

SHELIA CHAPMAN

Blood of the Rainbow

Raging Storm

By Shelia Chapman

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BLOOD OF THE RAINBOW - RAGING STORM

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My grateful thanks go out to my husband, my son Adam, Connie Deavers and Brenda Swiger for all their help, and patience.

This book uses a mixture of US and UK English. The narrative is in US English, but where written items are quoted, the appropriate spelling, grammar, and idiom of the character is used.

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This book is the first of a trilogy which acts as a prequel to the 'A Vested Interest' series. In the timeline, 'Raging Storm' would be set about seven years before 'Immortality Gene'.

'Raging Storm' is a fictional, paranormal romance novel, which unlike the other 'A Vested Interest' books, was written entirely by Shelia.

John Chapman

Chapter 1

Sara Foster explained her reasons for leaving Crooked Creek, but, of course, Kaye, her mother, didn't listen. James, Sara's father, understood. Kaye never *tried* to understand. To her, adventure was better left to the movies. Internet was for perverts and ax murderers.

Too old-fashioned, and set in her ways, Kaye expected Sara to marry a local boy and spend the rest of her life driving a dilapidated old pickup down dirt roads. Oh, and grandkids, mustn't forget those. Had to preserve the Foster genes. Sara didn't want that life. The world was too big and exciting to be ignored. She wanted to make a name for herself and be remembered.

Lucy Ripley, Kaye's younger sister, lived in Shreveport, a city a hundred miles north of Crooked Creek. When possible, Sara spent summer breaks with her. It gave Lucy a chance to catch up, and Sara a chance to breathe. At least that had been the arrangement until three years ago, when Lucy joined a country rock band called Raging Storm.

Kaye hated musicians as much as she hated Native Americans. Why she was so prejudiced remained a mystery to Sara, but Kaye hated everything about them. Once she learned Lucy was part of the band, Sara wasn't allowed to communicate with her aunt, let alone visit during her breaks.

Kaye saw Lucy as a bad influence. She didn't want Sara exposed to her promiscuous ways. Musicians traveled from town to town, living on crumbs from someone else's table, and by selling their bodies. To Kaye, another name for a musician was gigolo or in Lucy's case, a whore.

Until Sara turned eighteen and graduated high school, she'd followed her mother's rigid small-town rules. If Kaye had

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known James had been mailing Sara's letters to Lucy for three years, Kaye would've thrown a fit. If she'd found out he'd given Sara a cell phone, so she could stay in touch with Lucy, Kaye would've thrown him out and divorced him. But James didn't care. Sara was his world. He did whatever made her happy.

She was a singer and a songwriter, and she was good at it. Her only problem was singing in public. It petrified her. Regardless, James knew one day his daughter would be a star. It was her dream, and to make it happen, she needed to chase her rainbows. She had to break free from her mother, which meant breaking free from him, as well. To James, this was part of being a father, letting go and allowing his child to grow.

On Sara's sixteenth birthday, Lucy told her when she finished school, she could come and live with her. She promised to show Sara life in the big city. With a population of around three-hundred thousand, Shreveport didn't qualify as 'the big city', but it beat Sara's little hick hometown. After all, how many famous musicians came from a place called Crooked Creek?

From experience, and reading Sara's letters, Lucy knew she couldn't withstand Kaye's badgering. Kaye was smothering Sara, and if it continued, she would destroy her dreams. One of the reasons Lucy joined the band was to help Sara. She'd blown her chance at stardom, but for Sara, the door was wide open.

A week before graduation, Sara's bags were packed and ready to go. She didn't have much, some clothes, a guitar, laptop and several boxes of music and memories.

The day after graduation, Sara loaded her things into the trunk of her car. With tears in her eyes, Kaye hugged Sara and made her promise to call, the second she got to

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Shreveport. Sara made a quick trip to the gas station, filled her tank, and hit the highway. She turned her music up loud and left her old life behind. She'd never felt so free. She knew her life was about to change. Everything was different, even the leaves on the trees, and the smell of the misting rain spattering on her windshield. She was seeing her world for the first time through new eyes.

