**How Kate del Castillo Built (and Rebuilt) Her Life** 

The actress, producer and Reina del Sur star opens up about early fame, proving herself (again) in Hollywood, leaving an abusive marriage, and the lessons she learned from her infamous meeting with El Chapo.

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Alicia Menendez: Kate del Castillo has built and rebuilt her life over and over as a successful actress making the crossover from Mexico to the United States. As a woman who chose to leave an abusive marriage and then again, most recently, following the very public fallout of her meeting with former cartel leader, Javier Guzman, El Chapo.

Part of that rebuilding includes Kate's return to Telemundo's La Reina del Sur, where she plays our favorite anti-hero, Teresa Mendoza. More than 10 years has passed since the show's original release, and we talk about the lessons Kate has learned in that time, her other projects, including her production company, Cholawood, and her new Peacock dark comedy, Armas de Mujer, about four women who band together after the police arrest their husbands for being tied to the same criminal organization. And of course, her raw insights on messing up, living with the consequences and how she learned to trust her gut.

Kate, thank you so much for being here.

Kate Del Castilo:

Of course. Thank you, Alicia, for having me.

Menendez: I was thinking and preparing for this interview with you after the interview I did for Latina to Latina with Eva Longoria. And Eva talks a lot about the fact, I know you're friends...

Del Castillo: Yes.

Menendez: She talks a lot about the fact that she became famous at 30 years old, and that meant she was a fully formed adult when she became famous, and that really gave her a ton of perspective. So to think of you, at 19, becoming this huge celebrity, were you ready for it?

Del Castillo: I don't think anybody can be ready for fame. I knew about it because of my dad, so it was nothing new for me. And I think, thank God, that's why I keep my feet on the ground because I've known this for all my life. That's all we lived out of, acting. And I think that's also why I respect and I admire everybody who's in the industry because it's so hard. But that's all I know. So I've been pretty famous or living with fame my entire life.

Menendez: I think one of the reasons that we all find Teresa so fascinating, I think especially those of us who are Latina, is that she is operating in a man's world.

Del Castillo: Absolutely.

Menendez: And she was operating in a world where at a certain point, she has not taken seriously, where she is diminished, where she needs to prove and then prove herself again. And it's like, no matter where you work or what you do, we have all, I think, had that experience. And I wonder for you, in your own life, when you have run up against that type of misogyny or expectation that you are not as competent as you are.

Del Castillo: Oh my God, yes. Well, to be honest, and sadly, unfortunately, I don't know a woman that hasn't been abused in one or another way, which is really sad. So yes, I've been abused in many ways in my life. I still feel like I'm a struggling actor, still, in America, which is crazy. But I still struggle with stereotypes in America. I still struggle with being a Latina and wanting me to wear tight dresses and sexualize me. I think there's a lot in the same industry to learn about us. We're in 2022, and this is getting there, maybe, but in a very slow, slow, slow way.

Menendez: There's Kate del Castillo, actor, there's also Kate del Castillo, businesswoman. And I want you to take us back. If there was a moment, or a series of moments, where you said, "It's not enough for me to act. I need to begin to own these stories. I need to be able to produce these stories." And the genesis of Cholawood.

Del Castillo: Yes, of course. Well, it's because of that, we have to change the narrative and only the people who are in these key positions can do that. For me it's producing. So if I'm going to produce, I'm going to produce something that I think it's not stereotyped, is great for not only Latinas to see, because I don't want to label us. That's labeling myself. I want to do mainstream.

As an actress, I can't still wait sitting down with my arms crossed to have this amazing roles come to me. I have to do something. That's why I created Cholawood Productions with my two other friends. Also, it was out of a moment in my life where I had no jobs. The contracts I had, because of the whole Chapo thing, they took them. So I found myself with a lot of bills, with a house, and with everything that I couldn't pay for. So we started Cholawood and we trying to help each other, the three of us women, Latinas, smart, powerful in so many ways. We said, "This going to happen to us. We have so much, we smart, we have all the know-how, we are creative women, so let's do something." And that's why we created Cholawood.

Menendez: You just said 10 different things that I have questions about. So I'm going to start with this, what are the roles that you wish you were offered or you wish you were considered for that you're not?

