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Mr. Ken Follett
London, England

by fax

Dear Ken,

The problem with Melissa, and you're quite right about her, is that in all the planning and scheming we never gave her a thrust of her own; and it's tough to make a character interesting unless there's something he or she desperately wants, is trying to accomplish, etc.

When I got your letter, I started to come up with various possibilities among which were a desire on her part to achieve something in music, a fanatic obsession with the health of her child, a nymphomaniacal lust for Jess, but none of those worked for me in the sense that they made her interesting or someone with whom readers could identify.

But today I hit on something which I think could work for you and would also tie in neatly with the plot. What if her running away from her husband and her obsession with Jess and life in the country were all part and parcel of her becoming a New Age person? This in California these days is not an uncommon phenomenon. She is a woman looking for answers, trying to find them through Yoga, meditation, attaining levels of higher consciousness. Some of this could stem from her rebellion against the strictly scientific character of her husband. I think she should be a strict vegetarian, someone who avoids all processed foods and tries to eat only raw vegetables and fruits, maybe some nuts. One of her main goals in life has to be to try and get Jess and everyone else at the commune to adopt her dietary preferences. Maybe she wants to start classes in Yoga or meditation or some other esoteric New Age techniques. What if she wants to turn the commune into an ashram and bring in someone who she thinks is a guru? Yes, she wants to help Jess do everything possible to preserve the commune (which is why she's not against the earthquakes), but she wants more than just to preserve the place as it is. She sees it reaching for a "higher" goal. She's one of the millions who sees deep meaning in **THE CELESTINE PROPHECY**.

I've probably thrown more stuff at you than you possibly can use; but even a fraction of what's above, I think, could be useful. And there are, of course, a ton of books on the subject (more coming out every day), which you could draw on to help form her character.

So, let me know if this is congenial to you; and if not, I guess we'll try something else.

Warm wishes,

Al

P.S. She could be an astrologer, trying to pick propitious moments for the things they're attempting.