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Ken Follett
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Dear Ken,

I've always loved cold countries. I find them exciting and romantic and kind of dangerous and as soon as I read that escape over the mountains I began to imagine what you'll do with it. I thought of the scene where Faber's boat crashes in a storm -- Wolff lost in the desert -- nobody can write those man-against-nature battles as you do.

I can see how you did this in four days. It has a white heat feel which is the best sort of 7 page outline possible. Larry returned *Run on Ice* to me with just one comment: "I love it!"

You've got your woman heroine -- center stage. However, inspiration rarely takes mechanics into account and I'll point out some spots where I think you'll run into trouble if you don't figure them out before hand.

There's the simple fact that Jane falls in love with two spies. One will pass, but not two, unless you can give us a good reason. Jane will have to travel in circles where spies abound which is a little hard to imagine. I think the simplest thing would be to have Ellis and Jean-Pierre know each other and for Jane to have met Jean-Pierre through Ellis. But how did Ellis and Jean-Pierre get together? Professions are out because Ellis is a poet and Jean-Pierre is a medical student. And you can't have them just sort of meet, because that's another coincidence. Therefore the only valid reason for them to meet is that they are both spies. How's that for deductive reasoning? Could Jean-Pierre be a French spy or even a recruited CIA man who turns? Could he have been planted by the Russians? This is something the reader would find out later, when they learn that Jane's two men are spies. *No.*

Yes .

That leads me to the character of Jean-Pierre. J-P wasn't just a spy, he was out there where the shooting was, risking a bullet to the heart every day! He had to truly believe in his cause -- be a zealot -- for that kind of commitment. Yet J-P doesn't come across that way. As I said to you on the phone, J-P isn't really a villain, he's a scoundrel. I can't find in this character a single motive for doing what he does. Ellis is easier. He's a poet, which means he's idealistic probably. He's on our side, which translates to a right and just cause, and he was sent to Afghanistan for a specific job.

Those are your two big gaps in logic -- Jean-Pierre's motivations and the coincidence of Jane loving two spies. Here are some comments I made as I read the outline: If Jean-Pierre "has no choice" but to take Jane and Chantal back to Paris when she tells him she knows all, how come he was ready to kill her and his daughter in the mountain pass? Why not just kill Jane right off, save his daughter and himself a lot of trouble? Inconsistent. Yes .

But why, after he tries to kill her, why does she still protect him, for the same reason, in the mountain village? I don't like J-P pretending illness. A trick (on the reader too). You can do better. Much more interesting if he were really ill. Yes .

Now I'm coming to a point that's a purely personal reaction -- but it's a very big reaction. I cannot bear when a writer uses unspeakable atrocities and holocausts for entertainment purposes. Because they are real. We've all seen pictures of slaughtered children, children on fire, mass murder. They are not products of a writer's imagination, they are real horrors. I hated SOPHIE'S CHOICE -- the Holocaust is not to be used as background for a silly love story. So what it was a best seller. Do not kill babies to advance your plot. ?

So please try to find something else that Jane can photograph as evidence against the Russians. Maybe one poor villager being executed (like that famous photo that helped turn Americans finally against the Vietnam war).

Those are my comments about what's already in the outline, except some lingering confusion as to how everybody got into those mountains for the big finale.

Now for some things that are not in the outline:

A marvelous Follett villain. That's more than a trademark -- it's a thing that gives your thrillers a special dimension. As my mother-in-law said to me quite guiltily, "I couldn't help it. I liked Wolff!" So who's the villain who's going to pull at us in spite of ourselves? You've got two choices that I can see. You could write Jean-

Pierre that way, once you've got his motivation, and you could give him a lot of push-pull if he had married Jane as part of his cover, and then found he was falling in love with her against his wishes. And of course he would never intend to have a child, that was contrary to all his plans (a good reason for him to be absent at her birth). That would also be why he felt like a "boyfriend" to Jane. Maybe Jean-Pierre's father was a dedicated communist and J-P was the next torch-carrier. (Maybe his father was one of those French worker-priests of the 50's who left the church and took up communism as man's only hope?). OK, I'm getting carried away. I'll stop. But find a motive for J-P's Russian activities and you can go anywhere.

Your other possible Follett-villain came from one sentence: "Col. Anatoli Yakushenko is a decent, patriotic Russian." If you build him, you'd have to make some major plot changes, or at least some big ornamentations. Unlike J-P, I have no ideas for the Col., except that if you use him for your villain it will make Ellis an even more powerful character. Battle of two idealistic patriots.

Jane: I liked Jane but I found her a little too gullible and soft-hearted. I want Jane to think more, be a little smarter. You've made her a mother too, and her child is always in danger, so she'll have to act like the mother of an endangered child which is the fiercest creature on earth. Along with this, she's found a new love and a sudden responsibility to her country. Jane has such possibilities that she can end up your most magnificent female creation so far, but that woman has got to be smart. She has to think faster than anyone else. She's got reason to. *Yes.*

Unless you have written that last scene in your mind and have got some wonderful shocks in store for us (which I don't doubt for a moment), it seems a little arbitrary for Jane to stop Ellis from pushing the detonator that will blow up the mountain, and then push it herself. That's a symbol, rather than a real violence. What if Jane set up the detonator herself. What if Ellis were incapacitated -- knocked unconscious or something? And Jane does this thing herself, watching J-P come round the mountain, hesitating till the last possible moment to push the button, knowing she's got to do it all the while? (Ellis has already taught Jane about explosives.) That really gives the end of the book to your heroine.

I talked to Elaine Koster and you'll be getting a letter from her too. She brought up one thing which I'll mention: you don't have any "real" people in this story, like Churchill, Rommel, Hitler, etc. That's another Follett trademark and a lot of fun for

No.

readers. I think real people would be fairly easy to drum up here: some dead Russian premiers -- Khrushchev, Brezhnev? And there's always Foster Dulles for the CIA. I think he died in the 60's. So maybe Ellis could have known him. (Just had a flash: Ellis is a poet, how about him coming into contact with some real Russian poets? Like Yevtushenko? What a great scene you could write -- vodka, tears, music and laughter. Great fun!) You're still taking your story from real history, only this time it's current. I'd like to see some real people too.

That's it for now. I love the story, the place, the sort of heroine Jane will be. What with the medicine, the landscape, the Afghanistans, those icy dangerous mountains, as well as the espionage, how could you go wrong? And for readers, cold sweat all the way.

Let me know what you think of all this.

Love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to be 'D. T.' or similar initials, written in dark ink.