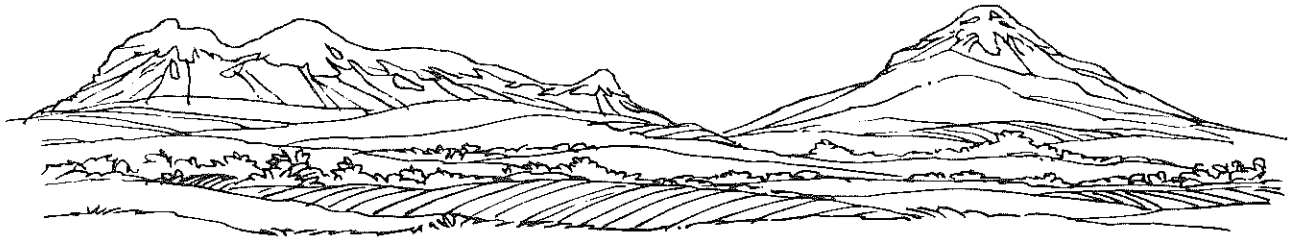


# The Warrior and the Princess

## The Mexican Legend of Ixtaccihuatl and Popocatepetl



In ancient times in the valley of Mexico, there lived a rich and powerful emperor. Colorful murals covered his palace. Jewels and brilliant quetzal feathers covered his crown. The treasure the emperor prized the most was his daughter, Ixtli. Her long, dark hair glistened like polished obsidian. Her eyes were a soft brown like the eyes of the deer that wandered in her garden. She was the most beautiful woman in the kingdom. Every young man who saw Ixtli wished to marry her, but no suitors pleased both the emperor and Ixtli.

One day Prince Popo, a great warrior, traveled from his neighboring kingdom to the valley to search for a wife. He saw Ixtli being carried to the marketplace on a litter. "She is as beautiful as people say," thought the prince. "But beauty alone is not enough. I can only love someone who has a kind and caring spirit."

Prince Popo disguised himself as a royal gardener so he could be near Ixtli to find out what she was really like. He watched her care for the animals in the garden. Ixtli often sent messengers with clothing and food to the poor people in the valley. Each day Popo fell more in love with her.

Finally, Popo could wait no longer. He knelt before Ixtli. "Forgive me, princess, I am not a gardener at all. I am Prince Popo from the mountain kingdom. I have worked in your garden to be near you. I have found that you are as kind as you are beautiful. I will love you forever."

Ixtli smiled at the young prince. She had fallen in love with this handsome gardener. She hadn't told anyone. She knew her father would never let her marry a commoner. But a prince! Surely he would agree to their marriage if it would bring her happiness.

Ixtli gave Popo the gold ring from her finger. "You must speak to my father. Show him my ring so he knows I have pledged my love to you."

"Oh, Princess, your love has made me happy. I will go to my kingdom to tell my people of your great beauty. Then I will return to claim your hand."

Ixtli waited for the young prince to visit her father. Day after day she watched for him. Months passed. Ixtli grew thin and pale. She worried about the prince. Had he been injured? Was he ill?

One afternoon as she sat by a window, one of her attendants ran into her room. "Prince Popo is here! He has come with a chest of treasures."

Ixtli ran to the visitor's room. "I thought you would never return," she said.

"I come from a poor mountain kingdom," answered the prince. "I could not return until I had treasures worthy of you. I have come today to ask your father to allow me to marry you."

"I will not hear of it!" stormed the emperor. "You are a prince of nothing. The one who marries my daughter must be worthy to rule my kingdom." Ixtli ran sobbing from the room.

Months passed. Ixtli pleaded with her father. Finally, seeing how unhappy his daughter was, he sent for the young prince.

"My daughter's happiness is important to me. I am willing to reconsider my decision if only to see her smile again. But first you must show me you are worthy of my daughter before I allow you to marry her," said the emperor. "You will be my messenger to all the kingdoms that surround our valley."

One day when Popo was carrying messages to a nearby kingdom, he saw soldiers marching toward the valley. He ran two days through the forests and mountains to warn the emperor. The emperor's troops hadn't fought battles for many years. Popo knew they would need a strong leader.

"I will command your soldiers," Popo told the emperor. "I have led my people against these same armies and defeated them."

"You have proven yourself a worthy messenger," the emperor said. "If you are a victorious warrior as well, you shall marry my daughter."

Popo and the emperor's soldiers fought the invaders for more than a year. When a messenger falsely reported that Popo had been killed, Ixtli died of grief.

The same day she died, Popo and his army of warriors returned. He bowed before the emperor. "There were many enemies, but we have won each battle. I will train every man in this kingdom so you will never be defeated."

The emperor, saddened by the death of Ixtli, placed his crown on Popo's head. "You have earned the kingdom, my son."

"I will accept the throne if I may marry Ixtli," said Popo.

The emperor led Popo to Ixtli's room. "She died this very day, thinking that you would never return."

Popo turned away from the emperor and picked up Ixtli. He carried her to the hills overlooking the valley. Holding a torch, he watched over her, hoping she would return to life. The snows came and covered the princess. Still Popo wouldn't leave her.

Today you can still see Popo and Ixtli on the hills overlooking the Valley of Mexico. The gods changed Ixtli into a snow-covered mountain called The Sleeping Woman. Popo, the brave and loyal warrior, became the smoking volcano that guards the mountain.

Name \_\_\_\_\_



## **Questions about *The Warrior and the Princess***

1. Why was Ixtli unmarried?

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2. Why did Popo pretend to be a gardener?

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3. What did the prince find out about Ixtli while he was posing as a gardener?

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4. Why did Popo wait so long to ask the emperor if he could marry Ixtli?

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5. Why did the emperor refuse to allow Prince Popo to marry his daughter?

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6. How could you tell that Ixtli truly loved Prince Popo?

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7. Legends often explain the reason for the existence of something in the natural world. What does this legend explain?

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