

# LOVE Has NO Boundaries



Don't Read in the Closet Event 2013

# CORAZÓN

Jenna Jones

# Love Has No Boundaries

*An M/M Romance series*

## CORAZÓN

**By Jenna Jones**

### Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love Has No Boundaries* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a free gift to you.

### What Is Love Has No Boundaries?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what they do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love Has No Boundaries*.

Whether you are an avid M/M romance reader or new to the genre, you are in for a delicious treat.

### Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

All rights reserved worldwide.

This eBook may be distributed freely in its entirety courtesy of the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group*. This eBook may not be sold, manipulated or reproduced in any format without the express written permission of the author.

Corazón, Copyright © 2013 Jenna Jones

Cover Design by Goodreads M/M Romance Group

This ebook is published by the *M/M Romance Group* and is not directly endorsed by or affiliated with Goodreads Inc.

# CORAZÓN

By Jenna Jones

## Photo Description

Adventurous-looking, mid-thirties Caucasian man, crouching by a fallen tree in the jungle, is juxtaposed against a handsome Latino man in his mid-twenties in a white T-shirt, at an event.

## Story Letter

*Dear Author,*

*I want a story where this man is an archaeologist studying Mesoamerica (Aztec, Maya). He is very passionate about the history and culture of the region, despite not being native to the area. The younger man is a Mexican college student from a wealthy family who is interning at the dig site (maybe his parents are contributing to the project financially or something). He's never cared much about history, especially not the barbaric people who were civilized by the Spanish conquistadors.*

*He starts out bored and annoyed with his job. Eventually the archaeologist's passion wears off on him and he learns to love the ancient culture and maybe the man who studies it too.*

*Happy ending is a must, some sort of sex would be great (these guys are too gorgeous not to). There will obviously be an age gap, but not too big. I was thinking the archaeologist is early to mid-thirties and the college student is early to mid-twenties. Necessary elements are archaeologist/ Mexican guy, everything else are just suggestions.*

*Sincerely,*

*Bridget*

## Story Info

**Genre:** contemporary

**Tags:** college, teaching, non-explicit, friends to lovers, young adult character

**Content warnings:** minor accidental violence, blood, discussion of ancient religious practices

**Word count:** 12,694

# CORAZÓN

**By Jenna Jones**

“Office hours are two to four every Tuesday and Thursday,” said Obie Pogue as he opened his front door, unsurprised to see someone who was not one of his students smile at him sheepishly in the yellow light of his front porch. His students rarely came to his house uninvited, but Javier del Bosque had the right of both long friendship and endless charm that let him get away with things that would fell much lesser men.

“Office hours for me are always and always,” Javier said, smiling sweetly. “Can I come in, Obie, or are you going to make me stand out here all night?”

“It’s eleven o’clock,” Obie said, stepping aside to let him in anyway. “Shouldn’t you be breaking hearts at some hot spot?”

Javier ambled through the house to Obie’s living room, unwinding his scarf from around his neck as he went. “It is my heart that is broken. I have received the most terrible news and I don’t know what to do. I met the most beautiful boy tonight and even he couldn’t help.” He dropped himself in one of Obie’s armchairs, his long legs draped over the armrest.

“What bad news?” said Obie in an indulgent tone. Javier was a dramatic person—every new relationship was his one true love, every setback was a disaster. Obie found it cute, if exhausting to deal with.

“Can I have a drink? I can deal with this news so much better if I have a drink.” He shimmied out of his jacket to reveal a silk shirt of ruby red, patterned with tiny darker-red diamonds. The color made his skin look rich and glowing.

Obie tore his eyes away. “It’s a school night, Javier. You don’t need any more drinks.”

Javier leaned his head back with a deep sigh and toyed with the tufting in the back of the armchair. “My adviser tells me that I need field school to graduate, and that the university will only let me stay one more year before

they quite insist that I do. But all of the deadlines for this year have passed, so I must wait until next summer—which is, of course, too late.”

Obie had often thought Javier could have a PhD by now if he’d just apply himself, but on the other hand he wasn’t the only third-year senior in the anthropology department. Not for the first time, he wondered what Javier was doing in anthropology in the first place. Out loud, he said, “What are you planning to do?”

“I don’t know, Obie!” Javier wailed and covered his face with his hands. “Tell me what to do. Father always says to take your advice—perhaps it’s time I did.”

Obie leaned back to take Javier in fully. As usual, Javier looked like he spent as much on clothes as he did on tuition, a carefully constructed persona of carelessness, a hairstyle made to look like he’d just rolled out of bed, colors selected to highlight his olive skin and unusual, amber-colored eyes. Obie sighed, reminded himself that Javier was his friends’ son and he’d known Javier since he was a teenager, and tried not to feel ratty beside him in his thin flannel sleep pants and T-shirt so old the graphic of whatever event it commemorated had faded beyond recognition.

He said, “Both your father and I have asked you if you’re sure college is the right thing for you. You’ve always assured us it is, and I haven’t told him about a lot of the shenanigans you get up to—”

“What is that word? Shen—Shen—”

“Shenanigans. It’s like mischief, but sex is usually involved.”

Javier chortled. “I like that word! I am going to use it.”

“Anyway,” Obie said patiently, “I haven’t told your parents about them because I’ve tried to respect your privacy as an adult.”

“Very kind of you,” said Javier with a gracious nod.

“But this isn’t something you can charm your way past, Javi. Is anthropology really something you want to do? Because if it’s not, maybe it’s time to go home and figure out what that something really is.”



Javier sat still for a moment, picking at a cuticle, and then said, “If I must leave without my degree, my visa will also expire, and I must go home. And if I go home, Father will put me in an office at one of his factories.”

“Is that so terrible?” Obie asked gently.

Javier shrugged and got up from the chair to amble around the living room. He picked up a small head carved from red stone and ran his thumb over the tiny face. It was an artifact from the site owned by the Del Bosque Foundation in the Yucatan peninsula, where Obie participated in a field school session every summer. The little head had been a gift from Marisol, Javier’s mother, for the discoveries he’d made on behalf of the foundation, and Obie wondered if it reminded Javier of home. From the bleak look on Javier’s face, Obie didn’t think that was a good thing.

“There’s no shame in making steel,” Obie said.

“I know. Anything that is built in Mexico, my family’s steel holds it up. But no, it is not what I want to do.” He turned to Obie. “Mother thought anthropology would be good for me. It’s about people. I like people. But not digging in the dirt, I don’t like that.”

“What do you like?” Obie said, smiling to himself.

“You know what I like. Fucking, dancing, beautiful boys. Speaking of beautiful boys, where is Jason? He is usually in about now, to scold me about taking up your precious time like a jealous wife.”

“I don’t know where he is,” Obie said, letting the subject drop. Javier obviously didn’t want to talk about it anymore. “He moved out.”

“No! Oh, Obie, and you let me prattle on about my own little problems when you are heartbroken.”

“I’m not heartbroken,” Obie said as Javier came to sit beside him on the couch, his expressive face soft with concern. “I’m fine. I ended it.”

“But why? I thought at last you had someone to make you happy.”

“Well,” Obie said slowly, enjoying the scent of Javier—spicy cologne, leather from his trousers, end-of-the-day perspiration, expensive soap—as

Javier stroked his shoulder to comfort him. “There were a lot of things, little things. His jealousy, for one thing. You’re right about that.”

“I am always right in matters of the heart.”

“Of course you are. But the last straw was when I took Jason shopping with me for some more cargo pants, because I go through pants like crazy during field school—”

“Summer in Cancún,” said Javier dreamily. “I miss the beaches.”

