

THE WEAVER'S DAUGHTER

SYLVIA PATIENCE

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SAMPLE CHAPTER

15

THE BORDER CROSSING GUARD has yellow hair and a red face. He keeps wiping his sweaty forehead with a handkerchief. He only glances at the cards of the people ahead of me in line, asking them a couple of questions, just like David and Marta said.

When it's my turn, I hold out my card. My hand is damp and shakes so much I fumble and drop it. Quickly, I stoop to pick it up. My fingers scrabble to scrape the thin card off the pavement. I want to look at Rosa, but I don't. At last, my fingers close around the card and I straighten and hand it to the guard, trying to keep my hand steady. I've already called attention to myself.

The guard frowns and rubs the back of his neck. He looks at the card, then back at my face. He looks down at the card again. "Enedina Reynoso?" he asks, studying my face.

"Sí, yes, sir," I whisper.

"Speak up please. Where are you headed?" he says in English.

"I — *no entiendo*. I don't understand." My voice won't go any louder.

He asks me in Spanish, "What's your destination in the United States?"

"I-I — San Diego, sir."

"And the purpose of your visit?"

My throat is closing. I'm supposed to say I'm going to visit someone and go shopping, but I can't get any words out.

He looks at the card and back at me again. "Step inside, please."

My stomach feels like I'm going to throw up. I look back and meet Rosa's eyes, wide and scared. I see her drop out of line as I follow him inside. He says, "I'm going to take a couple of fingerprints. Just put your index finger here."

I hold out my shaking hand and he places my finger on a little glass screen. "Other hand." He does the same thing.

He swipes my card and looks at a computer screen. He turns to me, looking very serious. "The prints don't match. Where did you get this card?"

Everything looks far away. I hear buzzing in my ears.

"Sit down." He points to a plastic chair. "I'm going to get an officer to take you for some questions."

I collapse into the chair while he talks on a phone. Another guard comes and takes the card. I'm not going to be allowed to cross the border. Will they put me in jail? Is this what the dreams meant? The guards are big. Each wears a gun in a holster where it can be reached easily. My legs feel weak. I have no chance of running away, so I concentrate on picking up each foot and setting it down as I follow the second guard to a nearby building. I look around for Rosa, but don't see her.

This man has dark hair and looks Mexican. He must notice how I'm shivering, even in the heat, because when we get inside, he gives me a chair and brings a glass of water. I drink it slowly. My stomach calms a little and I begin to look around the room. It's big and noisy. Phones ring and some kind of police radio is constantly talking or making static. Other guards in the same uniforms are sitting at desks. They all wear guns. I jump when I hear a man yell and swear in English. He's

standing in front of a desk at the other end of the room with two guards. He has stringy long hair and a beard. Handcuffs hold his wrists together. One of the guards is digging through his grimy backpack.

Another man, wearing dusty cowboy boots, looks like a *campesino*, a farm worker. He sits in front of a nearby desk, holding his straw hat on his lap, looking down at it while a guard talks to him from across the desk.

The guard with me motions to a woman who's just finished talking on the telephone. She also wears the guard uniform and a gun. When she comes over, he says, "Maria, you better question this kid. She looks like she's about to pass out."

The woman is short, with dark hair. Her expression is serious, but I can see from the lines on her face that she must smile a lot. She sits at a desk in front of me. "Don't be afraid," she says in Spanish. "My name's Maria. Can you answer some questions?"

I nod *yes*. I can't trust my voice.

She holds up the border crossing card. "This isn't you, is it?"

They already know. I shake my head *no*.

"What's your name?"

I can't think to make up a name. I manage to say, "Ixchel. Ixchel Chan."

"That's Mayan, isn't it? Can you spell it for me?"

I nod and spell my name. She writes on a paper in front of her.

"How old are you, Ixchel?"

Is it better for me to be older or younger? I tell the truth. "Almost thirteen."

"Where did you get this card?"

"I ... I f ... f ... found it," I say, looking down at my hand that still holds the water glass.

"I see. Ixchel, is anyone forcing you to do anything? Are you afraid of anyone?"

I look up, surprised. "No ... no. I only want to go —" What should I say? The story of the aunt in San Diego, or the truth of my father in Los Angeles? "I only want to go across the border. For a visit."

"Where do you live? Where's your family?"

Mamá wouldn't want me sent back to Mérida. "I live here, in Tijuana, with my family."

"Can you call someone to pick you up?"

I don't have to lie about this. "My family doesn't have a telephone."

"Mmm, I see. What's the address?"

It takes a moment to remember the name of the street Marta told me. "It's on Cerro Colorado."

Maria keeps writing things down. "I'm sorry, Ixchel, but I'll need to look in your bags. The big one first." She comes around the desk. I set down the water glass, stand, and hand her the *bolsa*. She takes out my few clothes, the *huipil*, my *rebozo*, everything.

She holds up the *huipil*. "This is beautiful. Hand embroidered. *Yucateco*, isn't it?"

Does she guess I lied about where I'm from? I don't say anything. She looks at me. "Y-yes," I say. "My grandmother."

Maria puts everything back inside the bag. "Now the one around your neck, please."

I pull it out from under my shirt, take it off, and hand it to her. She takes out the money and the paper with my father's address, the one with Rosa's brother's cell phone number, and the card for Señor Williams.

"Whose phone number is this?" she asks.

"It's the brother of my best friend. He lives in Texas."

"Are you planning to go to Texas?"

"No, I ... my friend wants me to call her there."

"And this address in Los Angeles? Who's this?"

"My father. He lives there. I'm going to visit him."

