

Tailspin

by John Farrell

In February of 1963, after months of reading desultory manuscripts by would-be novelists, Meredith Peck finally made a discovery. The book was called *Tailspin Up* by Mort Macready, a fast-paced combination of doomsday scenario and romantic adventure involving a dashing airline pilot for Pan Am and a willowy insurance saleswoman who fall in love while valiantly failing to save the world from self-destruction. For Meredith (Em, as her friends called her), having endured the Cuban Missile Crisis and the sickening plane crashes of 1962, Macready's tale of love and apocalypse produced an exhilarating effect. It spoke to her feeling that the balance of the world-system was now so ticklishly precarious that the slightest glitch could bring the whole thing crashing down. At the same time it made that prospect seem almost beautiful. *Tailspin Up* was full of poetry and whimsy and metaphysical wit. Em was in love with it.

The next day she put a passionate ten-page report describing Macready's novel onto her boss's desk and re-read his cover letter for the tenth time. "Dear Miss Hale," it began, "Enclosed please find my novel, which has the admittedly strange title *Tailspin Up*. The title is, I suppose, a kind of paradox. What it suggests is that our world is in a tailspin, that it is out of control and coming to an end, but also that human beings cannot know if this is a good thing or a bad thing. It has been the darling of many a long evening and many a sleepless night, and I look forward to your assessment of its value."

Unfortunately, Em's boss, Lillian Hale, doyenne of New York literary agents, did not share her enthusiasm for *Tailspin Up*. "What goes up must come down" was her reaction. This was an attempt at diplomacy. Lillian had hired Em straight out of Wellesley seven months before. She suspected her of intelligence and liked her wit. She was even charmed by her good looks, including the dimples. She saw a lot of her younger self in the girl and

wanted to encourage her. But in her judgment *Tailspin Up* was hopeless. It succeeded in being pretentious and vulgar and just plain kooky all at the same time. So Em, having waited a week for the verdict, went home on a Friday night in despair. It was not the rejection of her opinion that bothered her the most. It was that Tailspin Up simply had to see the light of day, and she didn't know how that was going to happen.

"I can't believe Lillian doesn't get it," Em said that evening to her apartment-mate, Timmy MacBride. "The book is simply sensational. It's D. H. Lawrence and Joseph Conrad and Hermann Hesse all rolled up into one."

"Can it be that good if it reminds you of so many other people?" Timmy asked. She was actually a good roommate, but this was a perfect example of her how irritatingly obtuse she could be.

"No," Em insisted, "it's absolutely fresh and real. It doesn't really remind you of anyone."

"But if Lillian doesn't like it, it isn't going anywhere."

"It has to!" Em told her. "That's why I went into publishing in the first place, to discover books like this."

"What are you supposed to do now?"

"I'm supposed to write him a drop-dead letter, with some futile words of consolation attached."

But at the moment there looked like no other choice.

Em brooded overtime on the problem that weekend up at Amherst with her parents, who listened patiently to her complaint and tried to convince her that Macready wasn't her responsibility after all. As soon as he got the rejection letter, her father told her, he would no doubt be putting the manuscript back in the mail. Probably there was another agent more suited to appreciate the kind of writing Macready was doing than Lillian Hale, and if he was that good, sooner or later he would find a publisher. But Em wasn't ready to trust the

system. Besides, she and no one else had to be the discoverer of Tailspin Up, the title of which she had already shortened to *Tailspin* to make it more of a household word.

Monday after work Em was sitting in a café baring her soul to Suzy, her freshman year roommate. “What is it about this book that fascinates you?” Suzy wanted to know.

“It’s very hard to explain,” she told her, “but it’s taught me something about the importance of the end of the world and of endings in general. The end of the world might be coming—for all of us or maybe just one at a time—but if we do things beautifully it doesn’t matter. There’s something more important than how things turn out.”

Suzy was having trouble getting her mind around this. “What kind of things should we do beautifully?”

“All kinds of things. Beautiful, non-self-regarding things. If we’ve given up the world already, we have nothing to lose. We can be completely free.”

To all appearances, Suzy’s soft, bland face neither anticipated nor judged Em’s revelations, but accepted each as it came along. *This is why I love Suzy*, Em was thinking, she really listens. Suzy was thinking, *This Em is taking a very strange turn*. “When did you start concerning yourself about the end of the world?”

“This book helped me see it for the first time.”

Em announced this as if her world had changed forever. Suzy was about to say that what Em really needed was a boyfriend, but she had tried that advice before.