“Summer in the jungle outside of Cancún,” Obie corrected. “Anyway, we were shopping for pants and Jason held up a pair to me to eyeball the size, and then he *tsked* at me.”

Javier tilted his head. “*Tsked*?”

Obie clucked his tongue. “That. He did that.”

“Oh!” Javier started laughing. “I would leave a man who did that to me, too. Why did he?”

“Apparently I’ve gone soft and gained weight over the school year.”

“You have not.” Javier rapped on Obie’s abdomen with his fist. “Listen to that. Belly of steel.” He looked up at Obie with a smile, and then slid his hand up Obie’s chest and laid it flat. “I can feel your heart beating.”

For such a simple touch, it made Obie’s heart race. He closed his eyes to enjoy it before he murmured, “Javi, don’t,” and pushed Javier’s hand away.

Javier sighed and leaned his head against Obie’s shoulder. “Come out with me, now that you are single again. You should be dancing.”

“And watch you flirt and break hearts? No, thank you.” He wound his arm under Javier’s head so he could cradle Javier’s face in his palm. “I hate watching you throw yourself away on people who don’t matter.”

Javier smiled ruefully. “Someday I will have you dancing with me.”

“Maybe,” Obie said. He let Javier go. “Go home, Javi. Talk to your parents and see what they think about all of this, okay?”

Javier shoved himself up from the couch and picked up his scarf and jacket. “You think they will throw money at the university to make them let me graduate,” he said gloomily.

“I think they will help you find an actual solution,” Obie said as he got up from the sofa too. “C’mon, I’ll see you out.”

“You’re getting rid of me?” Javier said as he went to the door.

“I have a class in the morning. So do you, as I recall.”

“Maybe I do. What is tomorrow?”

“Thursday,” Obie said, smiling despite himself. For all of his carelessness and party-boy lifestyle, Javier still managed to turn in essays and pass tests. A B-minus average wasn’t remarkable, but it was better than Obie could have done if he treated his classwork that way.

Javier shrugged. “My first class is after lunch. I could stay a little longer. I would love to stay a little longer.”

Obie took the ends of Javier’s scarf and tucked them into his jacket. “Go home. Call me over the weekend and tell me what your father says.”

“He will say the same thing he always says. ‘Why did you have to go to school in *del Norte*?’” Obie chuckled—Javier did a perfect Enrique imitation—and Javier smiled as he looked down at the knotted scarf. “I am well protected against the night air, I see. Good night, Obie.”

“Good night, Javi.” He opened the door and let Javier out, and then leaned against it and exhaled a deep breath.

\*\*\*\*

Obie was out for his morning run when the phone strapped to his arm buzzed, interrupting his music. He tapped it and greeted the caller with a sharp, “Hello?” expecting it to be Jason, who’d fallen into the regrettable habit of scolding him when Obie was doing things he actually enjoyed.

“Oberon,” said Enrique del Bosque, a much more welcome voice, and Obie slowed down so he could talk properly.

“Enrique! Good morning. Or is it afternoon where you are?”

“I am in Sao Paulo, and it is morning. I was woken this morning by a call from my son. I understand he spoke to you last night about the school’s ultimatum.”

“He did,” Obie confirmed, pausing on a street corner to check for traffic before jogging across. “It sounds to me like they’ve got him between a rock and a hard place.”

“He should have been finished three years ago. Or he should have an advanced degree by now. I had two at his age.”

“I just had one,” said Obie, “but I only planned on one, anyway. Did you figure out a plan for him?”

“He refuses to leave.” Enrique sighed heavily. “Why did he insist on a school in the States? We have perfectly good universities in Mexico, with perfectly good anthropology programs.”

“I remember. I don’t think he’ll really have much say in whether he stays or goes.”

“There is no program that can squeeze him in?”

“If the application deadlines have passed, that’s the end of it.”

“I think if you visit us more often, he will concede to coming home.”

“He’s not a teenager with a crush anymore, Enrique.”

“Yet he is no better at hiding his affections.” He paused again. “You will visit us after the field school this summer?”

“I will.” He was approaching his house now. “I’ve missed the hacienda.”

“I am eager for what you find this year. About Javier, Obie—will you speak to him again? Convince him it is time to stop being a student and earn a living?”

“I’ll try,” Obie said, thinking of Javier’s face as he described the life that awaited him at the steel factories. It would be like burying the boy alive. Obie said slowly, “Or I could try something else.”

“Anything. I am tired of letting him be a child.”

“I haven’t hired a T.A. for field school yet. I could bring Javier. He’ll get the class credits and earn a little money, and there will be the responsibility of helping me and the other students. He’s very good at that, Enrique.”

“My son, a teacher,” Enrique mused. “There are worse vocations. Very well, Obie. If he agrees and the school will accept it, I accept it, too.”

“Wonderful.” He ran up his front steps and paused on the porch, breathing in the cool morning air. “I’m done with my run. Is there anything else I can do for you?”

“I think there is nothing. Thank you, Obie. I will rest easier tonight.”

“Talk to you soon,” Obie promised and tapped the phone to end the call.

\*\*\*\*

Javier lived in a house he shared with four or five other students (the number seemed to change every time Obie visited), owned by the family of one of them, an art student who was painting the house for his senior thesis. Every room had a mural in it, some more complicated than others, and the house always smelled like linseed oil. Two of Javier’s roommates were international students like Javier—one from India, a quiet man who could usually be found outside reading when he wasn’t in the physics labs, the other from Hungary who spent a lot of time in the common room, making out with various girls who were charmed by his accent. Obie suspected the art student was a little in love with Javier, since he was constantly touching up the mural in Javier’s room, whether Javier was in it or not.

He gave Obie a heartbroken look when Obie asked if Javier was in. “Kitchen,” he said and turned to lead Obie there, even though Obie had been there many times. “He’s leaving us, he says.”

“I heard.”

“Isn’t there something you can do? You’re in his department.”

“I’m not even tenured yet,” Obie said. “I have no influence on anyone, let alone to dictate department policy.”

“He’s drowning his sorrows,” the art student said. “Or he was,” he added when the kitchen appeared to be empty, but then they heard voices in the backyard. “Or the party’s moved outside.”

“Good place for it,” said Obie and went through the back door. The yard was unenthusiastically maintained—there was an apple tree with several mini trees beneath it, where apples had fallen and seeds had taken root, and there was a space intended to be a vegetable garden that inevitably grew nothing but zucchini, which none of the students ate. Javier and Sanjay were in deck chairs under the apple tree, Sanjay looking on with bemusement as Javier rambled in Spanish about having to go home without graduating.

“Professor Pogue,” Sanjay said with relief when he saw Obie. “Save me.”

“Gladly.” He sat on Javier’s deck chair and Javier gave him his most mournful smile. “I talked to your father this morning,” he told Javier in Spanish. When Javier had indulged too much it was as if he forgot every word of English he’d ever learned.

Javier covered his ears. “I don’t want to know what he said. He’s already bought me the plane ticket home, hasn’t he?”

“Not yet,” Obie said. “I had a thought, and he agreed we should give it a shot.” He wrapped his hands around Javier’s wrists, and Javier took his hands from his ears cautiously. “Be my T.A. this summer.”

Javier regarded him. “Are you propositioning me?”

“I’m trying to save your degree, dummy. If you’re my T.A. this summer, it gets you around the class size limits, you get the lab credits, and you can graduate on time. Well, late, but at least you’ll graduate.” He ducked his head to look into Javier’s eyes. Even red-rimmed and sorrowful, they were lovely, a fascinating amber color that Obie didn’t think he’d seen on anyone else.