Del Castillo: Well, something that is not only for Latina. I can play whatever. Why label people from where they come from, unless it was an amazing... I could be a Latina heroine in a Marvel movie. I'm just thinking out loud. Something like that. And it's hard to find something like that. It was hard for me to find something like La Reina del Sur, Teresa Mendoza, this amazing character of this woman living in a man's world and having to think and strategize and without sexualizing her. So it's a lot of things.

On the other hand, I need to work because I still have the house and I still have the bills, but now I'm in a different position, thank God, where I can be a little bit more picky about what I do and what I accept. And also I'm producing now. So that's really great because I'm not only producing for me to lead on everything that I produce. So I think it's really cool.

Also, I think that those mixes, the intertwining between actresses that they do a lot in America, Reese Witherspoon, with Nicole Kidman, with Jennifer Aniston, and all these amazing women that they come together and I say, yes, that's what I want to do with amazing American and Latino and whatever woman just producing amazing shows.

Menendez: You referenced the "El Chapo thing," and I know that you were done talking about it, you were over talking about it. The things that stick out to me most about what you've said about it is, one, that you don't regret it, which I wonder if you still feel that way, and, two, that you feel as though you were naive at the time. I think when we have... Sorry, you want to jump in?

Del Castillo: No, that's fine.

Menendez: I think those of us who have an experience of feeling like we have been naive, there can be a whiplash to becoming very hard, very hardened, so that we are not naive, that we don't feel we are taken advantage of again. So I wonder how you both wise up while keeping yourself soft?

Del Castillo: Oh my God, that's a great question. And for sure I was naive in so many ways. And now I say to myself I was really stupid not seeing what was coming, but it was impossible. By the way, for your first question, I do not regret at all. What I regret is that I didn't see. There's some things, when you make a decision on your own, you have to step up to that decision that you made. But when there's things that are not in your hands and it's not your decision to make, then it's impossible.

There are things that I wouldn't have done like that, but there was no option for me. But I did take the decision to go and see this person, for example. I know that's something I'm going to live with for my entire life, and they're always going to be referring to me. That's fine because that was a decision I made. I'm an adult and I know what I'm doing.

Everything that came after that and all this thing that I know that if I was a man, this would've never happened. Then that's beyond my capability as a woman to do anything about it until somebody comes in and says something. But there was nobody there. And still, the Mexican government hates me. So there's that. It was unfortunate but I learned so much.

Menendez: Tell me what you learned. What is the lesson here?

Del Castillo: Oh, trust yourself. And I had this instinct and something in my gut told me that I shouldn't have trusted either Sean Penn or Jose Ibanez. And so there was something about the whole thing that... I remember it and still my body can feel that rejection in some way. You know what I mean? I was so adamant about trusting them because they were this big Hollywood people. I never thought that they were going to betray me the way they did. So I should have listened to myself much more. That's one thing.

The other thing is that we are alone in this world. We are alone, and we cannot make it through by ourselves in so many ways. And we need to seek out for help when we need it. The same thing happened when I was married to my first husband and all this domestic violence went on. You think you're in a tunnel with no light at the end of the tunnel because you're not able to see the light. But it's always there. It's always there. It's just you're so into the thing that you think there's no other option but to either to kill him or to die yourself because there's no other way out. That's how bad it is when you are in a situation like that. And there's nothing wrong, by the way, by asking for help. And I thought that I could do it by myself and I couldn't.

Menendez: How did you find the light?

Del Castillo: I found the light when I saw myself one day in the mirror. I saw myself ugly. I didn't recognize myself in the mirror. I saw myself not only ugly, but much older, so unhappy and so not me, not being me at all, being different with people, with my parents, with my friends, with myself, just lying to myself and trying to justify this A-S-S-H-O-L-E because he is like, "No, he's okay. Probably he is an alcoholic, or probably he is just this and that." No, that's what he is, that's the real. But I promise myself never to see myself in the mirror and see that woman there, because that was not me. I didn't recognize me. That was the day that I left.

Menendez: It's interesting because in one hand, this is only the third season of Reina, but a lot of years have passed between the first season.

Del Castillo: Yeah, 12.

Menendez: Yeah. I wonder of what you bring to this role now that you didn't or weren't able to bring 12 years ago?

Del Castillo: It's funny because when I found myself with the role of my life that I so much wanted, and I said, "Oh my God, I finally got to be Teresa Mendoza." I didn't prepare that much because I didn't want, I prepared in so many other ways, but I didn't prepare that much because I wanted to find myself as naive as she was in that moment. And I want everything to be a surprise for me as an actress, as well as for her, this whole thing that happens to her.

