her oldest daughter would be poisonous, so nobody could touch her or they would die. Parvaneh would not tell Soraya how to lift her curse unless she asked Tamineh if she was lying. Soraya would not do this, but she finds out on her own how to lift the curse, and she doesn't like it. In addition, Soraya meets and gets some help from a handsome young man who is not afraid of her, but there is much more to his story than he lets on. Now, Soraya has to decide between the safety of her family, and her own desires, and every choice she makes ends up being the wrong one.

Did the plot keep you interested?

Yes, the plot kept me interested. Many chapters ended with cliffhangers, making me want to read more.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

The pace of the book was good. It had action, but it was not too quickly paced.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

This is a good book for seventh graders.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I would recommend *Girl, Serpent, Thorn* for people who like adventure and fantasy books. If you like *The Hunger Games*, then you might like this book, too!

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

Teens might notice some similarities between this story and the story of Rapunzel. Both stories

include a main character who is isolated from people, and is lied to.

4 stars: I enjoyed this book and found it worthwhile reading.

This book had action, fantastic creatures, and was overall a good book. I would not give it five stars, however, both because I reserve that rating for my absolute favorite books, and I struggled a little to connect with the main character.