And they lit up beautifully when he smiled with genuine happiness, as they did now, and he lunged at Obie to hug him tight. “Lifesaver! Why didn’t you think of this last night? You could have saved me the hangover.”

“I didn’t think of it last night,” Obie said, laughing. He patted Javier’s back. “The department has already agreed, but you have to graduate next year, Javier. You hear me? You walk next year.”

“I hear, I hear,” Javier said, bobbing his head, and then held out his bottle to Sanjay. “Drink with me! I will be a college graduate!”

Sanjay looked at Obie helplessly, and Obie took the bottle. “Your roommate’s a Muslim, remember? Come on, let’s get some coffee in you.”

“Coffee is an excellent idea,” said Javier, hauling Obie up with him as he rose. “Let us have coffee and celebrate Cancún! Beautiful Cancún with its beautiful beaches!”

“The jungles of Quintana Roo,” Obie reminded him, but Javier was far too giddy for it to sink in.

\*\*\*\*

Thanks to the Del Bosque Foundation, the base camp outside the little town of San Rafael had dorms rather than tents. The students were two to a room, while the professors got private rooms to share with their partners. Most anthropologist spouses were hardy enough to handle six weeks in the jungle, digging and hauling along with the students.

Students came from all over the world to attend the field school, many more than once, so a mixture of languages and accents could be heard as returning students greeted each other and new ones introduced themselves around. There were two other professors as well, both specializing in Meso-American anthropology and archeology, and Obie spent a few minutes, after he’d dropped off his belongings in his room, saying hello and making sure they were settling in.

As he passed down the hall from the common room, he glanced into one of the rooms and saw Javier sitting on his bed, looking despondent. Obie rapped lightly on the door. “Javi?”

“Obie,” Javier said and attempted a smile.

“What’s wrong?” He sat on the bed beside Javier, and Javier shrugged.

“Nothing, I suppose. The rooms are very nice. My mother’s touch, yes?”

“Yes. This place is her other baby.”

Javier smiled and looked away. He looked out of place here, in a T-shirt and khakis, and Obie supposed he felt it, too. “They were so happy when they found you, you know. Someone as devoted to the cause as they, with so little self-interest.”

“Hey, I have plenty of self-interest. I want tenure and publications just like any other academic.”

“Self-interest aligned with theirs, then.” He leaned his head on Obie’s shoulder. “We are very far from the beaches.”

“Over a hundred miles.” He hesitantly laid a hand on Javier’s slender back. It was warm through the cotton and damp from the humidity.

“And the town is tiny. I suspect the social life revolves around the church.”

“It is, and it does. The residents seem to like it when we have lectures there about the dig, so they know what’s going on.”

“I’m sure it’s the highlight of their year,” Javier said wryly and lifted his head. “And tomorrow the work starts. I suppose we should get a good sleep tonight.”

“I recommend lots of good sleep. Your roommate has been here before and he’s a good guy, so I’m sure you’ll get along.”

“Roommate,” Javier murmured with a twist to his mouth. “I have never shared a room with anyone I wasn’t also sleeping with.”

“Don’t sleep with him,” Obie said. “Hookups happen, of course, but I don’t recommend you hook up with your roommate out of boredom.”

“I have never hooked up out of boredom!” Javier exclaimed, and then laughed. “All right, perhaps once or twice... a year. Besides,” he added and gave Obie a look through his thick, dark lashes, “if I were to attach myself to anyone, it would be someone who is already a friend.”



“None of that.” Obie stood. “It’s an adjustment but you’ll be fine if you focus on the work. Have you introduced yourself to the rest of the class yet?” Javier shook his head, and Obie said, “Do that, Javi. We’re going to be together for six weeks. It’s never too soon to start making friends.”

He started to go when Javier caught his hand and tugged him back. “You will be my friend, won’t you, Obie?”

“Of course I will.” He put a hand lightly on Javier’s hair. The humidity was making it curl, despite Javier’s use of many products. Obie liked it this way. “Haven’t I always been?”

“This is new,” Javier said. “This is not my parents’ house or your house or school. It is entirely different and I am—” He swallowed.

“Javier, you’re not scared of meeting new people, are you?”

“Never!” He hesitated again. “I am going to graduate after this, if I do well.”

“Your parents sure hope so.”

“And then what happens?”

Obie sat on the bed again. This could be a long conversation. “I’ve thought for a long time that you could earn a PhD if you wanted. You’re intelligent enough for a career in academics and curious enough for research when you let yourself be.”

“As my father is fond of telling me, I lack the drive.”

“Well,” said Obie, not wanting to confirm it even though he agreed.

“It is all right, Obie. We have had this conversation many times—usually when another year passes and I am still a student. I cannot imagine spending the rest of my life digging in the dirt.”

“There are other paths you could follow.”

“And because of my parents, everyone will expect me to study the Mayans and the Olmecs and all the rest of them, when I find them barbaric, at best,

with their human sacrifices and bloodthirsty gods.” He shuddered. “The best thing those civilizations gave us is chocolate.”

“There’s more to the Mayans than human sacrifice,” Obie said, though he knew there was no convincing him otherwise. They’d had this argument many times. “It’s your mother’s culture, Javi, and your culture. That’s why she is fighting so hard to preserve as much as she can.”

“It is her culture, not mine. Father’s family imported brides from Spain for centuries—I am more Spanish than I am Mayan.”

Obie said slowly, “I know it can be difficult when you feel caught between two worlds.”

“I do not feel caught between two worlds,” Javier muttered. “I feel forced to appreciate something I cannot. I always have been. Mother has dragged me to villages to watch mumbling priests and to sites to look at crumbled stones and to museums to marvel over shards of pottery for as long as I can remember. The sooner I am done with it, the better.”

Obie sat back, surprised at his vehemence. “I had no idea you felt that way.”

“It is difficult to bring up when it is your passion, also.” Javier shook his head. “If I were to pursue the path of anthropology, I would prefer another part of the world to be my specialization. Australia, perhaps, or Asia. As far away from this peninsula as I can get.” He glanced at Obie’s face and gave a lopsided smile. “Never fear, I will be a faithful and diligent assistant to you, even though my heart longs to be elsewhere.”

“No fear of that,” Obie said.

Still, as he lay in bed that night, Obie didn’t know what to feel about this revelation. Javier had been feigning interest all this time, not only in Obie’s work and in the passion of his parents, but in his own ancestry. What a disconcerting feeling that must be, especially when he was surrounded by it. No wonder he’d gone to school in the States instead of Mexico. Obie had no illusions about why Javier had chosen the school he did—Obie’s presence, his

parents' contributions to the school's Meso-American collection—but he'd never thought it would be an escape for him, too.

Yet he still wanted to go into the field, rather than rebel entirely and go into whatever the furthest discipline on the spectrum would be. Astrophysics, maybe, though Obie couldn't imagine Javier being satisfied with peering through telescopes, either.

*Figuring out Javi's life is not your problem*, Obie told himself sternly, and rolled onto his other side with his pillow bunched under his head.

\*\*\*\*

The first two weeks of field school went exactly as it had in previous years. The students worked hard, carrying away dirt and overgrowth from the site, which was a small minor temple the school had unearthed two years before and now had authorization to properly excavate. There were carvings to clean, sketch and photograph, and artifacts to document and carefully store, but mostly there was dirt to clear so that the building would be exposed to the sun for the first time in half a millennium.

Obie and the other professors gave classes and lectures, advised and discussed, negotiated a few personality clashes and tried to keep everyone's focus on the work. This got easier the longer school went on, as the new students became acclimated and the returning students settled in.

