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Mr. Ken Follett
London ENGLAND
BY FAX: 71 352 5168 and
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Dear Ken,

Between visitors, naps, and walks in our snowy streets to try to get back my strength, I've been doing nothing but thinking about **THE THIRD TWIN**. Actually, the most worrisome manuscript you ever sent to me was the first draft of **TRIPLE**. My recollection is that I wrote you a forty page letter, making suggestions on pretty much every scene and chapter; and you, like the trooper that you are, came through in spades. First draft of **ON WINGS OF EAGLES** also, as I remember, had all the drama of a railway schedule. That one took two more full drafts; and we had a stupendous winner. But I fear that there is a difference between those stories and this one. **TRIPLE** and **ON WINGS** both had in their conception an irresistible momentum; the problem was to bring it all to life, which in both instances you did magnificently. There is no doubt in my mind that you could do similar things with this book and bring about 1,000% improvement; but I fear it would be like putting up a beautiful building with a weak foundation, that problems in the conception could fail to support the weighty structure.

Most of the rest of this letter will address characters and plotting elements in the novel as it exists; and in the end, I'll deal a little with thriller generics which I think we'll need to apply to this book. I must confess that I feel awkward writing you this kind of letter. For more than twenty years, my aim always has been to emphasize what's good and how to make it even better; but with this project I fear that would be a luxury we cannot afford.

Jeannie: As you point out in your fax to me, her relationships need to be solidified. If her mother has Alzheimer's, and Jeannie is her sole support, the costs would be astronomical. In 1983, when my mother died, the nursing home bill

was about \$3,500 a month; and I'm sure that it would be much higher now. Chances are that her mom would have to be in a state-supported institution, unless Jeannie is making far more money than you now are budgeting for her. Regardless, however, we need to see the relationship between the two of them on-stage.

I love the whole thing about her father, the thief, and I was sorry to see him disappear from the last third or so of the book. However we reconstruct this, he could be an even more crucial ally as you speed into your climactic actions. One thought I had might be that his last big robbery before he was imprisoned involved lots and lots of money so that he could pay for the mother's nursing home for some considerable period of time.

We need more specifics on Jeannie's career and background. What sorts of work has she done, so that she could demand what appears to be quite an unusual contract for a job at a university? She would need to have attained, it seems to me, some highly unusual, interesting professional and/or academic distinctions. We also need a lot more techno-babble, which would demonstrate why and how she is in the forefront of this particular branch of computer science. As to her current project, we need clarity as to what she hopes to discover. Usually, scientists enter into research with some hypothesis which they hope is going to be proved by the experimentation; but in her case we don't know what that is. If it's just a study for the sake of doing a study, then it becomes almost impossible to build suspense into the work as work. On the other hand, if each test result brings her closer to proving something that she had a sense was true and hitherto unknown, then all this becomes more exciting.

Her personal life, too, could use enriching. I would love to know how Steve stacks up as compared with other guys with whom she's had relationships. There should be things about him which she especially values and which she hasn't found in other men. To further round her out, it would be good to know where she fantasizes her career is going. Does she see herself as the head of an academic department, someone like Berisford; or would she prefer to get out of academia and work in industry--and what about kids, a home, a husband, etc.? To open her up more, it might help if you were to give her one close friend, possibly combining Lisa and Donna.

Steve: He presumably is a law student; but the needs and requirements of the school which he's attending need to make themselves felt. Woven through even the most exciting scenes of our plot, he also needs to be concerned about moot court appearances, preparing briefs, exams, all the stuff that would dominate his life except for the fact that he's now fallen in love with Jeannie and is getting involved the mounting danger to her. We also need a richer identity for him as a character unto himself. If it's a lawyer that he's aspiring to be, then it would be good to know if it's a person who prosecutes criminals whom he most admires, or does he long for the quietude of a practice which

involves wills and estates, or the frenetic activities that go into business mergers and acquisitions in which lawyers can reap fabulous fees? Or maybe he fancies himself some kind of theorist, and hopes more than anything else to be a judge; and then if he proves brilliant enough to end up hopefully on the Supreme Court? Whatever, he should have some dream which is driving him through the law school experience, not ordinarily a pleasant one.

Next his personal life. I like his falling for Jeannie and his going after her; but it would be good, too, I think, if at some point he questioned the wisdom of getting involved with a woman six or seven years older than himself. Remember that these are people in their twenties, and not in their forties, when this age difference can seem like quite a big deal. As with Jeannie, we need to see from his point of view the things that he sees in her which are superior and more exciting, more special than all the other girls he's gone with. And maybe one in particular. In fact, it might be interesting to add a girlfriend with whom he is in mid-stream; and despite his no longer being interested, she continues to pursue him. That, I think, could add spice and pleasant complication to the Jeannie romance. In terms of his other relationships, it would be good to know, I think, what special feelings he has for his mother or his father, not both; and also, if there's anything else in life for which he has a passion. Could it be tennis? Maybe he played on the varsity team in college; and he's a ferocious player, and it's his interest in tennis, too, that could have sparked his interest Jeannie as he watched her play. What a great partner she would make for mixed doubles!

