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Mr. Ken Follett
BY FAX

Dear Ken,

As I told you on the phone, the ending of **ALL THE PROUD AND MIGHTY** made me cry a little bit, and I think you have put together one hell of a story. The great strengths of the manuscript in its present form are the intricately worked out plot, the wonderful settings and set pieces in Victorian London, and some exceptionally powerfully scenes.

The next job, as we both know, will be mainly in further developing the characters, enriching certain areas of the background, making the emotional substructure as powerful as the physical action, and pulling the entire fabric of the book into a tighter weave.

Augusta. She is tough, determined, ruthless even, which is all well and good; but there needs to be another side to her, an interior which the world may not readily perceive but the reader can which will give her some humanity and make her into more than a stock villainess, which is now what she appears to be.

There are lines in the text which suggest that she adores both her husband and her son, but we never see or feel any of this. It's fine for her to be bossy and peremptory, but we should also have glimpses of her behaving tenderly toward both of them.

For Mickey, I think she ought to have an uncontrollable lust. As the book now is constructed, she, Edward and Mickey appear to form an almost inseparable triangle; but the elements which bind them to each other could be brought forward more, and one of them, I feel, ought to be sex. Both Mickey and Edward could be bisexual and have relations with each other as well as with women, while Mickey could be having a relationship with Augusta. When we spoke, you thought that there ought to be sexual tension but nothing more than that. My sense is that you could have tremendous sexual tension stemming from the availability and/or willingness of either partner at given points in the story. Mickey as a sexed-starved youth could want Augusta even more than she wants him; and then as

the years pass, he could tire of her while her lust for him might grow ever stronger. If you brought something like this into the story, I don't think it would change the basic actions appreciably, but it would add a lot of intensity between these characters, and especially if the Mickey-Augusta relationship had to be kept secret for Edward.

We need a bit about Augusta's childhood and background to explain to the reader why she's the kind of character she's become. Perhaps as a child or teenager, she was put down in some way by an aristocrat, or maybe her family was, or maybe she had a crush on a young man above her class who dropped her unceremoniously at some point. But something along these lines would give depth and a rationale for her lust for Joseph's being named a peer. When we first meet her, she doesn't seem to be a social climber; but my sense is that she probably has been one from a very early age. Perhaps the school that her son attends could be one that the rejects from Eton and Harrow go to, but she plainly would have preferred a top school for her son, and his not having been admitted galls her and incites her even in the very first chapter to long for a peerage. Maybe she imagines that at Eton an incident like the drowning of the Middleton boy could never have happened.

To round out her character, I thought it might be nice for her to have a side interest. What if she had a passion for decorating, which to some extent is already implied in your text. She might always be redoing one room or another, replacing one piece of furniture with a better one. She ought to be one of these women who treasures her house, loves it with a passion, and is always trying to make it more beautiful with an additional picture, a vase, whatever.

The plots which she engineers are all excellent, but we must get the feeling that they stem not so much from malice but because she feels beleaguered and threatened. It's as if she must do these things to defend herself from imagined ruin.

Finally, for her to be the social center of the family, for all them to come to her house every day for tea, she has to be in some way warm and gracious to them, appear to be considerate of their needs and feelings, or it's unlikely that they would want to come every day to her house. And coming back to Joseph and Edward, we need to see the brilliance in them which she sees through her own eyes, as well the Adonis who she sees in Mickey.

Mickey. As I mentioned to you on the phone, the Granada subplot needs some research. I'd like to know a lot more about Mickey's family, childhood, his feelings about his relatives, the location and history of Granada; and I would hope that you could get a lot of useful information of this kind in a novel set in 19th century Latin America or a history of Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, or perhaps one of the Central American republics.

As to Mickey himself, I think it would be good for us to feel

more of his sense of being alien, foreign, his longing to belong, to be accepted, and to be needed. Augusta then would become a quasi-mother to him, protector, and Edward would be not only a side-kick but a sort of younger dependent brother.

Mickey, as you have him, appears to be totally evil; and I don't think that there is a role in a serious novel of this kind for such a character. We need to give him at least some humanity. There ought to be someone he loves. It could at first be Augusta. It could be one of the cowboys on his father's ranch who did good things for him as a child. Or maybe an older sister whose kindness and caresses he remembers fondly. And he too could have a side interest of some kind. Maybe he's passionate about horses, or guns. Maybe he starts a gun collection, or if he's too poor to buy weapons himself, he haunts museums, trade shows where they exhibit armaments, and he makes it a point of keeping up on all the technology relating to new cannons, machine guns, rifles, shotguns, whatever. And his knowledge could also be something that's very impressive to his father.

