

WHITEOUT

NOTES ON THE FIRST DRAFT

Barbara Follett

- TITLE:** A great one.
- OPENING:** I think that the book, in its current form, suffers from having the first four chapters removed. That is why it does not open with your customary zip and zing. It is also why the first sentence is such a non-event.
- SETTING:** I did not feel that enough was made of the Scottish setting - both in terms of scenery and of atmosphere. I am sure that your research trip will rectify this.
- SPEECH:** The way the protagonists speak is far more American than English or Scottish. Though I dislike the Dickensian portrayal of vernacular in novels I do think that attention to speech patterns can help to give atmosphere. I particularly noticed the following Americanisms: "vacation" instead of "holiday" on Page 3; "family doctor" instead of "GP" on Page 10; "old folk's" instead of "old people's" also on Page 10; "cop" on pages 12 and 18; "movie" on page 34; "watch movies and stuff" on page 63 and "egghead" on page 64. After that they seemed to peter out but I did not get the sense that any of the protagonists were Scottish. Nor was there any contrast with the speech patterns of the English characters.
- HERO:** I did not warm to Toni Gallo. At times I almost disliked her. She was too cold, too controlled and too perfect. It reminded me of how I felt about Lucy Blythe when I first met her. Now, knowing her a little better, I find her a more attractive person. But then I thought her calculating and doubted her motives. I am not quite sure what to suggest but I did find her sexiness in the last scene incongruous.
- REDHEADS:** I may be wrong about this but I feel that you have had rather a lot of redheaded heroines recently.
- EX-SPOUSES:** Mama Marta needs more beefing up. I found myself wondering why Stanley had married her. What he had done for sex since her death. How he felt about their marriage. How he felt when she died. Where her grave/ashes were.
- I have the same questions about Toni's ex the cop. At present he is too one dimensional. The sort of uncaring guy every woman is glad to get shot off. But that cannot be the whole story. Sexual tension, there would be interesting. But it would also need to be resolved. However, it might provide an explanation for Toni's coldness and give an opportunity for more background.

- STANLEY:** Much as I hate to say this I think he should be in his fifties not his sixties. We also need to get a more emotionally rounded picture of him as well. I would like him to have had a brief, unsatisfactory, fling or two after Mama Marta's death. I would like some of the feelings these arouse to be explored a bit.
- CHILDREN:** The plump daughter and her academic man are very well drawn. But the dramatic daughter needs a bit of fleshing out emotionally. As does her horrible husband. His advances to the younger sister were an unheralded shock. Made me have to re-assess a lot of the relationships that had been established in the very nice family kitchen scene. This is not a bad thing but did not really work for me. I needed some indication that he was a sleazeball before he suddenly became one.
- KIDS:** I thought that they worked particularly well. Lovely.
- STAFF:** I am not sure that they should vanish quite so thoroughly. Might they not have tried to walk to the house on Christmas Day?
- CHRISTMAS:** We have often talked of the advantages of a Christmas book. I felt that this festival, with all its layers of meaning, sentiment and memories needed a much more central role. It brings out a host of emotions in most people but the protagonists did not express them.
- VILLIAN:** The awful dramatic gamine villain was just too awful to be true for me. She took on Dr No dimensions with the scene in the swimming pool. Your villains are generally more subtle. I prefer that.
- BROTHER:** He is pretty good. I would like him to be a bit more torn between his family loyalty and his anger with them.
- OVERALL:** The plot is great, the setting is marvellous and you have done it again.