

Ken Follett Private

From: Emily Kischell [EKischell@WritersHouse.com]
Sent: 06 January 2004 22:01
To: Ken Follett_Private
Cc: Amy Berkower
Subject: WHITE OUT

January 6, 2004

Dear Ken,

As we discussed on the phone, the plotting of your climax in this novel probably surpasses anything like this you've done since EYE OF THE NEEDLE; and I was in awe of your ingenious twists and turns as I raced through those final scenes. But as I also mentioned, we have some work ahead of us with the characters.

① The basic question we need to ask about Toni (and about any point of view character) is who does she love and who loves her? So, Toni, I believe, should be smitten by Stanley even before your action begins. He is a man the likes of whom she has never known: Kind, rich, brilliant. But her downside is that she's convinced that it's hopeless for anything to develop between them. He's too old. His son hates her. He has a family who probably would turn against her; and besides all that she sees herself as hopeless at science, which of course is his big thing. So I suggest you give her an interior in which she's vacillating between urgent longings for him while at the same time stifling these desires as best she can. And given her feelings for him, her remorse at letting him down and her wish to save him would be all the greater.

We talked about her grieving for Mark, and that is important. There are any number of ways in which they could have become friends; and in fact, she may have known him prior to his working at Oxenford and may even have recommended him for the job. What if they both sang in a choir together or participated in some other musical group?

I'd also like her relationship with Frank to be less harsh and less antagonistic. Yes they broke up because he wouldn't commit and wouldn't agree to have kids; but what if she still has some affection for him, although she's quite glad that she's no longer with him? Maybe their breaking point was a brilliant bit of detective work which she did but for which he took the credit and got promoted. But she's long since forgiven him.

Carl too may not need to affect her so severely. She could think he's silly, pompous, self important, and she has no interest in having a personal relationship with him, but there could be something about him that she likes nonetheless. She might find him amusing, but she of course hides this.

We could also warm up her feelings for her mother. What if mother raised her two girls single handedly, gave them endless help with their schoolwork, focused intensely on their getting a good education, scholarships, made parties for them. Toni adores her. Toni could also be more devoted than she is now to her scatterbrained sister. It would be good too if we could have some bit of her backstory in a dramatic flashback. Maybe her job interview with Stanley.

Kit also, I feel, could well be made more interesting. I suggest that he has not been unemployed; and in fact that he designed and installed a security system for Harry's gambling parlor and possibly his home as well. Kit may even feel like he's a friend of the family; so that when he's attacked by Daisy, it's a rude shock for him to discover that he's not.

What if he also has devised what he believes is a system at winning at blackjack or poker; and this of course has been his undoing, and not just mindless gambling. He is, after all, an IT wiz. And if you like the blackjack idea, I can send you a proposal by another author with good information about this.

Kit could also have done some smalltime computer hacking, perhaps bought some

expensive items with stolen credit card numbers. But let's also give him a big fantasy which is to breach the security at some major bank, transfer a hefty sum (maybe belonging to Harry) to the Cayman Islands, and then run a small disco and inn somewhere in the Caribbean. As to the money he skimmed from his father, he might have done that to finance some expensive IT equipment which he couldn't afford.

I suggest that for Kit we also have a flashback or memory of the event as an adolescent when he first started going bad. And it could be that ever since then relations with his father have been strained. But Stanley nonetheless encouraged his IT studies, and praised him greatly for Kit's state of the art security system for Oxenford.

I see Kit loving two people, Miranda and Tom.

I suggest too that we make Ronnie into more of a pal. He too might be single and perhaps counts on going to the Caribbean with Kit. You might also consider putting him into Kit's loft that first morning when we meet Kit. Ronnie could be there with a different girl.

Craig at 15 would be more interesting, I think, if in addition to his quest for Sophie he also had an ambition of some kind. He might for example be torn between wanting to become a movie star and a doctor. He could discuss this dilemma with Sophie. We might also try to find out what her dream or dilemma is.

To whom in the family is he particularly devoted? And which of his relatives, if any, does he not care for or actively dislike?

Is he eager for a Christmas gift of some kind? From his parents, from Stanley? This could be another subject he might broach with Sophie.

Miranda, as I've indicated in my marginal notes, loves everyone in her immediate family, and she finds reasons to admire them despite their obvious faults.

She could have a secret ambition for Tom, imagines him stepping into Stanley's shoes. She struggles to tutor him extensively in science and math. But Tom's passion is for drawing. She might consult Kit about how to awaken Tom's scientific interests and wonder at what age her father started showing this bent.

We know that her dilemma is, will Ned be accepted by the family which she desperately wants. But then, should she have a child with him? Or are Tom and Sophie more that enough? In her heart of hearts, she could long for another baby, a girl.

Nigel, I see, as the king of thieves. He has stolen jewels from Asprey, bullion from the Bank of England. I suggest that we establish that he's meticulously worked over Kit's plan with him. He's a man who leaves nothing to chance and double-checks everything. But he's had a lot of praise for Kit's plan and this had meant the world to Kit. Harry too is in awe of Nigel. It could be rumored that he lives like an emperor in a vast estate on some tax shelter island or maybe Lichtenstein.

Daisy, who can be a thug, but who is not necessarily ugly, is smitten by him. On past visits to Scotland, she's enjoyed sex with him and now longs to leave her father and make a life with him.

But unknown to her, he's bisexual and his real love is Elton. This could get traumatically revealed to her at some point in the climax or maybe earlier.

Elton might have had no formal education and he could use non-grammatical ghetto speech; but he could have the instincts and speed of a feral animal combined with a saucy good humor when he's feeling lighthearted. From the outset, he mistrusts Kit, sees nothing but trouble coming from the son of a rich man.

He's also hostile to Daisy, despises the little attentions she shows to Nigel, and even tries to get her thrown out of their group. To him, a woman in their lives or in their work is anathema.

Stanley can be gentle and kind with his family, be sensitive to them; but they nonetheless should all be somewhat in awe of him. A poor boy who by dint of will and intelligence and endless labor has given them tutors, the best schools, luxurious holidays, financial assistance when they needed it. Olga can and should rail at him as she does, but I wonder if this ought to be as easy for her as you now have it. There are times when Stanley comes off as something of a milquetoast whereas I feel he ought

to be more powerful and commanding.

Ken, some of what is in this letter is amplified and/or duplicated in my marginal notes in your manuscript which you'll be getting tomorrow. And now that you have your basic story worked out so neatly, I am confident that you may even have some fun enriching and fleshing out these potentially intriguing characters.

Warmest wishes,

Al

P.S. We have yet to figure out why we couldn't receive your ms. via email.

Sent on behalf of Albert Zuckerman. Please respond directly to
azuckerman@writershouse.com

Emily A. Kischell
Assistant to Al Zuckerman
(212) 685-6550
ekischell@writershouse.com