“How’s Meredith taking her disappointment over that manuscript?” Lillian Hale asked Samantha Baker, her chief assistant, a few days after the girl’s recommendation had been rejected.

“She’s back on the slush pile and other duties,” Samantha reported, “working her tail off.”

“Spinning her tail off?”

"That's it. I can see she's still arguing in her head, though. She reminded me the other day that Dickens and Shakespeare weren't popular writers, which didn't keep them from being profound."

"What did you tell her?"

"I told her to remember that was back when popularity wasn't so populous."

"Good answer," Lillian said. "I remember the first time I tried to sell my boss Malcolm Barnes on a novel. It was written by a housewife in Pittsburgh, about a suffragette who married the Bobbie who arrested her. Barnes actually laughed at me. 'Even women won't buy that premise,' he said."

"What did you do?"

"I cried in the bathroom and put it in the mail."

"Do you think it was it a better or a worse book than *Tailspin Up*?"

"Oh, much worse, I'm sure," said Lillian, shaking her head.

"Do you remember the first book I tried to convince you to sell?" Samantha asked her.

"I don't," said Lillian.

"It was a poetic account of brothers growing up in the Adirondacks and what happens when of them drowns."

"That sounds familiar."

"Yes, it was Tom Slade's first book."

Lillian burst out laughing. "I forgot what a dope I was. I should have listened!" She had a way of enjoying her own mistakes.

"You should have listened," Samantha told her, trying not to sound too serious. She liked Lillian, but working for her was like riding a tiger while dressed in an evening gown.

By the end of the week, armed with the freedom of those who have nothing to lose, Em had a plan. There was to be no rejection letter. Instead, she hit upon the doomsday strategy of

approaching a publisher on her own. She didn't have contacts independent of Lillian, but her scheme was to wile her way into the good graces of Fontaine, Kemp, and Garber, one of New York's most prestigious publishing firms, which had a reputation for betting on younger talent. (She didn't know if Macready was younger or not, but he was at least unknown.) Em had Tailspin with her, cradling it against her chest like an infant, outside of F., K., & G. at opening time, when she spotted a handsome, well-dressed gentleman in his early fifties entering the lobby and decided to make her move. She had never seen a picture of Simon Garber, the head of the firm, but this was just the kind of fellow he ought to be.

"You must be Mr. Garber," she said as he held the glass door for her.

"Not at all, but he publishes me," the man replied quite cheerfully. "I'm Peter Framkin."

Em blushed. She had failed to recognize one of America's best-selling authors.

"Good heavens, Mr. Framkin, please forgive me. I should have known you anywhere."

"You didn't, though, not even here," he said, "but I'll forgive you. I'd like to be less well know if it were compatible with selling books." Typically Framkinesque, Em thought. Slightly misanthropic, in a good-humored sort of way.

"Are you seeking employment with Mr. Garber?" Framkin asked.

"No," Em said, "I work for Lillian Hale. But I have a book I'd especially like Mr. Garber to consider."

"Lill sent you on a mission? You know I sent her my first novel and she turned me down flat."

"Really, how could she have done such a thing?"

"Well, now that I think of it she was probably right."

Framkin was an awfully genial fellow for a famous writer.

"You know, Mr. Framkin," Em said, "I have a novel here that I think could be a bestseller, but Lillian doesn't believe it and wants me to turn it down flat."

"Do you know the author?"

"Not at all. It was a blind submission by a person who, so far as I know, has never appeared in print."

"So you've become his champion."

"Yes, I suppose I have." Em lifted an eyebrow, and Framkin responded cheerfully in kind.

By this time they had reached the reception desk and the real Simon Garber was coming to meet his star property. "Look here, Simon," Framkin said to him, "this young lady has an item for you. A novel that's been spurned by Lillian Hale. That sounds intriguing, doesn't it?"

Things were shifting a little out of Em's control here, with jovial overtones she didn't entirely get, and Garber was looking at her with a not quite friendly expression. She knew right away he was too well dressed to be as charmable as Framkin. "Would you be the author of this manuscript?" Garber asked.

"No, sir, it's a novel called *Tailspin Up* and it was written by Mort Macready, who as far as I know is an unpublished author, but it's absolutely brilliant and I'm trying to save Lillian from making another horrible mistake like when she turned down Mr. Framkin's first book."

Garber was following these complications with somewhat ostentatious effort. "Does Lillian know you're here?" he asked.

"No, she seems unaccountably not to have recognized its genius." *Unaccountably* was one of Em's favorite words. Along with *genius*, it made Framkin laugh—but Garber was unmoved.

