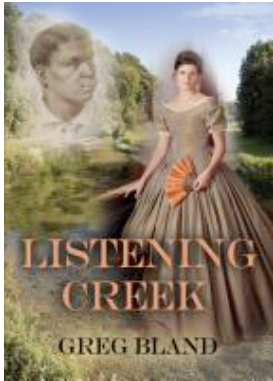


LISTENING CREEK

GREG BLAND



Listening Creek weaves love, war, tragedy and hope into lives destined for redemption. Sarah, a young plantation owner's daughter finds herself enamored with her father's property, Beau, a 17-year-old slave. The cracking whip forces Beau to escape only to be haunted by an accusation of murder. Barefoot and half naked, the escape leads to a life as a Buffalo Soldier and Indian wars. Only fate can determine the plans God had for them.

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new year but Paw stayed quiet, his pipe firmly planted between his tight teeth.

Mama kept me up on things. She said it was important for a young lady to be aware of the world around her. It scared me sometimes though. Sometimes I didn't want to know. It made it hard for me to go to sleep at night, thinking of all the men fightin' and dyin' for something I really didn't understand. She told me of iron ships, that floated and fought one another on the seas. I had seen wooded ships one year when they took me to New Orleans, so I figured someone had been lyin' to Mama and told her of ships made of iron - and floated. Mama had a good heart, but sometimes she would believe anything anybody told her. She made up names for the iron ships too, funny names like Merrimac and Monitor. I knew from science class that a monitor was a big lizard that lived someplace over by Africa. Now, why would anyone name an iron ship after a lizard? Mama was so funny.

One day, I believe it was in late May, Mama and I were out on the veranda. The summer heat hadn't set in yet. I remember it was a beautiful day. All the men were working. Zelda, Magpie and the women

A trail of eight or ten ponies vanished over hard packed ground and rock outcroppings. The men strung out on a horizontal line to pick up the dim trail. About thirty miles south of the place where the main trail had split south and west, they found MaeAnne Manken. She had been raped. Her clothes were torn and scattered in pieces along the banks of a small stream. It was obvious she hadn't been raped once. Her face was beyond recognition, the large bloody stone still laying beside her head. She had been badly mutilated and left naked. Horse tracks surrounded her body as if ponies had been ridden over and over her corpse. The men stood their horses in silence. Beau sat fixed, his glare hard.

Sergeant Ryan dismounted. He untied his bedroll from behind the cantle of his saddle. The Lieutenant dismounted and helped Ryan wrap the body in a blanket. They tied the blanket snugly closed. Four of the men lifted MaeAnne's body over the back of a spare horse and tied it down. Sergeant Ryan didn't hesitate. "Lieutenant, I'm riding northwest to find the others and I'm taking these ten men with me. Take the others back to the fort with Misses Manken here."



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