

Writers House Inc.

A LITERARY AGENCY

ALBERT ZUCKERMAN, D.F.A.
AMY BERKOWER
MERRILEE HEIFETZ
SUSAN COHEN
ANTHONY CHASE
SUSAN GINSBURG
LUCY VANDERBILT
ANITA OHM
MICHELE G. RUBIN
JOCELYN W. KNOWLES

January 8, 1992

Mr. Ken Follett
By fax: 011-44-71-352-5168

Dear Ken,

As is your custom, you have made a great leap forward with this outline. Even in synopsis, the story now is altogether absorbing; and I think that you have licked most of the major problems.

The main thrust of the suggestions which I'm going to make will have to do with bringing forward more of the conflict between Mickey and Augusta on one hand and Hugh and Maisie on the other. As you have it now, these characters, I feel, don't bump heads directly enough or often enough and their conflicts are more muted as a result than they should be, if we're to generate the kind of excitement that I know you're going to want.

Also, a minor suggestion as to names. I don't think your Latin America character should be called Marcus. A Latin version of the same name would either be Marcose or Marcano. Similarly, I still feel that calling their country Granada would be a mistake. It sounds too much like either the Spanish city of that name or the island, Grenada. As substitutions I would suggest any of the following: Parador, Santa Via, Granador or Santa Maria.

Prologue: This scene, it seems to me, provides an opportunity to introduce three of your point of view characters in sequence. I would suggest that first we see this scene through Mickey's eyes. Then we can meet Hugh who is watching surreptitiously. And finally, we get to know Augusta when she arrives at the school, presumably having been informed what really has happened. I like this whole opening thing a great deal; and I think that it will serve you well throughout the book, much more so in fact than is now the case in the present outline.

For one thing, there seems to be no follow up to this outrageous kiss which Mickey gives to Augusta. And when we resume in the scene which follows, you give us no inkling what went on between them during the seven intervening years. I don't think you can introduce so bold, even shocking an action and then just sort

of drop it. As I have suggested previously, I think you might get a lot of mileage out of making Mickey into Augusta's lover.

Hugh, observing what amounts to a murder, says nothing. This, it would seem to me, would be a wonderful occasion to set up his fear and awe of Augusta and of her family. There might too be some sense of family loyalty; and we might here initially get a sense of his ambition and also his resentment.

Part One: 1.(i) I found myself wondering about Mickey. What is the state of his finances, sexual relations, closeness or distance from his father? You might get some drama out of the father wanting him to come home, but will agree to let him stay if Mickey can obtain the guns. You might, as images for these characters, think of Alfredo and Sergio Machado.

Mickey, it seems to me, could be having affairs with both Edward and Augusta, and then he would have the terrible problem of trying to keep each one secret from the other.

(ii) I think this would work better if Augusta, instead of lobbying with several family members, somehow forces-pushes her husband Joseph to do this. As I see it, this is a good opportunity to develop her relationship with Joseph and make her into something of a Lady Macbeth.

(iii) Here is an example of what I might call your being oblique. The drama, I feel, is between Hugh and Augusta and ought essentially to be between the two of them. In the first scene, she could tell him what she's arranged or what she proposes to arrange. But bear in mind that Hugh too has some power over her because of what he knows about Edward years ago. Hugh, in fact, might mention the expected visit from Middleton.

After the scene with Augusta, Hugh might have one with the two girls; and it might be interesting if Rachel were drawn to Mickey.

(iv) This scene, I think would be improved, if Augusta was to have it with Hugh instead of Lady Stalworthy. We need openly to establish the contests between them, to make very clear how much more capable he is than Edward.

(v) As you have Mickey and his father now, they seem to be cut from the same cloth. Mickey would be a lot more interesting, I think, if he has more scruples than his father and is not happy about entering into murders and other nefarious plots, at least while he's still so young. But he wants to be strong like his father. He wants his father's approval. And he recognizes his father's great strength and has a wish to emulate it and acquire it, even though it might be a little against his nature.

2.(i) Robinson cannot of course be Maisie's real name. Either she has changed it to Robinson, or she has a name like Rabin

or Rabinowitz or Robinor or Robinov.

I suggest that the scene in which Edward goes after Maisie be written from Hugh's point of view, and that he do something in the course of it, perhaps try to play moderator or someone to take off the tension. He, after all, is our hero and we need to keep him in the thick of things as much as possible.

