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Mr. Ken Follett
The Sherry Netherland

Dear Ken:

As I mentioned to you on the phone, I think that this outline for THE RUSSIAN PRINCE is a vast improvement over your last version, and I think that the book itself is going to be delightful. And in lots of ways too, I think it's going to turn out to be "richer" than your last three novels.

The area of the novel which I think still needs more thought than anything else has to do with the character of Walden. In order for us to be richly concerned with the successful negotiation of the treaty between Russia and England, and in order for us also (as readers) to get very worried about preventing the assassination or preventing anything untoward happening to the Prince, we need to become involved with Walden -- since he is the prime mover of both these elements of the plot.

There are a number of ways you might consider towards accomplishing this. And all of these could be used singly or in combination. One would be to involve him in a much more "caring" way with his daughter, his wife or both. Another would be to put him in some greater jeopardy, and this could be physical jeopardy and/or jeopardy to his reputation or his status or his financial well-being, or all of the above. In any event, we need to feel through him the danger to England and to the Empire which he loves.

I think now what I'll do is go through the outline scene by scene, and some of my comments as I go along will apply to Walden as they will of course to other areas of the story.

The frame can be fun, but I think it would be even more fun if it also contained some sort of small drama all its own. Ideally, there ought to be some little problem between Peter and Lizzie, and the solution to their problem ought to result from Charlotte's story.

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Here too, I think we need to mirror their personal element of suspense, with the novel's larger element of suspense.

Your opening scene with the Earl's dying strikes me as extraneous. I can see how as a "set piece" this might be fun for you to describe, but there is no one in the scene who reappears in the novel or who plays any real role in it, which makes me think that it's extraneous -- unless you decide to redo it and include Stephen at his father's bedside, but my inclination is to leave it out. Walden

The Moscow opening, I think, is good. Both Lydia and Walden would benefit, I think, from having at the outset specific aims in their own hearts and minds for their own futures. These of course would then be reversed. Feliks similarly ought to be introduced with a "dream". Probably even at this early age he should be contemplating an assassination which he thinks would set the world to rights. Whatever dreams and goals you give these three young people at this point in their lives would serve you well, I think in scene after scene all through the rest of the novel. ✓

I think you also need to bring in some historic or news event which would delineate the period, and would separate it clearly from the 1914 period in which the bulk of the book is set. In TRIPLE you used the return of young people from WWII, and I think we need something similar here to mark out this early phase of the story from the part which takes place more than 20 years later. ✓

The grown up Walden appears to be introduced in the scene with Grey. As you have it presented in the outline, it seems to lack any drama or conflict. Perhaps Grey might want the negotiations handled in a way which Walden believes won't work. Walden could think that Grey doesn't understand the Russian temperament or personality, and it would be nice if we could see Walden's brilliance, force of will, and charm prevail here over Grey. ✓

Also, we ought to have a glimpse of the essence of whatever it is that Walden wants most for himself at this point in his life. This could be revealed either in an inner monologue prior to the scene with Grey, or perhaps in a scene with Pritchard, or we could learn about it in Walden's thoughts as he deals with Grey. ✓

A number of possibilities come to mind. His greatest concern might be, for example, that Grey is not fit for his job and might botch things up badly for Britain and for the Empire. Or, he might essentially be concerned about the loss of his investments in Russia, or similarly he might have some large financial coup he's trying to bring off very much on his mind. Or, his biggest concern at this point might be snagging some particular Nobleman for

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his daughter. This would take on great importance, since he has no male heir. He might even decide that Oblomov might be a perfect candidate. If he were to make that decision, this could perhaps interestingly complicate his negotiations, since on the one hand he might be trying to endear himself to the Prince as a prospective father-in-law, while on the other hand he is trying to wring a treaty from the Prince which would be favorable to England. No

None of these ideas in themselves are, I think, particularly important. The important point is that we find out whatever it is that you decide is uppermost in Walden's longings at this particular time.

