

Mina and the River

By Wendell Keith Jacobo

Once in the land of Cagayan, there lived a fisherman and his daughter. The fisherman's daughter Mina has always wanted a sparkly blue dress, but they were poor and had a simple life. The fisherman could not buy Mina the dress, but he would always make her even happier than a princess. He would take Mina to the Cagayan River and spend the best moments of their day. They caught a lot of fish together. They gathered bucketfuls of tulya or small clams. They always played and laughed in the river. And they would sit together watching the sunset behind the river. "The river blesses us with food and water, Mina, so if you love the river, you protect it," the fisherman would always tell Mina.

One night, as Mina went to bed, a fairy appeared in front of her. It was small and had wings like a butterfly.

"Your highness, we don't have time," said the fairy.

Mina was confused.

"I am Laleta, a river fairy. And you are a princess, Mina. If you complete a task before the sunset tomorrow, you can claim your crown and have the blue dress that you have always wanted," continued the fairy.

Mina thought for a second.

"What do I have to do?" she asked, finally.

"You must take all the trash you can find and throw it into the river. This will make the river gold in color, and I will mold the water into a crown – your crown," replied Laleta and then disappeared.

That night, Mina couldn't sleep for she was excited to carry out her task and become a princess.

The next morning, Mina ran to their trash bins and was pleased to see that it was full of plastics. She carried it with her to the river and dumped all the contents into the water. The clear blue water turned yellow. But it was not yet golden.

Mina ran to her neighbors and asked for their trash. The neighbors gladly gave their bins because they thought that Mina was helping the community. They did not know that Mina had other plans. Mina returned to the river carrying two plastic bags of trash. She tossed them both into the water.

Mina suddenly became concerned. Fish were now floating on the surface of the water along with all the trash she put there. But she's so close. And it's almost sunset. She went around town to ask for more people's trash bins. Just like her neighbors, they gladly handed it to her. The river was dark brown now and it was entirely covered with dead fish and waste.

The sun was now dipping in the horizon. But her task was not yet complete. Mina ran back to her house and found one plastic bottle. This should do it.

Mina rushed to the river but was surprised to see the townspeople.

"Mina, what happened to the river?" exclaimed one woman.

"A fairy told me that if I could make the river golden with trash, she would turn me into a princess and make me a crown and a blue dress," answered Mina.

"But where will we get water to drink? And food to eat? The fish are dead," replied a man.

Mina starts to feel bad. But it doesn't matter. The sun is almost set, and she still has that plastic bottle in one hand. This is her only chance to become a princess, to get that blue dress.

This is it. She positions her arm ready to throw that bottle – but suddenly, something came over her. She remembers the times she and her father spent together in the river, playing, laughing, and being happy. She remembers what her father has always told her. *If you love the river, you protect it.* She drops the bottle to the ground.

Mina's father arrived just in time. She explained everything to him. She felt sorry for destroying the river and she apologized to everyone.

The next day, Mina began work collecting the trash she had thrown in the water. All the townspeople were helping her clean the river. She understands now that the river should be loved and protected.

As they finished cleaning the river, Laleta the river fairy appeared.

“Congratulations, Mina. You have passed the test. You have proven that you love the river. And that is a quality of a true princess,” said Laleta.

Laleta snapped her fingers. Mina was now wearing the sparkly blue dress she has always wanted, and on her head was a shiny golden crown.

From then on, Princess Mina inspired the people of Cagayan to love the river and take better care of it. The river became so clean that it sparkled under the sun just like Princess Mina's dress.

The end.