

BLOW-OUT

“Hon! Hon! Come back! Hon, come back!”

Mother was calling to me as I pulled away from the cottage in my sister’s gray convertible coupe. I could see her petite figure in my rearview mirror. Mother was not very tall, only a bit over five feet. Her beautiful white wavy hair blowing softly in the summer breeze was framing her face, today etched with lines of worry. Her hands were gripping the porch railing as though she were steadying herself. I swallowed hard, but just ignored her calls. Pushing my foot harder on the accelerator, I sped away. The car was a fairly new one my sister was letting me use while she was traveling in Europe, and on that hot summer afternoon I had the top down, not to enjoy the breeze blowing my long brown hair, but so that everything would go according to plan.

I had only one intention. Although that graveled mountain road was one of my favorite drives, I was not out for a pleasure drive. No, not today. All I could think of was to reach the hairpin turn at Cornwall, Orange

County, and go flying over the cliff to put an end to my miserable existence.

No one would know I had gone over intentionally.

There was no guard rail to stop me, and accidents there were frequent. Besides, I had to take this route to go for the bottled gas we needed. At last, the opportunity I had hoped for for weeks had come, and in such a way that no one would guess I meant to take my own life. Mother was not able to go with me as our hired girl could not be found, and Mother had to be at the cottage when the girl returned. I had not left any suicide notes for anyone. My going over the cliff would be considered just one of those tragic accidents.

Life could not continue as it was. It was 1938, I was only twenty-three but it felt like everything I had ever wanted, hoped for, and worked for was gone—my future destroyed. And it seemed that no one cared. From the time I was a small girl I had wanted to study medicine, and I had worked hard toward that dreamed-of goal. Two years of medical school were already behind me. How I had looked forward to the vigorous, fulfilling years ahead in my career, and eventually to having a happy home of my own. But now, in the space of just a few weeks, hopes for both career and home had all been shattered.

The first blow had come in the form of a letter from the medical school informing me that I had a secondary lesion of tuberculosis in the right lung and must take a year out from my studies. I was supposed to be going into my clinical year! I wasn't prepared for anything like this.

I was aware that lately I hadn't had my previous strength and energy, but I thought it was just the usual end-of-year weariness.

On receiving this news my parents hurried me off to our little vacation home in the Pennsylvania mountains, as the only therapy for pulmonary tuberculosis in those days was rest, fresh air, and nutritious food. The cottage was close enough to our hometown for Dad to commute to work every day.

My brothers and sisters, all older than I, were away, and had no idea what I was going through. Nor could I have shared this turmoil with them in any case. I felt no one could possibly understand. Following the doctor's orders, I had tried to rest but I couldn't. At night sleep wouldn't come. I would lock myself in my bedroom and pace the floor into the wee hours. It just seemed that the bottom had fallen out of everything! But that was only the beginning.

The second blow came the day I told my boyfriend, a student in another medical school, about the tuberculosis. My parents objected to this boy, and I guess because they objected I had come to like him more than ever. In fact, we were secretly planning to elope sometime that summer. But since I had seen the x-rays myself and knew how serious the disease was, I felt it was only fair to explain the situation to him. He came to see me, and we decided together that our relationship had to end. But I could never forget the unfeeling way he said, "Well, I guess we'd better part company; you're as good as dead." That cut

me deeply, especially since I had thought he really loved me. Not knowing how serious our relationship was, my parents couldn't know what this new hurt meant to me. They were just relieved, I guess, that it was all finished. Then several weeks later that wound was opened up again when word came from a friend that this boy I had hoped to marry had eloped with my best friend! But the worst was still to come.

A second letter arrived from the medical school. This time it contained the statement of my dismissal from the school. Under no condition could I continue my training. I guess I deserved dismissal as my behavior had hardly been above reproach! But it was blow upon blow! It was more than I could take.

And so every night I continued to lock my bedroom door and pace the floor. And each night Mother stood outside, pleading with me to talk things over with her, trying to assure me that they could understand and that they did not blame me. I wouldn't listen. How could she and Dad understand when they had never experienced anything like this? I took so many sleeping pills that I should have died, but instead they just invigorated me and left me sleepless. I could think of nothing worth living for.

And now suddenly the opportunity had come to end my anguish. As I was tearing up the road with the accelerator pushed to the floor, familiar landmarks flashing by me, a kind of mad exhilaration possessed me. I had neither the time nor the inclination to reassess things now. I just wanted to reach my destination. Numbing my sense of

feeling, I didn't let myself think of Mother as she had looked, calling after me in her fear, or that she had called me "Hon," the family's name of endearment for me.