I think your readers are going to relish Charlotte and enjoy her meetings with Belinda. Your first scene between these two girls ought to have, I think, some sort of spine, some minor conflict around which to hang all this material. Perhaps Charlotte might already have found out something about the Suffragette Movement and be proposing to Belinda that they jointly attend the meeting, or perhaps broach a question about the movement to Charlotte's father, or perhaps sneak off the estate to a bookstore in the village where some pamphlet or book might be available. Charlotte, after all, is going to turn out to be more daring and less conventional, and I think it would help if you were to establish her that way at the outset. If Belinda hesitates to join in Charlotte's dreams or actively opposes them, I think you would contrast the two girls nicely, and also at the same time give us a bit more excitement.

I wonder too if at some point in this scene you oughtn't to give Charlotte some sort of romantic fantasy, and then of course later on Feliks might become the perfect embodiment of that fantasy.

You might also think about introducing Marya and Pritchard early in the book, probably shortly after we first meet Charlotte and Belinda. Yes

We obviously need Hartmann and we need to learn his point of view about things, but you give us no action and not even a framework for action in Hartmann's first scene with Barre. One way to introduce this material might be to bring in another character who puts Hartmann under a great deal of pressure, and indeed orders him to accomplish this mission or else. Or perhaps better might be a similar scene in which Hartmann puts Barre under a great deal of pressure to come up with the "perfect" candidate for the job. The best solution, if you can work it out, might be to eliminate the scene altogether, and then start this part of the novel with Hartmann and Feliks, with our perhaps learning what is really on Hartmann's mind from interior monologues. The reader, after all, is going to have no stake in the personal destinies of either Barre or Hartmann, and I think we're

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always better off limiting ourselves to scenes with characters in whom the reader has an abiding interest, and at this point in the story that would be Feliks.

I think Feliks would be a much more interesting and attractive villain if you made him less bloodthirsty. I would enjoy him more, I think, and believe in him more too if he were a "failed" assassin. In other words, what if from the very moment Lydia left him, which is in fact the same time that he was jailed and tortured, he began vowing to assassinate kingpins of the Czarist regime, but somehow never managed to do anything along these lines except dream and talk and talk and dream? Serious Bolsheviks and anarchists don't really take him seriously, because despite all this talk, they all know he's never really done anything violent. He likes the idea of revolution and justice, but he cringes at the sight of blood, or something like that.

My reason for coming up with this suggestion has to do with doubt as to Feliks' agreeing and so readily to this assassination plot. It isn't clear that he knows Barre terribly well, and he doesn't know Hartmann at all, and yet he with no serious doubts or questions readily seems to agree to this highly perilous course of action. But what if Barre understood his self-hatred, his yearning to be accepted by the more violent Bolsheviks and anarchists, his wish for status in the eyes of Stalin, Lenin or whoever? What if it were to be whispered about that he had been offered this delicious opportunity and had turned it down? Wouldn't that be the ultimate shame? He could perhaps be like someone out of Chekhov, mired in the desire for action but unable to act, and here is his golden opportunity!

Even then, I think he would be suspicious. He would want to know, why me? Why not you guys alone? And of course the answer would have to be something like, well, you speak Russian like an aristocrat. You could get close to the guy. Or something equally convincing and compelling. Barre and Hartmann also would need some strong argument as to why Oblomov's death would further the anarchist cause.

I like Charlotte's being presented at Court, but I wonder if you ought not to have Belinda there with her. Thus, in a way, you could make this a continuation of her previous scene with Belinda.

When first we meet Lydia as an adult, we need for her too a glimpse into whatever it is that matters to her most at the moment. Later on, of course, it becomes Feliks, but we need to know where she is in her heart as she welcomes Oblomov.

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I very much like the political complication you have introduced between Russia and England, and I think it makes the negotiation quite a real and solid one. But I worry about how you are going to get some personal drama into this element of the story. In the outline as you have it, it all seems totally political and rather abstract. To make it "happen" in a human context, we are going to have to know how Walden feels about Oblomov personally, about Russia, and also how this issue affects his guts. If as you write this scene, you find it's hard to get in this personal element, perhaps you might want to have Charlotte walk in on them and then use her as some sort of catalyst.

I very much like the initial assassination attempt. Why does Feliks come alone? Wouldn't he want either Hartmann or Barre to be there with him, if only for moral support?

