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A LITERARY AGENCY

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Mr. Ken Follett  
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Dear Ken,

I like VAULTING more and more; but I'm not at all sure I like the title. But what's new about that?

I find the period fascinating; and both the action in the background and foreground is fascinating to me -- and I think it will also be to your readers. And I think too that with this series, you are going to pick up many more readers than you have had so far.

I do feel, as I mentioned to Barbara on the phone earlier in the week, that you probably should put this through the typewriter one more time. As I see it, there are still several problems of importance which ought to be dealt with before we show this to your publishers.

I'll talk about all this stuff in detail through the course of this letter, but in summary the problems I see are (1) We need to add a sense of the religiosity of the period. (2) The climaxes of each of the Books need more orchestration and building-up. (3) Some of the characters need a bit of altering. They could use some additional background, I feel; and also I would like to enrich the network of relationships between them. (4) The scenes (i.e. the big ones) need some building-up. As you have them now, they seem to me to resolve too easily; and if we're going to have tension and excitement, we need to build greater difficulty into how these characters manage to do the things they do.

Ken, this was a deeply religious period. A character like Ellen (and her son Jack too) could easily be a non-believer; and there's no problem about someone like Philip advancing in his career because of his administrative skills, as contrasted with his piety. But all through the novel (and the outline), we need more of a sense, I think, that these people believe in the power of God, believe in the beauty of an afterlife (or the terror of one); and that they are on the whole true children of Christ and presumably the Catholic Church. As you have the story now, something like the phoney relic brought home by Jack advances the story considerably; but I have no sense at all that anyone in this novel really fears God or loves Him. Just about everyone seems to be concerned with purely worldly motives; and I think this goes against the real flavour of those times.

I think the rest of my comments I'll make page by page as I go through the text.

I wonder if you should begin the story with Tom. A possibly more exciting way to start would be with a scene between Ann and her father. Ann could be getting up the courage and then telling her father that she cannot possibly marry William. This would serve to weave Ann into the story at a much earlier point, and it would also enable you, I think, to weave in some of the political background -- which right now is presented in large chunks which pretty much stop the action. I think too that this sort of scene at the beginning would be a good way to attract female readers who glance at the first page; and it also would introduce a more glitzy environment than by beginning with poor Tom labouring outdoors. **No.**

The second point-of-view character to be introduced, I suggest, should be William. How about a scene in which he gets a terrible dressing-down from his father for screwing up these wonderful marriage-business arrangements which the father had worked out? This would give us a second chance to get in a bit of the politics and background; and it also would show us in action why William is so furious with these other characters later on in the story. We don't want William to be a "sympathetic" character; but on the other hand, we ought to have some insight into him and sense of who he is before he appears suddenly on the scene and fires all the stoners. **No.**

I wonder if Tom ought to be as you say, "unimaginative." Wouldn't we get more mileage out of him if he were a stonemason of great vision and daring? In fact, I think you ought to consider making him your master-builder. **Yes.** Perhaps before he came to work on this particular house, he was in charge of a major project, a castle perhaps or a church or maybe even a cathedral. And what if that previous building collapsed, not because of something he himself did; but because he was forced to use inferior materials or he was saddled with incompetent workmen or some other cause over which he had no control? As you have the story now, he pretty much carries the whole first part of it; and therefore I think we need to make him more than a strong, proud labourer or craftsman. He needs to be, I think, someone special. **Yes.** With this scandal hovering in the background, he would be a man who has something to fear. He might have had to flee for his life. Or he simply might be under a cloud, someone without a real prospect for work if his reputation followed him, etc.

Also if you make him into this master-builder and visionary, you could get something interesting going as and when he develops a greater love and interest in his stepson than in his own son. That would even further heighten the conflict between Jack and Alfred later in the story.

The scene in which Tom and his family is fired from their work would stir up more interest, I think, if Tom demanded some compensation for being fired without notice, or demanded whatever might have been customary at the time. I for one would like to see him show some spunk in the face of William, even though the consequences might be terrible for Tom and his family. I think if Tom did something like this, we could then see how extraordinary he was -- especially if his wife urged him to be silent, etc. The firing scene would be a lot more dramatic too if the whole family were to be present as it happens.

