

Lost in Oaxaca

Jessica Winters Mireles

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Travel and awakening combine in *Lost in Oaxaca*, Jessica Winters Mireles's delicate romance.

Camille is a piano teacher at a personal and professional crossroads. After an abusive lover left her injured, Camille turned cautious. Her hope of becoming a master teacher depends on a teen prodigy, Graciela, who left Santa Barbara for Mexico just before a critical music performance. Camille tries to bring her prized student back, but ends up stranded in Oaxaca.

When an English-speaking Zapotec native, Alejandro, offers to help, Camille confronts her own prejudices and motives. She falls in love with Alejandro, as well as with new flavors and experiences. Her search culminates in realizing that Graciela is undocumented. In the book's suspenseful resolution, Camille takes compassionate risks to benefit others. Late reflections on immigration, DACA dreamers, and social injustice shift the focus without overshadowing Camille and Alejandro's bristling passion.

Alejandro is a capable rescuer who delivers Camille's comeuppance through pointed remarks whenever she displays her privilege, yet he's understanding of her shortcomings. As much as Camille is dismayed and charmed by everyday life in Mexico, her love for the countryside and its festive customs multiplies through chance encounters with kind strangers and Alejandro's enthusiastic aunt. Camille's emotional healing follows a natural progression that tracks her acceptance of circumstances beyond her control.

Camille's wealthy background and former competitive nature lead to defiance that springs from pressure to perform. Camille's mother is redeemed when she helps her daughter with Graciela; she's a sharp counterpoint to Camille's new companions.

Thanks to family support, burgeoning belief in Saint Anthony, Alejandro's considerate perspective, and her own renewed purpose, Camille steps into a more polyphonic version of her life. *Lost in Oaxaca* is a vigorous, sensitive account of crossing borders to reimagine what love looks like when it's poured without reserve.

KAREN RIGBY (March / April 2020)

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