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Dear Ken

I have, at last, finished my first edit on JACKDAWS AT NIGHTFALL, and must apologise for taking longer than I'd intended. I was going to do a quick read, and come back with general comments, but I found myself jotting down fairly detailed notes which may be useful to you at this stage.

First, I must tell you how much I enjoyed the plot: it's well done, and full of incident so that it races through towards the end. Flick is a great character, and as such, stands out throughout the book. I would have liked to have met her!

It's going to be a dream of a book to pitch, and I'm sure will hit the spot with the readers out there. Apart from anything, the whole idea of the female resistance team is so terrifically appealing, and such a clever idea.

I'm going to start with some general points, then will add my page by page points (some of which are probably unbearably pedantic).

- ① First off is Flick, who I've already said is a marvellous character. However, I think we need more of her background: at the beginning, she makes reference to 'the Earl' etc, we are never actually told about her upbringing as the child of a housekeeper in a large country home, so that when we first meet Diana and Flick's mother, it's all a bit of a mystery. I thought, at first, I'd missed a vital bit, but I'm sure this early background isn't there. See my detailed notes for pages references.

I also think that Flick is so strong throughout the book, that some of the other important figures – Paul and Michel notably – rather pale into insignificance. I found

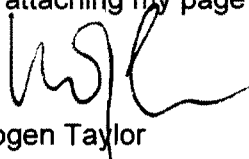
- ② Paul a tiny bit wet behind the ears, and wonder whether you might think of beefing him up a bit. He's so deferential towards his father, he seems like a small boy at times. Again, see my more detailed notes.
- ③ Michel is not particularly rounded, partly, I know, because he becomes such a peripheral figure. However, I think, especially when we are first introduced to him, that he needs to be charismatic, and especially sexually charismatic, if you see what I mean. Perhaps more of a reaction from Flick when she finds out about Gilberte, a recognition that, of course Gilberte and Michel are made for one another in a way that she and Michel never were – the physical pull is there. He is, after all, the head of the local resistance team, too, which says something.
- ④ This brings me to the first love scene between Paul and Flick. I'm not sure why, but it just doesn't seem very charged to me. Somehow, Flick asking Paul about whether or not he used 'precautions' in his first sexual experience makes it all seem a bit clinical.

The shaving, later, is good, but I think you need a sense of extraordinary intimacy, a mutual knowledge and understanding, straight off rather than Flick asking Paul these rather controlling questions.

- ⑤ Dieter is excellent: full of a combination of menace and intellect and I like him hugely. So much so that I felt, and you may well not agree, that the scene right at the end where he is left a mindless, gibbering wreck in the care of his wife is unnecessary. I felt it was more poignant to leave him dying in the vineyard. I also felt that your portrayal of his devastation after discovering Stephanie was excellent, and really says everything about him.
- ⑥ Finally, on a plot point, I found myself wondering constantly why Brian Standish (and he gets called Standish and Standall intermittently, but you'll see my notes) didn't tell Michel that there were two people at Mademoiselle Lemas's house. Was it his lack of experience? Of course, if Michel had known of another person, then he would glean that their cover had been blown... You might want to insert a sentence or two to clarify this one. See my detailed notes.
- ⑦ I felt, by the way, that the pace really took off on Days 8/9 and onwards, which, of course, is what you intended. However, there are a few longeurs early on which I think may be caused by the jumping around from England to France to German quarters and such like. You might want to take a look at the early chapters for pacing.

It's a great book Ken, and I think you've achieved something really special with Flick. Many, many congratulations.

