

Follett, Ken

FIVE TIGERS

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Writer's House

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ms., 392pp

Hilary Ross

First draft of Follett's thriller set in Paris and Afghanistan.

Jane is an expatriate Englishwoman living in Paris, working as a translator to earn her living. Her lover is Jean-Pierre, a doctor and a communist; her previous lover had been Ellis, an American poet, who was a radical left-winger, and it bothers her that Jean-Pierre admires him. After dinner one night with friends, Jean-Pierre says he wants to go to Afghanistan and administer to the rebels as they have no doctors--he explains that he no longer thinks the Russian invasion a good thing, that the two of them had once had an argument and that Jane won-- and he asks her to marry him.

Once she is married in living in Afghanistan, Jane is disappointed with her marriage as she finds that the intimacy she expected with her husband has not evolved. Instead she feels lonely and so "accidentally" gets pregnant, thinking to have the baby for company. Meanwhile, back in Paris, Ellis turns out not to be a left-wing poet, but a spy for the CIA, and he completes his mission in Paris by trapping Boris, a man the Russians use to pay terrorists. When he returns to the U.S. he gets a new assignment-- he is to convince the Afghans, who consist of various tribes to unite their fight against the Russians under the leadership of Masud, a Tajik who has the most military talent, in return for U.S. arms shipments. His cover is going to be that he is there for idealistic motives--training the natives in the use of explosives.

When Ellis arrives in Afghanistan, Jane has had her baby, a girl named Chantal. Jane has found out that Jean-Pierre does believe in the Russian invasion and is there as a spy--she catches him with his contact, Anatoly, and confronts him with the information after having had Mohammed, an Afghan whose son she saved, change the route of Masud's caravan. Jean-Pierre's mission is to give the Russians the time and place where Masud will be so that he can be wiped out. Jean-Pierre agrees to go home with her to Paris, but Jane then finds out that the Russian advance has cut off the route to Pakistan is closed, the only route left open is the Butter Trail, a very dangerous road through Nuristan. She also finds out that Masud is planning a conference of resistance leaders in the village and fears that Jean-Pierre will find out and tell the Russians so they can kill the entire leadership in one fell swoop. She decides to see if he has some method of contacting them other than through meeting Anatoly and finds and destroys the radio he has in the false bottom of his medical bag. Jean-Pierre finds out about the conference and when he discovers his radio is destroyed, sends a message to Anatoly through a wandering madman he treats for a bad stomach.

Jean-Pierre says he is going off to treat some victims of a Russian attack, but Ellis discovers there is no attack and asks Jane about it. Jane then tells Ellis everything and together they tell Mohammed. They evacuate the village and when the Russians come they ambush them. Jane and Ellis then leave the village and make love up in the hills. The next morning the Russians return and look for Ellis; Jane decides to flee with him and the baby via the Butter Trail. Anatoly and Jean-Pierre hunt them down, finally catching up to them despite an attempt by Mohammed, who serves as their

guide, to throw the Russians off the track by returning to guide them and leading them the wrong way. Jane and Ellis can get away by blowing up the pass and a contingent of Russians but when the crucial moment arrives, Jane cannot set off the detonator. However, when the Russians throw the pair into their helicopter, Jane pushes Jean-Pierre out the open door and Ellis takes over the plane; Anatoly jumps out the door.

This draft of the novel still needs a great deal of work. There is virtually no suspense until the chase, the last ninety pages or so of the ms. The other big problem is that of characterization. Jane is pretty much okay, but the characterization of Jean-Pierre and Ellis needs more development. Jean-Pierre is wishy-washy rather than villainous, and as a result, pretty boring. It is also hard to see why Jane loves him so much as he has no real personality to react to. Perhaps if he had a great deal of superficial charm that would make him appealing and hide his flaws? As it stands he is dull and mildly unpleasant until the end when he turns a bit nasty. Ellis is handsome as first introduced, but his attractiveness and/or magnetism is not felt throughout the novel. He too seems a bit blah, and needs more development, perhaps one of the things he could be is somewhat more swashbuckling? Also, I think Mohammed could be built up a bit more as a <sup>romantic</sup> romantic, as it would add more color and texture. The mullah is good and very typical. In the area of suspense, Ellis mission in Afghanistan, to get the rebels to unite, while dangerous is more diplomatic than physical, e.g. he is not there to blow up a dam, kill a Russian bigwig, etc., and consequently there is, at least the way the situation is set up, no inherent tension from the danger presented. The suspense only occurs later on when the escape takes place. Perhaps more matching of wits is needed and/or more obstacles that get in the way of reaching Ellis' objective. Also, should Anatoly be more involved in the plot machinations? He seems like a character that could be developed more, one who could be more interesting; Jean-Pierre is really only his tool.

I also noted a few queries and suggestions, some quite minor, which are listed below.

p. 3 "Private view". Do you mean private showing? Pre-opening preview? This is not clear. Also, when does the story open? The only clue is Mitterand and I'm not up on French politics. Of course the hostilities have started in Afghanistan but I can't remember when they started exactly. Perhaps you could give a date or two for benighted readers like me.

p. 72 Ellis' boss is named Hilary. I have never met or heard of an American man with this name, only English ones--it is rather like the name Evelyn, which is never used in the U.S. as a man's name.

p. 75 "twenty-eight years young." This is confusing, as "young" is usually added after a person's age when they are in fact old, i.e. "seventy-two years young."

p. 106 It is Uzbek, not Uzbak.

p. 139 "tummy". This word is used a lot when stomach or abdomen might be better. For example, somewhere later on some one is punched or shot in the tummy, which seems ludicrous.

p. 198 The panic that Jean-Pierre says he has had in life--shouldn't we see this sooner, as it would help give a clue to his personality. Also, might not he have panicked when Jane found out about him?

p. 255 Why is Ellis' father a construction foreman? It seems somewhat unlikely. Later you say he was ambitious--did he ever rise and own his own small company, etc.?

p. 331 You say the arrival of the Russian bureaucrat delays the search, but in fact, it does not.

p. 334 Jane has betrayed Jean-Pierre. Does he really think he can subsequently have a happy married life with her? It doesn't seem reasonable.

p. 346-51 It would add some drama if the reader saw Mohammed's confrontation with the Russian guide and getting his throat cut. Also, the villagers find the body very easily, which gives Mohammed away. Why didn't he hide the body carefully? Or perhaps he did but it was discovered purely through a fluke? Yes

p. 381 Why is the door to the helicopter open after the take-off?

p. 391 Jane says no one has ever asked her to marry him before, but Jean-Pierre did propose to her and she married him. What has happened to Jean-Pierre? Is he dead? Did Jane divorce him? How can she accept Ellis' proposal?

Finally, although the title FIVE TIGERS has a nice enough ring, it is merely the name of the valley in Afghanistan, and does not refer to anything more exciting, as a thriller title certainly should.

Five Tigers

Villagers have more sense of satisfaction with the Valley.