Berisford: He presumably holds senior professorships at three universities; but we have yet to learn what are the scientific accomplishments for which he is noted and celebrated. Ideally, he should be as important as the two guys who discovered DNA. That would make him a god on the Jones Falls University campus, its most glittering star. But no scientist is content with past accomplishments. He needs to be working on something in the present which he thinks could surpass in importance what he's done in the past, so we also need to learn the thrust of his current research. Corollary to that, we need some sense of the size of his staff, the kinds of laboratories he directs, the grants he gets from the federal government which provide work for dozens of other junior scientists, etc.

We also need to dip more richly into his past and learn what it was that he and his colleagues actually hoped to accomplish with their cloning experiment. This presumably was done at the behest of the Department of Defense, the CIA, or some other secret agency, or was it something simply that he and his colleagues decided to do on their own? And how and why, specifically, did the whole thing come to be buried? Was it his choice, or someone else's? Finally, to what extent does he believe that he succeeded or failed? Did he produce only psychopaths, or did he get supermen, too? And if he went wrong, does he have any idea how or why he did? And would he have been the sole scientist responsible?

Crucial to Berisford are his relationships with Barck and Proust; but right now these guys seem like only one person. Maybe they should be only one. If not, then we need to know does he like or dislike one or both of these guys; and there should be some sense of which one he likes better and why, and which one he dislikes, and why. As the scientific brain, he presumably has played an important role in developing Genetico, but we have no idea what actually he's done. Also, what does he want in his personal life? Does he long for a love relationship, or has he concluded that intimacy is just not for him? And if we're going to keep Harvey as his son, then we need to know what, if anything, he may be trying to do to help Harvey. Berisford is smart enough to know that he has a sickie on his hands; and if he's any kind of a concerned father, he would be trying more, I think, than simply to shield the young man from the police.

Genetico: This corporation hovers in the background, and appears to be a determinant in the action; but we know so little about it, that it's mysterious. For example, what are its well-known proprietary products? And if it doesn't have any well-known proprietary products, what products is it developing that have such exciting potential? Where does it have its facilities, its headquarters? Why do the Germans want it? Were there other bidders? Is it publicly traded, or is all the stock privately held? Does part of the deal involve Berisford continuing to be associated with the company? It seems to me if he's the scientific brains, then anybody buying the company would want him along with it. Was the cloning experiment, something done under the aegis of Genetico, or simply under the aegis of the three individuals? This is crucial because there could be no law suit against the company unless the company itself had been involved. Also, aside from this possible lawsuit on cloning, is everything else about Genetico strictly kosher? Finally, the sum of money you mention, \$160 million, is considerable, and I can imagine that if it were to be divided among three men, we're talking about a small fortune; but on the other hand, a company of that relatively small value would not be in a position to fund research at Jones Falls University or anywhere else. Most private companies do not fund research at universities; and if they do, they're outfits with gross revenues in excess of a billion. One way, perhaps, to make Genetico come alive would be in the form of a character, someone who is Berisford's assistant at the company who brings him up to date on new research developments, new sales, personnel problems, etc.

Harvey: As Steve's clone, he is presumably good-looking. As someone who engineers so clever a scheme to perpetrate a rape, it's clear too that he's clever if not brilliant, also cruel. But does he want nothing more in life than to rape women? People like this, of course, exist, but the problem for the novelist is how to make this kind of character interesting. My suggestion would be to give him some kind of fantasy life.

My next paragraph was going to deal with Jeannie's job as a main stake in the novel and its being overshadowed by our rapist clones; but I have now dealt with that in my last letter to you. For now, I'll just say that to me what's most unusual and potentially exciting about this novel are the clones; and that means, I think, that we have to find a way to exploit them to the hilt. It could be that the suggestion I gave you on the phone is perhaps not ideal, and you may come up with a much better idea; but however we do it, it's what these creatures do or try to do that's going to set this book apart.

Finally, we come to what I think is the issue of what today's public is seeking in the thriller genre. Yes, they want character complexity. They want solid tidbits of new high-tech stuff and/or science. They want a good love story. But more than anything else, I think, they want non-stop excitement. **VERTICAL RUN**, a first novel by an author named Garber, was acquired at Bantam for more than a million. Movie rights, too, went for somewhat in excess of that figure; and there's nothing especially distinguished about the writing except for the non-stop action. In every scene, the hero faces some new and heightened danger. In your case, it seems to me that we are trying to recapture the excitement that we had with **EYE OF THE NEEDLE**; and although in the earlier portions of the book, Lucy didn't appear to be in deadly peril, your other major characters all were. What I'd very much like to try to help you do would be to reconstruct this so that with each scene and each chapter, we have a new danger to each side; and of course the characters must sweat terribly and do desperate things against each such danger. Some of the more recent Grisham books have gotten away from this, but his biggest best-seller, **THE FIRM**, has the hero in a life-threatening situation almost from the very first chapter, and the pressure is not only unrelenting all through the book, but it builds to greater and greater heights. Secondly, the pressure against the antagonists also continues to grow until they too feel menaced for more than their property, but for their very lives. It is just this kind of pressure against both sides which I believe we can and must generate with this novel.

Ken, I'm prepared to devote the entire week starting January 22 to you and to this book; so I feel that your trip here ought to be open-ended. We could perhaps finish in a day; but if it's going to take us several, then I think you ought to plan for that. I'll look forward to seeing you here.

Warm Wishes,



Al

P.S. I have yet to study your most recent fax. I'll respond Monday.