Earlier in the story, we have had Charlotte flirting with Oblomov, and I think that she before the ball needs to look forward to seeing him again, or if she doesn't we need to know what she does think of him, and to what degree he conforms or is different from her own romantic fantasy.

An element which seems to be missing from the plot is what happens after the ball and after Feliks' escape. Neither Walden nor anyone else in England seems to do anything about the assassination attempt. It would seem to me that now we not only have danger to Oblomov but danger to this important and highly delicate negotiation. One thing you might consider doing would be another scene between Grey and Walden, in which Walden is all but dismissed from working further with Oblomov, or perhaps Walden might actually be dismissed; and maybe Walden could somehow turn the tables on Grey. Oblomov, for example, might refuse to negotiate with anyone but Walden, grateful as he is for Walden's quick thinking and saving his life.

I'm not sure whether we want Walden or Pritchard to begin hunting the assassin at this stage, but if they don't get busy doing that themselves, I would think that they need to feel confident at least that someone else is indeed doing just that. Right now, all we have is Oblomov going into hiding.

I suppose it would be spreading things too thin if Walden and Pritchard were on the one hand trying to track down Lydia's lover and on the other hand were also trying to track down Oblomov's would-be assassin. But I do think that at the very least Walden ought to feel personally in jeopardy from this point on in the novel. And we also need to show him as concerned for Oblomov's

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safety as Oblomov is for himself.

I very much like the scene in which Feliks first confronts Lydia, but what follows may need a bit of bolstering. For example, Walden probably ought to ask Lydia to wear a particular piece of jewelry because it is typically Russian, or especially Russian, and he thinks that her wearing it would please Oblomov, or maybe impress Oblomov, or both. Then, I wonder if he ought to see this in the shop quite so quickly. Probably we ought to have one of our diplomatic scenes with Oblomov. Either before or after the negotiation, Oblomov has tea or a meal with Lydia or Charlotte as well as with Walden, and it is at that point that Walden notices that Lydia is not wearing the piece of jewelry he asked that she wear. Then, with perhaps some small scene in between, Walden ought to make his discovery at the shop.

When Charlotte comes home and reports on her meeting with Mrs. Pankhurst, I wonder if your scene would not be stronger if she had it with only one parent rather than both. I suggest that she have the scene with Walden alone. Later on, he is the one to whom Pritchard is going to report about finding Charlotte at the march, and if he alone had this scene with her here, I think you could have even greater drama when he discovers that she has defied him.

When Walden discovers (or thinks he discovers) that his wife is having an affair, you say he is distressed. I wonder if he ought not to feel some real pain, pain at being deceived by a woman he loves (or thinks he loves), to whom presumably he has been good and adoring; and I think too we need to feel the pain to his ego.

My first thought about Bonnie was, do we have time for a character and a relationship which does not really bear on the plot or affect the action. But Ken, consider this. What if Walden's dallying with Bonnie doesn't really satisfy him, convinces him all the more of his love for and his need for Lydia, and makes him resolve to win her back, and all this would involve him more with her and with the subsequent resolution of the story.

At the bottom of Page 24, Hartmann is under great pressure because Germany has a new problem, but I wonder if any of this can have an effect on pressuring Feliks. Maybe what's needed here might be some sort of taunt from Barre or maybe a thorny letter from Lenin, congratulating Feliks on his plan, or offering to welcome him back into the fold once he finishes with Oblomov. I'm not sure what you should use, but it does have to be something which would be meaningful to Feliks and which would impel him to further immediate action.

On Page 27 you have Walden go to the Commissioner of Police. I like the idea of the British government being represented throughout the novel by Grey, and since this now appears to be a diplomatic and political matter as well as a potential criminal matter, why couldn't Walden just as easily take it up with Grey, a character we already know, and a relationship which already has some bearing on the novel? Grey, if need be, could give orders to the Commissioner of Police or others; but since Hartmann was followed to the German Embassy, I wonder if indeed all of them would not first go to Grey.