Jared reached for the door handle on his black BMW and glanced across the street. A strange car had pulled into Lucy's drive. He frowned and scratched the back of his head.

Lucy stood by the car, waiting. The girl barely got out before she grabbed her and hugged her.

He did a double-take.

"Hi, Luce," she giggled.

"Sara! Hi, kid. You *finally* made it!"

She smiled. "Um, Luce, could you let me breathe now?"

Jared narrowed his eyes and listened. *So her name is Sara.* She looked so familiar; he couldn't help but stare. "Who are you? Where have I seen you? You can't be *her*, can you?" Using his enhanced hearing, he continued to eavesdrop.

"I'm *so* glad you're here." Lucy put an arm around Sara's shoulders. "We're gonna have so much *fun!*" she said in a high-pitched voice. Sara unlocked the trunk and handed Lucy a carryall.

He stepped closer to get a better look. He leaned against the back of his car and grinned slightly, not hiding the fact, he was watching them.

Lucy slung the strap over her shoulder and reached for Sara's laptop. "This isn't heavy, Sara. It can't be all of your stuff!"

"I didn't bring a lot," she sighed. "Mother wouldn't let me. It's part of her plan to lure me back." She grunted, set a box of books on the driveway and reached for her guitar.

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“Besides, I figured when I get a job, I can buy what I need.” She propped the guitar case against the back bumper.

Lucy forced the air from her lungs and frowned. “That reminds me. When we’re done here, you get on your phone and call your mother. Kaye has called twice already. She seems to think you should’ve been here thirty minutes ago.”

Sara shook her head and groaned. “Luce, she *knows* how long it takes to get here. I’ve been driving for three years, without a single speeding ticket or being involved in an accident. I don’t understand why she insists on worrying about me.”

Jared chuckled, a little too loud. Sara glanced across the street and held his gaze for a few seconds. He crouched as if he’d dropped something. He didn’t want to seem rude, but he couldn’t keep his eyes off Sara.

Lucy laughed. “Don’t knock it, kid. I guess it’s her way of showing she loves you.”

“No, it’s not! It’s her way of making sure I didn’t do something impulsive, like head for Nashville.”

Lucy laughed and glanced up at the cloud-covered sky. “You didn’t threaten to run away again, did you?”

Sara exhaled and glanced across the street again. Jared opened his trunk, took out a bottle of cleaner and pretended to polish his hubcaps.

“The thought had crossed my mind,” Sara said and glanced across the street a third time.

One side of his mouth turned up slightly. He held Sara’s gaze like a hungry predator. She grabbed Lucy’s arm and turned, whispering. “Who’s the guy, by the black BMW?”

Lucy glanced across the street. “A dream!” she sighed. “That’s Jared Thundercloud.”

Sara grinned slightly, her cheeks showed some color. “Native American?”

“You *noticed*?” Lucy snorted.

“Well *duh!*” Sara sighed and shook her head.

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“Come on, let’s get this stuff inside.” Lucy chuckled. “It looks as if the bottom might fall out any second.”

He shook his head. “This is stupid. It can’t be her!” He stood in thought. Finally, curiosity got the best of him.

Sara grunted and struggled to reach some CDs at the back of her trunk.

Jared grinned and admired the view. He softly cleared his throat. She didn’t respond. He frowned. *Didn’t she hear me?* He waited. *I guess not. Now, what am I supposed to do?* He groaned inwardly, remembering.

“It started sprinkling on me, right before I got to the turnoff.” She grunted again and stretched. Her fingertips barely touched the edge of the jewel case. “Now I remember why I *didn’t* want this monster of a car!” She crawled into the trunk. “It’s so hard to reach the back of the – gotcha!” She backed out.

He softly smiled and leaned closer. *She thinks Luce is still behind her.* “You look like you could use a hand,” he chuckled in a deep voice, as soft and smooth as melted chocolate.

Sara jerked her head up and knocked herself silly. She stumbled. He grabbed her arm. “Careful!” he frowned, agitated with himself for frightening her.