Scene Two should be built entirely around Tom's clumsy attempt at robbery. The dynamics of this event would illustrate, as it were, all the other stuff that you talk about in the early part of 2. *No.*

I wonder if 3 and 4 ought not to be done from Ellen's point of view. *No.* She and Jack could be watching these people together. Their dialogue could reveal a fair bit about their status and current condition; and inside of Ellen's head, we could feel her attraction for this man -- lust perhaps, pity at the loss of the woman, etc. As you have it now, she seems to propose to Tom quite easily, and he accepts quite easily. I think you need to set up some real obstacles. Some of these could be inside Ellen and inside Tom, and there could be external obstacles as well -- and of course the surmounting of these would provide the drama. *No. Tom is a govtend.*

I don't really understand the relationship between Philip and Francis. True, they are brothers; but what is it that each one wants or dreams of? And why do they feel it necessary to write to each other in code? Are these two young clerks already planning some sort of sedition against their masters? Or in favour of their masters? And if so, why? To make sense of all this, I wonder if you don't need to spell out a bit more about their backgrounds. I guess I find it odd that two sons of a London boatman would be doing these sorts of things. You need, it seems to me, to weave in a few more elements to give all this some credible substantiality. *Yes.*

On the top line of page 4, change Robert to Roger. That had me confused for a bit. Also, I'm not sure I understand what you mean by Roger's oath in line two. *x*

Chapter Five, as you have it, is all information and virtually no action. We are going to have to come up with a dramatic situation in which to introduce Philip. It could be in his dealing with his lust, or perhaps hiding evidence because of his politics. But however you do it, it has to be arranged in such a way that the current action in which he is involved is affected vitally by this news which he receives. *OK*  
*He is angry at the mismanagement of King'sbridge.*

Philip also needs a close relationship, a character with whom he can continually interact besides his long-distance brother. I was wondering if perhaps Ellen might not be his sister? Or might she be a woman with whom he has had an affair; and then Jack could be his illegitimate son? *No.* Or, what if he had a young illegitimate son or daughter somewhere in the village? Ken, we need a strand in the novel to humanize him. *Yes.* As you have him now, his only interests are financial and political. He isn't involved on a human level with anyone but his brother; and their relationship seems to be no more than two co-conspirators. So, Jack could be a possibility. Ellen could be a secondary possibility. Or you could invent a character. Or, you might even give him a homosexual lover in the monastery? *He is in love with Ann?*

As the story develops, we learn that he wants to build his cathedral, establish his independence from the local nobility, be the lord of his own market, etc. But in addition to all this, we are going to need a way to share his dream -- want it as much as he wants it; and I have no clue yet as to how you are going to set about this.

*Perhaps religious feeling. He believes the Church represents all civilized values. (He and Francis were orphans raised by monks?) He gets incontinently angry about ecclesiastical mismanagement. He helps Ann.*

At the top of page 5, Philip uses his brother's information to win favour with the Bishop; but on first reading, it appears that he would thus be hurting his brother by revealing this. Again, what's going on between these two men has to be made more clear. Also, for the scene to work (and this holds true almost in every scene), you need to stress the risk Philip is taking by doing this and the possible danger to him if his ploy should not succeed.

Scene Eight could probably be condensed into Nine, since Nine is by far the more dramatic of the two. I would here stress William's risk. Or is there none? He appears to be coming in to hostile territory more or less as a spy. If he were to be uncovered, would something bad happen to him? Thus, if he really is in some sort of danger, I think we would have more excitement. Also, it's not clear how at this point he feels about Ann -- does he still want her, or does he want only to humiliate her?

Hovering all through the background of the book are these political machinations over who gets to be King or remains King. One of the things that we need to know is what do our point-of-view characters want in this respect? ~~For~~ For example, Robert of Gloucester swears loyalty to Stephen and escapes punishment; but I have no idea how we are supposed to feel about him. Should we be glad or not? Who does Philip, Tom, Ellen, want to be King? And why?

Eleven, I believe, ought to be written from Jack's point of view. Perhaps he spots the quarry and leaves them all there. They may not want to go. They may balk at approaching the manor house. And this would be a good way initially to set up Jack's wild independence.

