

Title: *The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea*

Author: Axie Oh

Genre: Fantasy

Reviewer Name and Grade: Emily K., 7th Grade

Date Reviewed: 6/21/23

The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea is based on a traditional Korean novel titled The Tale of Shim Cheong (in which Shim Cheong, not Mina, both of which I will discuss later, becomes the Sea God's bride). The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea takes place in ancient Korea and centers around a young girl named Mina who lives in a small village beside the sea. Every year since the former emperor's death, the Sea God has sent a series of storms, ruining crops and separating families, and every year, the village has sacrificed the most beautiful or the most skillful girl in the country to the Sea God in hopes of her becoming the Sea God's Bride and ending the storms once and for all.

In the beginning of the story, Shim Cheong is portrayed as the Sea God's Bride. The night of her sacrifice, Cheong and her husband, Mina's brother, sail out to sea and await the Sea God's precious dragon, who, every year, comes to open a passageway into the sea for the Sea God's Bride to travel through. Mina, not bearing to see her brother and sister-in-law in such pain, chases after their boat and, before they can reject, slices a deep cut into her hand with her great-great-grandmother's sacred knife, pledging her loyalty to the Sea God. The dragon arrives shortly after and Mina, without stopping to look back, jumps fearlessly into the ocean.

Mina had always wondered what had happened to previous Sea God's Brides - whether they made their way to the Sea God's palace or whether they simply drowned in the ocean, their sacrifices futile. As she drifts incessantly through the passageway opened by the dragon, she feels safe in the knowledge that they have all, like her, survived and endured the oddly peaceful journey through the ocean. When Mina arrives at the Sea God's Palace, she finds a red ribbon tied around her wrist and recognizes it as the Red String of Fate- something that is said to be invisible on Earth but forever binds the fates of two people, signifying that they are destined to be together. Mina follows the Red String of Fate and finds hers to be connected to the Sea God, who she discovers has been sleeping for 100 years, suffering a recurring nightmare that is the cause for the annual storms.

Not long after, three members of the Lotus House, one of the several groups of high-ranking spirits in the Spirit Realm, arrive in the royal court, one of them introducing himself as Shin. Shin approaches Mina, and before she can react, slices the Red String of Fate from her wrist with his sword, stealing her soul, and with it, taking away her ability to speak. Mina is told that if she does not successfully wake the Sea God within 30 days, her soul will be forever gone and she will become a spirit. Along her journey, she meets a group of three friendly spirits who go by the names of Mask, Dai, and Mikki, who help guide Mina through the Spirit Realm and offer her protection in battle.

A short while later, after rescuing Shin from assassins who invaded his home, Mina finds that a Red String of Fate has formed between herself and Shin. This occurrence leads to a series of unprecedented events, in which Mina learns, as she is told by her friend Mask, "don't chase fate, Mina, let fate chase you," and gains the confidence as well as the independence that she will need in choosing between Shin, her true love, and the Sea God, whose love may be her only window to saving her village and returning to the human world.

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

Yes! Although the book was quite long, the author skillfully described the setting and the characters with incredible detail, allowing me to feel as if I were a part of the story. The plot was also extremely interesting and it was nearly impossible to predict what would come next (such as the Red String of Fate forming between Shin and Mina), making each unexpected event very exciting.

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

For me, the pace of this book was just right. However, this may not be the case for all readers, as I typically prefer slower-paced, longer novels and the book itself is over 300 pages (although for such a story, I find the length to be ideal, as it allows for the perfect amount of detail).

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

The content in The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea is appropriate for grades 5 and up, but, due to the more advanced vocabulary, I would recommend it to people as young as 6th grade. Additionally, the book contains many positive role models, such as the protagonist, Mina, whose traits embody that of a courageous, well-rounded person.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I would recommend this book to readers who enjoy fantasy, mythology, and action novels. I would also recommend this book to people who are looking for a book with a feminist twist on a traditional story and would like to gain a further insight on Korean culture.

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

Although this book is not a love story, it does involve relationships (this is seen mainly in Mina's love for Shin). However, this book pleasantly surprised me, because although I do not typically like solely love-based stories, I found that the relationship aspect of this story did not overpower the overall theme, and therefore did not affect my feelings towards the book as a whole.

5 stars: I'm really glad I read this book; it was awesome!

This book not only expanded my knowledge on Korean culture and mythology (such as beliefs regarding love, fate and death), but it also was extremely well written, with unexpected plot twists that often left me on the edge of my seat. I would recommend this book to any avid reader in search of a breathtaking culturally-based novel, as I can now happily say that The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea has become one of my new favorite books.

Reviewer Name and Grade: Joyce L, 9th grade

Date Reviewed: July 25, 2023

“The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea” by Axie Oh, follows Mina, our main character. She's from a Korean village that's cursed by storms and death, the village believes that the sea god is furious at them. In conclusion, they sent a girl each year, to throw herself into the sea, to be his only true bride, ending his wrath. Mina follows her brother, Joon who follows Shin Cheong, his girlfriend, to the sea. This year, she was chosen to be the Sea God's bride. Not wanting to see her brother unhappy, Mina takes Shin's place and sacrifices herself instead.

Instead of dying, she wakes up in the Spirit Realm. Her hand is tied to the Red String of Fate, a string believed to tie a person to their story/destiny. Mina walks to hers, leading to the Sea God. She finds that the god isn't a cruel person but a boy-like god, under a curse of eternal sleep. Mina tries to wake him but gets interrupted when three unknown figures cut Mina's String of Fate and her voice. Within 30 days, she must figure out how to get her voice back, wake the Sea God, and save her village. If she couldn't die and become a spirit and lose her village.

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

The plot of the book keeps me interested, the narration was amazing! The story takes inspiration of Korean Mythology, folktale, and lore. The way Oh wrote a story in a story gave it a dream-like feel, making it more nostalgic in a way.

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

It was slightly slow, but it was good enough to keep me reading the book. The book itself was fine but again with the romantic aspect of it being quite slow besides from that it was a good pace for the book. Allowing the reader to soak in every bit of detail of the book.

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

The appropriate age for this book would be 13+ or 7th grade and up due to it possibly triggering to some. The book details a loss of a loved one, memory loss, and death.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

The types of readers I would recommend this book to readers who love fantasy, folklore, legends, The Red String of Fate, destiny, fate, and adventure.

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

That the book uses The Red String of Fate. Some people I know don't really like that type of trope, so it is just a heads-up.

The rate of the book I give this book is 3.5. I really just wished that Shin and Mina had more interactions, and their time together was more emotional in a way. Since Mina was going to take her place in the sacrifice. The emotional aspect of the book was just, lacking in a way. I felt like the parts where it was 'emotional' could've been more emotional than it was. I just felt like she could've done more to the scenes with more emotions and romance because there was many opportunities but it just wasn't hitting that point of tears. The book could've been a tear-jerker but the emotional aspect of the book was lacking in a way. The narrative of the book was good, but I just wished that Oh focused on the emotional aspects of the story in a way. The romantic aspect of the story was the main reason for the 1.5 taken off, but some of it was because the pacing was slightly slow. I was fine with it but I feel like it could've been a little faster to make it more dramatized in a way. Overall, I just wished Oh focused on the emotional and romantic aspect of the book and paced it a little faster. I wish to read this book again or give it a second chance, but it just doesn't really hit that point of, 'Oh this story is amazing! I want to understand it more!' but more of 'It was good but could've been better' kind of vibe for me.

