

The background of the cover is a photograph of a vast, golden field, likely a wheat or grain field, stretching to the horizon. The sky above is filled with heavy, grey, overcast clouds, suggesting an approaching storm or a somber atmosphere. The overall color palette is dominated by the warm yellows and oranges of the field and the cool greys and blues of the sky.

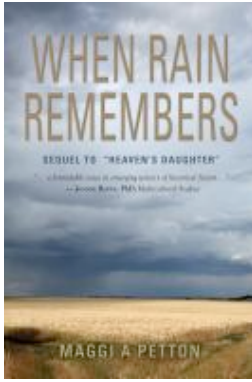
WHEN RAIN REMEMBERS

SEQUEL TO "HEAVEN'S DAUGHTER"

"... a formidable voice in emerging writers of historical fiction..."

— JOANNE BOBIN, PhD, Multicultural Studies

MAGGI A PETTON



Sometimes life forces us to make difficult choices. In this sequel to Heaven's Daughter, Effie is thrown into an upheaval she never could have imagined. Events beyond her control force her to navigate through her anger, loss, betrayal and passions. Her process is agonizing and we root for her as much as if she were our child. But, she must chart her own course - and learn her own lessons - as must we all.

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Sequel to

HEAVEN'S DAUGHTER

Maggi A Petton

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PART ONE

Chapter One

“Effie?” Clara Phelps called softly. “Effie!” she said with more insistence.

Effie jumped, startled out of her thoughts. “Sorry, Mama.” She held up her hands so that the yarn on them would unwind easily as Clara wrapped it into a ball. No sooner were Effie’s hands up again than her eyes drifted back out to the golden fields of wheat where Abby wandered.

This small wheat farm in Hanover, Pennsylvania had been home to Effie for the last five years. She loved the farm and the people on it. She loved evenings like this when the wheat sighed in the soft breeze, nearly ready for harvesting. The songs of the crickets seemed to float on the whisper of wheat, and Effie felt the delicious comfort of home envelop her. She watched Abby’s blond head drift along, her long hair swishing with the wheat in the soft wind, and she wondered what was wrong. There was nothing specific, nothing she could name that made her feel uneasy, just a sense of mild anxiety that floated on the wind the way distant thunder warned of an approaching storm. She shook her head and tried to ignore the feeling.

“Everything alright, dear?” Clara asked.

“Yes, Mama,” Effie said, nodding her head ever so slightly. “Everything’s fine.”

But it wasn’t fine, and Effie was beginning to suspect that she knew why.



Abby let her hand brush the bowed tops of the wheat as she walked along. She loved the way full grown wheat came just to her wrists and tickled her fingers. Walking alone in the fields in September, just before harvest, was an indulgence. She was rarely alone since Effie had joined their family years before. If it hadn’t been for Effie she probably wouldn’t have made it home after her kidnapping ordeal. Sometimes, still, she shivered to think what might have become of her if Effie and her mother, Noni, hadn’t helped her get home. Noni risked everything to help her. Of course, Noni risked

everything just running away from the plantation where she and Effie were slaves. Allowing a white girl to tag along with them increased their danger and the chance that folks on their secret journey would refuse to help them.

So much had happened since then. As Abby watched the shadows grow long, she wondered how things had gotten so complicated. She was beginning to suspect that she might be pregnant. Her menstrual cycle was late. The changes in her body were subtle, but enough to warrant anxiety. *But it was only that one time*, she argued with herself. *Just that one mistake.*

She didn't want to think about what it might mean if she were pregnant. There were too many problems such a situation would create—especially given that the father of the baby could only be Jess Timmons Jr. Jess was the son of the Negro family who'd worked on their farm since before Abby was born. She and Jess were close in age, but he'd lived in New York for over a year and rarely came back to the farm any more. Last time he was home he'd surprised his parents by bringing his pregnant wife for them to meet. But Mabel and the baby died within twenty-four hours of arriving, leaving Jess heartbroken and bereft. Abby never meant for it to happen. She was worried about Jess and found him in the cemetery where they'd buried Mabel. It happened so fast that she still wondered if it had happened at all. But it did happen, and Jess fled to New York without a word. Being with child, in and of itself, would ruin Abby and her family. Giving birth to a Negro baby would be insurmountable.