Javier did exactly what Obie asked him to, documenting the finds and helping to set up lectures, and Obie had never heard him say so little in the ten years they had known each other, even when Javier didn't speak any English and Obie's Spanish was little more than rudimentary. He put out only a minimal effort to pass his classes, and when they took a field trip to Chichén Itzá he brought a book rather than tour the temple complex, telling his classmates, "I've been here before. It never changes."

"Should I worry? I'm worried," Obie said to Brendan, one of the other professors. "Maybe he's depressed."

Brendan stopped typing on his laptop long enough to give Obie a glance, and then resumed typing.

“What’s that look for?”

“You’re worried about a student being depressed? I’ve been doing this with you for three years and I’ve seen you worry less when a student got lost.”

“I was worried,” Obie said. “I disguised it with an aura of calm.”

“If you’re worried about Javier, ask him how he’s doing,” said Brendan as he typed. “You’ve known him a long time, haven’t you? He’ll probably tell you.”

“But he’s my student, so I can’t get personally involved.”

“But he’s a friend of the family so you’re already personally involved. Now go away, I have a lecture to prepare.”

“Going,” said Obie and went to find Javier.

He was in the common room, his laptop on his crossed legs, and he glanced up when Obie came in. “Did you get the photos I e-mailed?”

“I did.” He sat on the sofa beside Javier. Two other students were playing chess on the other side of the room, and paid them no attention. “I have a strange thing to ask you. Are you doing okay?”

Javier paused and gave him an uncertain look. “I’m passing the translation class, last I heard.”

“You’re doing fine in translation,” Obie said. “You’ve always been good at languages. I mean in general.”

“I am bored stupid,” Javier said. “My body has never hurt so much for so many days, the Internet connection is too slow for me to Skype the boys who offered to keep me amused, and all the other men here are straight.”

“I’m not,” Obie said.

Javier smiled as he typed. “Every time I have come near to asking you out, you barely restrain yourself from physically pushing me away.”

Obie’s hopes that he had been more subtle were dashed. “It’s not appropriate for you to ask me out. You’re my student, and the son of my

friends. You and I, we have a very complicated relationship, have you noticed?”

Javier laughed. “I have.” He paused. “If I was not me and you were not you, would you go out with me?”

“If I weren’t me, I don’t know if I’d like you.”

“You are teasing me,” said Javier and resumed typing.

“Maybe a little,” Obie admitted. “I was worried you’re depressed. At least you’re only bored. And maybe a little lonely, but so are most of us.”

“I can finally count to one hundred in Mayan,” Javier said as he typed. “My mother will be so proud.”

\*\*\*\*

Most of the artifacts the field school found were small—shards of pottery, arrowheads, beads, maybe a tiny figurine carved from a semiprecious stone like jade or jasper. As Obie told the class, every anthropologist may hope for a big find, but the reality of research was in the small things, the objects of every day. “When we’re dust and bones,” he said, “researchers will puzzle over our cell phones and sunglasses, the things we hardly think about.”

Every basket of dirt was carefully sifted to reveal its secrets, and anything big enough to readily see was first photographed where it was found before it was carefully removed. The site being a temple, Obie knew they would likely find a few knives and more delicate things in addition to the beads and shards, and so one of the lectures covered the religious practices of the Mayans—as bloody as the Aztecs, if less well-known.

Javier frowned throughout the entire lecture, and told Obie afterward, “And you wonder why I find them uncivilized.”

“They were perfectly civilized,” Obie said. “They were just civilized differently than we are.”

Javier snorted, and went off to talk to his roommate instead.

Three weeks into school, they had cleared the north side of the temple to its foundation and had begun work on the east side. Obie was taking rubbings of the inscriptions in the north side wall when Felicia, one of the students, came around the corner, her eyes alight with excitement. “Professor Pogue, we’ve found something that might be huge. Come see!”

Obie climbed out of the pit and followed her to the east side, where the trenches were still shallow. Even so, among the dark layers of undergrowth and soil, there was the unmistakable gleam of human bone—the round top of a skull, and the ridge of a cheekbone. More soil had been cleared away to expose further remains, enough for the students to realize what they’d found and lay down their tools until they knew what to do next.

“Javier,” Obie called, “get the camera. Everybody else, step back a bit.”

“It’s bodies, isn’t it?” said Felicia. “We found bodies!”

“What this likely is,” Obie said, “is the skeletal remains of the sacrifices offered here. They were often thrown down the steps of the temple after the heart was removed or otherwise disposed of, and they were pushed up to the top of the strata over time.”

Javier came to the trench with the digital camera, and stopped short, staring down at the bones. “Thanks, Javi,” Obie said, reaching for the camera, but Javier made no move to give it to him. “Javi?” Still Javier didn’t move, staring down at the bones, and Obie said, “Javier,” more sharply than normal.

Javier shuddered and looked at him. “Obie.”

“Are you okay?” Obie said more gently. “You’ve dealt with human remains before, haven’t you?”

Javier shook his head, his expression solemn. “Never. It’s always been... cleaner.”

Obie put his hand on Javier’s shoulder. “Get a hold of yourself, Javi. They’ve been dead for at least five hundred years. They’re not murder victims. We treat these just like any other artifact—document it, clean it, store it, study it. Okay?”

Javier looked at Obie again, his eyes brimming. “No,” he said. “No, I am not okay.” He shoved the camera into Obie’s hands and turned away to stride in the direction of the road.

“Javier!” Obie called after him, and when Javi didn’t turn he added, “Wait by the bus,” though he suspected Javier wouldn’t listen to that, either.

There wasn’t a sound from Felicia and the other students as they watched Obie. He took a deep breath. “Come on, guys. There’s work to do.”

\*\*\*\*

Javier didn’t return by lunchtime, or by the time the class went back to base camp at sunset. Obie hoped that meant he had walked back to base, but he wasn’t in the common room or his room when Obie looked for him, the cleaning crew and cooks hadn’t seen him, and he didn’t appear during dinner.

Finally Obie texted Javier’s cell phone, even though the reception this deep in the jungle was unreliable at best, and told him, *Call me. I’m worried.*

He took one of the Jeeps out, to check the roads between camp and the site. He drove slowly with the lights on, and tried to keep his imagination from adding details to his worst fear—guerrillas kidnapping Javier because they knew of his family. Obie knew this jungle, but even so, he had no idea how to read it for signs of struggle.

If Javier was in real trouble, Obie had no idea how to help him. Enrique might, but Obie dreaded the possibility of telling Enrique he’d failed his son in the worst way possible. Still, with the night only getting darker, and the unsettling sounds coming from the jungle, Obie drove back to base and prayed Javier had seen fit to return while he was gone.

The communal showers were deserted. Obie showered off the dirt and sweat of the day, and returned to his room with his dirty clothes bundled under his arm. He stopped short when he saw Javier lounging on his bed, flipping through one of Obie’s books. “Javi,” he breathed, and Javier looked up with a faint smile.

“I got your message. You’re very sweet when you’re worried.”

“Javier del Bosque,” Obie began, and then dropped his clothes and crossed the room. Javier stood, that faint smile still in place, and Obie hugged him with his arms around Javier’s neck. Javier sighed and leaned his head against Obie’s, his hands on Obie’s back. “Where have you been?”

“I walked to the village. It’s farther than it seems by Jeep.”

“It’s an hour if you keep up a good pace.” He held Javier’s face in his hands and looked into his eyes. “Do you have any idea how dangerous it is out there, in the middle of the night? This isn’t a city park, Javi!”

