



DOÑA MARINA / MALINTZI

WHILE Cortés and his followers are resting themselves at Cempoallan, while Montezuma is awaiting their approach with superstitious dread, we will stop to make the acquaintance of the gentle woman who was so important to the daring invader of the heights of Anahuac.

She was born at Paínala, now a picturesque village buried in forests on the borders of the Coatzacoalco River, about 1502. This pueblo, as well as others in its neighborhood, belonged, it is said, to her father, one of the great vassals to the crown, then worn by Montezuma II. Thus the little duchess, for so she might be called, lived until her eleventh year, in ease and comfort. Then her father died, and her mother, marrying again, transferred all her maternal care and affection to a boy, the child of the new union. In order that this boy should inherit the family wealth and estates, reports were spread of the death of the other child. The body of a slave who had just died was substituted for the heiress, and the funeral celebrated with pomp. Meanwhile the disinherited girl was given over or

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sold to travelling merchants, who in their turn transferred her to the chief of the Tabascans, to whom she became a slave. In the Tabascan kingdom she grew up, and with her great intelligence acquired readily the Mayan language used at Tabasco without forfeiting her native tongue, that spoken at the Aztec court.

Like the Aztec maidens of good birth, she had been carefully trained up to the time when she was abandoned to slavery. Her new position did not reduce her to humiliating tasks, or forced labor, and she probably led a happy life in the soft climate of her new home, surrounded by trees always blossoming, rich vegetation, and new friends, who, although her keepers, were gentle and indulgent after the manner of the Mayan tribes.

In 1519, just as the pretty maiden was reaching her seventeenth year, Cortés arrived at Tabasco. After the first fright of their coming was over, followed by futile efforts at resistance, the Tabascans were willing to make peace. A treaty of alliance was concluded, as we have seen, and with the gifts of the chief to the conqueror, came twenty young slave-girls, whose business it was to grind the corn to make bread for their new masters. Cortés at once ordered that these women should be taught the truths of the Christian religion, and among the rest the heiress of Païnala was converted by Aguilar, and baptized by her new name, Marina. Marina, for the Indians became Malina, as their tongues do not accept the *R*. Afterwards Cortés himself acquired the nickname of Malintzin, that is, the master of

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Malina, and with them the word Malintzi, or Malinche, has attached itself to her as well

When the Spaniards again landed, a grave difficulty presented itself. Aguilar, the interpreter, knew Mayan, but not one word did he understand of the Aztec dialect now spoken. Suddenly one of the young women presented by the Tabascan chief was seen conversing fluently with the visitors who crowded round the boats of the new-comers. She was instantly summoned by the commander, and at once became very important as interpreter, translating for Aguilar what he could easily render into Spanish. Through her was transmitted the first message of Montezuma to the dreaded white woman. It makes a pretty picture—this graceful Aztec girl standing between the two parties: on one side the Indians, richly dressed, to impress the stranger, in robes of gay colors, adorned with feathers and ornaments; on the other Cortés, in the armor of the time, assuming all the haughtiness of demeanor possible; grouped about him his band of stalwart followers, curiosity on their features, making up by their eyes for the uselessness of their ears, which were of no use to them for understanding what was going on. The Aztecs speak and announce the will of their monarch. Marina, with intelligence in her glance, listens attentively, then with her grave smile reports the matter to Aguilar. Aguilar must have been in rags, for his long sojourn with the Indians had brought him to a low estate. He gathers the Mayan message from the lips of Marina translated from Nahuatl, and gives it in good sound Spanish to

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the captain. His reply is conveyed by the same double interpreting back to the messengers. The substance of the colloquy is, on the part of Montezuma, a welcome, and lavish offering of gifts, through which appears his unconcealed anxiety to speed the parting guest. From Cortés the reply of scanty thanks for benefits received, and the determination to press on to the plateau.

If we were allowed to believe good old Bernal Diaz, the visible testimonials of the conference needed no interpreter. The gifts of the messengers are described as splendid—shields, helmets, cuirasses embossed with pure gold ornaments, sandals, fans, crests of gaudy feathers interwoven with gold and silver threads, and strewed with pearls and precious stones. The helmet sent back by Cortés had come again filled to the brim with grains of gold.

Two round plates of gold and silver, as big as carriage wheels, excited the most delight. The gold one represented the sun, and was richly carved with plants and animals. Where are all these things now? So utterly disappeared that many people believe they only existed in the imagination of the chronicler of the Conquest.

No wonder that such startling treasures proved an invitation more potent than the twice translated prayer to go away which accompanied them.

The Spaniards were impatient to move at once. Cortés, charmed with the grace and intelligence of the young interpreter, encouraged her by every sign of favor, and she, young, forlorn, deserted, expanded under the warmth of his kindness and flattery. In

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a very short time she acquired enough Spanish to interpret directly for her lord and master, who became the object of her intense adoration.

Marina was very beautiful, according to the description of the Spanish chroniclers. If she were at all like the descendants of her race, she wore, doubtless, a white loose garment, embroidered in the square neck and sleeves with red ; her black hair was braided in two long tresses interwoven with pearls and coral. Her slightly copper-colored tint was clear enough for a soft play of rose in her cheeks ; her large soft eyes beamed, and her white teeth flashed as she smiled ; while, for the most part, her oval face remained grave, almost sad, in its expression. She was slight, graceful, with small hands and feet.