In line with what I said earlier about Feliks, I don't think he should plan to kill anyone but Oblomov. He could perhaps be planning to flee the country immediately after the assassination. He could have prepared a hiding place, a ready way to exit, counting on joining Lenin in Switzerland or something of that ilk, so that he might not necessarily be concerned what Charlotte had to say after he had performed his mission. In fact, he might want her to broadcast that he indeed was the man who did it, in line with the sort of personality I earlier was suggesting you might give him. This by the way would make his falling on the bomb to save her and her baby more consistent, I think.

On Page 28 I'm not clear how Walden and the Police Commissioner (hopefully Grey) make the connection that the man seen with Lydia and Charlotte may also be the same man who paraded as Dick Turpin. Shouldn't you add some additional clue somewhere?

Once Walden and Pritchard know that Feliks is about to be arrested, they might want to watch the arrest, and Walden might even want to have a close look at the blackguard who has been dallying with his wife, and maybe his daughter. If they were to wait outside, while the secret service or the police or whoever went in to get Feliks and failed to find him, I think that from that very moment, we could invest the two of them and thus the story with some additional urgency. They need to know right away, I think, that Feliks is on the loose and dangerous.

On Page 29, when Lydia sees Feliks entering the Folly, why does she hurry back to the house? And why does she go to Walden's room? I'm not saying she shouldn't do that. As you've laid out the story, she must. But on the other hand I would imagine that her natural inclination would be to follow Feliks, and I think you must give her some reason for returning home.

I know that these suggestions have filled several pages, but as and when you use some of them, I don't think
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they change anything basic or structural (all of which is quite strong now), so that I would hope that you'll be able to make your decisions about these fairly quickly, incorporate some of them into a new draft, or maybe even wait until you do the actual writing, which I hope will go smoothly for you and give you pleasure.

Love,

Al

Feliks must be deeply magnetic and a man of contradictions. (Anachronism a contradictory philosophy).

Feliks wants to keep Russia out of the war.

Feliks comes from Russian Switzerland to London specifically for the purpose of assassinating Odonov.

Charlotte is Feliks' daughter.

(Pro + Epi: have Charlotte find out who her father was? No)

Walden is depicting a way of life; so make that way of life very attractive.

Feliks wants to kill Walden, too. Walden, related to the Czar, may be the only man in England who can close the deal.

Walden represents the old way of life; Feliks the new.

Feliks must be in danger; Pritchard more of a threat to him.

Feliks and the German: conflicts, tensions: something in common but deep mutual contempt.

Feliks + Charlotte: emotional and intellectual support; he tells her "I'm your father" (she must first suspect then gradually discover this); he uses that; she shares his idealism.

Walden: everybody adores him; he is the best of the English aristocracy; he is conscious that he represents a way of life.

After the hit Turpin incident a movement begins. Walden is personally involved. This puts him (and Feliks) in personal physical jeopardy.

The only time to kill Odonov will be at 3pm when the secret treaty is signed; so Feliks puts a bomb in the room (then Charlotte goes in).

Walden and the movement: there is national danger, his home has been invaded, and his wife has been released; so out of honour and arrogance he insists he is the only one who can make sure everything is done right.

Feliks is recognized at the ball.

Pro + Epi: some internal drama plus a close connection with the Army.

Bonnie makes Walden realize how much he loves his family. He is deeply in love with Lydia, he is crazy about Charlotte, and -
some more deep & real relationship between Lydia & Charlotte.

Walden's life task is to defend the old order - he fights the Lloyd George Budget, etc. Walden refuses to receive Lloyd - would he get a note from the King.

Early in the story we must see the psychological roots of Charlotte's later rebellion and know that she is capable of defiance.

Feliks & Lydia go to bed at some point.

Charlotte falls in love with Olman. He won't make love although she wants to. They have some great interest in common?

Feliks contacts the Germans because he needs their help in certain ways.

Feliks begins by working with the anarchists but realises (when he is almost caught in the Irish Turpin incident) that one of them is a police spy; so he turns to the Germans.

Feliks killed a guard escaping from Siberia.

Lydia does not want to meet Olman because she's afraid of her memories.

Chancellor instead of Lloyd.

Chase supreme at end begins with abortive arrest of Feliks.

When Olman disappears - both Feliks and Walden are looking for him.