"What kind of a novel is it?" he asked.

"It's an apocalyptic love story about the end of the world, but it's exhilarating and poetic in a truly unexpected way."

"That would have to be unexpected," Garber said without cracking a smile. "Tell you what, though," he told her. "If you leave the manuscript with me, I'll have my assistant take a look at it and she'll get back to you one way or the other."

Em felt the cool breeze of efficiency upon her, but at that moment Framkin came to the rescue. "You know, Simon," he said, laying a finger on the arm of Garber's exquisitely blue suit, "I think this is an interesting story. The famous agent, the unknown author, the underling champion risking her neck to save her boss from her own past. I'd like to look at this manuscript just to be part of the plot."

"Are you sure, Peter? I believe you're involved in one or two plots already."

"I imagine I can handle it," he said a little sideways. "What's your name, miss?"

"Meredith Peck," she told him. "My address is right on the envelope."

"Ah, I see that. Any relation to Gregory?"

"I'm afraid not, Mr. Framkin."

"Peter is good enough," he said.

Peter took the manuscript and promised to get back to her before long, and Em, resisting the impulse to give him a colossal hug, walked out the door with a towering sense of accomplishment that made it impossible to sit at her desk for the rest of the day. A person of Peter Framkin's talent would be bound to see the point of *Tailspin*.

Knowing that Macready's words were being perused by a mind so intimately connected with the higher realms of art gave them new grandeur in Em's imagination. She spent the next few days in a reverie of the novel that eclipsed the world around her. She did not become the heroine, Miriam, or the hero, Adam, but she shared in their common glory and fate. Over and over she relived the final moments in which the heroic couple are flying over Colorado in a small private plane they've commandeered in an attempt to escape from American agents who believe they are working for the Russians. All the time, of course, they've been trying to expose a great international conspiracy/snafu that is about to trigger thermonuclear war. After an endless sequence of escapes, all the more hair-raising in view

of the shrinking window of time left to save the world, Adam and Miriam suddenly realize that it's too late. It's all over and they have lost. Human civilization is about to be destroyed and human intelligence about to vanish, the words of Homer, Shakespeare, and Dante to become meaningless, and human life to cease altogether. Remarkably, though, Adam and Miriam do not think of themselves. Instead, they look down over the landscape of this small section of Earth, all desert and mountain. The last mortal sundown is glimmering into dusk, the only sign of human presence being a few blinking lights. Miriam turns to her partner. "Adam," she says, through morally lovely tears, "the world is going to be so beautiful and peaceful, so perfect, really, without human beings. Maybe it's better that way."

"I was having that very thought," says Adam. "Still, dear, if I may call you so, I wonder how many couples are making love right now, at the last possible moment, snug in their homes or maybe even under the starlight."

"How wondrous, Adam. Yes! Tens of thousand, I would guess, maybe even hundreds of thousands of people are making love at the end of the world."

"Shall we join them?" he ventures, looking over at her.

But it was too late. "At that moment," Mort Macready writes, "a great, outrageous roar was heard, like the mingled voices of all the children who would never be born, and the landscape, disgorging pulverized remains of a million lost generations, rushed upward to embrace Adam and Miriam, as if determined to keep one more love from going astray."

Em's ecstasy lasted a full week. By the second week, however, doubts and fears began to compete with it, resulting in an up-and-down sequence of elation and fear almost like a love case. Soon it was agony waiting for Framkin's reply, not least because Em had given him a manuscript of which, as far as she knew, there was only one copy. Three weeks, then a fourth, and she was nearing panic when a package arrived containing Macready's novel. Em opened it with unbearable impatience and found a typewritten note on top.

Dear Meredith,

I want to congratulate you for recognizing the promise in Mr. Macready's book, *Tailspin Up*, which I find compelling in a number of ways. Macready has a good story here and he tells it with panache. He's got something I'm not sure how to name without using an embarrassing word, something like "vision" or "belief," a sense that things are a certain way and it's important to tell it. The book is a storytelling success. Still, I'm not quite sure it's what I would call a literary success. The run-along style and the somewhat improbable leaps of the plot make me think of it as more in line with popular taste than a book published by K., F., & G. or represented by Lillian Hale. A different sector of the publishing world would likely be more receptive to Mr. Macready's writing, though I don't know if that's what he was aiming at. Probably the most important thing you can do for him at this point is to let him know he has an appreciative reader, someone who will lend an ear. That was important to me when I began to write—that there were one or two people who read me with real interest and saw something in what I was doing, even if it wasn't Faulkner.