In Twelve, we need more intensely to feel their desperation. Also we could use a bit more drama. What if Jack wants to go there and Ellen doesn't, but in the end, Jack prevails? If Ellen had a prior relationship with Philip, either as his mistress or his abandoned sister, we could then have some greater fortification as it were for her not wanting to go.

In Thirteen, Jack is taking a great risk, and we need to participate with him in this, and then feel his great relief at not being caught and punished. ~~No~~ We also need to feel the impact of this on all the others -- especially the religious reaction. After all, this is the House of God that is burning down.

The drama between Alfred and Jack in Fourteen needs to be encapsulated in one strong dramatic scene.

Both the Bishop and the King are important secondary characters; and even in a synopsis, I for one would like to know a little more about what kind of men these are.

If the Bishop is going to be niggardly about granting money for building the cathedral, I would like to know what else he wants this money for. *Building a cath.*

It's terrific that Philip thinks of proposing this compromise to the King, but here again we need to feel that he is taking a great

risk by going behind the Bishop's back to do this. *Yes.*

Sixteen, I assume, is going to be written from Ann's point of view. ?

I wonder about Ann and Richard returning to Kingsbridge in Nineteen. Where do they hope to live? What do they hope to do? Would they have no relations to whom they might turn?

Ann seems to launch so quickly and almost easily into this business career. I think we need some preparation for this. Perhaps we could see her with sheep and wool in earlier scenes. And now in Nineteen, when she undertakes this venture, again we must feel that she is taking a terrible risk -- so that when she prevails, we can experience this as a great victory. *Or Philip suggests it?*

Twenty does not seem to contain a dramatic action; and to my taste, it's too much like the previous scene. On the other hand, if you were to write it in the context of Philip's problems with either the Bishop or Percy and William de Clare, then I think it could work.

As I suggested earlier, I think Tom ought by now to be the master-builder. *No.* If he were, then we could have some real suspense. For example, will his plan be accepted? Will he and his family get the job?

*The master may bring his own craftsmen.*

In Twenty-one, it's not clear to me where Philip has obtained the money to employ all of Percy's quarrymen. And it's also not clear to me why Percy would have quarrymen, if previously his quarry had been given to the church.

The climax of Book One on page 10 has Philip standing with Tom and family; but we haven't really intensified sufficiently Philip's involvement with these characters. If you don't go for any of my earlier suggestions about tying Philip more closely with these people, another idea might be that he has hired Ann to look after his illegitimate child or to be the tutor of that child or something of that ilk.

Now, as I mentioned at the beginning, we must deal with building a climax, and a resolution -- which seem to me to be somewhat missing here. The dynamics of the novel are, I guess, that Tom, Jack, Ellen and Philip prevail -- despite fierce opposition over the Bishop and/or William. They prevail in the sense that construction begins on the cathedral; but we haven't had all that much continuous and sustained opposition to the building to make that into a satisfying enough victory. *Yes.* Also, we don't really have any kind of emotional resolution. We are going to need, I think, a death or maybe a marriage. But it has to be something of a major change in the human dynamics. *Yes.* Maybe it's at this point that Ellen finally agrees to marry Tom. Or maybe it's at this point that Philip finally is willing to acknowledge his paternity of Jack, or that Ellen is his sister -- but we need some kind of human coming-together, something that will bind our central characters more closely together and that will touch our hearts. *— Tom & Ellen marry. His mother.*

William needs a confidante to define him. I mention this now, at the beginning of Book Two, but probably this character could well be

introduced much earlier. True, through much of Book Two we have his father who can serve this function; but he would stand out more if he was also frequently accompanied either by a man-at-arms, possibly a servant, or even a low-class woman who could be his mistress. Anyone of these subsidiary characters could provide a good avenue "into him." It's not clear too whether he still lusts for Ann. And what is his wish beyond more money and more business? Does he want more revenue for any particular reason? I wonder too if you ought to end with this woman's voice laughing at him. Why not have a real encounter?