I'm attaching my page notes following: meantime, very good wishes to you,



Imogen Taylor

P4 I've made some minor changes here for flow:
Line 5 A seventeenth century palace, it was a small version of...
Line 12 I don't think we need the 'like a native'. Suggest delete
Line 16 Suggest 'Flick was wearing a shapeless, faded' rather than 'had on'
Line 18 Suggest 'The real France, though, would come back' – to avoid 'But' at the beginning of the sentence. Likewise 'And' later.
Line 22 suggest 'The chateau had once been home to the aristocracy' rather Than 'an aristocratic residence'

P5
Line 2 suggest 'The chateau' rather than 'the building'
Line 4 Suggest 'they would intersect at Sainte-Cecile. Yet, according to local legend, the real reason it was here....' Then delete 'back in 1934'
Line 11 suggest 'put her life at risk' rather than 'do something dangerous'
Line 12 I've altered this substantially to read 'She had accepted without thinking about it very much. There was a war on after al. Most of the students she had been with at Oxford were doing the same.'
Line 22 suggest 'acts of sabotage'

Page 7
Line 1 'under military discipline' seems very American and out of keeping with British wartime language. Suggest 'were not obliged to obey orders. They would do so if the agent was knowledgeable and authoritative and not otherwise. Flick...'
Line 8 Delete 'to the point of paranoia'. It suggest hysteria, somehow. See other very minor changes on this page on mss.

Page 8
Delete 'and people would follow him in to Hell'. It's much punchy without.
Para 3 I've changed last lines to read 'a restricted area, open to Gestap personnel only.' I've made some other, minor changes to the mss.

Page 9
Line 4 'prevail against' sounds rather archaic. How about 'they were not like to overcome/succeed against disciplined German troops'

Page 10
Line 4 Delete 'swanky'. Last line seemed a little clunky, somehow, so I've changed it to read 'Flick and Michel stood up and strolled casually into the doorway of the Bar Sport, inconspicuously taking cover.'

Page 13
and page 14, I've made some minor changes, for fluency, particularly page 14 about Dieter's background which now reads, 'and Weber had resented Dieter for his comparative success' I don't feel we need more.

Page 16
Minor changes here, including line 1, 'Flick stood behind Michel in the doorway of the Bar Sport'

Page 18
Para 3 seemed to need a bit of pace to emphasise the extraordinary action, so I've changed it to read 'At last the Germans began to act: the guards took cover.... The redhead turned and ran, but her stiletto shoes stuck on the cobblestones and she fell'

- Page 19 I've made quite a few amendments here: best to see the mss. Likewise pages 20 thru 23. On page 22 I've added 'after all, she had provided a plan of the chateau' because actually your reader already knows this.
- Page 27
Line 20 suggest 'The woman came forward, shooting a look of hatred at Stephanie'
- Page 28 You have some repetition of 'Dieter guessed that' here, so I've made alterations.
'Wireless listening room'. I assume you mean radio listening room, but you might want to clarify.
- Page 29 Delete line about wives and graveyards: too much.
Page 30 I've deleted, in Para 2, the series of questions here because I think the reader would surmise all this. It now reads ' a great deal of information about the Resistance. If he could penetrate their network, he could inflict a great deal of damage in the time remaining before the Allied Invasion'
- Page 31 Is Bertrand deliberately calling himself Bernard here?
Page 35 See minor changes on mss.
- Page 36 See my changes here, because we know all about Antoinette's pass etc.
- Page 38 'Breathing hard' rather than 'blowing hard'?
Page 40 Michel seems to know the lay out of Gilberte's flat intimately(para 2). Wouldn't Flick already be quizzical about why? And last line, suggest 'shaving kit' rather than 'tackle'
- Page 41 I think 'mistress' rather than slightly quaint 'floozie'
Page 43
Para 2 I found myself confused here about measurements – should it read 'the minimum practical length was six hundred metres' or something.
- Page 47
Line 3 a 'tireless' engine sounds odd. Suggest 'its massive eleven-litre engine was still very powerful'
- Line 22/23 instead of 'brain' suggest 'intellect'
- Page 48 Some of the phrasing needs clarifying here – see my markings.
- Page 49 Line 4, which is a sentence that Dieter has rehearsed, reads 'You asked me for an estimate of the potential of the French Resistance to hamper your response to an Allied invasion' It seems very long-winded for a rehearsed line to me. Can you re-jig it? Something like 'You asked me to find out how strong the Resistance were, whether they could pose a serious threat to you if the Allies invade' or some such.
- Page 50 Line 3. Can Rommel say 'A conceited plan' rather than as it reads now. It sounds a little less playground, if you see what I mean.

