

1-1-1999

Hope

Sylvia Masters

Follow this and additional works at: http://digital.usfsp.edu/npml_outreach_advancement



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Masters, Sylvia, "Hope" (1999). *Outreach: Society for Advancement of Poynter Library*. 9.
http://digital.usfsp.edu/npml_outreach_advancement/9

This Other is brought to you for free and open access by the Library Outreach at Digital USFSP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Outreach: Society for Advancement of Poynter Library by an authorized administrator of Digital USFSP.

AM 1

HOPE

I feel much better now that I've decided what to do, Rita thought, sitting up in bed.

It was nearly noon by the bedside clock. Smoothing her sleep-tossed black hair, she turned instinctively to the crib beside her bed, smiled wistfully at her sleeping daughter and thought about the baby's father, whom she'd hoped to marry.

Carlos's fall from the scaffolding on which he'd been window-washing destroyed Rita's hope for a stable emotional and financial future. Five months pregnant, destitute and desperate, Rita had sought sanctuary here, Holy Sisters Shelter for Unwed Mothers.

She yawned enroute to the bathroom and grimaced at the realization that she'd lapsed into the habit of sleeping a lot during the day to avoid deciding where life should lead her now.

Well, I've decided, so I'm leaving today, she murmured, thinking about the comfortable, worry-free time she'd spent in this converted motel, where each mother and child had a bedroom, bath and kitchenette unit, ample donations of necessities for the newborn, and compassionate nuns dedicated to restoring each woman to a productive lifestyle.

Tapping on the door seemed to echo her musing: it would be Sister Serena, intent on discussing Rita's plans for the future. Sighing, she slid into her heavily-soiled, once-white, laceless

sneakers and shuffled to the door.

"Good afternoon, Rita. Rested now?"

Ignoring the nun's disapproving tone, she smiled.

"Yes, thank you." She motioned her visitor toward the two straight-backed, cane-seated chairs flanking the small table beside the window.

"You've been with us eight months now, Rita," Sister Serena said, when seated, "and you may stay longer, of course, if you need to, but our function is to help you restructure your life, to enable you to support yourself and your child."

The nun peered intently at Rita. "Most women who come here are eager to take advantage of our career-training programs, but you have been reluctant to even discuss them. Why, Rita?"

Rita lowered her eyes and pressed her lips together. The nuns were very kind and she'd often expressed her gratitude; but she couldn't reveal her situation and her plan.

"I'll talk about it tomorrow, Sister," Rita hoped she sounded convincing.

"Fine. Come to my office at eleven and we'll explore which programs you might pursue."

After Sister Serena left, Rita stuffed the carryall bag with diapers, prepared a bottle of formula, sat down and wrote the note. The pen moved swiftly, surely; she'd perfected the wording during the sleepless pre-dawn hours following her decision.

Folding the paper in half, she coiled it around the baby's bottle, secured it with a rubber band, and placed the bottle in a paper bag, which she tucked it into the foot-end of the second-hand baby-carrying cradle standing beside the crib.

Gently, Rita moved her baby from the crib to carrier without awakening her, lifted it and left the building.

She walked to the taxi stand at the bus stop, three blocks away.

"How much to the airport," she asked a driver.

"Thirty dollars".

Rita winced, then shrugged, nodded and climbed into the cab.

I feel much better now that I've made up my mind." Sheila informed the bathroom mirror reflection, as she secured her black ponytail with a tortoise clip. "I'll Ted exactly what I told his mother on the phone.

"Two miscarriages and a stillborn baby. That's three strikes and I'm out," she'd stated, struggling to control her tears and quivering lips while she voiced the agony she'd endured for three months. "I'm never, ever going through another pregnancy!"

Her mother-in-law, though sympathetic, had tried to temper Sheila's adamant declaration by reiterating the doctor's assurance that there was no physical reason why she couldn't produce perfect children in the future, but Sheila had rejected that reminder and ended the call by reaffirming her resolve:

"From now on, no birth control, no sex. That's what I'll tell Ted, and if I become pregnant again, I'll have an immediate abortion. Sorry, but you'd better accept the fact that you'll never be a grandmother."

Now Sheila smoothed the chartreuse knit shirt over her tan silk slacks and strode through the bedroom and tastefully furnished dining and living rooms.

Snatching her handbag from the table beside the front door, she hurried to the teal Mercedes in the driveway.

