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September 4, 1991

Mr. Ken Follett
BY FAX

Dear Ken,

As I told you on the phone, I think your outline for ALL THE PROUD AND MIGHTY is, on the whole, strong; and in fact for a first go-round, it's probably one of the most cohesive and well put together ones you've ever done.

But I think it can be made a lot stronger, and I'm going to offer a few suggestions along those lines.

① We certainly do need a love story, but the Hugh-Maisie plot as you now have it, could benefit, I feel, from some altering. The chambermaid who gets raped by the young lord or by the rich bourgeois and then goes off and makes a career in the theater, carrying her illegitimate child, is, I fear, something of a cliché in the romantic-historical genre. I myself have been the agent of probably three or four novels in which this sort of action and relationship has been central. I think we definitely need these two characters, and we'll need Maisie to have a child, but I'm going to suggest another way of approaching this.

② A second change in the plot may involve probably the elimination of most of your Part V. As I see it, the thrust of the novel involves a conflict with, on one side, Augusta, and her cohorts, and on the other side, with Miller and his allies

Once Miller prevails over Augusta, and Hugh and Maisie make it back together, the main actions are completed. I don't think the reader cares terribly much about the resuscitation of the bank, which is, after all only an impersonal institution.

③ What's most exciting to me about this story is the uncouth American and his wife coming to London, confronting British snobbery and social mores, confronting terrible business difficulties and, in the end, prevailing. The Hugh story with which you now start the outline, is to me of only secondary interest. I think I'd prefer to see the novel start with Miller. Hugh could be a side kick of his; and some of the things you now have in the opening section could come to light as the novel progresses; but Hugh, as you now have him, is not enough of a

dynamo nor are his problems unique and special enough, I feel, to warrant giving him that whole first section.

④ Augusta needs to be your Wolf or Faber in this book. Like Miller, she, too, ought to have something in her past which makes her longing for respectability and a high place in society almost an obsession. It would help, too, if there had been some episode in their mutual past which provided an additional source for her enmity.

In terms of the ongoing action, she needs an overt plot against him. Perhaps she contrives to do something to embarrass him and Dolly at a reception at the Royal Court. This might fail because Miller is too clever and second guesses her, and then word of this might get out, embarrassing her and causing her to hate him twice as much.

⑤ Edward is too pathetic a character, it seems to me, to be used as a point of view character. Much more interesting a villain, I feel, one who might be actually Augusta's chief ally, would be Mickey Marquez. What if he were his country's ambassador? Imagine Alfredo Machado in his prime, a dashing ladies' man. His country is in desperate need of funds. The President-Dictator is his father or his brother; and he has to woo and win Augusta to get to Edward, who is wishy-washy and unable to take any action without being pushed by someone. If Marquez fails to come up with the money, there probably will be a revolution or a coup, and there is a strong likelihood that his family will not only lose power but may be slaughtered. So, it's Mickey who indulges or helps Edward indulge in his perversities, but just as importantly, it has to be he, too, who is Rasputin to Augusta. One possibility could be sex. Another could be social preferment. Marquez, as an ambassador who throws lavish parties and who is received at Court, could open doors for Augusta, and be received in the stateliest of stately homes -- her greatest dream and longing. He could be a hunting buddy of dukes, a yachtsman, a favorite gay blade.

On the side of the heroes, I see point of view characters as Miller, Dolly, Hugh, Maisie and Sylvio.

⑥ I have reservations about starting the book, as you do, with the wedding. The problem, as I see it, is that you're introducing a lot of characters all at once, none of whom as yet mean much to the reader. THE GODFATHER, of course, starts with a wedding, but that one serves essentially to introduce the Godfather and his two sons, but only as characters, without the action really even beginning until later on. I think this novel ought to start either with Miller being offered the appointment or perhaps with Augusta being told that Miller is being offered the appointment, and you could set up the impending struggle right then and there.

⑦ One thing the book could use more of, I feel, is physical action, and this, to some extent, could be provided by Silvio. He could be the son or brother of the opposition leader, the guy whose mission it is to help overthrow the evil and bloodthirsty

dictatorship. If he can stop the flow of money from London to his country, there's a chance that the evil government will fall without a lot of bloodshed. He, as I see it, could be your Feliks character.