In Two, I wonder what sort of office is that of Sheriff in this period? Two seems to me to end too easily. What if the quarrymen and the stonecutters knew they were going to be attacked and also, thought that they could outmaneuver this party of knights. Then we could have a battle of sorts. ~~No~~ One which William in the end could win, but not so easily. What I'm getting at here, in addition to more drama, is to create more of a personal rivalry and animosity between Philip and William. ~~As~~ As you have it now, they appear to be commercial competitors -- almost like two publishers, each of whom wants to do more business; but I think that the involvement between these guys has to go deeper than it now appears to in this outline. \* What if Philip's father, instead of being a London boatman, was someone who had been wronged or ruined by Percy? ~~The~~ The man might possibly have been a small landowner whose property had been taken away from him through one ruse or another by Percy. The two boys might have then been forced to go into the church as the only way to escape manual labour or serfdom. And something like this might generate the kind of real heat that could lie underneath the conflict between these two opposing sides.

All of Three should, I think, be built around a scene between Jack and Alfred.

In Four, I wonder what you mean by "intellectual level." There are, after all, no books anyone can read; so that I'm not at all sure what constitutes intellect in this particular place and time.

Ann too needs some definition. She wants to make a lot of money -- why? Does she lust to buy a house, or a larger house? Does she <sup>then</sup> want servants that she had when she was a child? In other words, I <sup>am</sup> don't think commercial ambition is enough. For us to feel for her, we have to share her dream and know what she hopes to accomplish with all this money she is making and hopes to make. The money cannot be an end in itself -- at least if she is to be a character we are concerned about. X

And I wonder too about you making her so asexual and unromantic. She is at an age, after all, when most women (if not all) want desperately to give birth to children and to share their life with a man. I think she would be much more interesting to the reader if you presented her on the surface as you have her now, but if you also gave her some kind of inner life which contrasted with her surface appearance. \* She might even, after all, dream of becoming a nun and marrying Jesus. But maybe she feels she cannot do this, because she has been raped, or because she had to look after her brother, or because she is bound by oath to revenge her father -- or whatever.

*Her sexual feelings develop now & without her noticing (but we do.) because of Jack.*  
The attempted sabotage attempt by Alfred should, I think, be the core of the second half of Four. And this should be Jack's scene.

\* Philip sees William as representing the old, immoral, savage world order which is now yielding to the Church.

In Five, I found myself wondering how the parish church is different and distinct from the cathedral.

Alfred's romantic interest in Ann ought to be written, I feel, from Ann's point of view. ✓ Your point-of-view characters probably should be limited to Ann, Philip, Jack and William -- as the main ones; and in the first half of Book One, I guess Tom also will be a point-of-view character and maybe Ellen in a scene or two. ✓

In Six, you reconfirm that William is a staunch supporter of Stephen; but I would like to know more about what constitutes this staunch supporter and what, in fact, William has done for Stephen.

The scene about reducing the wages must be, I suppose, either between Philip and Tom or possibly between Philip and Ann. As you have it now, it's not clear which of our characters are involved.

Who in this day and age are the "big buyers" of fleeces?

And when did Ann get so rich that she could buy all these fleeces?

Again we see Ann as indifferent to Alfred; but I have no clue as to what's inside her heart. Here again, I think this needs to be done from her point of view.

In Seven, I'm somewhat confused by the politics. Again we have Francis appearing to subvert his own patron. It's not clear whether Francis and Philip are in cahoots together, or Philip is simply betraying his brother.

And again, Philip appears to get his market so easily. There must be physical, emotional, and psychological obstacles to his passing this information to the King, and then to the King's rewarding him. ✕

I am puzzled by Philip's bitter disappointment. Why does he care whether or not Maud is released? If Stephen has granted Philip his market, why should Philip have any further antagonism against Maud? Or is he terribly worried that Maud will now prevail, Stephen will lose his throne and then Philip will lose his privilege? ✕

I like the idea of Ann becoming a manufacturer; but again we need to introduce some drama. What is the risk for her in this? Where is the conflict? Perhaps her brother could be vehemently opposed? Again, this is a huge and difficult step and in the outline, it all appears so easy.

In Nine, we have some interesting political history; but as far as this particular novel is concerned, our readers will care about this history only in terms of its impact on our principal characters. It's how all this affects them which matters. ~~interesting~~

And why does Maud grant market rights to Kingsbridge?