It worried her to think of how Effie would respond to the news she might be pregnant. She practically saw and heard Effie fall in love with her the moment they met in the woods. Effie would be devastated to learn that she had had sex with Jess Jr., and, even though she was aware that her feelings for Effie had been changing, she did not want to hurt her.

Oh, I'm just being silly. The stress of these last weeks has made me late. After all, she reached up and touched her cheek remembering the day that crazy Colms fellow had attacked her and forced Effie at gunpoint from the barn, *I was knocked out and Mama had to sew my*

face back together. That's enough to make a body go through some changes. I'm sure my cycle will start any day.

As she turned to start back toward the house, she tried to shake her worries about being pregnant. In the unlikely event that she might be, she was thankful that her father was not alive to know. As she neared the porch where her mother and Effie rolled skeins of yarn into balls, she had, yet again, convinced herself that she could not be pregnant because of one silly mistake.

She spied Effie watching her from the porch and waved, wondering why lately her feelings for Effie had begun to waver. Sometimes she was glad of Effie's devotion—other times she just wanted to be alone and wished to have her room back to herself. There were times when she could not imagine her life without Effie and times when she wished Effie would find someone else to love. When she really thought about it, Effie's love confused her. She couldn't deny that it felt wonderful to be the object of such desire, but lately she found herself shrinking from Effie's touch and even her voice. Her own love for Effie confused her. She knew she loved Effie, but more and more she wondered what kind of love it was. Was Effie a friend or a lover? She just didn't know what she felt lately.

By the time she climbed the steps to where her mother and Effie sat, she managed to push all her worries from her mind. She sat down on the porch swing, grateful for the cool of the evening, and smiled.



Clara Phelps woke up with a start. For the fourth day in a row a dream startled her awake at 3:00 a.m. and vanished before she could grab hold of it. The knot in her stomach tightened as she tried to remember the dream. But she could not recall a word, a vision—nothing of what the dream had revealed. There was only a sense of dread that left her feeling anxious and would not let her return to sleep. When she could no longer tolerate lying in bed, she sat up. Her feet found the worn slippers in the dark. She slipped on her robe and went downstairs to make a pot of coffee.

Perhaps she was just missing Jeremiah. Clara did miss him terribly, but life on a farm, life anywhere she supposed, did not stop

because the light in hers had dimmed so suddenly when Jeremiah died. But missing her husband didn't explain her anxiety. This was different. It set her whole body on edge, as if every nerve was exposed.

She took her coffee out onto the front porch, sat on the swing, and sipped. She prayed. She thanked God, again, for Abby's life. Only a month ago Abby had been attacked by a lunatic who pistol-slammed her across the face and rendered her unconscious. Clara sewed her daughter's cheek together, and Abby recovered, but she was only sixteen and would bear the scar on the right side of her face for the rest of her life.

The crazed son of the plantation owner that Effie and Noni had escaped, had come up from the South to steal Effie. He forced the girl at gunpoint to go with him. Sweet Effie. Clara's panic, when she'd realized Effie had been kidnapped, threatened to undo her. Fortunately, the feeling was short-lived. Moments after Clara's discovery that she was gone, Effie stumbled through the door, very much the worse for wear. The poor child was barely holding her dress together and was covered in scratches. Her hands were bound and there were teeth marks on her breasts.

She remembered that horrible feeling now. Although both girls were safely asleep upstairs, Clara's coffee turned bitter on her tongue as the emotion of that day returned. The memories were powerful. It didn't matter whether Clara told herself that things had turned out fine and all was well, she could not shake the new overwhelming sense of helplessness and dread. It was as if she were surrounded by something sinister. It was all around her, infusing her with every breath.

But, on a farm, there is little time to consider things that cannot be seen or identified. There was nothing to be done about her feelings. So she went back inside, dressed, and set about fixing breakfast. Jeremy, her middle child, would be up soon. The girls would be down shortly thereafter, and another day on the farm would begin.