So we were just walking and then running hand to hand, and then she starts doing all these things and she starts being mature in so many ways and not in the best ways. Life just gives you that sometimes, and you have to mature much earlier than you should. But that's what happened to me. That's what happens to most of the women that I know, unfortunately.

Now in the second season where she said, the first season she finishes pregnant and say, "I'm going to have this baby. Why? Because I want to feel fear again. I want to know what that is, because I became this insensible woman, hard." And she wasn't like that. Something happened to her to be this way and this cold and this harsh. So at the second season, she finds fear right in front of her because they kidnap her daughter. And then on this third season, now she is a teenager. She is a grown up. She knows how to take care of herself. So now is the time for Teresa Mendoza to come and seek justice.

Menendez: You were on the Today Show earlier, and you're talking about hosting the Latin Billboards and riding around a motorcycles and how, "Ah, that's a thing of the past," because you've gotten too old, which I had heard Ada Limon, our first Latina US poet laureate, reference getting old, that means you're living.

Del Castillo: Absolutely.

Menendez: That they're one and the same.

Del Castillo: Absolutely. And the older, the better, to be honest. At least for me, I'm going to turn 50 and I feel the best ever in so many ways. Not only physically and mentally, spiritually and confident with who I am and what I want and what I don't, especially in what I don't want.

Menendez: What is that? What do you not want?

Del Castillo: Well, I don't want to be stereotyped. I don't want anybody to boss me around anymore. I don't want to be abused in any sense anymore. I don't want to have to need to be with someone. I don't want to need, I just want to want.

Menendez: One of the reasons I was so interested in talking with you, Kate, is that to me, you are a person who has built and rebuilt a life and a career multiple times. I think that we have a lot of listeners who are either in the midst of that building and rebuilding. Maybe it's their first round of it, maybe it is their second, and it may not be what it looked like for you. It may not be coming out of an abusive marriage. It may not be coming out of a public international scandal and rebuilding your career. But I think it's actually, it's the experience of getting close to 40, of getting close to 50 of deciding what 2.0 and 3.0 looks like. What is your best advice to someone who is in the thick of the rebuilding?

Del Castillo: Trust yourself in every single second, moment. Trust your gut. That's all we have. Be aware of listening to other people and making decisions for other people, because then you can't defend yourself, if it comes the case. If you take your own decisions, then you can step up for yourself because then you have the truth, even though if you are mistaken, but you have the truth.

For me, that that was the main thing. Also, being an immigrant, I think that changes a lot because I had to rebuild my career again then because I had a career in Mexico, in Latin America, and then I had to start from scratch. Most of the people leave when they have nothing to lose. And my case was exactly the opposite. I had everything to lose when I came to the United States, and it was another time they wouldn't listen to an accent like mine.

The industry was much picky about listening to different accents so it was really hard. But it's been a trip, and I trusted my God and I knew that I could do it, and I just didn't want to be back doing telenovelas. Not that it's anything wrong with telenovelas, I learned so much, and they are all over. Mexican telenovelas go through the entire world. It's not about that. I was just getting bored and I knew I could do something more, and I knew everything I had to know of portraying or being the leading lady. So it was really boring.

So the change was huge, leaving my entire family and my friends and everything and in another language, and the switch is different. Now for me, what's the most amazing thing is that with La Reina del Sur, for example, I think that's a real crossover when you are number one in ratings, winning ABC, CBS, all the American networks in that time slot, regardless of language. So in my own language, I think that is a real crossover. That's at least what gives me hope in so many ways. And doing a show in off-Broadway about Las Muertas de Juárez, talking about my country in English, in a solo show, in a completely American theater. So those for me are the real crossovers, and I feel very proud of it, but it's just a lot of work.

Menendez: Kate de Castillo, thank you so much for taking the time to do this.

Del Castillo: Thank you, Alicia. My pleasure.

Menendez: Thanks for listening. Latina to Latina is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua and me, Alicia Menendez. Paulina Velasco is our producer. Florence Burro Adams mixed this episode. We love hearing from you. Email us at ola@latinatolatina.com. Slide into our DMs on Instagram, or tweet us at Latina to Latina. Check out our merchandise@latinatolatina.com/shop. And remember to subscribe or follow us on Radio Public, Apple podcast, Google podcast, Good Pods or wherever you're listening right now.

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