

Michoacan, Mexico

The morning air, as cold and still as a winter graveyard, bothered Robert. This weather could be devastating for the Monarchs, and the frost clinging to the oyamel trees showed no sign of melting. He wished the eight teachers he was leading up the trail to the El Rosario Butterfly Sanctuary would move a little faster. Even though they were all new to his program, he felt a strange connection to one of them, Laura Benson, the teacher from Canada. It was as if he had known her in some distant past. Ridiculous, of course. He turned to look, and was rewarded with a smile from her. Embarrassed at being caught, he shifted his attention to the trail again and to the dense fog that had wrapped itself around their ankles, obscuring the ground.

Laura shivered in the chill that enveloped the Mexican mountaintop, but her excitement about being here was heightened by the glances their leader, Robert Meyers, kept giving her. It also didn't hurt that the professor shared her life-long interest in butterflies. She quickened her stride, and passed two of the other expedition members to fall into position a few feet behind him. She knew that millions of Monarchs should be in the trees ahead, covering every inch of the oyamels like bright orange fluttering scarves. Why couldn't she see them, or hear the susurrus of millions of wings fluttering in the canopy overhead? As the group pushed forward through the heavy ground cover, a hard-edged noise, like the cracking of thin ice came from underfoot. The closer they got, the louder the sound became. She almost bumped into Robert when he paused and stared upward, as if searching for movement. When he stooped into the fog, coming up with an icy clump of the ground cover, she did the same. She brushed carefully at the frosty layers of debris, wondering what she was looking for. Some of it was moving.

*Oh, no! Please, no,* she thought. Reeling backward, not knowing where to step, she lost