ENGLISH TEXT OF RAINBOW WEAVER (TEJEDORA DEL ARCORIS)

BY LINDA ELOVITZ MARSHALL

High in the mountains above Lake Atitlan, Ixchel watched her mother weave thread into fabric as beautiful as a rainbow. The fabric had blues as clear as the sky, reds as bright as the flowers, and yellows as golden as the corn.

“Mama,” Ixchel asked. “May I weave too?”

Her mother shook her head. “Not now, Ixchel,” she answered. “This cloth is for the market. If it brings a good price, it will help pay for your school and books.”

In and out. In and out. Ixchel’s mother and neighbors wove on backstrap looms. They wov as their mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers had done before them, as Mayan women had done for more than two thousand years.

After a while Ixchel asked, “Mama, may I weave *now?”*

Again her mother shook her head. “Count threads with me, my love. I’ll show you how to make designs.”

Ixchel and her mother counted together. “*Hun, ka’i, ox’i, kaj’i…”*

With each additional color, the cloth grew longer and the design prettier.

Ixchel reached for some thread. “*Please?”* she asked.

“No, my love,” answered her mother.” You are still too young and there is no extra thread.”

Ixchel crossed her arms ans tudied the hard-packed dirt of the yard. *I want to weave. I want to help pay for my books and school too,* she thought.

But she didn’t say anything.

Instead, she walked towards the *milpa,* the field where the villagers planted corn, beans and squash. Plastic bags littered the path. Day after day, more bags were tossed from windows of passing vehicles or discarded by people returning from market. No one could use all the bags and there was nowhere to put them.

Pushing the bags aside, Ixchel gathered branches and sticks. Some of the sticks were long and some were short. She carried the sticks and branches home, then tied them together.

“What are you doing?” a neighbor asked.

“Making a loom,” Ixchel answered.

Her mother smiled. “But, Ixchel,” she said, “we don’t have any extra thread.”

“I know, Mama,” she answered. “I won’t take any.”

Ixchel tied one end of her loom to a tree, then she gathered tall blades of *pajon* grass.

Sitting on the ground, Ixchel joined the blades of grass together by knotting the end of one blade to the end of another until she made a long chain. Then she pushed the batten over and under, back and forth, turning the blades of grass into fabric.

When the fabric was finished, it was too small to be a doormat or even a placemat. It was too scratchy to wear as a bracelet. Worst of all, it was a dull greenish white. The fabric was far too small, far too scratchy, and far too dull for anyone to buy.

Ixchel knew it would never sell.

Disappointed, Ixchel took another walk. Climbing the path villagers took to bring sheep up the mountain, she saw a clump of black wool hanging from a branch. Xchel tucked the wool under her belt. She noticed more clumps of black and white wool dotting the grasses, sticks and plants. Ixchel gathered this wool and tucked it under her belt too.

At home, Ixchel turned and twisted the wool, spinning it into a long, thick strand of yarn. Then, over and under, back and forth, she pushed the batten and wove the yarn into fabric.

Ixchel looked at what she had woven. The fabric was thick and heavy. The colors were boring. Tiny pieces of grass and dirt were stuck in the fabric. The weaving was far too thick, far too boring and far too dirty for anyone to buy.

Tears rolled down Ixchel’s cheeks. *There’s no way my weaving will sell in the market,*  she thought. *No way I can help.*

Wiping her tears, Ixchel headed toward the milpa again. Along the way, she kicked aside a plastic bag. Red, purple, orange, green, yellow and blue bags were everywhere. They were in the fields, drooping from branches, and clogging roads and ditches. There were so many bags, it was hard for her to walk.

Angry, Ixchel picked up a bag. She ripped it to shreds. Suddenly, she had an idea.

Isabel gathered bag after colorful bag. She took the bags home, washed them and hung them to dry.

“Now what are you doing?” another neighbor asked.

Ixchel smiled. “You’ll see,” she answered.

By the next day the bags were dry. Ixchel cut each bag into long, thin strips. She tied the strips together. Sitting at her loom, Ixchel pushed the batten over and under, back and forth, weaving until she had used all the strips.

The fabric was short, but it was clean and colorful. It had blues as clear as the sky, reds as bright as the flowers, and yellows as golden as the corn. The fabric looked like a beautiful rainbow, almost as pretty as the weavings of her mother, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers before her.

Wondering what else she could make with plastic bags, Ixchel headed back to the milpa. As she gathered more bags, the path looked cleaner and the countryside prettier.

When Ixchel returned home, her mother and neighbors were waiting with colorful plastic bags.

“We saw what you’re doing,” said a neighbor. “We wanted to help.”

“And without the bags everywhere, our village looks pretty again,” said another neighbor.

Ixchel thanked them. Then she handed the weaving to her mother and she said, “My first rainbow.”

Her mother hugged her close. “It’s beautiful, my love!” she said.

“Thank you, Mama,” Ixchel said. “But do you think it will sell?”

“Let’s take it ot the market and see,” said her mother.

At the market the next day, Ixchel and her mother watched as people walked by the stalls.

Finally a woman stopped. She picked up Ixchel’s weaving and asked,” Did you make this?”

When Ixchel nodded, the woman smiled.

Her weaving sold! And for a very good price.

Ixchel beamed with happiness. Now she could help pay for her books and school. And like her mother, grandmother and great-grandmothers before her, Ixchel had woven a rainbow.