- Page 93 'I can't tell you' rather than 'I'm not supposed to tell you'. I don't think Percy would say that, it wouldn't be part of his ex-Army make-up.
- Page 95 Here we have Flick going to Somersholme, but I think we should have much more of this background earlier.
- Page 97/98 Referring to Flick's mother as Ma reads very oddly, so I've changed it where I can. It's OK in dialogue, I think, but not as part of the narrative.
- Page 100 'revisiting' her decision sounds a very contemporary thought/phrase. I've altered it to read 'She had made a decision and she would stick to it'
- Page 102/03 I think the British refer to 'the Army' not 'the Military'. And on page 103 I don't think Diana would need the explanation of rank – somehow people just knew back then.
- Page 105 line 2. Dieter has been given a 'hot lead'. Too contemporary, suggest 'vital information'
- Page 107 Halfway down 'Rommel feels it is crucially important etc etc'. This needs tightening up, I think.
- Page 109 Rectilinear flower beds. Can we just have rectangular?
- Page 111 'You're not serious' sounds too contemporary. How about 'Don't be ridiculous!'.
Could you look at Dieter's speech to M. Lemas: it needs tightening up, I think.
- Page 115 'terrorist'. I don't think this term was used at that time. Suggest delete and finish with 'aiding the British'
- Page 116 Percy uses 'bullshit', but I think he'd say something like 'stuff and nonsense' in his Army duffer way.
- Page 117 Minor alterations here
- Page 118 see changes
- Page 120 Paul and Percy leave Maude's file on the table: I just don't think they'd be this indiscreet. Could you suggest they've seen it earlier, or something.
- Page 122 'letting his irritation sound in his voice'. Suggest change to simpler 'letting his irritation show'
- Page 123 'candidates' rather than 'prospects'? And what's 'two pip emma' please?
- P127 'shot an enquiring glance' rather than 'looked an enquiry'?

- Page 51 Here, in Para 2, we have a reference to Flick remembering coming home from a villa with 'the Earl and his family', but we, as readers, have no knowledge of this background thus far. I think we need Flick's background very early on: it has shaped her.
- Page 52 thru
Page 55 minor changes here – see mss.
Page 57 Repetition of 'second-raters'. Suggest instead 'Next time you'll have a less experienced handful'
- Page 59 'cute' is too American for a Brit, isn't it? Suggest 'charming'. And can Paul think 'it was absurd' rather than bullshit? See other minor changes.
- Page 60 'desk job' rather than 'soft job' – line 3
- Page 61 Sorry to be so fantastically pedantic, but I think spongebag trousers are those little checked things, not stripes. See my amendments here.
- Page 70
Line 11 'splitting up' sounds very contemporary. Suggest 'Separating'
- Page 71 'perfidious Allies' sounds odd here. Can we just delete it?
- Page 74 Line 2. Bernard, or Bertrand? Page 76/77 He's Bertrand.
- Page 79 Would Gaston know all of these Resistance crew addresses? Wouldn't only Michel, possibly Flick, know some? See p34.
- Page 80 'give a shot' sounds very American. Suggest 'examine' or 'inject'
- Page 82 Lord Colefield here. Is this the Earl, or someone else? It all needs clarifying.
Delete 'It made her feel worthless'. Somehow, it doesn't feel right that Flick would think like this, she just wouldn't be thinking about herself here.
- Page 85 Flick recalling a weekend in the 1930s – again I don't think we've been given her background yet.
- Page 86 Tiny point, but I've altered throughout am and pm, because the British would say 'in the morning' or 'in the evening'
- Page 87 Some minor changes here.
- Page 88 'aeroplanes' not the American 'airplanes'
- Page 89 'cop'? I think it would be 'copper' and wouldn't he be a 'formidable enemy/foe' rather than 'hazard'
- Page 92 Paul's conversation here about his father and Monty sounds very naïve. Can you take a look?

