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Dear Ken,

For a second draft outline, I think this one is in very good shape. I like the villain a lot more than I did in **THE THIRD TWIN**, and I think that this is going to be an even stronger book. Also, I love the idea of the title, but I think you could perhaps shorten it by calling the book, **FROM THE DRAGON'S MOUTH**. What do you think?

1. As I mentioned to you on the phone, Jess is our main character, and I think that this scene could easily be done from his point of view; and that would serve the double purpose of getting the story going and introducing your main antagonist. Melanie of course has told him all about Michael and his capabilities; but it's Jess who has cooked up how they are going to get their hands on this information. He is the desperate one, the character grasping at straws to try to save his life's work. He could come along with Melanie, sort of backing her up, explaining that they left the child out in the car to avoid any kind of ugly domestic squabble. And he then could stand guard while she purloins the disk. It would be good, I think, to have the sense that he loathes having to do something so underhanded, but has come to believe that there is no other way. It would be interesting too in this scene to learn from his point of view what he thinks of and feels for Melanie and even how he feels about her child who

Maybe the breakup with her husband is associated with her joining the FBI; so that a roadblock in her FBI career seems like a blight on her carefully-constructed new life.

deserves, by the way, a better name than Dusty. Sounds like a dog.

2. This chapter seems to me to have three units which can hinge on three dramatic questions. First, in the courtroom, will she win? And I think it would be good to have her father there in the courtroom audience, to bring him into the story as early as possible.

The second scene is in the office of her boss, and the question is, will she get the promotion? This time she loses. And by the way, the freeze demanded on electric power should, I think, be limited to hydroelectric power. From a practical point of view, anything else would be, I think, impossible.

I suggest building the third scene with her father around the question, should she take the job or quit? As an FBI agent, she presumably is a lawyer and could get a job in a law firm, make more money, maybe meet more eligible guys. And I wonder too if this professional disappointment ought not to be mixed with the pain of some recent personal disappointment. Maybe she got divorced not too long ago or broke up with a man with whom she was involved or maybe even had a husband who died. Her father, the old warrior, should persuade her or help persuade her to take the assignment. After all, the threat could be real; and he knows deep down that she's someone who loves action. And this could be it. And then she might leapfrog over all her current bosses.

3. As you have it, this is largely exposition with not much of a dramatic core. What if Judy has had great difficulty in getting an appointment with him? He could be all tied up on some high-level project with a deadline for big money for an oil company and thus refuse to be interrupted. To get to see him, maybe she has to all but break in. He could think her coming and her questions ridiculous, and she could have to work like a demon to get any answers out of him. She hates this pompous guy. But she has to beg, cajole, threaten, and bully, and at some point maybe apologize. After all, it's always a good move to start off a love relationship with a lot of conflict.

4. Here again I see three scenes built on three dramatic questions.

First, will the thing work? A lot of tension, and then it does, and then we have at least a small earthquake which prepares us for what's to come. X

How is he going to get his hands on this machine and make off with it? As you have it, it's all as easy as pie; but this, I think, should be fraught with difficulty. ✓

Once he has driven off with the seismic vibrator, and he's on the run with Star, is he going to be able to get away with this? As you have it, it's all terribly easy. This I imagine is a large, bulky and hugely expensive piece of equipment, and he has to be, it

seems to me, terribly worried about being caught along the way.

In the summary of this chapter, you mention that he has a daughter, Flower 11, but she never seems to have any role. I would like to see her figure in the plot at some point; but if she does not, then it's probably better for her not to exist. Also, throughout the outline you talk about the people in the commune who are opposed to this plan; and this opposition, it seems to me, needs to crystalize around one character, possibly Star, since she is secretly jealous of Melanie and then of course later on her jealousy comes right out into the open. But if it's not Star, then perhaps it ought to be some other feisty female. ✓

5. I suggest having the scene between Kincaid and Cayron offstage. If you agree with this, then you might begin with Kincaid in a car or plane with Judy instructing her what to say, his already having had the unsatisfactory meeting with Cayron. The dilemma for Judy then becomes should or shouldn't she obey? She of course decides to risk disobeying and gets whomped.

6. I'm not at all sure that a commune could exist on Federal land for 27 or 28 years without any sort of legal status and without any payments to the Government. Federal land is leased to cow and sheep herders, to mining companies, to operators of ski resorts; and my sense is that this land too, if these people were to live on it and develop a successful business, which they have, would also have to have been leased. A detail, but one which I urge you to check into.