She timidly lifted her eyes to see the face that went with the sexy voice. *Oh, no! It’s him!* Her mouth gaped; her face turned every possible shade of red. She couldn’t find her voice. *Great, Sara! Now he thinks you’re a clumsy idiot!*

“No, I don’t!” Jared said without thinking. He winced. “Are you OK?”

“Huh?” Sara touched the top of her head. “I think so.” She glanced at her hand and swayed.

He produced a white handkerchief from his back pocket and placed it on her head. “Here, apply pressure.” He put her arm across his shoulders, wrapped an arm around her waist and steadied her. “It’s alright, lean against me. I’ve got you.”

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He led her under the carport. “You banged your head pretty hard. I’m sorry I scared you. I honestly thought you heard me.” He forced his breath out.

Sara swallowed hard and softly smiled. “I get queasy when I see my blood.”

Jared opened the kitchen door and helped her to a dining chair. “Luce, bring me a first aid kit!”

Lucy appeared at the end of the short hall. “Sara! What happened?” she asked when she saw the blood on the side of her neck.

“It’s not as bad as it looks,” Sara groaned. “I bumped my head.”

He carefully removed the blood-soaked cloth. *Bumped? You half knocked yourself out!* He took a penlight from his pocket and checked her eyes. “Lemme be the judge of that.”

“You’re a doctor?”

He grinned. “Did my cold hands give me away?”

“It was the, um,” she sighed, embarrassed. Jared frowned and shook his head slightly. “You know. The *thing* around your, um... neck.”

His eyes lit; he lightly brushed the back of his index finger down her cheek.

Lucy slid a clear plastic box, across the table to him. “Here you go.”

Jared glanced at it and rolled his eyes. “Lucy, this is pathetic. What I *need* is a small bowl with some hydrogen peroxide in it and some cotton balls. I need to *clean* the wound. I *assume* you have those?”

Lucy frowned, taken aback. “Sure,” she snorted. “I’ll get them.”

Sara glanced at him and frowned. *You didn’t have to be so harsh!*

With a pair of tweezers, he separated her hair from the wound. “When was your last tetanus?”

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Her mind was still fuzzy. *Did he say tetanus?* She tried to unscramble her thoughts. She swallowed the bile at the back of her throat. Her blood pressure jumped several notches. “Um, gosh, I don’t know. Probably four or five, maybe six years ago. Why?”

“To be on the safe side, I might need to give you a booster.”

Lucy put a bowl and some cotton balls on the table. She sat in a chair beside Sara.

He dipped a cotton ball and dabbed her head.

She clenched her teeth. “It stings!”

“Sorry. I’ll try to be more careful.”

Strange, he practically yelled at her. Why is he being so nice to me? She’s more attractive and closer to his age. He’s at least five or six years older than me.

“How did this happen?” Lucy asked.

Jared dipped another cotton ball. “It was my fault. I was trying to be a gentleman, and I scared the daylights outta her.”

“You know each other?” Sara prompted, trying to sound indifferent.

“Yeah, we do,” Lucy smirked.

“Oh,” Sara exhaled. *Just my luck.*

He smiled. *She’s jealous. She thinks I’ve got a think for Luce.*

“Sara, this is Jared Thundercloud. He owns Raging Storm, the band I told you about, and he plays keyboard for us. This is my niece, Sara Foster. Oh, and Sara, as you might’ve guessed, he’s a doctor.”

She rolled her eyes. *No joke. The stethoscope around his neck was a dead giveaway – honestly Lucy!*

He smiled and briefly shook her hand. “Nice to meet you, Sara.”

Their eyes met; she forgot about everything. She took a slow, shaky breath, dazzled by his handsome features and

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deep, round voice. "Nice to meet you too, Jared, I mean Dr. Thundercloud."

"Call me Jared," he smiled and slowly stroked the full length of her hair against her back. She shivered. "I think you can get by without stitches. I'd be better satisfied if you'd let me give you a tetanus booster. I can make a quick trip to the clinic and bring it back. Will you let me do that?"

Her face warmed. Lucy tucked her chin. Her niece hated hospitals *and* needles. "I'll be gentle," he said.

Sara took another slow breath. "I guess so," she said, reluctantly. He would never know how much she wanted to say no.

