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January 31, 1990

Dear Ken,

I really do love being with you and Barbara, especially when there's a new book to discuss. Last evening was great. The company was perfect, the food out of this world, and the new book so exciting I can hardly contain myself. I figured that was why I was a little tipsy (I'm no drinker) because I couldn't understand how one bottle of wine shared by the three of us could have that effect on me. It wasn't until this morning that I remembered the 2 or 3 glasses of champagne at the hotel! As I said, a delightful evening.

I am enthralled by the Clipper, by what you told me last night. Hunt the wind! The point of no return! Navigation by the stars! Morse code! I can see what you are going to do with it! Forget the cliched emergency, as you rightly said. The Clipper, just being the Clipper, will provide exquisite suspense. A note about the passengers: in the outline they run for the plane exactly as we do. They would be more aware of dangers, of braving a frontier. Even if they knew nothing about flying, they would have a sense of embarking upon an adventure. How they react individually could illuminate their characters, and enlarge the role of the Clipper itself from the start. ✓

Forget Lucky Luciano. The more I think about the mysterious blond Norwegian the better I like her. Something you said at dinner clicked it all into place. You said -- "she is the future." So, in this last voyage of the Flying Clipper, you have the never-to-be-recovered past and the not-even-to-be-imagined future. And that, as scientists say when something fits perfectly, is elegant.

It's important that she not be a point of view character, that she be viewed through the eyes of others, or the readers, never her own. She must remain mysterious. What you could do, to be fair to the reader, is trace her path to the Clipper and by telling what she does, reveal ~~ing~~ an urgency. Harry's suspicion that she's after the jewels too could provide a red herring.

Only a handful of people in the world know about the Bomb. Only a handful know the Apocalypse is coming down. At the shootout her one aim is to get to that radio and tap out her message. Because it is too important to die with her. (But I hope you won't kill her!)

Whether you use the Norwegian or not, I'm glad you agree someone on the plane should be connected to the war. It's the thing I feel strongest about, that was lacking in the outline.

Turning Nancy Black into a sympathetic woman of her time who is trying to save an honorable business, her father's good name, and her sons' heritage is much, much better. And the manufacture of affordable good shoes for the working class seems just right. I didn't like Nancy before. With this new idea she could end up among the favorites. Mervyn is still an unconvincing character, as we agreed.

Back to that gorgeous plane. The sheer romance of it! I told you how I used to listen for the night-mail plane when I was a child. I would hear the faintest sound of its engine, the crescendo as it passed overhead, and strain to keep on hearing as it faded into the distance and finally was gone. I think what thrilled me was its brave and lonely sound. It was the only thing up there. No birds, no other aircraft -- just that little plane in all the big night sky.

The romance of flying is tremendous and so is its nostalgia. The Clipper provides all that plus suspense. What a treat NIGHT OVER WATER is going to be. I love it.

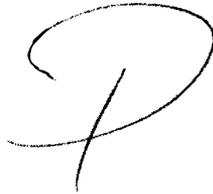
I intend to go back with you and Barbara to the Quilted Giraffe when they serve you your dessert with the Flying Clipper.

Love.



P.S. Elaine Koster called me after I left yesterday so I returned her call today. She asked me what I thought of the outline. I told her what we discussed -- that Nancy Black would be more sympathetic and a woman of her time. I told her the new things you told me about the Clipper, point of no return, etc., and she was thrilled. I told her I felt the one thing the outline lacked was someone connected to the war and that you agreed with this. I told Elaine we discussed a couple of possibilities concerning this, but since they were only possibilities I didn't want to go into them. I told her I absolutely loved the book, and that when you talked with them and they heard everything I heard last night, they were going to flip.

This is just to keep you abreast. I'll be anxious to hear about your meeting on Friday, so I'll call you after you get home.

A handwritten signature consisting of a large, stylized capital letter 'P' with a long, sweeping tail that loops back under the main body of the letter.