



AUGUST SUN

GREG BLAND



The anticipated sequel to Listening Creek is here! August Sun continues the lives of Beau and Sarah Sterns in the Tularosa Basin of New Mexico territory. The last of the Indian Wars disrupt the plans God had for them. Tragedy and renewed faith proved again that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose.

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Greg Bland

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First Edition

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Lone Wolf sent scouts out to survey the valley below. His band had been surrounded by Mexican forces in Chihuahua. It was October 1880 and his run from the 10th American Cavalry at Rattlesnake springs had run his band of warriors low on food and water. They had moved along the Rio Grande, replenished water rations and took refuge in the Tres Castillos Mountains of northern Mexico.

"It is the Mexican Colonel you spoke of," one of the scouts reported. "I have seen him before. It is him, the one they call Terrazas. He is easy to recognize with his long nose and big hat. He is not a big man, but he looks big with his hat and white feather dancing to one side."

Lone Wolf's one-eyed half brother led a small band of his own and worked to support his brother. Dark Wolf, as his followers called him, was born Sleepy Grass. His mother laid him in the tall swaying grass of the birthing meadow and named him after the restful sleep the spirits gave her newborn son. As a young warrior, he had been cut badly while stealing horses on a night raid. A Comanche blade laid his face open from his hair line to his cheek bone. His right eye had

been split in two sending water and blood down his face. Lone Wolf wanted to give his brother the name One Who Moves Too Slow. Sleepy Grass rejected the name and accepted another warriors suggestion of Dark Wolf, stating he needed to raid like a dark wolf if he was to avoid anymore Comanche blades.

The forces of Colonel Joaquin Terrazas surrounded Lone Wolf's warriors, holding ground for several days. With darkness covering their movements, Terrazas ordered his men to push their circle tighter around the outnumbered Apaches. Flashes of fire roared from the black powder rifles of the advancing Mexicans. Lone Wolf's men returned fire, holding ground for several hours. The repeating rifles Lone Wolf had used at Rattlesnake Springs against the 10th Cavalry proved to be superior to the cap lock rifles of Terrazas' men.

Shortly after sunup and with Lone Wolf running low on ammunition, Terrazas shouted "Carga! Ahora tomelos. Deseo El Lobo Solitario capturado! Charge! Take them now. I want Lone Wolf captured!" The remaining battle was short and Lone Wolf was taken into custody by the Mexican Army.

Dark Wolf and a loyal band of twenty or so warriors escaped to the southwest. He watched from a distance as Terrazas' sword ended his brother's life. He watched as his people - warriors, women and

children - were marched off into the darkness. Dark Wolf's bitterness for the Mexicans and the Americans grew stronger that night. He vowed to fight, raid and kill on both sides of the big river. He would fight to avenge his brother and his people.

Sarah watched as August splashed his muddy bare feet through the water. He was a playful bright-hearted boy, in love with his mother and deeply devoted to his father. August had recently turned four. All of Tularosa treated him as family, his dark skin blending in with the Mexican girls and boys of the village. Water droplets sparkled in the dark ringlets covering his head. His bouncing laughter sent shockwaves of joy through the vineyard and into Sarah's heart.

Irrigation water was less abundant this year. All of the farmers were cutting back on water. There had been less snow in the high mountains. Spring brought little rain and the summer monsoon had not arrived. Water had been plentiful in years past but this year's drought showed no sign of letting up.

She had named her vineyard Tulibrook. The sound of it pleased her when she first spoke the word. She had taken the name, of course, from the village name Tularosa meaning red or rose-colored reeds. Cattails

lined the stream that brought the life-giving irrigation water to the farmers in the basin. "Tulibrook," she said to herself. "That's a fine name. Tulibrook Vineyard, Tulibrook Wines, yes, I like it," she said. That was years before and the vineyard was yet to provide a profit.

Five years before, the three of them - Sarah, Beau and Driver had come down the steep grade overlooking the white sands of the Tularosa Basin. If it hadn't been for Father Miguel Gutierrez, the beginning would have been even harder than it was.

"The good Father won't be very happy if you track your muddy feet into his sanctuary," she said as she bent down to wash August's feet. A small trickle of water pooled before her allowing enough water to splash around his toes. "He is expecting us. You want to honor God's house with clean feet, don't you?" she asked.

August kicked his legs free of her restraint. "I wanna play, Mama. Let me down." Sarah released her grip and freed August to return to the field to play with the other children running between the rows of grapevines. She moved her eyes to the cloudless, blue sky. The August sun was three-quarter high. *'We're not due to meet with Father Michael until noon,'* she thought to herself. "Alright you squirmy little boy, go on and play," she said. He was gone before she could

make contact. Her hand missed in the attempt to swat August on the behind.

