

THE CONQUISTADOR'S WIFE

CHORUS 2: A SHARED DESTINY

At first glance it was plain to see that this slave girl, who called herself Malinali, was special somehow. The way she held her head high, and dared to look the great Conquistador captain in the eye...she was clearly of high and noble birth. Cortés would soon learn that she had been sold into slavery after her father—the Cacique of her tribe—had resisted the Mexica warlords and been killed as a warning to his people.

While a slave, first to the Mayans and later to the Tabascan tribe that offered her to the Conquistadors, Malinali was able to learn the languages and cultures of her many captors. By the time Cortés laid eyes on this graceful, lovely young girl—barely 17 years old—Malinali already spoke several Mayan dialects, as well as Nahuatl, the language of her Mexica enemies.

No wonder Cortés picked her out among 20 female captives given to him after his soldiers had defeated the slave traders in battle. He could see, beyond her beauty, that Malinali's intelligence, language skills and grace could prove extremely valuable to him as he struggled to understand this foreign land he was bent on conquering. In a world where men made the rules and women were expected to silently obey, here was a slave girl who dared to speak directly to men...and always seemed to have something important to say.