You mention that Jess sold his business and gave away all his money, but to whom? What if he gave it all to the commune? And with it, they are able to build a school, residences, irrigate their fields, all sorts of stuff which made the whole enterprise viable in a way that it never was before. Would that make sense? Chardonnay is such a common wine. I find myself wondering if they couldn't or shouldn't make something slightly more exotic?

One of the things that suggested to me that it would be good for you to visit a commune was your notion that they "make love to anyone they fancy". As far as I know, it doesn't work that way; and as far as I know too, none of these communes get by without money.

The setting off of the first earthquake could benefit from a bit more drama. What if at the commune there is one technically gifted person, and Jess needs his or her help. Without that, he's not likely to get this thing to work the way it should. He needs to be able to persuade this person. Can he? He can't. No way. Then there's the radio report; and this technical expert who loves the commune as much as Jess reluctantly agrees. This could provide a framework for you to work in much if not all the exposition which you want in this chapter.

One of the characters, if not Jess, has to recognize that the

earthquake is a partial victory at best. The Government has not yet caved in, nor is there any assurance that it will. So you would end this with an up movement and then a down movement. Also, this would be a good spot to introduce the tension maybe somewhat subliminal at this point between the two women.

The plot as you know have devised it depends on Star's voice being recognized. In this day and age, it doesn't make sense to me why she would do anything so foolish and possibly self-incriminating. One thing, there are devices through which one can speak but which distort the voice in such a way that its owner is unrecognizable. Or just as easily a fax could be sent or a typed message on the internet. Yes, we do need the message, but Star and Jess both need to be more clever about how they send it.

I suggest setting this scene in the FBI office. They have been alerted by Cayron who has been told that Truth is going to be making a big announcement. Judy perhaps already knows about this minor earthquake, but she keeps all this to herself, thinking that now she's going to be proven right and regain her status. But of course, once again she gets dumped on.

8. I suggest cutting the bit about Star being worried about being identified, especially of course if we're not going to use her message on audio tape.

I like Jess and Melanie posing as reporters at the press conference, but I think the scene would work better if Jess is the planner and main questioner. Part of his scheme might have Melanie along with him making eyes at Hayes and distracting him so that he's happy to tell Jess pretty much whatever Jess asks him. And Jess here must be under great tension. He's not eager to set off another earthquake. What he really wants is agreement from the Governor; and protecting himself and his fellow communards is a goal but a secondary one. In fact, maybe here what he's really trying to do is to find out who, if anyone, has real influence with the Governor, who might persuade the Governor to take the action which he's seeking.

9. Since as you know I am not happy with the audio tape, I would cut the bit about Michael's mother recognizing Star's voice.

And rather than have Michael call Judy, I think you'd get more excitement if you had Judy come to him for this info. And again, we need to make her work to pull it out of him. And in terms of Judy's character, what if you gave her a personal reason to be terrified of earthquakes? Like any Californian, she has probably lived through more than one; and she could well have lost a loved one, a mother, husband, child. This would give her drive to stop these people a personal urgency along with a professional one. ✓

11. This chapter works well as you have it; but it seems to chop off in the middle. The real drama, it seems to me, is in her thrashing about with various options. And now it occurs to me that

you may have an easier time if you decide to give her a sidekick. If not, so much of her action is going to be in the form of interior monologue, maybe too much. So, she could have a young man or woman as an assistant, or maybe even better, you could involve her all the way through with her father.

12. Here I would urge you to consider a somewhat different scene. What if at the press conference, he has learned from Hayes something about Cayron. And now it's Cayron who he approaches in a bar or on a golf course or at a marina because Cayron is such an avid sailor, or something of that ilk. Of greater concern to Jess than the FBI's plans are the Governor's intentions and what can be done, if anything, to push the Governor over the edge. Jess could pretend to have land that was affected by the most recent earthquake and he's worried. Or you could come up with some pretense which is more clever and more diabolical; but the net result should be, I think, that Jess comes away learning that short of a huge disaster, this Governor is just not going to cave in. And now he must wrestle in his soul with what to do next. BWA

The romance between Michael and Judy starts, I think too late. By the time we get to Chapter 19, I think that they should be getting into the sack; and if that's going to happen, I think we need an intervening scene around this point or maybe even earlier to get the romance going.