The letter ended with Framkin saying how much he admired Meredith's efforts on Macready's behalf and added that he was hosting a party at eight the following Friday to celebrate a friend's book. Em was invited to come by. Perhaps they could chat more about Macready and *Tailspin Up*.

Em's cheeks were blushing bright red. She reacted to Framkin's observations about *Tailspin* as if the novel were her own. Was he being serious when he said that Macready had "vision" or was he just being polite? And what did he mean by saying that the plot was "improbable" and "popular"? Wasn't the world loaded with nuclear missiles at this very moment and hadn't it quite recently been on the brink of destruction? Em took up the

precious manuscript and started re-reading, and for a moment Framkin's judgment cast a shadow. Macready's characters seemed stiff, his style overblown. But the effect didn't last. Before long Em was racing through Macready's pages again, becoming absorbed in the inevitable but thrilling race toward doom.

After several days of thought, Em came to the conclusion that, in the end, Framkin's view of *Tailspin* was not entirely discouraging. The book wasn't a potboiler. It had "vision" and she would have to find a way of bringing Framkin more firmly over to Macready's side. The first thing she decided to do was read Framkin's own first novel, *Summer without Rain*, the one Lillian had originally rejected. It was a very different book from Macready's, about Texas sharecroppers suffering through a horrendous drought. The topic seemed like a throwback to the thirties, the style parched and grudging, like Texas dirt. Nothing could have been more different from the elegant humor of Framkin's later work, which dealt mostly with suburban love affairs and the affluent melancholy of the postwar boom. Yet Em could see something in the "vision," to use Framkin's word, that was vaguely in common with Macready's, a sense that, whether the risks were natural or man-made, nothing could keep you from disaster, but it still mattered how you stood up to the moment. Em didn't know if she would have spotted this glint of philosophy in *Summer without Rain* if she hadn't read Tailspin first, but she was sure it was there and that it must have been part of the "vision" Framkin was responding to when he wrote his letter.

Em left her desk early Friday afternoon so she could make it home to change for Framkin's party. She arrived at the apartment building on the dot of eight and, as she was hoping, Framkin himself opened the door. In a moment she was sitting on the arm of a chair holding a drink and being reminded to call him Peter.

"I can't thank you enough for reading Mr. Macready's manuscript," she told him. "It may not be as good as *Summer without Rain*, but I knew Lillian was missing something."

"Don't tell me you've actually read *Summer without Rain*," he said. "You must be one of the few human beings who can make that claim."

"That's so modest of you, Peter, but would you be offended if I told you I see something in common between Macready's work and your own?"

"My dear," he said, "there are few things I can imagine being offensive coming from you." Peter had a lady's-man twinkle about him, to be sure, but Em could tell he wasn't going to be a pest, unlike some of the less prestigious authors who came through the Hale Agency.

"I don't want to use that embarrassing word *vision*," she told him, "but I see in both of you a certain admiration for panache in the face of trouble, even if it's the panache of sharecroppers facing a plague-full of locusts."

"You know," Peter told her with his usual chuckle, "in my early days I was possessed by what you might call a certain literary stoicism that was popular at the time. That's what I had to get rid of in order to become a convincing writer. I'm not saying nobody can write like that, but I don't have the grandeur of soul you need to do it."

Em was looking for a way to twist the topic back toward Macready's grandeur of soul when a young man who had been answering the door since she arrived came over to be introduced, an extremely handsome, slightly taller version of Peter who turned out to be his son. "Dad told me he was expecting a beautiful young literary agent," he said. "That must be you."

"I'm hardly a literary agent," she told him, but the compliment made her notice that the drink in her hand was already going to her head. Three hours and several drinks later she was still on the arm of the couch talking to Buster Framkin, the two of them having progressed through a pleasantly hazy swirl of talk, covering, more or less in order but with some backtracking, the Lillian Hale Literary Agency, Miss Hale herself (her basic friendliness, her temper, her salty humor, the sharpness of her tongue, her fashion image too ambitiously modeled upon Della Street), the reading habits of Em's roommate Timmy

