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January 29, 1990

Dear Ken,

I loved the Flying Clipper. I poured over the drawings -- imagine that much luxurious room in the skies today -- it's the airborne equivalent of the Orient Express! And it just cries out for evil deeds.

As you introduce your characters you give a view of Britain on the eve of WW II. England is still innocent, still merrie, still strong in its assumptions of class -- it's about to vanish forever, we know, but they don't. It's there in little nuggets -- Harry who changes to an upper-class accent and avoids arrest, Verne who never carries a package, people carrying gas masks in the streets and laughing about them -- and I hope in the novel you will give us even more. Like the Flying Clipper it's all about to end, so it's a poignant bit of history.

The Isleys are terrific -- you were obviously inspired by the scandalous Mitford/Mosley clans. I adored Percy -- a wonderful, funny character. Margaret is a typical Follett heroine -- you'll see to it that readers fall in love with her. Diane Losely -- a name out of Trollope! -- is a prediction of Marilyn Monroe. Lady Isley is a true eccentric but rich enough not to seem one, Lord Isely is a great tyrant whom I rather like.

My first comment is about Verne, so let's go to the pages now. Wouldn't Verne bring her maid along? They did things like that then. Maybe it could be the maid, maybe someone else, but I felt the need for another character on the Clipper, one not associated with any of the ongoing plots, someone outside the various pieces of action, and so able to quietly impinge upon them all. I think we need someone to lead us around that Clipper, and to change the pace too. ✓

In the next few pages Percy as the suddenly Jewish Isley is great, but on Margaret we need a little more, specifically the fact that her lover died fighting fascism which gives her the best reason to fight the Nazis.

On page 12, do you really want to make Harry a father? Running out on a girl-friend is one thing, but abandoning a child is unforgivable. I know you mean to show him ruthless under the charm, but we're going to like Harry, and he gets Margaret too. ✓

Diane is all there, as much as she need be, but Michael is rather shadowy. Maybe by building a friendship between him and Percy on the plane (they're both comedians, at least Michael writes comedy) we'll get a better sense of him.

Nancy Black is the only character that gave me problems. She's a woman of our time, not hers. With her background, presumably Jewish, ghetto, immigrant, orthodox, she would not be the fully liberated, hard-nosed woman you've made her. She would not be divorced -- this is before WW II, remember, and it wasn't done, especially in strong Jewish families. They'd disown her. Why don't you make her a widow instead? She could do the same thing -- try to wrest the company away from her brother for its own good, but she'd go about it a little differently. "Her father expected her to run the business," you say, but given the Lower East Side culture I'd say it's more likely that her father expected her to run Peter, who ran the company. On rechecking the outline I see you've nowhere said that Nancy and Peter are Jewish. But I assumed it from their business, the clothing industry -- and the reference to the Lower East Side. And in fact they'd almost have to be, given those particulars. Anyway, Nancy bothered me. She's a late-20th century woman. To fit her in her time I'd make her a little more circumspect. *Manipulative rather than confrontational. Bold & show, not frank*

Mervyn Losely needs more fire and passion, whether it's love or vengeance, if he's going to run after his wife the way he did.

Let's talk here about the Clipper and its crew. Mervyn's plane develops trouble over the Irish Sea. Why not save that for the Clipper? I was so intrigued by that plane and the drawings, I'd like the plane itself to play more of a part in the story. But once everybody is aboard, the Clipper fades into the background. I'd like to roam

Howgorit calculation - heading the wind - point of
no return - Ted must get across the Atlantic.

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around it -- see its luxurious suites and hidey holes, get to know the captain and his crew. Maybe some minor trouble could develop, frightening to the passengers. We'd see how the captain handles the ship and how the ship responds... a small emergency, before the big one.

Now the individual plots -- will Nancy get the business, will Margaret escape her tyrannous father and fall in love with Harry, will Harry get the jewels or get caught, will Mrs. Losely choose her husband or her lover and is it too late for her husband... all mesh into the big one: Ted Deacon, his hostage wife, the forcing down of the Clipper and the rescue by the Mafia of one ^{of} their godfathers. Secret help comes for Ted in the form of his old buddy at Newfoundland. He'll be there at the splashdown. Ted is very clever for one so mild at downing the plane, jamming the radio, and crippling the second engineer with laxatives, but then he's got an urgent motive. This is going to be a wonderfully tense and suspenseful scene, topped with terror and mayhem at the shootout. Here I have a couple of questions about Harry. How does he get into the baggage hold unobserved? That's a neat trick. And where did he get the gun to shoot Tony Joe? He can't have picked up Percy's (Ollie's) gun because he wasn't in the same room as Percy. "There is a shot, and Tony Joe falls. Harry steps through the door from the crew room." Unless I missed something, Harry had to be toting his own gun, which doesn't fit his character.

On the very last page you give a neat twist to a happy ending for Margaret and Harry. He's got the Delhi Suite. Margaret doesn't know. I have a feeling she won't care. And the paragraph before that you ask a question that intrigues me no end. The Mafia boat pulls away. "Who is driving it?" Who indeed!

As I read this outline I looked for something that isn't there. You've recalled England on the first day of WW II; it's the last voyage of the Flying Clipper as a luxury aircraft, never to be replaced; everyone on that plane is escaping or pursuing someone or something -- yet nothing that happens on that plane is tied to the great event that starts the novel, WW II.

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I know this is a different sort of book from your other thrillers, yet it is a thriller too. And to have a plane full of people on the Clipper's last voyage out of Europe without any of their stories related in any way (and I don't count the Isleys' going to Connecticut to sit out the "silly war") to the war that's going to change the world, seems a deliberate omission, and almost impossible in reality. I'd like to see a tie. I think it would put it all together, your beginning and your end, in the strongest way. No spies, no espionage, just -- omygod, that's what that was about! -- for the reader.

You've got everything in place for just that sort of kicker. And I think you could make it work with a few small adjustments in your plot. So here goes -- Spuntino was driving that boat away, with the help of the U.S. Feds.

There was a rumor, never officially denied so it's become part of folklore if not actual history, that the Mafia secretly aided the Allies during WW II... that Lucky Luciano made a deal with the government in return for his freedom to infiltrate the Blackshirts, report on Mussolini's movements, and engage on a course of sabotage there and morale-boosting here. The Mafia became an Allied secret weapon.

Spuntino, from whom we hear nothing in the story, could be a Luciano, returned to America under heavy cover to be briefed by the U.S. government. He was not under arrest, not going to prison, but because of all the secrecy the Mafia didn't know that, so they jumped the gun and attempted a rescue. They got it all wrong.

If this idea intrigues you, I think it can be easily done and we'll talk about it. It could be explained afterwards to Ted by Appleby whom the government had to tell once he told them what Tony Joe was planning to do.

This idea or not, I'd in any case like to see someone tied to the war, no matter how remotely. I think that one thing will make a wonderful, exciting novel absolutely perfect.

Here we go again -- this is going to be fun!

Love,



PG: Tall mysterious
Norwegian blonde with heavy
water... All the men fall
for her except Henry who is
not taken in.