“Obie, I have been traveling here since I was a boy,” Javier said patiently. “Of course I know, and I’m never worried unless I have reason to be. I just went to the cantina and had a drink and a long contemplation.”

Obie took his hands from Javier’s face and stepped back, suddenly aware that he was only wearing a towel. “Well, good. I’m glad nothing horrible happened.”

“Thank you,” said Javier wryly.

“You know what I mean. I’m glad you’re okay.” He picked up a pair of sweat pants and tried to pull them on as casually as he could. “You *are* okay, aren’t you?”

“I think so,” Javier said, sitting on Obie’s bed again. “I am uncertain.”

Obie sat on the bed too. “Tell me what happened back at the site. I’ve never seen you react to anything that way.”

Javier picked up the book again and ran his thumb over the binding. He said slowly, “Doesn’t it seem to you at times that history is a tide that pulls people along? Until one day, you realize, no, history happens because of the decisions that people make. It is an unsettling feeling, realizing that.”

“I think it happens to everyone who studies history, in any form,” Obie said. “One day it hits you that the past didn’t just *happen*. It’s people doing things, or not doing things, and their consequences.”

Javier nodded. “The Mayans have always been a blur to me. Strange pictures in old documents, wizened old men in villages mumbling in a strange



language, stories they told us in school that gave me nightmares as a boy. Mother has tried so hard to make me appreciate them as her people, but I could never accept them as mine. I felt nothing for them.” He lay back and held the book on his chest. “Until today.”

Obie leaned on his elbow and watched Javier, waiting for him to continue.

“Bones, Obie, bones in the field, in the dirt. I have never seen them so... real before. Not a picture or a neatly-wired skeleton, but actual bones of actual people...” He looked at Obie. “It made me want to weep.”

Obie stroked Javier’s hair back from his forehead. “It can feel pretty raw, experiencing that for the first time. But you have to develop some objectivity. Bones are part of the job.”

“I think this is why I prefer the art side of things,” Javier said. “Even at its most bloody, there is still no actual blood. I know there was no actual blood today,” he added, “but there was at one time. Blood and flesh, and beating hearts.”

“It was an honor to be sacrificed to the gods, Javi. Even if it seems horrific to us, to them—”

“I know,” Javier said impatiently. “I know all this, Obie. I have heard the lectures too. But it is one thing to hear the stories in a lecture hall and quite another to look at bones in the ground and realize *this is my family*.”

“Ah,” said Obie in understanding.

“My mother’s people did this—*my* people did this. They wielded the knives or they offered themselves or they carried the stones to make the temples—or most likely, all three. They walked this ground. They drank this water and breathed this air. They lived and died, fought wars and grew food, hunted and prayed—and they are mine, Obie. I am here because of them.” He flexed his fingers. “I have my mother’s hands, I am told. I have to wonder what those who gave her those hands did with them.”

“Nothing you need to be ashamed of,” Obie said. “They lived their lives the best way they knew how. All the ancients did.” He lay down near Javier so

their heads were touching. “As bloody as it may seem to us, as violent as it may seem, it’s still worthy of respect. The world was a tough place. Tough people were the ones who survived.”

“Including,” Javier said softly, “the ones tough enough to offer one’s self to the gods, so the rain would fall.”

“Including that.”

“It is stronger than I would be.”

“Me too, I’d say.” He tried to imagine Javier climbing the stone steps to an altar and a waiting priest with a stone knife, and shuddered. “As much as I admire the culture,” he said softly, “I’m glad we don’t live in that world anymore,” and got a lopsided smile from Javier in response. “I’m even glad you felt safe enough to walk to the village, even though you probably shouldn’t—”

“I am a native son,” Javier said, laying his hand on Obie’s cheek, “and you worry too much.”

“Only about you,” Obie said, and Javier kissed him.

\*\*\*\*

Everything that had kept Obie from kissing Javier before was still true—Javi was still the son of his friends and mentors, he was still a student, he was still Obie’s employee for the duration of field school.

None of it really seemed to matter as Javier kissed him, gentle and hungry.

Javier had been fifteen when they met, with long skinny limbs and floppy hair, handsome and fresh and just beginning to understand how attractive he was and the power that gave him. His crush on Obie had been obvious, flattering, and surprisingly sweet, as they tried to talk to each other in languages both of them barely spoke. Obie had been twenty, absorbed in his studies, overwhelmed by the del Bosques’ interest in him, and he knew then that he and Javier could never be more than friends. Anything more was much too complicated.

He knew he should stop kissing Javier. He knew he should stop letting Javier kiss him. He knew he shouldn't find Javier's kisses so sweet, so satisfying, fulfilling every yearning he had to touch someone he already held dear. He knew he should stop kissing Javier back.

*Not yet*, he thought, pushing a hand into Javier's hair and letting Javier move them onto their sides. *Not yet*.

Javier pushed Obie onto his back and knelt over him, amber eyes dark, a hesitant smile on his lips. "I have wanted to kiss you since I was fifteen," Javier said softly as he slid his hands down Obie's chest. "You taste even better than I imagined."

"Javier," Obie said, shaking his head, "nothing has really changed."

"I know. We are still complicated."

"Getting involved like this won't make things any simpler."

"And you don't want people to think wrongly about me." Obie shook his head, and Javier laughed and leaned down to kiss him again. "You are so sweet."

"I think," Obie breathed, tilting his head back, "it's being pragmatic." His hands settled on Javier's hips as Javier kissed around his face and beside his mouth, before finally kissing him deeply, his hand cradling the back of Obie's head.

"You are very practical," Javier said as he kissed him, "and thoughtful, and I am charmed that you think I need protection in my own country."

"In the jungles of your own country," Obie said, turning his head so Javier would kiss the other cheek. "I wouldn't go into the woods or swamps in the U.S. unprepared."

"I followed the road," Javier said. He wove their fingers together and held Obie's hands over his head. "You are sweet to worry so much about me."

"I worry because I care." He ran his thumbs over the insides of Javier's wrists, smiling when he felt goose bumps rise on Javier's skin. "Not just because you're the son of my friends, either."

“I know,” Javier said, dipping his head to kiss Obie again. “You worry because you think I throw myself away on people who don’t matter. Perhaps I have only been waiting for you to notice that I am your Javi and always will be, and until then, people who don’t matter are the best I can do.”

“Javi,” Obie whispered. Propriety suddenly seemed much less important than getting his mouth and hands on Javier’s skin. He pulled his hands from Javier’s and ran them over his back, his shoulders, his chest, as Javier turned his head to capture and tease Obie’s mouth.

“*Bésame, bésame,*” he said, so Obie kissed him over and over. He smelled delicious when Obie buried his nose in the crook of Javier’s neck, and Obie was genuinely surprised at how gently Javi cradled Obie against him, nothing like an impatient boy. “*Corazoncito, mi corazón,*” Javi said, and Obie touched and kissed him until the only language he spoke were moans and sighs.

\*\*\*\*

Obie was awake to see the light in the window gradually lighten from dark to gray. Javier slept against his chest, a hand splayed over Obie’s heart, and Obie threaded his fingers through Javier’s hair as he watched the window.

The rest of the school would be up soon. Not only that, but it was guest lecture night and the guests Obie was expecting were Enrique and Marisol, to give their annual lecture about the Del Bosque Foundation. Normally this was his favorite night of the entire summer, but now Obie wished they had a day or two to get used to each other before coping with Javier’s parents, too.