"Thank you," he whispered in her ear and stood. His hot breath made her shiver again. "Speaking of Raging Storm," Jared said to Lucy. "We're still on for practice tonight, aren't we? Unless you and Sara wanna spend some time with each other." He sat in the chair beside Sara, took her hand, and turned it over. "That's your head clean. Let's get rid of the blood on your hand before you throw up on me." He smiled and wiped it with an alcohol swab.

She thought her heart would jump out of her chest. He was so handsome. She couldn't help but stare at his deeply tanned skin. His long black hair, hanging below the end of his shoulder blades, tied back at the base of his neck.

Lucy winked at her. "I was thinking about bringing Sara with me. You see, the kid here plays guitar and sings pretty good too. I taught her *everything* I know. I was hoping you could use another female vocalist."

She sighed and rolled her eyes. "Thanks, Luce!" she said with sarcasm. *Now he'll want me to play and sing for him. Even if I didn't have stage fright, if he's anywhere near me, I'll have trouble remembering my name, let alone song lyrics. Breathe, Sara, breathe!*

Jared smirked. "Yeah, I saw the guitar. Sara, in that case, would you like *me* to teach you to play?"

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Lucy punched him in the arm, hard. "You rat!"

"Damn, Luce!" He glared at her and rubbed his arm. "I'll look forward to tonight. That's if you're feeling up to it. If not, we can put it off until next week. You might have a slight headache from your head-butting session," he teased.

If you wanna spend time with me, I won't let a headache stop me. "No! I'm fine," she blurted. He turned the full force of his dark, piercing eyes on her. *I think.* He stood. *Oh, no, he's leaving!* She groaned inwardly.

"Maybe we better be sure, first," he softly chuckled. "How about you and I go for a walk so I can make sure you're not gonna have any adverse effects from your bump?" He waited for a response, enjoying his advantage.

Did he ask me to go for a walk with him? Alone? Sara had followed rules for so long she automatically looked to Lucy and waited. After all, if there were rules to adhere to, they would be hers now.

"You're almost nineteen, Sara," she smiled. "It's up to you."

Wow! She's right. I'm an adult. She can't legally stop me from doing anything.

Nevertheless, Lucy was sweet and had always treated her with respect so she would give her the same courtesy. She would Kaye as well if she stopped treating her like a child. "Sure, I'd love to unless you want me to stay here with you Luce."

She smiled. She'd seen right through Sara's sugarcoated gesture. *Lucy, he doesn't want you. Remember that!* "If I didn't know better, I'd swear you were hitting on my niece."

"Lucy!" Sara groaned and rolled her eyes again.

Jared smiled down at her. "That's because I *am!*"

Yep - thought so. Lucy faked a laugh. "Where are you taking her?"

"Down by the river."

"Oh, no!" Sara said. "What about Mother?"

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It's official. I don't stand a chance with him. He wants my niece! Be happy for her Lucy. Be happy for her. She shook her head and waved it off. "Go on – get outta here," she smiled. "I'll think of some kinda lie to pacify your mother. That's what she expects me to do anyway."

Yes! Sara tried to contain her excitement. "Are you *sure?*"

"I'm sure. Now get outta here before I change my mind."

"*You* behave!" she said and flashed Jared a warning glare.

"Shoot!" he frowned. "There goes my fun. Don't worry, Luce. She's safe with me." *Safer than you could imagine.*

Jared put a hand on the small of her back and guided her to the door. "Oh! Don't eat, Luce," he threw over his shoulder. "We're having a cookout."

Chapter 2

There was an awkward silence as they strolled side by side, down the pavement. Jared didn't know *what* to say and Sara was too embarrassed to say *anything*. Finally, he broke the ice. "So," he drew out, "are you going to college, in Shreveport?"

"To be honest, I hadn't given it a lotta thought. If I could get past my stage fright, I'd like to pursue my music."

He grinned. "I think I could get you past that."

She took a slow breath to control her breathing. *I'll bet you could too. He's flirting with you stupid! Do something! Say something. I can't! I just can't! Sara, you're a chicken!*

Jared softly chuckled. *She certainly seems like the right girl.* "Luce is right. Raging Storm *could* use another female vocalist. Maybe you and I could do some duets?"