And as for tracking down Star or whoever sent the message, I would prefer something ingeniously high-tech. Some exotic way to trace the origin of something sent on the internet. Or a stakeout at a public faxing facility from which the fax was sent. I don't have a clear solution, but we need something stronger than what you have.

14. Good.

15. This would work better if you set it up. Judy is agonized. What should she do? She knows about the meeting with Cayron, and maybe with her father's advice decides to take the plunge and gate crash. Then of course things would continue as you have them. ✓

16. Earlier in the book and especially here we are going to need a sense of how beautiful and idyllic this valley is. These communards have been together for 20 or so years, have raised children here, have weathered natural disasters, lived through crop failures, survived various kinds of hardships, seen their kids grow, some prosper and some get into trouble; and they now must search deeply about how far they'll go to hang on to all this. But for the searching to make sense and to have emotional impact, we will need a rich sense of place. And probably it all shouldn't be perfect. There may be some things about this valley and about the way they live that some of the communards don't like at all. And as in any group of twenty or forty or sixty people, there is bound to be jealousy, antagonism, decisiveness, etc.

The scene, I think, should be from Jess' point of view, and it's close to a life-and-death struggle for him to persuade these peace-loving people to do what he thinks they should.

17. This works well; but for you to develop excitement and tension, she does need to play off someone.

18. Set up the visit of the FBI agent. They know that he or she is coming; and Jess might be behind the scenes trying to handle this, instructing people what to say and do before the agent arrives, listening behind a closed door and maybe even sending out replacements who say things that he has instructed them to say. Melanie could bamboozle the agent, but it should be Jess behind the scene who is controlling things. And perhaps the agent should be Judy herself? ✓

19. Here, as I suggested earlier, is where I think the love affair should start.

20. Jess here, I think, should be more desperate than he's ever been. he does not want to set off another earthquake if he possibly can help it. So, instead of spending another evening with Marvin Hayes, maybe he does something extreme like briefly kidnapping Cayron. What he wants to do more than anything else is scare Cayron into scaring the Governor.

21. The basic action here is fine; but I think now Judy should be in constant touch with the Governor and/or Cayron. We need this, I think, to emphasize the terror that they feel for themselves and for the people of the state.

22. This is the one chapter in the entire book that doesn't involve either Jess or Judy. Maybe it should take place offstage, and then you could combine it with the next chapter with Melanie reporting back to Jess?

23, 24. No comment here, these both seem straightforward and excellent.

25. You say that Jess must hide his seismic vibrator "for the next earthquake". But is there no chance now that the Governor may cave in? This earthquake has wrecked havoc. It's killed people. Jess' first assumption, I think, must be that now finally the Governor will cave in. But all that happens, of course, is that at this point the Governor perhaps makes public the threat, makes public the fact that he will not give in to terrorists, et cetera; and then Jess goes off the deep end and becomes so furious that his battle takes on a personal cast. To put it differently, I think that these issues need to be considered by Jess, Melanie and their cohorts before they rush into getting ready for the next earthquake.

26, 27, 28. All okay.

30. Michael's parents, we learn, live well away from the faultline; but how close does Michael live?

31. How would Judy "guess" that the buyer might be Michael's wife? Has she seen pictures of Melanie at Michael's house?

32. Again, Judy makes a lucky guess. It would work better if she could do something ingenious that leads her to this conclusion. ✓

33. Again we have a scene with none of our principals. What happens here could be discovered by Judy from a voice mail message at Michael's house.

34. Judy I think should be part of this raid; but we need earlier to set up Star as a woman scorned.

35. How does Michael realize that Melanie has used him and betrayed him? We need something concrete to make this happen.

37-40. Your climax is powerful; but it reminds me somewhat of what we had in your ending for the outline to **THE MAN FROM ST. PETERSBURG**, lots of action and nothing personal. What I suggest is that you redo the construction here so that you interpolate personal confrontations with the ferocious action. Judy and Jess, I think, need to come face to face as do Jess and Cayron, maybe Judy and Kincaid, maybe even Jess and the Governor.

Ken, if you'd like to talk about any of this before we get together, I'll be here on Sugarloaf through Friday the 21st, returning to New York on Saturday. If you don't have my number with you, it's (305) 745-1373; and if I don't hear from you, I'll come up to your hotel Monday around 9am, unless you tell me some other time is better. I'm assuming that you're staying at the Peninsula.

Warm Wishes,

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