



Ann Charles

LOOK WHAT THE WIND BLEW IN

AN EXCERPT ...

From Chapter One...

Mal Viento: An evil wind that can cause sickness or death.

It's a curse."

Angélica García frowned at her father over the beam of her flashlight, wondering if the heat had fried his brain. "It's not a curse, Dad."

"Go over it again, *gatita*. And this time, use plain, old English." Juan García reached out and gently tweaked the tip of her nose. "Not all of us speak Mayan in our sleep."

Angélica wiped away the sweat trailing down her cheek. She tilted the flashlight beam slightly away from the temple wall, grazing the surface so the shadows added depth to the blocks of Maya glyphs.

She pointed at the first set. "This shows *Yum Cimil*, the Lord of Death. It says he rode in on the wind with a traveler." She moved to the next. "Here, the king is performing a sacrificial ceremony, offering his blood for the lives of his people. And in this one, *Yum Cimil* has turned his back on the king's sacrifice and is devouring the village."

"What about that last set?" Juan asked.

"It shows the Lord of Death crouching inside a temple. It says he 'waits.'"

"Waits for what?"

"It doesn't show."

"Sounds like a curse to me."

Angélica aimed the flashlight at her father.

He stared back at her, all traces of his usual grin absent. His silver-haired sideburns glistened with sweat.

She shook her head. He couldn't be serious. "You're losing it." She pointed the beam back at the first glyph set. "Look here. The Lord of Death rode in on the wind with the traveler. That means the proof we need is at this site. I just have to find it." She skimmed her fingers over the warm chiseled stone and smiled at him. "I knew Mom was right."

"I still think it's a curse," he said, mopping his brow with a handkerchief. "You shouldn't have read it aloud."

She growled in her throat. After almost four decades of digging in tombs and temples throughout the Yucatán Peninsula, northern Guatemala, and Belize, how could he still believe in curses? "Be serious, Dad. That Lord of Death Waiting glyph is just the Maya equivalent of a ghost story."

He lifted his eyebrows. "What makes you so certain it's not a curse?"

Angélica scrubbed her hand down her face. She couldn't believe they were even having this discussion.

"Listen, child," Juan started.

"I'm almost thirty-five now, Dad."

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“Maybe so, but I’ve been on this earth—in temples just like this one—a lot longer than you have. It’s time you ...”

She crossed her arms over her chest, bracing herself for the usual I’m-your-father speech.

He paused, glancing down at her arms then back up into her face. “And now you’re giving me *that* look,” he snorted. “I don’t know why I try to tell you anything. You never listen anyway. One of these days you’re going to learn that I’m almost always right.”

“*Almost* being the key word there.” Her grin took the sting out of her words.

Juan chuckled, patting her on the head. “You’re getting more and more like your mother every day.”

Tilting her head, she batted her eyelashes several times. “You mean intelligent and beautiful?”

“Mouthy and obstinate.” He pointed at the carvings on the wall. “Whether you like it or not, this curse could mean trouble.”

Angélica heard a nervous-sounding groan from the shadows behind her father. She shined the flashlight over Juan’s shoulder into the wide eyes of Esteban, a nineteen-year-old Maya boy from a nearby village who had worked for her off and on over the last few years. He must have finished recording the artifacts in the other chamber and slipped into the room without her hearing him.

“Shit,” she said under her breath. The last thing she needed right now were rumors spreading through camp that an ancient curse had come back to life. She turned back to Juan. “Dad, it’s not a curse.” Clearing her throat, she glanced pointedly toward her Maya crewmember. “It’s merely an artist showing a grim vision of the future.”

“Call it what it is, *gatita*. It’s a curse warning whoever sees it that death is waiting for its next meal,” Juan argued.

Esteban visibly shivered. “Are we its next meal?”

This was going from not good to really, really bad in seconds. “Can we talk about this back in my tent? *Alone*?”

Juan stared at the glyphs and rubbed the back of his neck. “If only Marianne were here.”

“If Mom were here, she’d say you always were more superstitious than logical.” Angélica grabbed her father’s arm. It was going to take physical persuasion to get him to leave the temple.