(ii) This scene would work a little better, I believe, if Mickey already knows of Tonio's reckless gambling. It might be good if Mickey were to draw them there on purpose. At first Tonio wins. Hugh tries to restrain Tonio; and this would of course set up a nice antagonism with Mickey.

(iii) It's not clear to me how this scene advances the action. It does, of course, reveal Maisie to be a "good" girl. What might work here would be for Hugh to rescue Solly in some way; and as a result, Solly incurs a debt to Hugh. Solly conceivably could be about to be fleeced or mugged.

(iv) The action here seems a bit subtle. You might want some demonstration of Mickey's powers over Edward. Maybe Mickey forces Edward to eat one of the girls. Or maybe Mickey takes the one Edward wants. Again, it's not clear how this scene advances the action; and what you have is a scene between two unsympathetic characters. If we're going to keep it, we need somehow to set up a problem between the two of them and write it from Mickey's point of view.

3.(i) Maisie, I feel, is going to be a wonderful character, one you're sure to have a lot of fun with. I think you would have more opportunities for drama, excitement, and closeness between her and the other characters if she had some prior relationship with them. What if, for example, instead of running away from Cardiff, she simply had run away from the East End of London where maybe her father had been a tailor to the Pilaster family, coming to their home to measure them up, and she as a little girl might have trotted along and known these men as young boys?

(ii) Is Hugh concerned about what Augusta might think of Maisie? He must worry at least a little about some consequences of pursuing this girl, it seems to me.

(iii) Here I suggest that Middleton himself be a solicitor or maybe he should come with one. We need to add more weight to his visit, make it a bit threatening, or certainly more threatening than it seems to be. What if, for example, Hugh is present or arrives in the midst of the meeting, and Augusta must subtly grovel in return for his not spilling the beans?

4.(i) I think it would help to have Hugh at this card game, trying to help Tonio and not succeeding. Tonio, I see, as an incredibly sweet man. Also, you will have to establish earlier that Mickey knows how to cheat at cards. Maybe in an earlier scene

we see his father teach him, the somewhat reluctant student.

(ii) The scene with Hugh and Maisie then could be on a subsequent night, and perhaps their sexual consummation could be on a second or third meeting. Maisie, it seems to me, ought to have at least a small touch of Victorian modesty, if not prudery.

And then there's the question of, would Edward have the physical strength to rape a girl as tough as Maisie? Maybe he needs Mickey to help him.

(iii) Hugh again, I think, ought to be part of this scene. After all, it's Hugh that Augusta really wants to get rid of, not Maisie who at this point is only secondary.

5.(i) Mickey, as I have suggested earlier, ought as much as possible be led in villainy by his father. I see pop as a cheerfully evil, greedy, grasping, but also fun-loving man; and if we involve him in scenes like this, we can keep him actively in the story until he returns back to Latin America.

(ii) I'm not sure if what we want here is a scene between Augusta and Joseph. That one could take place offstage as could the one between Joseph and Hugh; and then the onstage scene, it seems to me, ought to be one in which Hugh confronts Augusta, after already having been ordered to leave, but he wants to get a lick in or something before he does. This plainly is in line with the suggestion I made at the very beginning of this letter about trying to keep these two characters in the forefront.

(iii) The arrest of Daniel is going to need some preparation. Perhaps Papa hardly speaks English. He tells Mickey what to do, but it's left to Mickey to actually organize the whole thing.

Part II At this point, how does Mickey feel about Augusta? And she, how does she feel about the relationship of Edward with Mickey?

Mickey, it seems to me, can have two trumps with Augusta, one her passion for him, and the second, his knowledge of Edward's crime which she of course also knows about.

(ii) I wonder if Hugh couldn't do more on his return than ask for a partnership, be denied, and be disappointed. True, later on he is going to take steps to make sure he gets what he is after; but we need some indication even here that he is capable, determined, and someone who deserves to be the hero of the novel.

1. (i) Going back to the beginning of this section, I wonder if we need Jorge. He seems to be an extraneous character. I would suggest that here we either have papa return or have Mickey notified by letter about the railroad.

We could perhaps get some conflict out of Mickey asking for

5

six months to get this done and papa insisting that it happen tomorrow. Then I wonder if Mickey might exploit (or try to) his close relationship with Augusta. He could be the one pushing her to make Edward a partner, something which she also wants, but maybe hesitates to push because she knows how the other partners feel about Edward.

(ii) I suggest that you give Hugh and Dolly only one child. More will just clog things up.

And in this general area, Hugh and Maisie are going to need a scene alone together which they don't seem to have.