Farm life suited Clara. She loved the daily chores and routines that farm life offered. She and Jeremiah had felt similarly about that. Their ways were quiet and peaceful. They were just far enough from town to keep things that way. Although the past few years had heaped

a good share of drama into their lives, all in all she loved her life on the farm. Still, she could not shake the sense that her life was about to be turned upside-down yet again.

Clara put on a fresh pot of coffee and looked out the kitchen window to see Henrietta and Jess Timmons. As Clara watched the couple make their way across the field, she felt another twinge of anxiety and wondered why. She and Henrietta had become very close over the years, but lately she felt a distance from the other woman, ever since their son had lost his wife and gone back to New York. Before she could give any thought to how this might be related to her sleeplessness, Jeremy walked into the kitchen.

“Morning, Mama.”

“Coffee’s ready,” she said. “Did you hear the girls?”

“They’re up.” Like his father, Jeremy was a man of few words.

Clara poured Jeremy a cup of coffee and pulled two more cups out for Jess and Henrietta. She was pouring them coffee as they walked in the back door and into the mud room.

“Mornin’ Clara,” Jess called.

“Good morning, Jess, Henrietta. Coffee’s ready.”

Jess came in and sat next to Jeremy. The men wasted no time talking about the plan for the day. It was fall and there was plenty to do before the wheat could be harvested.

Henrietta put on her apron and fetched eggs from the larder. The morning routine usually found the two women chatting about their day as they finished making breakfast together, but the last few mornings an awkward silence between them made the clanking of the pans and bowls all the louder.

Clara and Henrietta had made breakfast together for nearly twenty years. They’d never had a harsh word between them, and the silence was new.

As Henrietta finished scrambling the eggs and Clara put the biscuits and bacon on the table, Abby and Effie came into the kitchen.

“Morning, all,” they said simultaneously.

Jess and Jeremy greeted the girls and returned to their discussion of chores. Clara smiled at Effie and called Abby to the window.

“Let me take a look at that cheek here in the light, honey.”

Henrietta greeted Effie and poured her some coffee. As Abby went to the window, Henrietta nodded a greeting. Something in Henrietta's look intensified Clara's anxiety. Both women had treated wounded soldiers during the Gettysburg battle. Together they'd learned more than they ever wanted to know about sewing up gaping wounds, so Clara immediately thought that Henrietta might see something in Abby's sewn-up cheek that she had missed.

"Henrietta," Clara said, "how do you think Abby's face is looking?"

Henrietta walked over to the window and reached for Abby's chin. She turned it toward the light and looked down her nose at the angry scar.

"I think you might take the stitches out any day," she said to Clara. Then, to Abby, "Your mama did a fine job of closing up that wound, Abby. No way you'll avoid a scar, but no one could have done a better job."

Clara relaxed.

After breakfast, Abby, Effie, Jeremy and Jess headed out the back door. The men would soon be in the fields. Abby and Effie would take care of the horses and chickens and start in on the vegetable garden. Clara watched the girls from the kitchen window as they went into the barn. There seemed a physical distance between them that was unusual. They weren't their usual chatty selves at breakfast, either.

Clara and Henrietta set about cleaning up the breakfast dishes. Clara, needing a way to bridge the strange silences that appeared to be taking over her home, broached the subject of Jess Jr.

"Any word from Jess?" she asked. Why she should feel nervous about asking about Henrietta's only son baffled Clara. Jess Jr. was as much a part of their lives as Abby and Effie. It made no sense, but the question asked, she waited for an answer.

Henrietta stopped wiping the table ever so briefly. Clara looked at her and thought she saw the woman's jaw tighten. Just as quickly as she had stopped wiping up crumbs, she resumed.

"Not yet," Henrietta replied. The tension in her voice was palpable.

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“Henrietta,” Clara started.

Henrietta did not give Clara a chance to say anything further.