In the morning light, the complications that had slipped away the night before were back to gnaw at him, but all the uncomfortable questions they would have to answer once they returned to the university were nothing compared to what Enrique would do when he found out—while he was resigned to Javier’s sexuality, he made no secret of the fact that he wanted grandchildren. And Obie was certain that Enrique and Marisol both would be more guarded in their friendship once they found out—punishment, whether it was a conscious choice or not, for seducing their son.

He took a little comfort in the knowledge that they were aware of Javier's fondness for him, and that he had chosen the university because of Obie's presence there as well as the family's connection.

Everyone would find out soon enough, he supposed, but that didn't stop him from wishing they could have a few days of keeping this tender little thing a secret between them.

Javier's hand slowly rubbed Obie's chest. "I can feel you worrying."

"I'm just thinking." He kissed Javier's hair, and Javier lifted his head to give him a sweet, sleepy smile. *Ah*, Obie thought, *that's why this is worth it*. "Good morning, beautiful."

"Good morning, *hermoso*." He kissed Obie's mouth.

"I was worrying," Obie confessed. "You're right."

"Worrying about what?"

"What your parents are going to do when they find out, for one thing."

"I'm not a child, Obie," Javier pointed out gently.

"You're their child." Javier rolled his eyes and Obie laid a hand on his cheek. "I'd rather they were happy for us than upset, but I'm not counting on it."

"They will be happy," Javier said. "They are always saying I should find a nice man. Well, Father says I should find a nice woman and sleep with men on the side, if I must, but I don't tell Mother that."

"It's a bit cold," Obie said. "The world's moved beyond that, anyway. But they're not the only ones we have to worry about—there are also the regulations at the university. If we're still together when we get back—"

"If?" Javier said.

"I don't want to assume anything."

Javier sat up slowly, the sheet slipping down to pool at his waist. "You think I am so changeable?"

“I don’t know what’s going to happen, Javi. We may decide we don’t like each other after all. Don’t get upset.” He sat up too, and put his arms around Javi’s neck so he could press their noses together. “I want to be with you.”

Javier laid his head on Obie’s shoulder with a sigh. “Good. That is what I want, also. Tell me about these regulations.”

“Students and instructors who date have to register with the Dean of Students, and sign papers agreeing not to sue each other if they break up.”

Javier huffed. “How very mercenary. It’s like those ‘in case of divorce’ papers. People assume everything will go wrong.”

“Prenuptial agreements,” Obie said. “I suppose it is. But it’s also to protect each other—so, for instance, you don’t accuse me of making you sleep with me for good grades. And a job, in this case.” He sighed, gloomy at the mere thought, and said in the hopes to lighten the mood a bit, “But your grades aren’t good enough for that to be true. Anybody you slept with for grades should give you a better deal.”

The moment he felt Javier stiffen, he knew he’d said the wrong thing.

Javier drew back from him, brows furrowed and thunder in his amber eyes. “You think I fuck my professors for *grades*?”

“It was a joke!”

“I’m not laughing, Oberon Pogue. What a terrible thing to say.” He got out of bed and started picking up his clothes.

“Javier, don’t go.”

“You are so worried about what people will think? Don’t be.” He pulled on his pants. “They will never know. There is nothing to know.” He pulled his shirt over his head.

“I don’t think that about you, Javi. I swear I don’t.”

Javier turned to him, hurt in his face like a mortal wound. “And don’t worry about passing me, Professor Pogue,” he nearly spat. “I’ll earn whatever marks I get—and not on my back.” He let himself out.

Obie sat there for a moment, blinking, and then flopped on his back with a frustrated groan. He shouldn't have said anything—not about his worries, not about Javier's parents—not until they'd figured out what they were to each other, not until this fragile little thing had some resilience to it, when it might bend but not break.

Instead, he had to try to be funny. He knew Javier—he knew how truly sensitive he was, and instead of protecting him he'd cut out his heart as surely as if Javier were tied to the altar at the little temple at the dig site. Knowing that Javier would be both too angry and too proud to tell anyone about their tryst gave him no comfort.

He could hear people chatting in the hall as they walked to the dining room or the showers. He rubbed his hand over his face, told himself he would think of something later, and got up to start his day.

\*\*\*\*

The del Bosques' Jeep was already parked in front of the site by the time the school arrived. Obie was relieved, despite his worries—Marisol never failed to soothe Javier no matter how moody he was—and smiled when he saw Javier sit up a little in his seat when he saw the Jeep, before he glanced around and went back into a disinterested slump.

Obie barely restrained himself from hugging Marisol and confessing everything when he got off the bus and she came to the clearing to greet the school. Javier didn't hesitate—he swooped to her with a “Mami!” and she laughed and hugged her much taller son, pushing her booney hat from her face and scolding him for not using sun protection. Enrique kissed both Javier's cheeks, and then said, “Oberon,” and kissed Obie's as well.

“Newbies, meet the del Bosques, the ones who are paying for most of this,” Obie told the students, and there were a few minutes of students thanking Enrique and Marisol for the chance to be at the dig and instructors catching up with all that had happened in the last year. Javier stayed with his mother, his arm casual around her—but there must have been enough amiss

with him to cause Marisol to glance up at him frequently and call him, “*Mijo*,” like she hadn’t since he was a teenager.

Obie finally said, “Okay, guys, time to work,” and waved off the groans. “That dirt won’t haul itself,” he said and told the del Bosques, “Wait until you see what I have to show you,” as he took them to where the school had begun to excavate the bones. He thought Javier might join the other students but he stayed with Marisol, his expression solemn as they went inside the protective tent to view the little trench.

“I didn’t expect this,” Marisol said. “It is strange sometimes, to be so confronted with the reality of history.” She hugged Javier to her and he quirked a tiny smile.

“That’s what I said.”

“I think it’s necessary for anyone who studies history,” Obie said. “It takes it from the abstract to something concrete. It reminds us we’re truth-hunters.” He looked at Javier, hoping he might understand the deeper meaning Obie desperately wanted to convey, but Javier was gazing at the bones and didn’t look up.

“They’ll make a fine addition to the collection,” said Enrique. “I hope you will want to be on the team to study them, Oberon.”

“Bones aren’t my area, really,” Obie said. “I’ll be happy to collaborate with whoever studies them for the paper afterward.”

“Will there be a paper?” said Marisol.

Javier chuckled. “There is always a paper. I should get to work.” He kissed Marisol and then Enrique, and gave Obie a cool look as he passed him on the way out of the tent.

Marisol took Obie’s arm. “Show me around,” she said, while Enrique stayed in the tent with Brendan and another instructor who were excavating the bones.



“We cleared one wall,” Obie began, but by then they were out of earshot of the others and Marisol turned to him, her face determined and startlingly like Javier’s.

“The two of you have been close as brothers for years, and today he has barely looked at you. What has happened?”

“I—” Obie said, “We—” He knew he was blushing, and it must have been obvious from the way Marisol’s eyes widened.

“You and Javier,” she said, shaking her head. “I suppose I have known it would happen someday. You have always had a special place in his heart.”

“I’ve fallen off the pedestal,” Obie replied. “I said something stupid and now he thinks I think he’s a slut.”

“Do you?” Marisol said calmly.

“No. Never.”

“Then what are you going to do about it, Oberon?” she said, still calm, but there was steel in her eyes and in her tone that reminded Obie what fierce warriors her ancestors had been.

He swallowed hard. “I don’t know yet.”

“I suggest you discover this soon. Javier has asked us to take him home with us.”

“I’m sure a weekend away will do him good.”

“He wants to come home for good, Oberon.”

For a moment, Obie felt as cold as if his heart had stopped beating. “Without his degree?”

