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MAMÁ MALINCHE
By Deyanira Vielma

Furrowed brows, full-blown scowls (sometimes furled fists)
 as they toss her name around in conversation.

Oftentimes, it's a whispered maldición that leaves
 a bad taste in their mouths — it's agrio and bitter,
 because what her name implies is bad, because *she's* bad.

She is a woman of many names —
 who lived many lives by the age of her death at twenty-five.

Her people, indigenous to the land, called her, Malina,

or, Malinalli,

or, Malintzin.

But when under Him and underwater, she was born again,
 it was the Spanish who baptized her, *Doña* Marina.

*(It was an honor
 after all.)*

She's Malinche —

a noun made adjective.

Her name, synonymous with sinuous and sly and shrewd.

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*(For how could you
know? You've been
taught to hate her.)*

For most, a shared hatred = nationalistic pride
where the legacy of “ethnic traitress supreme” lives on¹ —
as if rooted in the Five Suns, inherited by fathers and sons
a warning for mothers and daughters to never stray, to never run;

for they're twice cursed with the sins of their mothers — Eve and Malinche.

*(Don't forget their
distant aunt Helen.)²*

She, who bore a child of mixed blood,

failed to foresee the infamy:

of the acquisition —

of a womb, once empty;

of a people, so brilliant;

of a land, so rich.

A wave, enticing;

a gaze, commanding —

placed on a pedestal (only to be pushed off).

¹ T.R. Fehrenbach, *Fire and Blood: A History of Mexico*

² Helen of Troy

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As if embroidered on a sash or pinned on her chest,

she wears the titles *others* brand her with —

some adore her, most abhor her:

a traitor, an advisor, a sometimes lover,

Mother — La Madre de Mestizaje,

but, always,

La Chingada.

La anti-Virgen.

La Traidora de la Patria.

*(Or, is she a Victim
of the Patriarchy?)*

Men paint her in the likeness of women

who beckon on behalf of a lustful agenda;

who plead for wings to fly o'er sea;

who, under the illusion of control, cautiously move,

may slither, around their defenses — stroking,

their ego;

their talks of grandeur;

their dreams of a New World —

a new world with civility and propriety,

and jewel-encrusted crowns and gowns galore,

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and well-defined spaces for the races,

and one Crown

and one God.

Men — condemn her, curse her, and cast her out: “Pinche, Malinche.”

Women — commune, connect, and cry out:

“Se nos quedó el maleficio

“The curse of offering foreigners

De brindar al extranjero

Our faith, our culture,

Nuestra fe, nuestra cultura,

Our bread, our money,

Nuestro pan, nuestro dinero [...]

Remains with us [...]

Oh, maldición de malinche,

Oh, curse of Malinche!

Enfermedad del presente

Sickness of the present

¿Cuándo dejarás mi tierra?

When will you leave my country?

¿Cuándo harás libre a mi gente?”

When will you free my people?”³

(Her daughters?)

Brown. Woman. Icon. that is what some believe.

Blurred lines between victim and victimizer;

between Matriarch and Temptress.

³ Amparo Ochoa, Corrido: “La Maldición de Malinche”

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Dueling natures duking it out

in the space of one woman —

*(Don't you mean all
women?)*

— Yes, for one equates all, for it is She who's responsible for The Fall.

The public, faithful servants, dole out their stories: lips to ears.

Eyes believe what they read, cemented in the Good Book,

in the Florentine Codex.

Little painful reminders of the body as machine,

as miracle,

as menace.

By the Spanish, she remained —

Safeguarded by their promises and their power.

by her power, on the field with her shield.

by her power, garnered through skill and sheer will

to survive,

to thrive.

Ni sorda, ni muda, she surpassed her role, as woman,

only to become —

a connector of worlds —

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her body, a bridge;
 her tongue (silver), a tool;
 her mind, a weapon;
 a deemed deity – “la lengua de los dioses”⁴;
 a witch, that bewitched both followers and foes —
the key to conquest.

It’s the romantics, who are hopeless —

who believe love was the reason and not treason.

Poets, painters, and players preach about the ineffable paramours —

In spite of what history dictates, to *them*, it’s heart over hunger;

it’s a passion play

not a ploy for power;

it’s “custom to consume”⁵

the object of affection,

la otra mitad —

la alma gemela.

So, Malinche lost herself, never really knowing herself,

became what people perceived her to be —

⁴ Cordelia Candelaria, “La Malinche, Feminist Prototype”

⁵ Gloria Anzaldua, “The Cannibal’s Canción”

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free, a vessel:

for loathing for promise.

But it was where the snakes hid, surrounded by water,
that she was born in Coatzacoalcos in 1500.

Noble by birth, only to be sold —

by her mother no less, Greed – her god,

her master;

by treacherous lips that spoke of her death,

and ready hands that dug a grave to sell the lie;

by eight, abandoned, for the sake of another,

a brother;

chosen over and buried under —

like her father, gone.

gone.

gone.

That's what some people say, that it was her mother's choice to give her away.

Others profess, Malinche was sold as many before her were:

her father, a cacique; her mother, a captive;

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she, even then, a token of two worlds, of carnal coupling.

Beauty and brilliance = a dangerous combination;

so, she became the trade to keep the peace and save the nation.

Once an Aztec princess, then a Mayan slave —

she had no people.

(How could she?

She belonged to no

one and everyone.)

Passed off between provinces, between passing hands only to land in Tabasco in 1519.

That's when her new life began, with Hernán [Cortés].

It was a mission, one of God, of Gold, of Glory.

It was a massacre —

(A cultural

butchery.)

— White fists against brown faces.

She was always passed off and passed on, a victim of wandering eyes and lingering

hands;

a hunter and collector, Malinche was gifted *to* him —

the conquistador who made her *his* conquest.

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It was learned, this history of submission,

sired to serve and obey

– she knew of nothing else,

so, she “gave him Mexico”.⁶

Four centuries later free from Spanish rule –

it was she who paid the price with *her* name, *her* fame.

After her death, that’s when the myth began:

myth as viper,

myth as demon,

myth as courtesan,

myth as enemy.

For how else could a White man see a Brown woman?

Men wrote her story.

Men gave her a voice.

Men painted her picture.

Malinche was a product – molded and made by men;

saved and reclaimed by women, to transcend.

In the end, it was she who had a say, she who commanded her fate —

⁶ Naomi Quiñonez “Trilogy”

a connector of worlds:

la madre de mestizaje.

Gifts — cunning, resolve, lucha — all passed on to her daughters.

*(Now you know how
she came to be and
how she was
marked down in
history — but where
will you place the
blame? On her
people? Her captor?
Or, her?)*