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August 12, 1994

Mr. Ken Follett
Jumby Bay
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Dear Ken,

Making notes on lines, scenes and chapters is taking me longer than I had anticipated; and as I dictate this letter to you, I'm about half-way through the book, so that when we get together to work on Monday I may or may not have all of it completed; but you'll certainly receive more than enough to get you started.

As I told you on the phone, your action rolls along like gangbusters; and the story is chock full of fascinating and exciting scenes. Still, to some extent this manuscript reminds me of your first draft of **ON WINGS OF EAGLES**, which, as you may recall, had a somewhat flat quality. Then of course you went back and deepened and enriched the characters and also put more juice into the scenes, which is the kind of work that I would expect you're going to be doing here without great difficulty.

Perhaps the most important area of work still to be done, I feel, has to do with your three villains: George, Jay, and Lennox. Right now, they are all so relentlessly mean and evil that they seem to lack any vestige of humanity, with the result that after a while, they are just not very interesting. And there is a particular problem when you build a scene around any two of them. Since we don't sympathize with any of them, it becomes hard to become involved with what's going on. As I recall, we had similar problems in your first drafts with Walden and with William in **PILLARS**; and I think that you can do some of the same kind of humanizing with these characters as you did with those.

George is smart and ruthless, and that's fine; but for him to work well, we need to understand what's driving him; and he also should have a soft spot or weakness somewhere. Like any businessman, he must have business problems; but so far there don't seem to be any. Here are a few suggestions to consider. What if he is under severe financial pressure? He has borrowed heavily to acquire new mines or additional ships. But the mines are not producing enough income to meet the loan payments, or possibly a ship with very valuable cargo has been lost at sea; and he was counting on the revenue from it to pay off a loan or a portion of a loan. Or, as you have it later in the book, a mine could collapse, go out of production, and his projections for meeting his obligations could go up into thin air. Maybe you could add an off-stage character, a banker or moneylender who is the bane of George's existence. He might even be brought on-stage.

George at times might lecture Jay about the hardships of his own childhood, and that might explain how he has become so ruthless. Perhaps he was orphaned and grew up in the home of a cruel and callous relative or guardian. Perhaps he was beaten and made to perform chores which he thought only servants should have to do. People as cruel and conniving as you portray him to be usually perceive everyone in the world to be like themselves; and thus they justify their low acts by saying to themselves, "Well, if I didn't do that to this guy, then he would do it to me." A root cause for this cynical world view could arise from some really awful thing that happened to him as a child or teenager.

My experience with greed is that it derives from insecurity. People who worry about being poverty-stricken, going hungry, keep these worries all their lives no matter how rich they get. George strikes me as such a character.

Two other aspects to his character worth developing are the root of his cruelty to Jay as opposed to his preference to Robert, and some kind of soft spot. Jay as a child might have caught his father in a lie and corrected him in front of this banker character or some other very important person. As a child, I know I did this sort of thing, and my mother was always furious at me. In my case, I was forgiven; but Jay's trying to be forthright and honest could have cost his father an important deal or transaction; and he could from then on have felt that Jay had betrayed him and was an untrustworthy little shit. And from that point on, maybe, Jay learned that the smart thing was to be devious and secretive.

The soft spot he now appears to have is Robert; but we don't see any real on-stage evidence of a particular fondness or love for Robert. What's more likely, it seems to me, is that when he was a persecuted boy, there was a servant or a maiden-aunt or an older sister who interceded on his behalf and tried to help him; and he could be particularly devoted to that person. She does not have to be an onstage character; but could be someone about whose health

he's very concerned, to whom he is sending letters and gifts and to whom he also pays visits from time to time. I feel, too, that he should not disappear entirely from the book once Jay and Lizzie go to Virginia. Even though Jay owns the plantation, George presumably has shipping interests in Virginia, possibly warehouses, wharves, additional investment opportunities, so that he would have reason to come over on a business trip and at the same time visit Jay and Lizzie and very possibly Alicia would come with him. Maybe he wants to sell out his interests, fearing revolution in the colonies; and that could spark some interesting conflict between him and Jay.