“He said he is done.”

“He needs to finish field school—he has another year to go until he graduates—”

“Which is why,” Marisol said, “I can easily believe he is unhappy with you.”

“He wouldn’t leave the university just because of me.”

“Why not? He went to the university because of you.”

Obie looked away, his throat closing. “I don’t know how to make this right, Marisol.”

“Perhaps you can’t. Perhaps you have broken his heart so completely there is no healing it.” She patted his cheek, then leaned close and said, “But I do not believe it. Now.” She took his arm again. “Show me this temple of ours.”

He found a smile for her—he always did—and took her around the site to do just that.

One fortunate thing, he supposed, about giving Marisol the complete tour was that it gave him the perfect excuse to watch Javier. The students tended to blend together into a dust-covered blur, but Javier stood out even when he was moody and sulking. He was unexpectedly patient with a tiny brush clearing dirt away from fragile artifacts, and no matter how much he complained, he would still carry away baskets of dirt and vegetation as they exposed the temple inch by inch.

The most obvious difference between yesterday and today, Obie thought, was that Javier wasn’t talking, when normally he could get a conversation started with anyone from the other students to tourists to important visitors. The usual meandering conversation was going on among the students—their lives at home, their studies, their theories about their finds—but Javier was not taking part. Obie knew Javier wasn’t self-conscious in front of his parents, so... it had to be Obie’s fault, then.

He doubted Javier’s heart was broken, no matter what Marisol might say, but he could believe it might be bruised a little.

\*\*\*\*

After Marisol’s lecture that night, Obie saw them to the guest room and passed by Javier’s on the way to his own. The door was open and the light was on, and Javier’s roommate was reading on his bed while Javier packed his belongings. Obie hesitated, torn as to whether he should say something or

leave him alone, then thought, *Fortune favors the bold*, and said, “Javi—Mr. del Bosque, can I have a word?”

Javier gave him another cool look, then silently rose and went into the hall. “Come to the common room with me,” Obie said, and Javier sighed but went with him. He slouched in one of the armchairs, giving not an inch for Obie to move closer.

Okay, then. Obie said, “I am so, so sorry for what I said this morning.”

“Why? What did you say, Professor Pogue?” Javier said calmly.

“You know. The thing about your grades.”

“I’m sure I don’t know what you’re talking about. I didn’t see you until breakfast, did I?” He picked at the seam of his jeans. “You would never sleep with someone you were ashamed of. Certainly not a pretty student with more cock than brains.”

“Javi—”

“I need to pack,” Javier said. “My parents are leaving early in the morning and I’m going with them.”

“You don’t need to go.”

“Don’t I? I’d hate someone to say I only have a degree because I’m so good in bed. That would taint my future plans.” He shook his head. “No, I am doing what I should have done all along. I will sit in an office in one of my family’s factories and I will make steel. No one will make cruel accusations to me there.”

“I...” Obie began, but then a group of students came in, boisterous with excitement for the weekend break, and one of them said, “Javier, come play some *fútbol* with us! We need one more person to have even numbers.”

Javier gave Obie one more level look, then said, “Just for a few minutes,” and left with them.

*That was less than successful*, Obie thought, scrubbed a hand through his hair, and went to watch the game while he thought this out. Other students, a

few instructors, and the del Bosques were watching too, most of them sprawled on blankets laid on the grass, and Obie thought they would have more than enough people if the players wanted to switch out.

The wise thing, he supposed, would be to let Javier go. Javier's crush on him had to run its course eventually—it was a pity it had happened now instead of years ago, but everybody had to grow up sometime, even Javier. And maybe taking the advice he'd been getting all this time was the best, too. He'd never taken school seriously, not the way someone who intended to pursue the field would. Not for the first time, Obie wondered what Javier could have done if he had taken his studies seriously, if he'd made an effort, but it was too late for that now. And who knew, maybe Javier would be as good at whatever Enrique had in mind for him as he was at playing around.

The soccer ball bounced into the observers and someone threw it back with a, “Pay attention, del Bosque!” Obie looked for Javier—his expression was serious and he didn't smile in response to the jibe, only caught the ball and tossed it to the team captains so they could kick off again.

“Too bad we couldn't play at Chichén Itzá,” one of the students, Lauren, said to the girl beside her. “It would have been amazing to play in that ball court.”

“Would we sacrifice the losing team after?” said her friend with a laugh.

“We could,” Lauren said with a solemn nod. “Though it would be a pity if *his* team lost.” She nudged her friend and they both giggled as they watched... Oh. Javier. Of course.

Obie looked at Marisol, wondering if she'd overheard the conversation too, but she was cheering Javier and he suspected she didn't. Just as well.

People began to shout and cheer again as the game continued in earnest, and Obie couldn't help feeling proud at how good Javier was, how fast and graceful. Most of the American students hadn't played since elementary school, from the look of it, while Javier took the game as seriously as any of his countrymen, and he even smiled when a few of the international students shouted “Goooooal!” when he scored.

He wanted to tell Javier, *You can't leave. You've only just begun making friends and enjoying yourself.* More than that, he wanted to find the right words to say, *I'm sorry, stay at the dig, stay at school until you graduate. Stay with me.*

So much for wanting the practical solution for him. Obie smiled wryly to himself. It was selfish, after all, wanting Javier around. Well, he was selfish. He had wanted Javier for longer than he cared to admit and didn't want to lose him to a stupid mistake.

There was a sudden shout from the students and Obie snapped out of his reverie as Marisol leapt to her feet and ran onto the impromptu field. One of the players was down, his hands clasped over his face.

“What happened?” Obie asked Lauren. “I wasn't watching.”

“Javier got kicked in the face,” Lauren said, eyes anxious as she watched the field.

If Obie had thought he went cold before, this was even worse, and he was on the field and kneeling at Javier's side before he could even decide to do it. Blood was gushing down Javier's face despite the T-shirt one of his teammates had pressed to his nose, and Marisol held Javier's head and said, “Lie still, *mijo*, lie still,” her voice calm despite the fear in her eyes.

Obie picked up Javier's wrist and forced himself to breathe calmly as he took Javier's pulse. It was quick but steady. Not in shock, then. “Can you move your hands, Javi?”

“Yes, Obie,” Javier said, his voice muffled by the T-shirt.

“How about your toes? Can you wiggle your toes?”

“Yes, Obie.”

“Okay,” Obie said and released Javier's wrist. “Let's get you inside and make sure your nose isn't broken.”

Marisol let out a whimper and hugged Javier's head to her bosom, while he muttered in embarrassment, “I'll get blood on you, Mami.”

Enrique finally got Javier to his feet, and his teammates clustered around Javier as they took him inside the dorms to the kitchen. One of the house staff already had an ice pack made up, and she waited with it as Obie knelt in front of Javier and inspected his nose. It was unmistakably out of joint. He put his hands on either side of Javier's nose and said, "On the count of three, okay?"

Javier nodded. His eyes were already starting to swell.

"One," said Obie, "two," and he pushed Javier's nose back into place with a crunch. Several of the students exclaimed in disgust, and Marisol hid her face in Enrique's chest. "I think you won't even have a bump," Obie told Javier, and took the ice pack to press it to his nose. "We'll get you something for the pain and keep the swelling down, and you'll be just fine."

"I'll have character," Javier said, touching his nose gingerly, and winced.

"You have plenty of character," Obie said, and Javier glanced up at him in surprise. "All right, guys," he said to the rest of the students, "clear out. Javier needs to rest and it wouldn't hurt the rest of you, either."

