

"Sarah's Daughter" EXCERPT

"In a book I read," Rose said, "a little girl died and everyone cried and cried and cried. But when Sarah – when my mother – died, no one cried. Father didn't cry. They just kept talking about holding up."

"Some people," Miss Harty began, "think you should never let your grief show in public. Some people never cry about anything. But when something terrible happens to you, when you lose someone you love, it's good to cry. It's the way your mind washes away the grief, the anger, the fear. If no one will let you cry in the kitchen or the parlor, cry in your bedroom. Or take a walk to the cemetery and cry there. Your mother wouldn't mind."

They all eased into sitting positions at the same time. Rose looked at Miss Harty there on the floor and had a sudden urge to laugh. The teacher's skirts were clumped around her like a puffy quilt, and her ankles were showing. Who knew a teacher even had ankles? But then, who knew a teacher could sit on the floor?

"The next question," Miss Harty said firmly, "is whether you want to talk about what happened to your mother or not. Not today. We've had quite enough excitement for today, and you'll need to get home to take care of Abby. I told Charles to see to her."

"Oh, thank you, Ma'am," Rose said, immediately ashamed that she'd forgotten all about Abby once she'd been caught passing a note.

Out of sight, out of mind, she thought. Sarah would never have forgotten Abby. She guessed she had a lot of growing up to do and only a couple of minutes to do it in.

She turned back to the teacher. "I'm all right," she said. "I do feel better now, and I have to go home to feed the chickens, collect the eggs and get supper on. Father will be wanting supper right on time, I expect."

She paused and looked at the teacher. "He doesn't say, really, what he expects. He just doesn't talk anymore."

Miss Harty gave another little sigh, patted Rose's shoulder and gracefully removed herself from the floor. Emily caught her foot on her long skirt as she stood up but quickly regained her balance. They each reached a hand to Rose, who stood up slowly, afraid her head or her stomach might betray her again. But everything was all right. At least her big feet gave her something substantial to stand on in times of need.

"Thank you," Rose said to Miss Harty, feeling her face flush again.

"Wash your face before you go," Miss Harty said. "A little cold water will help you hold up." Again, she allowed a small smile.

"I'll see you tomorrow," she said and turned toward the chalkboard to write the next day's date in her nearly perfect handwriting.

*From "Sarah's Daughter" (Gadd Books, 389 pages)
Copyright Ruth Bass 2007*