His voice is so sexy, I can only imagine what he sounds like when he sings. She snorted. "You might not say that after you've heard me sing."

"Not hardly," he grinned.

Sara giggled and blushed. "Um, do you sing or just play?" *You idiot! Lucy already told you he does both. What's wrong with me? I've been around guys before. But he doesn't even compare to Jeff – the cheat! Try asking him something he hasn't answered - dunce!*

"I do both," Jared smiled, sensing her embarrassment.

"Can I ask a question?"

He chuckled and answered the questions she was too shy to ask. "No, I'm *not* married. And no, I don't have a steady girlfriend – *yet*," he said giving her a sideways glance.

"Very informative," Sara sighed and lied, "but it wasn't what I wanted to know."

He frowned. "Oh," his voice trailed off.

Sara's cheeks showed some color. She took a deep breath. "I don't want you to think I'm prejudiced, but which tribe are

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you from? I mean, obviously you're Native American, right?"

"Aren't we observant?" Jared smiled. "Was it my dark skin, high cheekbones or long hair? Please tell me it wasn't the accent. I've been working hard, not to say 'how', when I greet people. You tell me. Guess Sara."

Great, you've offended him. He's too polite to say anything. Offending him was the last thing I wanted to do. "I'm not good at guessing games!"

He stood in front of her, forcing her to either look up at him or at her feet. "Oh, come on, try, *please*."

Oh, God, don't beg, Jared. She taxed her memory but came up blank. Since a child, she'd been intrigued with Native Americans. It was one of the things which had attracted her to him. She glanced at his leather wristband but didn't recognize the baying wolf. "Navajo?"

His expression was serious, his eyes were unreadable.

Oh, no! I got it wrong!

Close enough. "Yep," Jared finally grinned and stepped to her side again.

Sara sighed noticeably, still not thinking too clearly. "Do you live on a reservation?" *Idiot!* Her face turned a deeper shade of red. *You're so stupid! Of course, he doesn't. There are no Navajo reservations anywhere near Shreveport. You moron!*

Jared softly laughed. "I live at Wisteria Hall, to the north of Cross Lake. But, my grandfather lives on one in Arizona. Maybe I could take you there sometime. Raging Storm plays at the annual country music convention every year. *If* I can clear my schedule."

"I've always wanted to see Arizona," she smiled. "I loved 'Geronimo' and 'Last of the Mohicans'."

He laughed again. "Well, at least you got one of them right."

Her eyebrows shot up. "What?"

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They started walking again. “Um, Sara, ‘Last of the Mohicans’ was filmed in North Carolina.”

“Oops, sorry,” she blushed and tittered again. “Guess I took the movies too seriously.”

“It’s alright,” he smiled. “I’ll enjoy serving as your guide.”

She frowned. “For where? North Carolina?”

“No, silly! Arizona. I’ll look forward to showing it to you, *all* of it.”

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They had walked a while longer before Sara mustered enough courage to say anything else. “Is Wisteria Hall some kinda plantation?” *Maybe the house is a safer subject. If you embarrass yourself much more, your face is gonna burst into flames. You already look like you’ve been sunburned!*

Jared slightly smiled. “Yes. During the slave days, it was a cotton plantation. It’s about eight or nine miles outside the city limits.”

They neared the curb.

“Then why is it called Wisteria Hall?” she asked, feeling braver.

He pursed his lips and glanced at her sidelong. He smiled again and took her hand. “You’ll understand when you see it,” he said and led her across the street. They crawled over a low, white picket fence. Instead of letting go of her hand, he laced his fingers with hers.

Sara drew in a quick breath; her eyes widened. She shivered. *If I’d known you were here, I would’ve moved long ago. Even if it meant running away from home and finishing school in Shreveport!*

He grinned knowingly and led her to the edge of the river. Every so often, he looked at her and smiled. After a while, it made her feel self-conscious. Each time their eyes met, she blushed and glanced away. She stared across the water. “Why do you keep doing that?”

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