From this time forward Malintzi was always at the side of the conqueror, aiding him not only as interpreter, but with her surprising vigilance, and perception of the tendency of events due to the knowledge of the natives. She was always full of courage, and had the endurance of a man, sharing all the sufferings of the little army with patience and even gayety. In fact, she had never been so happy before, and the hardships of the camp were nothing compared with the trials of her earlier life. She witnessed the slaughter of her countrymen with grief, and interceded always in favor of the conquered ; but no thought of patriotism troubled her mind as she deliberately surrendered the land to the hands of its enemies.

Later, Malintzi lived to contemplate the ruin she

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had helped to make, in a time when she had outlived the brief happiness of her sojourn with the Conquistadores. But we will leave her now, full of joy, affection, courage, the proudest, most useful of petted interpreters, in order not to anticipate the current of the story.



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DURING the two years occupied, with varying fortunes, in the conquest of Mexico, Cortés was always accompanied by Malintzi, who was indeed indispensable to him as interpreter. Her tent was always near that of the commander. His lieutenants treated her with consideration and respect, always giving her the title of Doña.

Through his reverses, and on the terrible *Noche triste*, it is said, that Malintzi never lost her courage. She was put in charge of some brave Tlaxcallans, by Cortés, who could not have her with him at the head of the fray, and their devotion brought her through the wild confusion of flight.

The long struggle over, Cortés, as we have seen, went to live at Coyoacán. Doña Marina was with him.

Now she is happy. Her hero rules triumphant over millions of men. She lives in a palace, with her guards, her maids of honor, her pages, and esquires. The long, sad days of her youth of slavery are at an end, she has resumed her rank. She has a son, baptized under the name of Martin Cortés, whom she tenderly loves, and with this child and

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his father, now at peace with all the vast empire he has conquered for his sovereign, she passes a tranquil, happy life.

Suddenly, to break in upon this dream, comes the news that Doña Catalina Juarez Cortés has landed at Vera Cruz, and is approaching the capital.

Very likely Cortés had forgotten to mention his marriage to Marina. Perhaps he had forgotten it himself. But the reader will remember Doña Catalina, the cause of the jealousy of Velasquez in the early days of Fernando's career. It is said that his first ardor for her cooled off after a time, and that the marriage would never have taken place but for the persistence of the Doña. It was not happy, and the adventurer sailed away, without regret for the cheerless home he left behind in Cuba.

Her name was never mentioned during the long period which passed between the landing of the Spaniards and their successful establishment in Mexico. But the deeds of Fernando Cortés were known to all the world, and especially sounded about in the island whence he set out. Doña Catalina, with every right on her side, set out to join her recusant spouse, encouraged by Diégo Velasquez, who saw with no pleasure the continued triumphs of Cortés.

Bernal Diaz says that Cortés hated his wife, but he dared not bring down upon himself the wrath of the Church by ignoring her, and Doña Catalina was received on her arrival with all the honors due to the wife of the great conqueror. She made a splendid entrance into the capital, and at once stepped into

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the position of head of his household, and succeeded to the homage of maids of honor, pages, and esquires.

Malintzi withdrew, persuaded of the necessity by the good father Olmedo, who baptized her, trained her in the Christian faith, and now, in the hour of trial, stood by her side.

Doña Catalina was not destined to enjoy long her new state. The air of the lofty plateau did not suit her constitution, accustomed to the lower atmosphere of Cuba. She died suddenly.

At Coyoacán there is a tale that Doña Catalina was drowned by her husband, and the well is even shown to tourists into which she is supposed to have been thrown. This legend is probably of later date than the time of her death, but even then rumors arose that it had been a violent one, and reports were rapidly circulated about Cortés likely to injure his reputation and, moreover, that of the Malintzi.

At that time Cortés was thinking of a return to Spain. He was thirty-five, still young enough to thirst for a full recognition at home of his great deeds. While making his preparation for departure, he heard of the insurrection of his lieutenant Olid in Honduras, who had declared himself independent. It was necessary for him to hasten at once to chastise his boldness. Aguilar, the interpreter, was dead, and Cortés, who had never troubled himself to acquire the Mexican dialects, had to send for Marina to accompany him, as interpreter only. This caused the rumors about the death of his wife to circulate more

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than before. Cortés, warned of the danger, took a decisive step to silence all such insinuations. At Orizaba, he caused the sudden marriage of Marina with one of his officers, Don Juan de Jaramillo.

Poor Marina was required to carry her devotion, her absolute obedience to her chief, to the extreme point of marrying a man she scarcely knew. She yielded. It is said that she never lived with her husband, but withdrew at once to her birthplace, at Pañala, where her own family still lived; that her guilty relatives threw themselves at her feet, afraid that she would have them destroyed by the Spaniard. She forgave them, and passed the rest of her life far away from the capital, in obscurity. She died young, when Cortés was yet at the height of his fame, before he had suffered the mortification of seeing himself overlooked by the court of Spain.

Not long after the expedition to Honduras, Cortés carried out his intention of crossing to Spain. On this first visit he was, as we have seen, received with acclamations, and loaded with praise and honors. When he again entered Mexico, with the title of Marquess of the Valley of Oaxaca, he brought with him a Spanish bride, Doña Juana de Zuñiga, daughter of the second Count of Aguilar, and niece of the Duke de Bejar.

So Malintzi, if her shade returns to wander under the *ahuehuetes* of Chapultepec, has her own grief to mourn, in addition to the ruin she helped to bring upon her people.