They shuffled out reluctantly, many touching Javier's shoulder or scrubbing their fingers through his hair in sympathy, and he gave them faint smiles in return. Obie and Enrique each took a side to help Javier to bed, and Obie said, "Let's put him in my room so I can be there if he needs help in the night."

Enrique said, "Good idea," and Marisol's mouth quirked a moment.

When they had put Javier to bed, the ice pack still pressed to his nose, Marisol took Obie aside. "Be gentle with him," she said, soft enough that Enrique wouldn't hear.

"I just want to watch over him for a while. If he's leaving, I—I need one more night."

"I don't know that he is," Marisol said, and there was a twinkle in her dark eyes. She stood up on her toes and whispered in his ear, "I would rather he have you than anyone, *mijo*," smiled, and joined Enrique.

Obie swallowed the lump in his throat and went into his room. He sat at the foot of his bed and watched Javier, shivering as the adrenaline that had kept him calm ebbed from his system. The sounds of the dorm eventually died out—doors closing, music playing and then going silent—until there was nothing but Javier’s breathing and the sounds of the jungle outside.

“Well,” said Javier, and Obie’s gaze snapped to his face in surprise. “Now what, Obie?”

“You get some rest, mostly. And eat some breakfast with protein tomorrow. Did you take any of the pain reliever? I know Enrique had some for you—”

“Babble, babble,” said Javier. “I took some. It will put me to sleep soon, but first, we should have words.”

“I suppose we should. Are you sure you don’t want to wait until tomorrow?”

“I am sure.” He sat up slowly and Obie moved closer to steady him in case he wavered. Javier put out a hand to stop him. “Let me. I will lie down if it’s too much.” He took a deep breath, and then smiled at Obie wryly. “It was like a very bad nosebleed.”

“It was like you broke your nose,” Obie said, equally wry. “Who kicked you?”

Javier shrugged. “It was an accident. It’s not a proper game unless someone bleeds.”

“I’ve heard that about lacrosse but not about soccer. Sorry, *fútbol*.”

“*Norteamericanos*,” Javier said affectionately, and then picked up the bloody T-shirt to dab his nose again. “I see why Mami and Father have let you lead this school all these years, despite how young you are. You are the man to turn to in a crisis.”

“I can keep a steady head, that’s all. You’ve never really had the chance to see it before.”

“So if I can see you worry, then you must truly be near panic.”

Obie looked down at his hands and didn't answer.

Javier said after a moment, as he folded the T-shirt again, "You made me feel like a whore this morning, Obie."

"I know," Obie said miserably. "I'm so sorry. I should never make jokes. They always fall flat."

"There is some truth in humor," Javier replied. "I adore you, you know. I have never thought you might love me back, but I thought you at least respected me."

"Oh, Javi, I do. I think you're amazing."

"But stupid."

"I don't think that. I think you coast because you can. I think you'd astound us all if you actually tried."

"So I am lazy."

Obie said, after a moment, "Yes. If you put as much effort into your classes as you do your boyfriends, you'd have a PhD by now."

Javier looked up at him, then at the shirt he was restlessly folding and refolding in his lap. "I didn't want to leave," he said softly. "Not if it meant I would only see you when my parents had an event at their wing of the museum, or when you came to Mexico to dig and explore."

"You could have stayed anyway, after graduation," Obie said. "We would have found a way."

"I'm sure some law or another would force me home. And you are unwilling to be an expat."

"I could live here," Obie said. "If I had a way to make a living, I could live here easily. And if you want to stay in the States, we can find a way to make that happen, too."

"Why would I stay now?" Javier said, looking directly at Obie. "Even if I do achieve my degree, I have no desire to teach."



“You have no desire to work in an office, either. You’re good at field work, Javi. You’ve got more patience than most of your classmates, and that’s more vital in this job than most people realize.”

“More bones,” Javier murmured.

“We deal with the past. That includes the dead.”

“Do they ever make you weep, Obie?”

“Sometimes,” Obie admitted. “Sometimes. Not as much as the living, though.” He added softly, “Don’t go,” and Javier closed his eyes. “Here’s what I’m thinking. We can go back to being friends through the rest of field school—the rest of the year, too. Perfectly innocent. And then after you graduate, we can try again, with no hiding.”

Javier said slowly, twisting the T-shirt in his hands, “I’m not certain I can be your friend again.”

Obie swallowed and whispered, “Okay. That’s—”

“You are still *mi corazón*.”

Obie looked at him. “Javi?”

Javier smiled helplessly. “What? You think such a little thing as love disappears in a moment? Why do you suppose I wanted to be away from you? To learn to live with the pain, of course.”

“Javi,” Obie said again, much happier this time, and moved closer to Javier to kiss him, stopping only when Javier said, “Ah, careful,” and so Obie kissed his forehead instead. “I’m going to kiss you so much when you can handle it. Just to warn you.”

“I want you to kiss me so much,” Javier said, and leaned his head against Obie’s shoulder. “I think the painkillers are setting in now.”

“Lie back,” Obie said and helped to prop him against the pillow, in case his nose started bleeding again. He settled at Javier’s side and Javier leaned his head against Obie’s shoulder again, so Obie held it there gently, his hand

cupping the side of Javier's face. "Are you going to remember any of this tomorrow?"

"If not," Javier said sleepily, "help me remember. I will believe you."

\*\*\*\*

*The following commencement season...*

Obie thought, with absolutely no bias whatsoever, *what are you talking about*, that none of the graduates of the school of anthropology were quite as handsome in their caps and gowns as Javier del Bosque. He wished for a moment that he was in the audience with Enrique and Marisol, to cheer for Javier when he crossed the stage to get his diploma—well, the cover for it, the diploma itself would be mailed over the summer—but as an instructor he was close enough to sit up a little straighter in his own regalia and catch Javier's eye.

Javier had not managed to pull his grades high enough to graduate with honors, but even so, Obie thought, no degree had been quite so hard-won. A few schools had even responded positively to his application for graduate studies, and Obie supposed essays, recommendations, and passion could make up for a less than stellar GPA.

They had not spent a year apart. They had made no attempt to hide how much they adored each other, and while the Dean of Students had shaken her head and warned them few relationships between students and teachers worked out, Obie thought there was an exception to every rule, and he was lucky enough to be just that.

The harder test was still to come, because Javier had been accepted into a graduate program on the east coast. But it was only two years, and there were always vacations, e-mails, road trips. There would be the field school, which bound people together no matter how far away they might be the rest of the year.

The announcer read, "Javier Xiu del Bosque," without stumbling over the unfamiliar sounds, and Javier rose from his seat, to the applause of his classmates around him and his friends in the audience. Obie applauded

vigorously, earning a nudge from Brendan, and grinned back. “If you can’t be proud of your boyfriend, who can you be proud of?” he whispered, and Brendan chuckled.

There would be a party at the house they shared after the ceremony, which was stuffed in every corner with Javier’s family who had come to see him finally graduate. Obie supposed it would be a few days before they had a few moments of privacy. Still, there were ways for a man to talk to his lover without anyone else overhearing, and when Javier turned from the dean to hold up the diploma cover, Obie caught his eye and made a little heart-shaped sign with his fingers. *Mi corazón.*

**THE END**

## **Author Bio**

*Jenna Jones is the author of m/m romance such as the EPPIE-nominated Chiaroscuro, Something Beautiful and the Apples & Gin series. She lives in the Wasatch Mountains, where she reads, writes and watches a lot of movies. She enjoys her imaginary worlds.*

## **Contact Info**

[Email](#) | [Website](#) | [Blog](#) | [WordPress](#) | [Twitter](#)