"I see. Well, Ixchel, your father must get the appropriate papers for you to visit. You can't cross the border with a card that belongs to someone else. A card you *found*. There are very strict laws against this. Do you understand?"

I look down at my hands, which I notice have been twisting the bottom edge of Marta's sweatshirt. "Yes."

"And this business card? Williams Gallery? What's this?"

"A ... a ... he sells my mother's weaving in his gallery. She, um, gave me the card in case."

"In case what?"

"If I c ... can't f ... find my father," I say, still looking at my hands.

Maria walks back around her desk, sits down, and copies the phone numbers and addresses before handing my bits of paper to me.

I feel relief that she didn't check my clothing to find the *faja* with my birth certificate and identification card.

Maria gives me a stern look. "I'm going to take your word this time, Ixchel. You can go back to Tijuana because you're a minor, and we have no record of you trying to cross illegally before. However, I'm going to take your picture, and we have your fingerprints. You mustn't try to cross the border without the proper papers again. And that includes Otay Mesa, or another checkpoint. The border patrol will send out an alert with the information to all of them. You could get into serious trouble. Do you understand?"

My hands tremble in my lap. My mouth is dry again and I can barely find my voice. "Yes," I whisper.

"And another thing, I have to keep Enedina Reynoso's border crossing card. If she loaned it to you, that was a serious violation of the law. She's going to have a difficult time obtaining another one."

I can't speak. I can only nod my head. I feel bad for this Enedina Reynoso, whoever she is. Her card was probably stolen. Now, because of me, she might not be able to get another. I wish I could make the guard believe I found the card, but that's a lie. It's all I can do not to cry. What shall I do? Where will I go now? Where's Rosa? I don't even have the address for Marta and David.

After she takes my photograph, Maria shows me to the door. "Go home. Tell your father if he wants you to visit, he must obtain papers for you." Then she smiles at me. "Good luck, *muchacha*."

I hurry away from the office. When I come to the little park, I lean against a tree until my legs stop shaking. I start to walk

slowly, not knowing where to go. I find myself walking back to the place where Marta left us. My stomach relaxes a little when I see Rosa standing on the corner, watching for me. We hurry toward each other and embrace.

“Chel. *Gracias a Dios*. They let you go. What happened?”

I hold onto her hand, shaking like a tree in a hurricane. I tell her about the border agent, how she searched my things and wrote everything down. “She took my picture. They have my fingerprints. The guard says if I try to cross again, it will go worse for me.”

“What should we do now?” Rosa asks. “Do you think Marta will come back?”

I wonder if she’s still waiting for us in the parking lot on the other side. Maybe she gave up and went home. “She might. We should wait.”

The loud bass boom of a car stereo blocks the traffic sounds as a shiny red car pulls up next to us. It rides so low the body is only inches above the street. A guy with slicked-back hair leans out the passenger window next to Rosa. In Spanish, he says, “Hey, sweetheart, want a ride?”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sylvia Patience has written two other novels for middle grade readers: *Toto's Tale* and *True Chronicle of Oz*, the beloved Oz story retold from the point of view of Dorothy's little dog, and *The Double Crossing*, about the adventures of two fictional thirteen-year-olds on the real 1939 voyage of the ship, the *St. Louis*, carrying 937 Jewish refugees attempting to escape Nazi Germany.

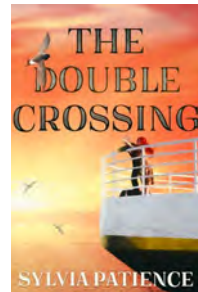
Several of Sylvia's short fairy tales have won prizes in the international Hans Christian Andersen contest in Sestri Levante, Italy, including first prize for a foreign entry in 2007 and 2022. Her poems have appeared in *The Porter Gulch Review*, *Calyx Journal*, and poetry anthologies. She is a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI).

Sylvia lived in Mexico for several years. She speaks fluent Spanish and volunteers with the Santa Cruz Welcoming Network which helps new immigrants in the community. She lives in Santa Cruz, California with her family. You can find out more about her world and works at her website, sylvia patience.com.

ALSO BY THE AUTHOR

THE DOUBLE CROSSING

*In 1939, shortly before World War II
breaks out in Europe, thirteen- year-olds
David and Hannah attempt to escape Nazi
Germany, along with over nine hundred
other Jewish refugees.*



Available from Paper Angel Press in
hardcover, trade paperback, and digital editions
paperangelpress.com

*Suddenly, the goddess Ixchel rose before me out of the cloth.
She was as beautiful and fierce as the jaguar.*

Chel, a young Yucatecan Maya girl named for this goddess of weaving, returns from selling her mother's work in the market, only to have her mother tell her the story of her vision.

In a terrible voice, she said, 'Woman, I am not pleased. I want better things for your daughter, my namesake. You must send her to her father, or I will no longer bless your weaving.'

Her mother believes in the vision and tells Chel she must go to Los Angeles, in El Norte, to join her father, who hasn't returned.

In spite of the dangers and her fears, Chel decides she has to make the journey. She misses her father and hopes for a better life with him. When she is turned back at a border crossing, she risks unknown dangers in a smuggler's tunnel, the place of her recurrent nightmares.

On the U.S. side of the border, she is exhausted and hungry when a little dog adopts her. They continue together in the attempt to find her father.

The Weaver's Daughter is an immigration story brimming with adventure, visions, and prophetic dreams, in the context of family, friendship, and Maya culture.

"Ixchel's story, told with honesty and sympathy, will stir readers' hearts."

— Eve Bunting, award-winning author
of more than 250 children's books

"The plot and pacing are solid, and the characters are well-developed, making for an enjoyable and educational story for young readers. An engaging tale about family and migration." — Kirkus Reviews