“I’d best get out to the garden with the girls. Plenty of tomatoes to get in and stewed today.” She swept the crumbs off the table and into her hand. As soon as she dumped them into the trash, she disappeared into the mud room and out the door and to the barn where the girls would be feeding Storm, Abby’s horse.

Clara watched Henrietta’s small frame slip inside the barn door. She sat at the kitchen table and dropped her head into her hands. Her fingers threaded themselves into her steadily graying hair, grasping it in her fists. She held onto her hair, pulling it because she could. At least it was something she could grab onto when so much that she used to depend on seemed to be slipping away.

Chapter Two

Henrietta Timmons could not get out of the Phelps' kitchen fast enough. Part of her felt bad running away from Clara like that, but she was so afraid that she might say something she'd regret that the only thing she could think of was to leave before it was too late.

She loved Clara—loved her dearly. She knew that Clara thought of her as her dearest friend. Henrietta was never quite comfortable with the designation. Maybe it was because she was more realistic about how the country, and folks at large, viewed Negroes. She knew that Clara didn't care what folks thought about her association with the Timmons family and she'd said so on more than one occasion. But Henrietta's life, and color, had taught her that there were just some boundaries one did not cross. Just because she and her family were "free" Negroes before Lincoln's war didn't really mean they were free. They were certainly not free in the same way whites were free. Henrietta doubted they ever would be.

It was true that she and Clara had shared more than most women could ever imagine sharing in a lifetime. It was also true that she and her family had a home and a livelihood because of the Phelps family. But, well, quite honestly, Clara had a blind spot when it came to her children. And Henrietta was not going to be the one to point it out.

Clara's oldest, Henry, had been as angry and stubborn as any child she had ever known. His resentment often took the form of picking fights with Jess Jr. She'd lost track of the times she staunchly held the flow of blood from Jess's lips or nose from the blows landed on him by Henry. Jeremiah seemed to have a better handle on the boy, but when Henry ran away to act out his aggression by fighting for the Rebels, he'd broken his parents' hearts. She was glad not to have to remind Jess Jr. to ignore the boy anymore, and if the truth be told, she was secretly relieved when he'd run off. Still, it was hard to see Clara lose her firstborn son to the war.

Jeremy was a sweet boy. Henrietta could not help but love him from the day he was born. He had a good head on his shoulders—his father's sense and his mother's kind heart. Henrietta still ached for

him as she remembered how he'd nearly crumbled under the weight of his marriage to that horrid woman, Rebecca. Henrietta attributed Clara's delay in understanding Rebecca's destructive behavior to her grief over losing her husband. In the end, Henrietta suspected that Abby and Effie had something to do with Rebecca's leaving, but she never asked.

Abby. Jeremiah was the one who'd had the soft spot for Abby, his only daughter. It wasn't until after Abby returned from her kidnapping ordeal that Clara started coddling the girl. It was easy enough to understand at first, but it seemed to Henrietta that Abby enjoyed the new attention from her mother. It worried her that Clara seemed oblivious to the budding feelings that their children had for each other.

Abby and Jess Jr. had been close, even as small children. Henrietta sensed her son's affection for Abby change as he grew. She watched them closely when they were together and never missed an opportunity to chide her son about the dangers of intermingling. He always denied knowing what she was talking about, but she knew. A mother knows. And she knew Abby felt the same even if Abby didn't know it.

Henrietta knew that Abby was somehow responsible for Jess Jr. leaving home not once, but twice. This last time, following the death of his pregnant wife, he'd left in a hurry. And, finally, Henrietta knew why.

She entered the barn.

"I'll do it!" she heard Abby snap at Effie.

"What's wrong with you?" Effie asked.

Neither of them knew that Henrietta was there. Henrietta stopped. She saw the pleading look in Effie's eyes just before Effie looked up to see her standing there.

Effie turned away quickly and muttered, "Hello, Henrietta."

"Girls," Henrietta nodded. "Everything okay?"

"Fine," Abby snapped again. She pulled the rope and led Storm from the barn.

"Effie?" Henrietta pursued.

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“It’s nothing, Henrietta,” Effie said, but she didn’t look up. She quickly brushed past Henrietta and headed out of the barn.