(disappointing), the hazards of having a famous father (humorously complained of by Buster), the advantages of having a famous father (reluctantly admitted by Buster), books Buster read at Princeton (including *As I Lay Dying*, *The Sun Also Rises*, and Goethe's *Faust*, which has a great plot premise), Mort Macready and his novel, the possibility and meaning of the end of the world, how ordinary Russians feel about the end of the world, movies about the end of the world, movies about planes and missile disasters, Macready again, literary stoicism, the beauty of real stoicism, the remoteness of the possibility of real stoicism, despite its beauty, given human fallibility (Em) or the frailties of the human nervous system (Buster), the potential thrill of the moment of death, near-death moments (Buster's total: two: Em's: none that she was aware of), the human susceptibility to laughter after being frightened, being either the effect of adrenaline (Buster's theory) or of heightened sensitivity to the fragility of life (Em's), Buster's love of flying, the thrill and potential danger of flying, and finally, Buster's desire to take Em for a ride in his father's private plane the following weekend, in response to which Em, however, was noncommittal. At one point Em noticed a vaguely familiar masculine shape in the corner of the room looking at her over the shoulder of the woman he was talking to. After struggling for a minute she recognized Simon Garber.

The next day, Saturday, Em, in a restless mood, decided to go in to work and attack the avalanche of papers stacked on her desk. She liked being in the office with no one around. Not only was the place more peaceful without its human inhabitants, but even the inanimate objects were friendlier, softer, and brighter. Alone, Em could bask in a comforting sense of possession and belonging she had never guessed would come with a job. But after a few minutes of bliss, she heard another key heard turning in the lock. It was Lillian. Un-made-up and in slacks, the *grande dame* looked considerably older, but Em could see she was in an excellent mood. "I didn't scare you, did I?" she said. "Can't get enough of the slush?"

"I came in to straighten my desk," Em told her. "It was getting out of hand."

Lillian strolled in, looked around the tiny office, plopped herself down in Em's own chair, and let out a satisfied, load-off-my-feet sigh. "Nice little place you've got here," she said. "Homey. But don't you have a young fellow to be kicking around with on the weekend?"

"Not at the moment." Em didn't like being asked.

"Lots of girls not nearly as good-looking as you are married at your age," Lillian told her.

"Were you married at my age, Miss Hale?"

"Gosh no, Meredith, I was married much sooner. But that was before I found my niche in life."

"How did you know you wanted to be a literary agent?" Em was happy to change the subject.

"It happened entirely by accident," Lillian explained, settling her awkward body more deeply into Em's swivel chair. "I had separated from my husband and was looking for something to do, and a friend of mine told me about a starting position that didn't pay very much but might lead to something. I didn't have any other prospects at the moment so I took it. I was never terribly literary, never much of a reader, but I think that helped me. I know how to be bored by things that are going to bore other people. If I had more imagination, I might not have done as well."

"You must have enough imagination to see what's good."

"I suppose so. But I see the whole thing more as a matter of will. You stake yourself to an idea of something you think is good and then you have to get other people to see it. You have to get them to use *their* imagination." While she talked, Lillian was making herself at home among Em's possessions, twirling one of her pencils and spinning the loose knob on her desk. Em was glad she had put *Tailspin* in the bottom drawer.

"How do you use your will to get other people to use their imagination?" she asked, sitting now on the only available surface, the far edge of her desktop. She was deeply interested in this conversation.

"Basically," Lillian answered, "you keep telling them how you see things, and hope sooner or later they'll see it your way. If you know them well you'll know what to say. And of course once you've had a bit of success, it's harder for them not to listen. Plus, if you can convince them somebody else is involved, that you're offering something there's competition for, that really helps."

"Miss Hale," Em said, "have you ever had a book you simply had to see in print, no matter what the cost?"

"Oh dear, no matter what the cost. That's a high price to pay for the pleasures that come between the covers of a book. Or between any covers, if you ask me."

Em gave no sign of understanding this.

"There are certain books and people," Lillian went on, "that really tap into our dreams, that make us want to do them good. We want to serve them. But there are limits." By now she had stopped playing with Em's paraphernalia and was concentrating on her listener. "At the end of the day publishing is a business. It's about buying and selling and personal relationships with the people involved, and getting your way without cheating them or pulling the wool over their eyes. You can pursue your dreams, but you have to get others to share them. And if they won't, you go on to the next thing."

"I suppose I have a lot to learn," Em conceded. "I really thought that *Tailspin Up* book was great, especially when the world is so teetering on the brink of disaster. It seemed such a thing for the moment, but one that transcended the moment too."

"As you very nicely said in your report," Lillian replied.

"Not well enough, though."

"You couldn't have done it better," Lillian said, getting up from the chair. "If anything could have convinced me, that would have been it." She was going to end on this comforting note.

