

## a desert place

# Spring is the season of plenty

by June B. Peterson

It is time of new grass. Soft, sweet, light bright green, like the freshly-sprouted leaves on the ocotillo whips, with their fire-red poker tips, and the palo verde and mesquite trees with lemon-yellow blossoms thickening every branch.

Wisteria lavender mist of ironwood here and there, and beneath and between the orchid purple of hedgehog cactus, orange and gold of staghorn cholla and canary of prickly pear. Exclamation marks of giant saguaros wearing cream and yellow tiara rise above all to pose against a cerulean sky.

Gambel quail lead quicksilver strings of walnuts to the water hole, where cottontails and jack-rabbits are already lined up, and a cardinal preens on a twig above. A trio of Harris hawks perch on the prickles of saguaro arms, but no one seems concerned.

It is the season of plenty. Whipped-cream clouds pile above blue-gray depths where streaks and sheets of brilliant light make pictures of trees and flowers in the air.

Large water drops hit the corrugated iron above my head, and I watch their polka dots scattering across the ground grow denser until all become one, and the mountains are draped in blue veils.

The world breathes the scent of a thousand flowers absorbing and returning these heavenly gifts of shower and sun. A double rainbow arches from the horizon to my land, and I surely do have gold here.

The air, so hot an hour before, turns chill, and the breeze becomes a full-fledged wind. One of the hawks rides it to the heights above the hill, scudding crabwise, hovering, before admitting submission and planing down the long slope to its nest.

Black clouds fill the northern sky, hinting of storms on the Rim and possible late flurries of snow. They bring inevitable desires to emulate the hawk on the flanks of Mount Agassiz, out the Grand Canyon Road, on my skis, just one more time before summer.

Tinges of pink touch the clouds and, as I stand motionless in the space near the water hole, I hear a scrabbling of feet on the pebbles. To our mutual astonishment, six very healthy coyotes bound into each other's view. A change of course creates momentary confusion; but, with hardly a break in stride, the leader is off on a tangent, over the cactus and bittlebush like an antelope, the rest of the pack likewise.

Leaving the water to them, I retreat beneath the corrugated iron roof, only to hear a great chorus to a half-dozen more coming from the creek!

And, as I listen, one lone maverick adds his voice from the spot where the rainbow ended. I see him, small and runty, an outcast from both groups, weaving his way among the bushes towards me.

He has a slight limp in one hind leg and appears to be wary of the noisy bunch in the valley.

He pauses often, unaware of my eyes, and gazes down toward them. I pull back ever so slowly under the roof and avert my eyes occasionally so he will not sense them; and he passes within a few feet of me, to disappear in the growing dusk of the hillside to the west where the cave is.

One ponders the increase in wildlife population hereabouts, amounting to overpopulation and the denuding of the once thickly-vegetated banks of Cave Creek.

Refugees from now vast lifeless land created in the name of golf, evergreen, tee and greenbuck.

With the setting of the sun, I find myself recalling the words quoted on Armistice Day in Australia . . . "and at the going down of the sun, and in the morning, we will remember them. Lest we forget."

If we can just achieve an armistice here before all the natural dwellers remain only in our memory, we will be the victors. The alternative - truly barren desert and desolation inhabitable by only man and his golf balls. And how long for them?