Henrietta watched Effie walk into the fields where she was quickly swallowed by the wheat. She did feel bad for Effie. Henrietta suspected the girls were lovers. She did not approve, but she didn’t say anything to anyone. It was really none of her business. She suspected Clara knew, too, but it was not something they ever talked about. And Henrietta had no intention of bringing it up. As she reached for the hoe and made her way to the vegetable garden, Henrietta knew that the relationship between the girls was changing, and poor Effie would be unable to prevent the inevitable.

Chapter Three

Effie shoved her panic down as she waded through the wheat to find Jess and Jeremy. Something was wrong with Abby, but Abby was shutting her out. All Effie ever wanted since the day she first laid eyes on Abby was to be with her. Although once the realization hit her that she really wanted Abby as more than a friend, she was terrified. Somehow, miraculously, Abby found herself feeling the same. It didn't take long for them to give in to their feelings. They were together almost constantly. They worked together; played together; shared a bedroom. Once the desires were awakened, they refused to be put back to sleep.

But something was changing. Effie felt it. Abby had been acting strangely all week. She was irritable and distant. One moment she seemed fine and the next she was weepy. Then, without warning, she became testy. Not being able to help Abby, to comfort her or be close to her at night was unbearable. Every time she tried, Abby claimed to be tired or not feeling well. The worst was when she threw a cutting barb at Effie.

"Why must you always be so needy? Please just give me some space!" Abby had said just last night after they blew out the candle in their room.

Effie had been so shocked and hurt that she went to her own bed, buried herself under the covers and quietly cried herself to sleep.

She cried now, wondering what would become of her if Abby didn't love her any more. Abby was all she knew, all she wanted, all she really needed in her whole life since Noni died. The love she felt for Abby sometimes frightened her. It was more powerful than any hunger she had ever known. She craved Abby constantly—her smell, the taste of her, the touch of her skin. If she were denied her ability to love Abby, she was certain she would no longer want to live.

What if Abby doesn't want me anymore? The thought tortured her. She looked to the heavens. *What if Abby doesn't want me anymore?* She fell to her knees and wept into the dirt between the rows of wheat as a light drizzle began to fall. When she had cried

herself out she turned her face skyward again and let the light, tiny droplets of rain fall on her. It was as if small bits of sadness splashed out of heaven to join the tears on her cheeks. She reached to wipe the rain and tears away. Her head dropped back down and she watched the moisture slowly absorb into the rich earth, planting her fear and sorrow like seeds. She wondered if rain held the memories of past sorrows and felt comforted by the thought. Then she stood up and went to see if she could help the men tend the wheat.

Throughout the day, Effie kept her distance from Abby. Whether it was her fear of another rejection or her need to bury herself in work to keep from worry, even she didn't know. But, that night as the girls prepared for bed, Abby reached for Effie's hand.

"I'm sorry, Ef. I don't know what's got into me lately."

Effie looked down at the whiteness of Abby's hand in her caramel-colored one. She always loved the way their skin both complimented and contrasted one another's. On rare mornings when they lay together later than usual, and the light of morning enveloped them, she often looked at her arm as it rested between Abby's breasts and thought how perfectly the colors blended—not the bold contrast of Storm's tobiano patches, but softer, sweeter, like the way the cream melted into the coffee when she stirred it.

Effie wasn't sure how to respond. Nothing she said seemed to be right lately. She closed her eyes and tried to think of what to say that wouldn't set Abby off again.

Abby stepped into her and wrapped her arms around Effie.

"Please, Ef. Forgive me."

Abby reached up to stroke Effie's cheek. Effie opened her eyes and looked into Abby's.

"Do you love me?" Effie asked.

"Of course I do!" Abby responded, but she lowered her head quickly and hid her eyes by laying her head on Effie's chest. "How can you even ask?"

Effie reached for Abby's arms and gently pushed her away.

"Look at me," she said.

Effie held Abby at arm's length, but Abby did not look up.

"Can you look at me?" Effie asked.

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“What are you on about?” Abby asked as she pulled away and walked toward her bed.