"Thank you, Miss Hale," Em said, but as Lillian was heading out the door she had one more question. "What do you do when you have a vision of something that other people just won't see?"

The question made Lillian smile. "Having a vision," she said, "is what we do when we're making a big mistake, because in this business, there are no short-cuts and no going it alone. I admire your persistence, though. There's no better sign of having a real future."

Em spent the rest of the weekend floating in the happiness of Lillian's praise. She even wondered if it wasn't better having her boss's approval than achieving her dream of publishing *Tailspin*. Lillian's words were still wafting in her head at nine on Monday morning when Samantha Baker came into her office to ask in a loud whisper what Em could possibly have done to make Lillian so furious. "I have a feeling she's going to fire you," Samantha told her, "but don't talk back to her. She might change her mind after a few days. I've been fired, and so was the girl who was here before me."

Em knew right away that Lillian must have found out either that she was at Framkin's party or, worse, that she had taken the short-cut of trying to infiltrate F., K., & G. Simon Garber must have turned her in. She knew right away what she ought to do—write Macready a quick forget-it letter and put his manuscript in the mail. She took out a piece of paper, rolled it into her machine, and typed "Dear Mr. Macready," but she couldn't continue. Her admiration for Macready made a small-souled gesture impossible to go through with. Em would have to face her boss and make a stand, but there was hardly time to consider what this meant before Lillian came stomping in, with Samantha trailing behind her.

"You didn't tell me you've become quite the socialite, Miss Peck, being entertained by Peter Framkin and son." Em could see right away that Lillian was in a towering rage. Her

vividly made-up face looked at least twice the size it did on Saturday, and her florid complexion had moved some hues deeper into red.

"I can explain, Miss Hale," Em stammered. "Peter invited me to a book party for a friend of his, and I didn't see any harm in it."

"Peter, is it? Pee-ter?" Lillian repeated, mocking Em's hesitation. "And how did you happen to meet old Pete?"

"Simon Garber introduced us."

This wasn't exactly true, and Em quickly realized it was probably even more damning, but Lillian didn't seem surprised. "Si-mon," she cooed sarcastically. "And how did you meet Si-mon, of all people?"

"It was somewhat by accident."

"*Some-what* by accident. *Some-what* by accident." Em wondered for a second if Lillian had rehearsed this scene. "That's not the way Simon described it to *me*," Lillian continued. "And why did you think Peter Framkin would be interested in you, by the way? Did you think it was because of that ridiculous novel? He's been married three times!" Lillian leaned over the desk into Em's face as she uttered this pulverizing fact.

"Mr. Framkin has been a perfect gentleman," she said.

"I'm sure the man has been perfect," Lillian replied, even more infuriated by Em's indestructible primness. "So what I want to know is, what happened to that precious manuscript anyway? Did you return it to the author as I instructed?" Here Lillian turned and looked up at her sidekick.

"Not yet, Miss Hale," Em was obliged to confess. "I can't help feeling it has potential, and Mr. Framkin seems to agree with me." At this turn juncture Samantha rolled her eyes, spun around on her heels, and left the room.

"Of course you and Mr. Framkin very cozily agree," said Lillian with a sarcastic sweep of the arm. Her face had stiffened now into a perfect mask of rage which she had to push her way strenuously through to get her even more furious feelings out. "I see the clever

little direction your career is heading in, Miss Innocent," she told Em. "You certainly don't need a beginner's job. Your methods are extraordinarily *advanced*. So advanced that you don't even know what they are! You're way out ahead of yourself. But I'll tell you one thing. You can give that manuscript to Samantha, who will return it to its ridiculous author. And then you can take your things and get the hell out of here. And tell Peter Framkin if he wants to be a literary agent, I have a position for him."

"But Miss Hale," Em tried to inject, "I was only trying to get other people to use their imagination. That's what you told me it's all about!"

"I'm not paying you to use your imagination on me, you fool!" Lillian shouted and before Em could utter another word, she was gone, leaving the aftershock of the word *fool* to hold court in her place.

Em looked around the office she had occupied so comfortably and began to pack the small supply of articles that belonged to her. It was painful extracting herself from a world she had made her own. But that wasn't the hardest thing. The hardest thing was parting with the manuscript of *Tailspin*. It didn't turn out to be the kind of stoic challenge the book had prepared her for, and she didn't remember to take it beautifully. She trundled out the front door and up the street, sobbing, with her shoe box full of things. Manhattan was still yearning upward before her eyes, full of people going urgently about their business, as if there were no uncertainty about tomorrow.