The memories of those first four years were vivid in her mind. She had often thought of the times before. The sun was warming the day and her mind went back in review of the first years in Tularosa. *'This year, this year could be our year, but the water, I worry over the water,'* she thought as she watched August and the other children run down the rows of grapevines. *'It's August and the grapes should be bigger by now,'* she thought.

The first year, the planting year, was busy buying land, trading for plants and preparing the ditches for irrigation. Beau and Driver were both great help with the heavy work of preparing the earth and planting. Driver worked alongside Beau just as if the vineyard was his. His loyalty continued just as it had in Mississippi and the many miles in between the plantation and here.

The second and third years were tending years. They watched the plants grow and develop strong root stock, but immaturity left the plants fruitless. Beau and Sarah had expected some sort of crop the third year, but for whatever reason the first fruits didn't appear until the fourth season.

They were hopefully excited the fourth spring. The small, new-growth grapes appeared abundant. Beau and Sarah bought presses and equipment for the winery. Sarah even negotiated with Father Michael and promised to provide the church with the sacramental wine in the fall of the year. The green grapes grew in small but abundant clusters. Sarah walked the rows morning and evening, tending the plants as closely as she did her own child. Water had been plentiful and she enjoyed tending the ditches and watching the life-giving water bring prosperity to Tulibrook. She watched as the grapes began to mature, their color slowly changing from green to a deep, heavy purple.

The birds watched too. Beau had gone to work in the mountains. He had left while it was still dark. He promised to be back the next day to help with the beginnings of the harvest. Sarah moved about the house cleaning up after the breakfast she and Beau had shared. August woke up fussing and needed a bath. It was past ten o'clock before she opened the front door to begin her harvest preparations in the vineyard. As she turned a corner, beyond a row of cottonwoods, she realized the grapes were thickly covered with birds. Grackles, blackbirds, red-winged blackbirds, dove and roadrunners all shared in the abundance of Tulibrook. There were not enough arms to swing, not enough

voices to scare all the birds off the crop. She ran down the rows swinging a hoe, yelling at the top of her voice. Driver heard Sarah and joined in the battle, but as soon as the birds flew from the vines and Sarah or Driver moved to another part of the vineyard, the birds returned to gorge on the ripened grapes. Sarah, Driver and little August fought the birds all day, doing their best to glean what the birds had left behind. Beau returned the next morning and helped for the next few days until the last grape was picked and stored for the wine press. They had lost the majority of the crop to birds. Driver and Beau tried to find the best in it all, but Sarah was distraught. "I know it's a big loss," Beau said. "But there's next year. We'll do better next year. We're still learning, Sarah. It'll be alright," he said trying to comfort her.

"It's not alright," she said. "We've worked four, long years getting to this point and those damned birds stole it all from us."

"I'll net the vines next year," Beau said. "I don't care where I have to get them or how much they cost, I'll cover the entire vineyard in netting. I should have known better. I should have thought of it. It's my fault, Sarah. Don't be so hard on it all, please?"

"Dats right, Sarah. Don't be so troubled about it," Driver added. "We'll be findin' a ways ta get by. Beau

be right. The Lord hepped us in days gone by. He'll hep us dis time too."

"I know," Sarah said. "You're both right, but it's so discouraging." She stopped a moment to wipe the sweat from her face and neck. "And this heat is about to fry me. I don't remember the summers being so hot."

"It shore be a scorcher," Driver said. "I thought maybe da summer rains would be here by now."

As Beau walked to the vineyard to find August, Sarah allowed Driver to comfort her. He'd always had a way of bringing her to a positive reality of things. He never judged. Oh, he was more than willing to share his opinions and views of things and his faith remained the foundation of his opinions. She loved Driver for the consistent and loyal friend he had been. She remembered him as the strong, able, dark-headed servant of her parents. He was the one who drove the family to church every Sunday. He was the one who was there without complaint, no matter the demand. He was the one who stood by her Mama when her Paw got mean. He was the one who took her away from the family trouble and the plantation. He wasn't happy about that decision to leave, but he was there beside her. He was thinner now. The salt and pepper hair had turned almost pure white in recent years. A few black

hairs remained to remind her of the younger man she had known. The heavy loads were harder for him now and his work days were shorter than before. His face showed very few creases of age. If it hadn't been for the white hair, others would believe him younger than he was. His hands were knotted and crooked with arthritis, his palms calloused from labor, but his back was straight. He wasn't bent like some of the Mexican abuelos or grandparents. He still carried himself straight and proud, even though he was anything but proud. Driver loved August and cared for him just as he had Sarah when she was young. He loved children today as much as he did on the plantation. Sarah watched Driver's eyes move back and forth with a protective love as August and some of the other children ran in circles avoiding Beau.

