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A LITERARY AGENCY

ALBERT ZUCKERMAN, D.F.A.  
FELICIA ETH  
AMY BERKOWER  
MERRILEE HEIFETZ  
SUSAN COHEN  
ATHOS DEMETRIOU

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Mr. Ken Follett  
92 Cheyne Walk  
London SW10 0DQ

Dear Ken,

My last two letters to you about VAULTING total fifteen pages, so this time I shall try to be brief -- and to the point!

First, this is becoming quite a wonderful story; and I think you have worked out virtually all of the "bugs", and you have added in all sorts of excellent stuff which promises exciting events and fascinating characters.

Ken, the one major area of development still to be addressed has to be building up your two female characters, Ellen and Ann. As you have it now, they both survive and prevail; but neither one really pushes the action or dominates the unfolding of events quite enough. Also neither one, as you have them now, is the partner to a really good love story. Ken, given the framework you already have, I think you can build one in, and I think we do need it.

William, as you have him, is a little too "black" for my taste. It could be, however, once you begin writing scenes from his point of view that we may see him more as he sees himself -- which is not happening in this outline.

My third and final important point has to do with length. From Chapter 16 on (page 41), you introduce all sorts of new complications and events which for the most part are fresh and new to the novel and to some extent, seem almost like a whole new story. I think it would make much better sense to finish the cathedral, get Ann and Jack married, and get rid of William and the evil Bishop all more or less at the big trial scene which you now have on page 41.

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From here on, Ken, I am just going to give you some small notes.

In my May 16th letter, I suggested an early scene between Ann and her father in which she would be getting up the courage and then telling her father that she cannot possibly marry William. In fact, we could even have the scene in which she rejects William. I think that this would be an excellent way to introduce this character. No.

William too could benefit from a sympathetic introduction. Such a scene might be one in which he gets a terrible bawling out by his father for screwing up the wonderful marriage arrangements which Percy and Regan have made for him. No.

Tom needs a past; and I think my suggestion that he was not too long ago in charge of a major project which collapsed through no fault of his would be something useful for him. No.

Ellen, even in this expanded outline, is still something of a mystery to me. It's okay that she be a mystery to the other characters; but we need to see inside of her, and I have very little sense of who she is, where she comes from, what she wants, etc. I think your new prologue ought to be written from her point of view; and then I think that this curse of hers needs to resonate much more than it now does all through the novel.

The politics are much more clear than they were; but I still am somewhat fuzzy as to why the characters we side with want, say, Stephen as opposed to Maude.

One of my suggestions was that Phillip hire Ann as a tutor to his child; and I think that still would be a good way to link the two of them even more tightly and also a way to link Ann to the child. No.

In my July 22nd letter, a suggestion which I still like is that William, instead of simply raping Ann, might first plan to seduce her. We might have a scene where he and a confidante (maybe his mother) try to set this up; and then we have the actual scene in which Ann rejects him and then he rapes her. And then of course he might regret this, which would make him, I think, more interesting.

Again, I think you would gain a great deal by keeping Ann's father alive. Her desperately trying to care for him in prison, keep him alive, get food to him, etc. would be a nice "humanizing" balance to her otherwise largely business personality. And I am puzzled that she wants to recoup her land and her title, but she does not seem to harbour any great feeling of revenge for having been raped.

I suggested that Phillip use Jack in a counterplot against the Bishop and William, and I still think that's a good suggestion.

Visually, the prologue is terrific. For it to resonate through the book, as I think it can and should, I suggest you do it from Ellen's point of view, and I suggest too that you make the hanged man someone whose death more intimately involves all of our major characters and the intrigues between them. Such a person could be Ann's older brother, or someone related to Phillip or to the Bishop or possibly even to Tom. No. And then, I think it would be good for bits of the mystery to unravel at two or three points during the novel and not entirely at the end. Yes.

I have a problem with Jack being as much of a man as you make him at age 14. God knows, it's not impossible for a boy of 14 to be smitten with a girl of 20; but it seems rather a large gap to me. Would it be possible to make him 16? He is 16 in Ch. 8.

I was puzzled by Ellen's feeling that Tom has led her into destitution. My sense is that from the beginning of the book, she was destitute; and it's not clear to what she returns in the forest. The inference is that life is easier in the forest; but I wonder how that could be. At another point in the synopsis, you mention how she has taught Jack all sorts of things including reading and writing while living in the forest because they had so much time on their hands, while I would have thought that they would have been busy from morning to night just grubbing enough to eat and enough firewood to keep warm. No.

On page 21 for the first time, you introduce an Archbishop who plays something of a key role. We need to know about this man, whoever he is, much earlier in the book. No.

Twice in the story, Phillip saves the day by action that is so expeditious that it's a little hard to believe. The first such instance is when he gets lots of people in to work on the cathedral in return for forgiveness of sins. This is a wonderful idea, and I am not in any way criticising it. All I'm saying is that in the book itself, this will require some thought, planning, careful execution, etc., so that when the Archbishop arrives, people actually are not just a mob milling about but are going about assigned tasks in an organized fashion -- and this sort of thing just does not happen overnight. And later on in the book, when we get a wall put up around the town to protect it from William, that too is not something which can be done overnight.

On page 24 you bring in a sheriff. Again, this is someone we need to know about earlier.

Since William on page 25 has been fighting on the side of King Stephen, it's unclear why he seems to escape scot-free and with no loss of power, land, etc.

On page 32 I was puzzled as to how Alfred would know the child is not his; but then I suppose it's a question of when he first slept with her as opposed to when she gives birth.

Jack, I imagine, would have to spend more than a year acquiring the design and masonic skills with which he returns; and I think we need to make clear that he has been working under some master builder, perhaps on some specific continental cathedral.

On page 39, I was puzzled that anyone would trust Alfred to build anything after his last disaster.

And further down on that page, when William finds Ellen, what if anything does he do to her?

Also, I would love to know just how Ann throws William out of the house.

Ken, this is a longer letter than I intended; but I am very confident that most of the small points will easily work themselves out in the writing. And the larger ones can, I think, be addressed and dealt with by you in a few days. I don't think it's necessary to do another outline. But if you want to, I would advise you this time to write your scenes in such a way that you and I both know who is the point-of-view character in each of them. I did find myself wondering from time to time about that as I read this.

Hopefully, I'll get to you on the phone before you get this letter. We have been trying you for two days now and getting only a busy signal. It's not clear now whether your phones are out of order and your answering machine isn't working or just what's going on.

The one other bit of news is that Bic pens is prepared to go ahead with you and Ludlum for their proposed ad campaign, if you agree to share billing with Ludlum. He apparently is willing. So, if I don't speak to you on the phone about this, please call me when you get this letter.

Also, I was thrilled with how well LIE DOWN WITH LIONS is doing in paperback in England. Publishing News had you at number one, and I gather that's true also for other British publications including The London Times. How terrific!

I am now running off to the dentist. Warm regards to Barbara and the kids.

Love,

A handwritten signature, likely 'A1', written in dark ink. The signature is stylized, with a large, sweeping 'A' and a smaller '1'.

A1

AZ:sm