In Ten, I was interested to learn about the massive taxes which William collects; but I think we are going to need mention of this much earlier. And we need to know too how William is faring now that Stephen is a prisoner.

In Eleven, I'm again confused by the politics. Okay, we have Maud on one side and Stephen on another, but where does that leave Robert? Is he against her, or is he against both of them?

And then I wonder about Francis seeming to desert Robert and join Maud. If Philip's close brother is a betrayer, then this in some way lessens Philip. It seems to me that if these two brothers are going to change sides, there must be some compelling reason, or they just don't seem like very nice people.

We have then Stephen released in exchange for Robert. Am I to assume that he is now given over to Maud? Is Robert more of a threat to her than Stephen? And most importantly, again, how does this impact on our principal characters?

In Twelve, we have a major attack by William; but we need something earlier to precipitate this. What could that be? ?

And then we have Ann financially ruined; but what happens to her emotionally?

In Thirteen, the town is soon rebuilt; but it's not at all clear how the danger from William has been removed. If William were lurking nearby with all his forces and could ravage the town a second time, why would they rebuild? And why would Philip set about doing something so costly and difficult as trying to build the cathedral if there were danger of another attack from William? ✕

In Fourteen, Richard presses his destitute sister to marry; but I find myself asking, what's in this for Richard? And this will have to be written from Ann's point of view. ✕

In Sixteen, I wonder if we ought not to kill Alfred. I think that the rest of the novel would be a lot more interesting if he were to survive and live on in disgrace. We would have an interesting obstacle in bringing Jack and Ann together, and you could use Alfred in a variety of ways to whip up new wrinkles in the plotting.

Is the Bishop in Eighteen the same man we had in Book One? If so, he seems somewhat to have faded away; and I suggest that it might be useful to weave him through a bit more.

The scene definitely should be "set up." We should know well before this what Jack is up to, what terrible risk he is taking; and then we will suffer in suspense with him, worrying whether or not this thing is going to work. No.

And what, by the way, is this second miracle going to be?

On the bottom line of page 18, you seem to suggest that there have been "dawn raids"; but I only know about one. Have there been many others? Or threats of them? Again, these need to be woven through.

The climax of Book Two is a human event, the marriage of Ann to Jack; and Jack's reuniting not only with her, but also with his son



by her; but it all seems to happen so easily. I think if Alfred were kept alive, and he is of course the legitimate husband, then there could be all sorts of interesting trials and tribulations which this couple would have to surmount. *Jack lives with Ann. The marks dyest.*

And believe it or not, that's it! *Philip gets an annulment.*

I am dictating this quite late Thursday night, because tomorrow Eileen, I and Michael are flying down to North Carolina for the day to look at a possible school for Michael for next year; but this letter will go out express mail Friday (i.e. tomorrow), so that you should have it by Monday; and then I'll call you, say, Wednesday or Thursday, so that we can talk over any points which warrant further discussion or which may be unclear to you.

The mini-series for ON WINGS OF EAGLES is getting more publicity than anything I've ever been involved with before. In addition to the review in People magazine which I sent you and the big spread in TV Guide, there have been all sorts of television things. I should mention though that People and TV Guide are the two magazines which have the largest circulation in America. And in addition, Burt Lancaster did fifteen minutes this morning on the "Today" show, in which he told people that playing Colonel Simons was the best role he ever had. And I gather that there has been all sorts of other stuff on television and on radio, plus an enormous number of television commercials (naturally mostly on NBC), whipping up interest in the mini-series.

On other business, I had a phone call from Walter Fritzsche about the German deal, and I believe that they are going to agree to the terms which I proposed in the letter -- a copy of which I sent to you. I expect to receive some sort of written confirmation from Rolf Schmitz who is coming over for the ABA next week; and then Walter will be coming here for the last two weeks in June. I wonder if we ought not to make a three-book deal in Germany, since it appears that we are going to have three books coming out of this story.

Walter, by the way, was thrilled with the idea of your new novel. He told me that for years he has been looking for a German writer to do a novel on the subject of building cathedrals, and he never could find one who could write well enough. The good novelists he knows only wanted to do contemporary stories; and the historians couldn't write well enough -- so he's really thrilled about this.

Talk to you soon.

Love,

*Al* — signed in  
his absence

Al