I was almost at the open mine—just two more turns to make. Suddenly there was a terrific bang and the car careened out of control, nearly flipping over on that narrow gravel road. Somehow reining the shiny convertible to a stop, I got out, saw the skid marks and then spotted the blown-out tire on the left front wheel.

As I stared at the ragged hole in that tire, I didn't hear any heavenly voices, but I knew that God had done this. Right there on that skid-marked mountain road the Spirit of God brought back to my mind things I must have learned many years before in Sunday school. The first words that came to me were, "He cares!" And then, in a marvelous way He continued to show me how much He loved me. I knew the verse He was using, John 3:16, I had learned it as a child. But this time it had my name in it: "God so loved Pauline Hamilton, that if Pauline Hamilton believes in Me, she shall not perish, but have everlasting life."

I began to reason: obviously God cared enough to stop me on that road, stop me from taking my own life—but why? I had turned my back on Him many years before, and refused to give Him any place in my life and my plans. What reason could He have to care about me? But He did, and the realization of that love broke me.

I crouched down on the road with all the necessary tools beside me to attempt changing the tire, but instead

I found myself weeping before the Lord, He speaking to me and I to Him. I didn't know much about prayer then—my praying up to that time had been little more than “Now I lay me down to sleep,” or “Lord, give me this or that.” Today it was different. Though neither formal nor beautiful, my prayer came from the heart. It ran something like this: “God, You win. I've made an awful mess of things. Lord, if You can do anything with this mess, here I am. You take over.”

Something happened there on that hot, dusty road that I can't explain scientifically; but it changed my life completely. I wasn't even sure the words that came to my heart were from the Bible—yet I felt they had to be. “Be strong and of good courage,” God said to me. “Be not afraid, for I am with you.” How I needed those words—and what comfort they brought to my heart!

Minutes after I had handed the mess of my life over to the God who cares, a car came into sight from the opposite direction. The driver, a man who was also living at the mountain resort, stopped when he saw my predicament and asked kindly if he could help. As he changed my tire, he didn't ask any questions, probably thinking my tears were brought on by the blow-out.

After the spare tire was at last securely in place, I slowly backed the car around and headed for home. Oh, I was dirty! My face was streaked, dust having mixed with perspiration and tears to make mud. Quickly slipping into the house I announced simply to Mother that I had had a blow-out, and ran to my room to clean up. Wisely, my

parents never asked any questions. I don't know how they prepared supper that evening without any gas; I wasn't hungry and didn't go down. I was still pretty well shaken by all that had happened and wanted to be alone to think over the events of the afternoon. Amazingly, the old burden and heaviness of heart seemed to have gone! That night I didn't lock my bedroom door or pace the floor. Instead I pulled down my old Bible from the shelf, dusted it off and began searching for those life-transforming words the Lord had spoken to my heart.

It was hard going, as I didn't know where to look for anything. However, as I leafed through the pages, one passage caught my attention. Jesus was asking His disciples, "What do you want?" "What do you want?" I felt as though God was now directing that question to me personally. Quick as a flash I thought of the verse Mother had quoted to me many times: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." I hunted high and low for those words until finally I found them in Matthew's Gospel—chapter 6, verse 33.

Can you believe I continued turning over the pages of my Bible most of that night? The time passed quickly, and I felt exhilarated, as it seemed that every place I opened, God had something to say to me personally. Finally I came to the passage where God said to Joshua:

"As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and of good courage..."

This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; be not frightened, neither be dismayed; for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:6–9).

I knew that this was God’s promise and His instruction to me. What a promise! What a challenge!

When I first opened my Bible that night, a slip of paper had fallen out of it onto the floor. I didn’t pick it up, however, until hours later when I was ready to go to bed. I don’t know where it came from, but on that piece of paper was written this verse: “As you go step by step, I will open up the way for you.” I knelt down and prayed simply and sincerely, “All right, Lord, You open the way, and I will follow.” His response to me was from the fiftieth Psalm: “Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.” I went to bed marveling.

By the time I lay down on my bed, it was nearly five o’clock in the morning. I was absolutely exhausted, both emotionally and physically. I slept, and I slept and I slept—so much so that on the second day my worried parents called the doctor. “Let her sleep,” were his instructions once he was sure that my problem was simply exhaustion. I slept for about two and a half days. I awoke a new creature in Jesus Christ. This was evident as I found

old habits dropping away, habits that I hadn't been able to break in my own strength. I never again smoked. I stopped drinking. My dependence on drugs was gone. It really was the beginning of a new life for me, a life of simply following step by step. Throughout this experience my parents never tried to pry into my privacy, never asked any questions, though I am sure they were dying to know what had happened. They simply hung on for me in prayer. And, as far as I know, they never mentioned a word about those days to any of my brothers or sisters.