"Here come dat little scamp. Just look at da mess he become dis mornin'. Didn't I just hear ya tell dat boy not get all muddy and track a mess inta da church? I don't know if it be him dat don't mind or you dat don't mind."

"It's alright," Beau said as he returned to Sarah's side. "He's a mess alright, but it's nothing a little water won't take off. Come on, Driver, help me with the rest of the clean up." Driver and Beau returned to work

while Sarah herded her playful four year old to the house.

They made wine that year. As promised the sacramental wine was provided for the church. The supply was stored in the cool basement beneath the sanctuary. What little was left was sold, the money went to buy netting for the next year's crop.

Sarah returned from her memories. The summer sun was hot on her shoulders. "Come on August. We've got to get going. You can play later. We've got to see Father Michael remember. Come on now," she called out across the rows of vines. August made a wobbly attempt at a cartwheel in front of the other children and waved both arms overhead as he ran to his Mama.

It was August of 1885. Beau said his goodbyes to Sarah as he stepped into the saddle. "I wanna go. I wanna go," August said squirming to free himself from his mother. "Daddy, I wanna go with you. I can ride in front. I'll be good, promise." Beau reached down and pulled August into the saddle.

"Get up here. I'll take you for a little ride, but then you'll have to get down. Your Mama needs you around here. Besides, what would you do while I'm busy with the ranch? There aren't any little boys and girls for you

to play with up in the tall timber." August nearly jumped into his father's arms, his legs spread wide to clear the saddle. "I'll be right back," Beau called back to Sarah, as he turned the horse's head toward the lane. August held a double-fisted grip on the saddle horn and squealed with delight as Beau turned left at the end of the lane.

"Are we going to see Father Michael, Daddy?"

"Not today. Your Mama will take you there later, remember. We're just going to take a little ride around the church then we'll have to take you home. I've got work that needs doing up at the ranch."

"Oh Daddy, I wanna go to the mountains with you. Please Daddy, please."

Beau rested his chin on the top of his son's head. It was a connection the two of them shared since the first time August was allowed to ride with his father. August loved the love and security he felt as his head was cradled by his father's chin. "August, I've already told you no, not this time," Beau said. "You know better than to beg. There will be a time, maybe next time. I'd take you with me but I've got too much work to do. I'll be gone from the ranch house too much this time."

Saint Frances de Paula church was quiet as Beau turned the horse to the left and rode to the back of the sanctuary. Beau was a Christian and knew the hand of

God had often guided and protected him. He quoted, "For I know the plans I have for you..." from the book of Jeremiah many times. Little August had heard the quote enough he too could recite the scripture. Although Beau was Christian, he wasn't Catholic. He and Sarah attended church and considered Father Miguel Gutierrez their pastor but they were without any formal commitment to Catholicism. Father Michael had married them privately without public acknowledgment or approval from his superiors. The cool, quiet of the courtyard behind the church brought a comfort to Beau. Memories of his first visit with Father Michael brought a smile to his face. That was a little more than five years ago and now he was carrying his son August around the church that first inspired this move to Tularosa. *'God truly knew the plans he had for me,'* Beau thought. "Look how blessed we are, August," he said. "Don't you just love it here? Look around you, son. The cottonwoods offer us shade, the brook gives us cool water for the vineyard and the Lord gave you a sweet, sweet Mama to love."

August jerked his body forward several times. "Let's go faster, Daddy."

"Alright, hang on," Beau allowed. He moved the horse into a canter as they circled the church. He turned left on the main road and continue the gait for a

half mile then slowed the horse to a walk. "We'd better get back to the house, boy. Your Mama's gonna be thinking I changed my mind and took you to the mountains with me."

Beau handed August down to Sarah, then bent low in the saddle to kiss her goodbye. "I'll be back in about a week. Send Driver up if you need anything."

"Alright then," Sarah replied with resignation. "I'll miss you. I always do, you know. Be careful." She slowly released Beau's hand, looking into his dark eyes. "Be careful, you hear me? Come on, August. We need to get you cleaned up."

Beau rode south from Tulibrook then turned east up the steep grade into the Sacramento Mountains.



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