As she drove, her concentration wandered. She reviewed the unsettling eight years of her marriage-- the first year, she'd been uprooted from her Boston foundation and promising position with a stock brokerage firm to settling into an apartment in a small Southern town. Six months later, she'd become pregnant, a euphoria that quickly evaporated.

"Technically not a 'miscarriage,'" was the medical verdict. "Occurring this early in a pregnancy, it's a 'spontaneous abort'." The doctor's assurance that the occurrence in no way precluded her from normal future pregnancies had lightened her grief and depression, though both returned a year later when she suffered a late-term miscarriage.

Sheila pushed aside the memory of the stillborn birth three months ago and forced herself to focus on the heavy traffic near Logan Airport.

She parked, strode purposefully into the terminal, and headed for the Flights Display Board, a route she'd taken frequently in the three years since she and Ted relocated to Boston.

Sheila frowned at the notice: Ted's plane would arrive an hour late, gate D2. She shrugged, ambled to the escator. On D level, she purchased a magazine, then walked towards the rows of blue plastic seats in the waiting lounge.

Rita paid her taxi fare and strolled into the terminal.

She sat down in the waiting area on B level, placed the cradle at her feet, and surveyed the women seated there.

She knew what she needed: Hispanic, thirtyish, married, wearing clothing denoting affluence, not a departing passenger.

Several women fit those requirements, but for vague, indefinable reasons, Rita rejected each of them.

Sighing, she took her still-asleep baby to another waiting area and went through another futile examination.

On D level, she noticed an attractive, stylishly dressed young woman leaving the newsstand. Her graceful stride, the glint of a diamond wedding band, flashing dark eyes and ebony hair resonated unquestionable assurance, so Rita followed her and when she sat down, Rita placed the baby carrier on the seat beside her, then took the adjoining seat.

"TransEarth Flight 629 will arrive at 5:05."

Rita noticed the woman's frown.

"Aren't flight delays irritating?" she ventured. "Is that your flight?"

"No, my husband's on it, returning from another business trip. Airport waiting's part of the price for living the American rat race."

She grinned, but Rita detected the wistful expression in the young woman's eyes when she glanced at the sleeping infant.

"How old is your baby?" she asked.

"Three months. Her name's Hope. Do you have children?"

The baby's name, and that question, brought spontaneous tears. Sheila shook her head and fumbled in her pants pocket for a tissue.

"I lost a baby at birth three months ago," she murmured, dabbing her eyes.

"Oh, I'm so sorry." Rita's sympathy mingled with the surge of certainty that swept through her. She caressed her baby's blanket, kissed each downy cheek twice, then stood up.

"Will you keep an eye on Hope while I go to the restroom?" she asked. "The cradle's awkward to manage in toilet booths."

Sheila nodded.

"If she cries, her bottle's in that paper bag." Rita pointed to it, forced a smile, and hurried away.

As soon as the mother left, Sheila reached over and gingerly traced the shape of the baby's face with trembling fingers. My baby would have felt like this, she thought, her eyes moist and her heart aching.

The infant stirred, opened her eyes and began crying. Startled, Sheila turned, hoping the mother was near enough to return to tend her baby's need, but she wasn't. so Sheila reached hesitantly for the paper bag.

"Hush, Hope," she cooed, "I'll take care of you."

Why's this paper wrapped around the bottle? Sheila wondered, as she removed the rubber band.

However, distracted by the baby's perisistent cries, she crumpled the paper in her left hand while she tucked the nipple into the infant's mouth. Instinctively, she propped the bottle at the proper angle for self-feeding.

Hope's ardent grasp and intense sucking sent a surge of yearning through Sheila. Maybe the ecstasy of experiencing moments like this a moment with a child of her own would be worth risking another pregnancy.

Then, suddenly aware of the paper in her left hand, she smoothed it out.

The first sentance made her hand tremble, and halfway through the note, the words rose up through a blur of tears:

'Please keep my baby. Her name is Hope. She's three months old and healthy, but she has no family. Her father is dead and I, her mother, incurably ill, have gone to join him. Please don't give her to social workers to be sentenced to a foster home like I was. If you can't keep her, give her to a family who will love her and give her a chance to grow into a good person.'

When Ted arrived, Sheila looked up at him with a tremulous smile, blinked her misty eyes and handed him the paper she'd been clutching to her breast.

###

"