She herded Juan and Esteban back toward the exit, a hole in the wall just big enough for them to squeeze through. “I may not be able to interpret glyphs as well as Mom could, but I can decipher the gist of what they’re showing. I’m positive this is not a curse.” She stared into Esteban’s eyes as she delivered that last line.

“How can you be so certain? You know as well as I do that odd things happen when you’re rooting around in the past.” Juan grunted as he lowered onto the hard-packed dirt floor and eased headfirst through the hole.

Esteban slid through next. After his feet disappeared from view, Angélica squatted and peered through the hole. “Tell me,” she coughed on some temple dust, “how can a piece of rock over a thousand years old contain a force released simply by verbalizing the hieroglyphic inscription chiseled there by a human?”

Without waiting for an answer, she snaked through the hole. Esteban lent her a hand on the other side.

Juan took the flashlight from her as she brushed the dust off her tank top and khaki

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pants. He led them through a narrow passageway. “Maybe I am too superstitious for my own good.” He looked back at Angélica. “But bad things have happened at this site.” His tone sounded ominous.

Resisting the urge to roll her eyes, she stole the flashlight out of her father’s hand and walked past him. It wasn’t the time, let alone the place, for this argument.

Angélica reached the ladder and climbed to the main level. Juan followed, and then Esteban.

After he stepped off the ladder, Esteban’s gaze darted around the pitch-black corners of the room. “What bad things, Dr. García?” the boy asked, his voice a whisper.

She shot her dad a now-look-what-you’ve-done glare.

Juan shrugged. “Several things, actually.”

“Please, Dad. Don’t start with that whole ‘something stole my maps of the Temple of the Water Witch, filled my notebooks with gibberish scrawls, and left a sacrificed wild turkey outside of my tent’ crap again.”

Juan took the flashlight back from her. “Well, Miss Skeptic, all of that did happen.” He started down the passage that would lead them outside. “But I’m not talking about those incidents,” he said over his shoulder.

“What then?” Angélica followed him.

“I’m talking about Dr. Hughes.”

She puffed her cheeks with a sigh. “Here we go again.”

“He’s been missing for twenty years now, you know. And the last time anyone saw him was at this very site.”

“Maybe Death ate him,” Esteban spoke from behind her, sounding like an extra from a Boris Karloff film.

“My point exactly,” Juan said.

She wrinkled her nose at her father’s back. “Honestly, you sound like a pair of delusional paranoids.”

Juan stopped several feet inside the entrance, waiting for Angélica to reach his side. Esteban pushed past both of them, his shirt soaking wet and smelling like he’d sweated through his deodorant hours ago. She watched him go, noting his rush to escape the temple’s thick shadows.

“All I’m saying, *gatita*, is that maybe you should think twice before being so quick to rule out this cu—”

“Dr. García!” Esteban cried.

A high-pitched scream cut through the heavy air.

Angélica and her father raced to where Esteban stood frozen in the temple opening.

She gasped at the sight in front of her. Tree limbs smacked against each other, debris tumbled across the ground, tents buckled and ripped free of their stakes.

Dust particles stung her cheeks as she stepped out into the strong gusts. She shielded her face, frowning. Where had this windstorm come from? An hour ago, the air had been still and thick enough to drink. She looked up at the sky. And why weren’t there any clouds?

Angélica turned to her father in time to see Esteban lean closer and yell something to Juan over the cacophony of the thrashing jungle. Juan nodded in agreement.

“What?” Angélica moved closer to her father. “What did he say?”

“*Mal viento*,” Juan hollered and grabbed Angélica’s arm, dragging her back into the safety of the temple and out of the howling tempest. “He says the evil winds have come.”

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“Evil winds?” Angélica squeezed the bridge of her nose. “Must you insist upon scaring the hell out of my crew?”

Esteban screamed in pain from somewhere outside.

Angélica’s heart stopped for a second.

“I told you it was a curse.” Juan pushed past her toward the entrance.

“Dammit!” Following on his heels, she leaned into the gale, dodging a flying tree limb.

“It’s not a curse!”