- Page 129 Why would Ruby (on p128) think it's an all-women team, rather than a mixed team? They might just need one woman...
- P131 Four pip emma. Can you explain this time thing?
- P132 Delete line about 'Finishing School'. This has already been explained.
- P138/140 Small changes here
- P151 'It would seem prurient to ask questions'. I may be wrong, but this sounds odd.
- P152 See my changes
- P156 I think I'd delete the comment about Communists. It seems too much here.
- P159 'Road' rather than 'highway'
British Post Office. Do you mean the GPO? I can't find any reference to the BPO.
- P161 Do you need this spelling out of how to pronounce Beaulieu here?
- P162 Para 2. Architectural affectation?
- P165 I'd delete these two lines referring to Greta here, because the reader is only a few pages on and already knows...

'You're in the army now' rather than 'the military' I think.
- P173 Repetition of the Resistance not being under Army orders. Suggest delete here.
- P178 'This bickering was the opposite of what she hoped for' sounds a wee bit clumsy. How about 'was not what she wanted'.
- Page 183 I've taken out a few lines here because I don't feel the reader needs all this explanation.
- P185/6 Tiny changes here
- P187 Would Dieter Franck refer to Standish as 'Brian'. I don't think army blokes did? Suggest we insert his surname instead.
- P188 Cathedral rendezvous is 'compromised'. Suggest 'under suspicion'?
- P190 What is a 'one-time-pad' encryption?
- P199 suggest 'mimicking her' rather than 'repeating her own words'
- P204 Brian Standish becomes Brian Standall here.
- P216 Do you know the source of the Jackdaw poem? We should probably acknowledge it.

- P218 Paul 'disruptive influence'. I think it might be better to say 'having an effect' because you mean the physical/sexual side rather than anything else, don't you?
- P224 Brian Standall.
'cruel carnage'. I'd suggest 'cause havoc in the chicken house' – sounds less dramatic...
Isn't it incredibly naïve of Standish to broadcast, given that he's nearly been caught in the cathedral?
- P239
240 here's the sex scene between Flick & Paul that I think needs a bit of work (see letter above)
- p252
256 I've altered the use of the word 'clandestine' here, which is used a fair bit.
- Page 260 Minor changes here
- Page 262 I don't know why, but 'Gestapo custody' reads oddly to me. 'in the hands of the Gestapo' better?
- P268/70 small changes here
- P271 suggest 'humiliating defeats' rather than 'reverses'?
- P274 I think Dieter would refer to Brian as 'Standish' when talking of him.
- P286 suggest 'your friend' rather than 'the one you like'
- P294 I don't think Diana would say 'What the hell time' – suggest cut the 'hell' – too American
- p298 'law enforcement people' – suggest 'police'
- p300 'one of his troops' sounds odd. Suggest 'one of his staff'
- p303 suggest 'he told himself not to underestimate her' rather than 'fat people'
- p305 Would Standish/Paul have put HCLP for helicopter? Rather HLCP?
- P309 black, rather than Negro.
Suggest 'Don't even think about it' rather than 'dream'
- P316 'doubtfully' rather than 'dubious'
- P322 Hasn't Flick now been seen in her new disguise by the Gestapo at the Ritz? Wouldn't they be making huge efforts to circulate new Description?

- P324
325/28 small changes here
- p341 Excellent
- p344 I can't verify the spelling of Quebecois. Can the Americans, please?
- P351 Delete 'scruples were suicidal' . There's more pace without it.
- P354 'Beat yourself up' sounds too American.
See other minor changes here.
- P360 suggest 'desire' rather than 'hot lust' which sounds too sexual here.
- P362 suggest 'steely determination'
- P370 'held captive' rather than 'tied up'
- P371 get romantic, sounds odd. Delete?
- P388 I've made a minor change here to avoid repeating information for the
Reader
- P423/24 minor changes here
- P437 I've added Ruby here – otherwise it looks as if she's left
- P441 Would Dieter refer to her as 'Flick'? Rather 'your wife'
- P443 I thought Paul mentioned marriage when they first met...
- P455 I'm finishing on a fantastically pedantic note: could you have a
Bishop of Marlborough? It doesn't have an abbey/cathedral

That's it!!!!