Effie didn’t think of herself as courageous, although her life had demanded as much bravery from her as from any soldier in any war. It took courage to seek the truth regardless of the answer, but Effie didn’t realize that she was searching for truth. What she wanted, what she needed, was to hear Abby say that she loved her.

“Do you still love me?” Ef asked again.

Abby sighed. She sat down on her bed, then stood again and walked over to Effie. “I’m sorry, honey. I know I’ve been acting funny lately. I don’t know what’s wrong with me.”

Effie said nothing but looked into Abby’s eyes, searching for what she needed.

Abby smiled a crooked smile from the wound on her cheek. She reached up and felt it. Her mother had taken out the stitches earlier.

“Is it horrible?” she asked.

Effie shook her head and reached up to Abby’s face. “No.”

“Be honest, Ef.” Abby turned to look at herself in the mirror. “It’s hideous.”

Effie felt her emotions shift. It never took much—the closeness of Abby, the softness of her, the smell of her. Effie stepped up behind Abby and slipped her arms around her waist, buried her face in Abby’s hair, and turned Abby toward her. She lightly pressed her lips against Abby’s scar, kissing it from end to end in feathery kisses. “It is just another part of you to love,” she whispered as she kissed her way to Abby’s mouth. “Nothing about you could ever be hideous to me.”

As she kissed her way down Abby’s neck, to her chest, and encircled her mouth on the pink of Abby’s nipples, Effie was transported to the one place that gave her life meaning. Abby. It was always Abby. It would always be Abby.

Effie made tender, beautiful love to Abby that night and fell asleep with her arms wrapped around her. The fact that Abby never really answered her question dissipated in the heaven that was making love to Abby.



Do you love me? Abby lay awake watching the moon move across the night sky and hearing Effie's question over and over as it continued to ring in her ears.

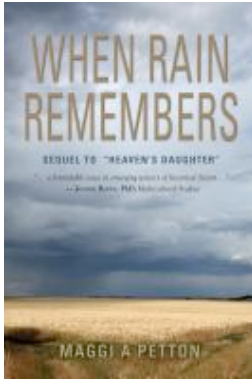
Yes, she told herself, of course I love Ef. I will always love her. She is as much a part of me as my breath. But...but...

Abby gently peeled herself from Effie's embrace and climbed into her own bed without a sound. At first, she faced Effie and watched the beautiful face so peaceful in sleep. Effie's high cheekbones were like her mother, Noni's. Her soft, black hair spilled across her pillow in gentle, curled waves. Her breath moved her chest slowly. Abby looked back at Effie's face and remembered the intense sadness in Effie's green eyes as she asked the question, "Do you love me?"

"I do, Ef," she whispered to the dark. "Just not the way you want me to."

It was the first time she acknowledged it. The realization both surprised and didn't surprise her. As the enormity of her awareness settled around her, she felt overwhelmingly pained. There was no way she would ever be able to tell Effie. She knew without a doubt that the knowledge would break Ef. She had always known how Effie felt, no matter how hard she had tried to hide it. She felt Effie's desire in every glance, in every word, in every accidental touch. Effie's hunger crept into Abby's dreams and lived itself out in sensual detail until Abby, so curious about her own feelings, could not resist her desire to touch Effie, to taste her, to kiss her.

Now, as she lay in the dark contemplating her lack of desire for Effie, she knew that she would need to keep her feelings to herself—just as she had needed to keep her feelings for Jess Jr. to herself. She wondered if her feelings for Effie might have continued to grow had she not succumbed to her desire for Jess. All of these thoughts roamed around and around in her head until she finally rolled over and stared out the window at a crescent moon that blurred and morphed through her tears until she fell asleep in the early hours of the morning just as her mother awakened again with a start.



Sometimes life forces us to make difficult choices. In this sequel to Heaven's Daughter, Effie is thrown into an upheaval she never could have imagined. Events beyond her control force her to navigate through her anger, loss, betrayal and passions. Her process is agonizing and we root for her as much as if she were our child. But, she must chart her own course - and learn her own lessons - as must we all.

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