

**Woody Mountain**  
**Friday and Saturday**  
**May 18 and 19, 1990**

Isolation was still possible in Arizona. For a while, anyway. She liked it, liked to be alone away from cities. All her life she had lived with a sky that was three-fourths of the landscape, big enough to fill a century, and mountains that rose on every horizon. She had grown up in unpeopled miles where danger was only natural, not malicious. The isolation of mountain-top fire lookout job suited her just fine.

Ten miles away, Flagstaff with its 45,000 plus people was a toy town that occupied only fifteen degrees on her firefinder circle of 360. She could hear no sound from the clamor of its streets, no hint of its strife and ambitions. On her mountain, with beauty to every horizon, there was peace and time and room enough to grow tall as a sycamore tree if she could manage to learn how. Worth the effort anyway.

It was spring. The Arizona sun was long past Equinox and approaching Solstice, burning almost as high overhead as it would all year. In the drought months, Pacific storms had as usual swung north into Canada, and the storm track along the Mexican border had disappeared. An upper level ridge capped the West. Cloudless days stretched into monotony, day after day of brilliant, empty sky.

Wind blew constantly, roaring past the walls, humming against the steel girders of the old tower, whistling around the window frames in a noise that seldom stopped. The tower felt alive. Pulsing. She kept the windows fastened shut in the mornings and sat against the east wall watching the tops of pines sway below her. In her glass room she was free in any weather for eighty miles in all directions, from the Painted Desert to the mountains west of Prescott.

From that height the whole Coconino forest stretched away, ridges rolling in waves to the horizon in succeeding shades of green, color upon color, blue fifteen miles away, pale bluegrey at eighty. Shadows outlined canyons in morning light, and details of the sides of distant mountains were distinct. As the sun crossed the sky, contours and canyons eased away to reappear again under afternoon shadow in a different palette of green, brown, blue.

Traces of snow outlined ridges high on the peaks she could see from her north window. Wind was cold. On the mountain, buds on oak trees were so tightly furled that the branches looked skeletal and brown among the pines, but the clump of aspen off the northeast slope was turning from white to green. Elderberry bushes were putting on new leaves. In sunny patches a few grasses were showing green close to the ground.

Ravens and swallows flashed past on the wind. Hawks faced into it, hanging motionless for minutes at a time. With her binoculars she watched their eyes searching the ground far beneath. Something about those eyes. Dark. Intent. With a hawk there was no chance of a