

# Writers House Inc.

A LITERARY AGENCY

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Mr. Ken Follett  
BY FAX

Dear Ken,

You are off to a very good start, I think, with this new book.

Yesterday, after a day of attending classes at Princeton with Kate, I came back to the city, picked up the mail and took your few pages home with me; and here are some suggestions "off the top of my head".

1. First, to enlarge the scope of the novel, to make it more than simply a private drama, you need to give some thought to the broad-ranging consequences of the banks' going under. For example, if this bank were to go under, might there not be a run on all banks? How many thousands of businesses and individuals might be ruined by the failure of the bank? To dramatize this, I believe you will need a character in the novel who is 'at risk'. It might be someone like the Duke who is impoverished but has a tiny fortune, which he has entrusted to Miller, or it could be the life savings of some other pensioner to whom Miller is personally devoted.

2. The outline, as it stands, seems to lack a really solid antagonist, a character who wants the bank to go under, someone who would benefit from this, someone who would like to see the financial market collapse so he can buy up this bank and all sorts of other things on the cheap. Maisie partially fills this role, but I think she should be just part of a larger scheme.

What if Joseph had an estranged brother, someone even meaner than he is? What if early in their careers Joseph somehow squeezed him out of the bank, and also squeezed out his son Hugh; and Alfred (for now, I'm calling him Alfred) has become a financial buccaneer who sees this as a big chance for profit and revenge. He might be the Falstaff-type character you've always wanted to have in one of your novels, and Maisie might even be his mistress.

I have some doubts about your opening scene. I fear it might get the book off to an imperfect start, because it doesn't give the reader a character with whom to relate. Both your South American

and your Brit seem like heels; and if we're going to get any mileage out of such an episode, I think we first need some kind of scene which establishes how desperate Feira is and what sorts of terrible pressures he's under.

Another character who's mentioned very briefly in your pages but who seems to play rather an important role in the end, is the agent of the opposition party in the South American country, someone who is out to foil Feira's attempts to float new loans. He could be an idealist, perhaps a socialist, someone akin to Feliks as a young man. I see him as someone who knows nothing about violence, and has no intention of doing anything violent, but somehow is forced to resort to violence in the end, in desperation.

The thrust of the novel from the protagonist's point of view (i.e. Miller) should be more to save the pensioner-depositors, save his daughter's romance, than simply to save the bank.

3. One aspect which remains undeveloped, and I'm not clear as to how you should develop this, is the love story. The only one you have now, Miller's daughter and the Duke's son; but if their story is going to count for something powerful in the novel, they also will need to be linked to the main plot.

Having said all this, I see no harm at all in showing what you've got either as it is, or with some of these suggested revisions included, to Carole at this time, along with some character sketches. She at least would see the direction in which you're thinking of going, and she may have some interesting suggestions, especially from a female point of view.

Have a good trip over, and Eileen and I will look forward to seeing you at our house on Sunday at 11.

Love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive initial followed by a long, sweeping horizontal line that tapers off to the right.