So, given the above, there may now be the ingredients for a climax which involves physical action. One possibility might be that Augusta, after Edward's death, either innocently or knowingly, gives Mickey an envelope of bearer bonds, a letter of credit, something which would ruin the bank and also ruin any chance that Silvio might have to overthrow the evil government. However you do it, though, I think Augusta and Mickey must be part of this climax, with maybe Mickey getting killed and Augusta, in the end, having to humiliate herself and perhaps beg from the Jews.

Or, we could also have an assassination plot. I don't think it should be as central as in THE MAN FROM ST. PETERSBURG, but Silvio, pushed to the point of desperation, could be lurking around the edges, having concluded that murder is the only solution.

8 My suggestion for the love story is that Maisie be pregnant with Hugh's child and not Edward's, Edward may have raped her, but the child should be Hugh's. That would make their coming together much more fulfilling, I think. As to Maisie herself, what if she were the daughter of a Jewish tailor, a firm frequented both by the Greenbournes and by the Pilasters. Working in her father's shop, she would have had occasion to meet all these young men; and young Greenbourne could be totally smitten with her but she is smitten with Hugh. When her situation gets desperate, it's young Greenbourne she marries, although she continues to love Hugh. If we go with that idea, we would cut out the whole theater career for her, as well as the subplot involving Joey; and what you get instead would be a major character with a foot in both banking camps.

9 A character with whom not much is done in the outline is Dolly. She could be of very simple origins, a woman with virtually no education, but under her simplicity she would be smart, shrewd and also good. I think it'll be a lot of fun for us to see her help her husband or even lead him into the social maneuvers and skirmishes and even battles. If Maisie is married to a Greenbourne, and the Greenbournes are close with the Prince of Wales, Maisie may have learned some tricks of social advancement and might even team up with Dolly and try to help her, as a way of getting back at Augusta.

10 In many of your books, what's most compelling is that you give one of your characters a terrible dilemma, one that tears him/her into two directions. I think you have such an opportunity with Hugh in this story, and that would give him a powerful thrust into the action, which I'm not sure he now has. What if, for example, he learns that Silvio is planning to assassinate Edward or Augusta or do something else which would cause huge harm to the bank. What

does he do? He wouldn't mind seeing Edward and/or Augusta assassinated; but on the other hand, as much as he hates them, he isn't sure they deserve to be murdered. nor does he approve of anyone murdering anyone.

(11)

As to other aspects of his story, I also have reservations about the whole drama involving Hugh's family, his ne'er do well father, his three sisters, all of whom need to be launched into London society. To me, that's another novel which slows down this one. Some of this stuff certainly could be alluded to. He could have his sisters on his mind while he's involved in the central plot; but I don't feel that this material warrants separate scenes or chapters.

(12)

To return to the climax, I think the main action has to be to save the bank from disaster rather than to resuscitate it after it has failed. I know that you're keen on the notion of these bankrupt people somehow managing to pull themselves together and pay off all their creditors; but my fear is that the accomplishment of this may be largely technical, administrative and, for the purposes of a novel, possibly boring. Also, as you have it now, the salvaging of the bank involves Miller dealing with characters who figure only in minor ways in the first 4/5 of the story. Miller's actual solution to his dilemma, i.e. setting up the syndicate of banks, is essentially technical, administrative, something involving institutions; and I worry that this would turn out to be far less exciting than the kind of knock down-drag out chase-fight which we might have between Miller and Hugh on the one side, and Augusta and Mickey on the other, each wrestling for control of some document which would mean control of the bank, or salvaging it.

(13)

We also need a way to dramatize the importance of this bank to the public at large, to the average British citizen. There would be hundreds, maybe tens of thousands of people of modest income and wealth whose life savings, pensions, etc. are intricately linked with the fortunes of the bank; and if it were to fail, they would be penniless and homeless. A character who embodies this, I think, needs to be part of the story. Perhaps Miller and Dolly have a butler and/or maid, but better, I think, a man who would be a close ally in their attempts to gain acceptance and respectability, someone who put all his money in the bank because he had such high regard for Miller; and then quite late in the story, this butler or chauffeur or gardener could become ill, could need to retire, and would have only the money he'd saved and invested with Pilasters to count on. Thus, Miller in doing everything he can with Hugh to save the bank, would be in essence saving this old retainer who would be representative of tens of thousands of others.

Ken, to sum up, I see the book essentially as a comedy of manners and a thriller, with a love story; but shorn of the family saga and romantic historical elements which now are part of the plot.

Think about all of this and then let's talk

love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'R' followed by a long, horizontal, wavy line that tapers to the right.