(iii) Joseph puzzles me. As you have him, he seems rather an automaton. Presumably he knows a few things about his own son. Would he want him as a business partner? I'm assuming, of course, that he's not stupid or blind. So if this is to happen, then Augusta must somehow compel him. One way might be to promise a girl who'll bring a large dowry, maybe even a huge dowry, money which maybe the bank temporarily needs. The only other alternative that springs to mind might be that she might threaten to expose some peccadillo of Joseph's.

2.(i) Mickey marrying Hugh's sister, or even falling in love with her, is an extra complexity which I think the story would be better without. It seems to me that he ought to have an offstage wife, someone who is suitable and has been supplied by his father, perhaps the daughter of a neighboring caudillo. She would be an obedient Latin girl who accepts his catting around as the norm, which as you know, is accepted among Latin American wives even today.

I wonder if Edward's marriage ought not also to be a social and financial coup. Joseph might after all resist making a large settlement on his dissolute son, so that Augusta (and perhaps Mickey) might have to find a girl with lots and lots of money.

2.(ii) This scene is terrific. Augusta ought initially to be the point of view character, waiting expectantly to see how her scheme is going to work. Then I would switch to Hugh who recognizes then and there that all this is Augusta's doing; and we might switch at the end to Augusta feeling triumphant.

3.(i) I suggest that the scene here of Hugh seeing Solly should be at his home so that Maisie would at least partially be present.

4.(ii) Hugh, it seems to me, should get his partnership by compelling Augusta somehow not to stand in his way. Maybe he runs into opposition at the firm, but he knows that she is at the root of it, so he comes to her. Also, by this time there must be great momentum for the railroad issue, so it would be very hard for him to stop it.

5.(i) I wonder if we couldn't also bring in Mickey Senior here in some way. Maybe he could take up with April?

(ii) Wouldn't Hugh try to talk Solly out of the railroad issue? Doesn't Solly despise Edward? It's not clear who the point of view character here is, and I thought maybe Mickey ought to be the one to do the selling.

6.(ii) We are going to need some preparation for Mickey's being ruthless enough to kill. One way would be to let us see him be violent earlier in the play, perhaps with an animal. Or even better, this might be something that pop engineers--after it's clear to him that maybe Mickey isn't up to it.

Also I found Dolly a bit vague and she's going to need some sketching in.

Part III 1.(i) The needed funds ought to be for some specific weaponry, maybe artillery or machine-guns if they existed then.

Mickey could do the killing, imagining his father ordering him or suggesting that he do this, and of course he does; but don't make it too easy for him.

(iii) Again, the real conflict for control is between Hugh and Augusta, but we don't have them on stage fighting things out, and somehow I believe we should. And it's not only control of the bank that's at issue but also leadership of the family. Maybe here Hugh might be tempted to call in the card he's holding about his having kept quiet about Edward's murder out of family loyalty. And if not here, at some point in the book I do feel that we should use this.

2.(ii) It's not clear to me what the difference is to the bank if Hugh resigns now or at the end of the year. What would they be gaining by hanging on to a reluctant partner?

3.(i) Augusta and Edward (and Mickey if he's there) need a contrary point of view.

Is it possible that Mickey could have some capital in the bank? Or could his country's treasury?

3.(ii) Hugh manages to do all this, as you have it, rather easily. I wonder if someone ought not seriously try to sabotage this. The obvious choice is Augusta, but she might be in league with some of the other Pilasters who feel as she does.

4.(i) Dolly's walkout here seems abrupt, and it reemphasizes the need for her to have some development to lead up to her walking out.

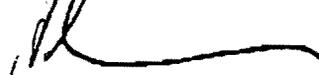
(iii) I wonder if here there might not be some reconciliation between Hugh and Augusta. And given her strength and determination all through the story, I wonder about her committing suicide.

Could she have an old maiden aunt in the south of France perhaps with whom she thinks she could spend her remaining years?

(iv) To dramatize this in such a way as to keep our characters involved, I suggest that Mickey is trying to raise bail. He goes of course first to Edward who is broke and then tries Hugh who refuses him. Although it would be nice if Hugh in some way could be mildly merciful. Also, to give some physical action to this ending, you might involve Hugh in actually apprehending Mickey who maybe is fleeing or in hiding and is difficult to corral.

Ken, I hope you find at least half of this stuff helpful and valuable; and I'll be eager to hear what you think.

Love,



Al

P.S. I'm faxing you this letter but also will be mailing a copy.