We could use some sense of what he does as the minister of Granada. Here and there, he ought to be rushing off to trade and tariff negotiations, escorting dignitaries from home, throwing a party for his country's independence day, all the stuff that ambassadors and ministers have to do. Also, we could use just a bit about his living arrangements, the size of the staff, the problems of being a South American diplomat in London.

All the murders he commits, except the one as a schoolboy, should be presented in such a way that it's clear that he feels driven to do these awful things, that if he fails to do them he'll be a disgrace, a failure, and his whole world will collapse around him. The drowning episode appears to be totally malicious, and I wonder here if it couldn't be reconfigured in such a way that he drowns this boy because he felt that either he or Edward was threatened by him in some way.

Maisie. She's a delicious character, and I don't have any suggestions for real changes about her, other than to advise you to enrich her ethnic background. As a child of Jewish immigrants, I'm assuming that there would be some vestiges of Yiddish phrases and Jewish observances in her daily life -- especially once she's married to a Jewish banker. My guess is that there are quite a few novels of Jewish immigrant life in Britain, and you ought to be able to get some good stuff out of one of them to make Maisie more credible in this respect. And of course some of this would carry over into her brother as well.

Hugh. First, the bank itself. What is the source of the Pilaster fortune? Who did what to get this bank started? Usually in a family institution of this kind, there is some sort of ancestor-worship, some reference back to the great man who started the whole thing and what he did, and all that is missing. There are some good histories of the Rothschild family, and there may be

similar ones about other banking dynasties which could give you some ideas along these lines.

As to Hugh himself, we need to see him more involved in the hustle-bustle of daily activity at the bank, much as we would want to see Mickey involved with Granadan affairs. It's not clear, by the way, why Hugh is more valuable to the firm in London than he was in Boston. Why did they bring him back? Also, you give us some nice description about some rooms in the bank; but we don't have a sense of its extent. How many offices around the world do the Pilasters have? How many employees? How many depositors?

We have a good sense of how Hugh feels about Augusta and Edward, but much less about his feelings for the other Pilasters. Since they appear to be such a close-knit group, and since he is among them as much as he is, we ought to know more about how he feels about each of them.

And his banking prowess needs to be dramatized a bit more. Early in the book, we see that he picks up on an opportunity to sell some Russian bonds, which suggests that he's alert and has a bent for salesmanship, but I'd also like to see at some point early in the novel an example of his cleverness, something that involves figures, calculations, which show how more money could be made by handling a loan or bill of exchange in some different way.

I wonder too if Hugh isn't just a little too nice, too righteous. Yes, he does need to care terribly about the honor of the family and the honor of the bank, but as you have him, his only vice appears to be wearing loud ties. Maybe you could give him something as simple as elaborate fantasies of killing Augusta, something he knows he would never do, but something he cannot quite stop himself from imagining.

I agree with your son that Edward is perhaps too much of a dolt. The partners seem crazy now to appoint him Senior Partner, even threatened as they are with the loss of his capital. Maybe what Edward does to cover up his inability is to come to his mother for advice with difficult banking problems, or maybe he comes to Mickey. In fact, maybe Mickey helps him at school with exams, with homework, and then this dependency carries on into his professional life. So maybe he appears to do some clever things, but it's really all coming from Mickey and the partners then don't realize how stupid he is. This would give Augusta an additional reason for being so hugely grateful to Mickey.

Joseph too could benefit from some further definition. Late in the novel, we find out about his collection of snuff boxes, which is interesting; but it might be good to bring this passion on earlier in the novel. He could be someone who's constantly running off to Sotheby's and Christie's to attend auctions, or maybe even chasing over to the Continent to purchase a particularly rare and wonderful snuff box. And this could be something that the whole family takes pleasure in, which would establish much more solidly

the use of these snuff boxes at the end of the novel. But Joseph also needs to be more of a character in his own right with respect to Hugh, who after all is his nephew, the son of his brother. I think having Augusta manipulate him works well, but make it a lot harder for her. Make him smarter, tougher, more of a match for her.

Nora appears to me to become a shrew rather suddenly. If there were clues early in her relationship with Hugh that she was going to turn out to be a bitch, I missed them; and I think it would be a good idea for there to be at least a few such clues. And you also need to do some preparation for her abandoning her children.

Ken, there's a fair bit more of course in my marginal notes; but I think that I've addressed in this letter the main areas of future work, and I'll look forward to hashing all this over with you when you get here a week from Friday.

Love,



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