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Mr. Ken Follett
BY FAX

September 12, 1991

Dear Ken,

I've now had a chance to mull over your thoughts and my thoughts, and here are some more comments and suggestions.

1. First, I think that Maisie could, indeed, be raped by Edward. The cliche, I thought, was her being a maid in his house and her subsequent theatrical career. But yes, I, too, am keen to keep Maisie; I agree that she would be a great foil for Augusta.

Hugh, as you have him, is not unique or special, but all we need to do is to give him some extremely difficult task, something which you or I might shrink from doing; then, in addition to being a plain, likeable, nice guy, he becomes as resourceful and determined as Eddie in NIGHT OVER WATER.

2. I cannot quarrel with your passion here.

3. I feel that your worry that Miller may not be sufficiently engaging is groundless. In this novel, I see him as the equivalent of Philip in PILLARS. Perhaps my saying 'comedy of manners' was not quite the right way of putting it. What I had in mind was the drama that would ensue from the differences in upbringing, outlook, social mores and all the rest of it which would differentiate the American from these monied Britishers. Miller, too, would be interested in these things only as a means to an end, but these mannerisms, differing ways of doing business, modes of address, figures of speech, clothing and how it's worn, all could make for a bit of comedy along with the drama.

4. I'm with you 100%.

5. I still love the idea of Marquez being a dashing ambassador who gets more invitations to ducal house parties than he knows what to do with, and who manages to get Augusta and Edward invited to places where they otherwise would never be welcome.

As to point of view characters, the bare minimum, it would seem to me, has to be Augusta and Marquez on the one side, and Miller, Maisie, and Hugh on the other. Any others would be optional and might be used, as you say, just once or twice.

6. In art there are no rules. The wedding seems to present difficulties and problems to me; but if you can make it work, god bless. What worries me is all the momentous stuff that goes along with the wedding, especially the shooting of Edward -- which happens almost immediately thereafter. How excited are we likely to get about this shooting and even about the coming together of this young couple, not to mention Miller's great joy and satisfaction if we only are meeting all these people for the first time?

7. Again, I'm with you.

8. Here I think I disagree, perhaps for the first time. One of the things which you see, which I do not I guess, is the value in the character of Sammie, who didn't particularly appeal to me in the outline; but my guess is that you must have a much richer vision of him. Putting Maisie into the Greenbourne family, as I see it, wouldn't take anything out of the conflict within the Pilaster family, since in the present outline she is not in that family anyway throughout much of the book. What the marriage would do is to give her a greater opportunity to deal with the Pilaster people on a more equal footing. She would be in a much stronger position to ally herself, at a certain point in the story, with Miller, and it would provide a conduit for intrigues which, at the moment, I'm not sure that you have. I agree that the Greenournes should remain as adjuncts, rather than as key players, but Maisie, in this position, could become more interesting because she would be more powerful.

9. Okay. Let's not promote Dolly. But even if she's not a point of view character, it would be nice to see her evolve and grow in this new environment.

10. I'm glad you like the idea of a conflicted Hugh; and (11) you're right that Hugh needs to be concerned with someone other than himself. But maybe it's only one sister that he needs to be concerned about.

12. You probably are right that if the rescue of the bank is made into a matter of character and conflict rather than technical genius, it could be quite dramatic. But if Augusta already is out of the picture, then with whom is Miller going to have the conflict?

Finally, I don't think we need to worry about categorizing this novel. As in PILARS and NIGHT OVER WATER, I think there does need to be at least somewhat of a suspenseful thriller element, but on the whole, it's a novel of character and family relationships set in a banking milieu, and that ought to do it, I think.

Call me if you want to hash any of this over.

love

A handwritten signature consisting of a stylized 'M' or 'J' shape followed by a long, sweeping flourish.