Whereas George is evil, Jay seems slimey. I suggest that you transform him from the amoral character which he now is, into someone with a lot of inner conflict. At the mine, for example, part of him wants to let Mack go; but another part of him takes over, feeling that this would be the weak and unmanly thing to do, and he's got to prove that he's a strong man. This kind of thing should even more strongly come into play when he's trying to kill his brother. First, he should have some grievance against Robert which now doesn't seem to be there. Second, there should be a vivid example of some other younger brother he knows (maybe a cousin) who is living in abject poverty, so that his fate if he doesn't do anything, is visibly spelled out before him. But even then, he should hesitate, worry about going to hell; and in the end decide that it's fitting, proper and necessary if he's not to be flung into misery.

Army life, his career in the military, his skills, if any, as a soldier, all are a bit sketchy at the moment. To give this aspect of the novel reality, I think he's going to need both a superior officer and a second-in-command with whom he has some on-going problems. Neither of these need to be on-stage characters, but dealing with them does need to be a fairly constant concern of Jay's. For example, what sorts of intriguing or other scheming and ass-kissing is he doing to get himself promoted? And with whom is he in competition?

He, too, I think, should have a soft spot. In his case, at one point it seems to be a passion for horses, which we learn about on the ship going across the Atlantic, but you don't make anything of this elsewhere in the book. It would add nicely to his character, I think, if he constantly was concerned with acquiring wonderful horses and with the problems of grooming and looking after them. Another humanizing aspect to him is his relationship with his mother, and that figures in the Scottish portion of the book, but then she disappears. It would be interesting, I think, to see Jay turn to her from time to time when he has severe problems with Lizzie.

I suggest, too, that in the scenes from Jay's point of view, we get more frequent news from the colonies. This, after all, is

where the story is heading; and information about these rebellious acts overseas could dovetail more with what goes on in London--at least in Jay's emotions.

Lennox, it seems to me, is hardly ever a point-of-view character; but he does play a very important role in the novel; and he is so unremittingly vicious that I long to know and understand him better. I suggest that instead of letting him be an independent entrepreneur, you make him either an employee or a co-venturer with Jaimmison. If part of the money which Lennox earns from coal-heaving has to be paid to Jaimmison, then when Mack takes over this business, there is a real loss to Jaimmison, and there's all the more reason why he should become involved. Lennox could perhaps be on a short leash. Jaimmison has ample evidence which could hang Lennox. Lennox is therefore caught in Jaimmison's web, just the way Peg gets caught in Lennox's. It would be interesting, I think, to see Lennox, who, on the one hand, is obsequious, but who on the other hand totally hates the Jaimmisons. Also, as you have it now, you get the impression that he must be fairly well-to-do and making quite a lot of money; and yet, there seem to be no instances of his spending any of his money, or of his enjoying it. Lennox, too, I think, could benefit from having some human aspects to his character. Maybe he's a compulsive gambler; and never has any money because he's always betting on horses or prizefights or whatever people bet on in those days, and he loses. Or maybe at cards. Or dice. Maybe there's a game of some kind constantly going on in his tavern, and he's always a participant, and usually a loser. In his case, I don't think we need a life story or any memories of his childhood; but he could have an old father or mother who come around periodically for a handout or free meal, and we can see how much he hates this person and infer how cruelly he must have been treated as a child. And would he have no woman?

The second major problem to be addressed, as I mentioned to you, is the manuscript's grimness in its current incarnation. Although Mack suffers cruelly at the mine, he does escape. We never really get to enjoy his initial burst of freedom. When Gordonson arranges for him to be able to organize teams of coal heavers and to buy shovels, this is a tremendous victory; but in the text, neither Mack nor we really experience his pleasure. And this kind of thing holds through pretty much throughout. We do have flashes of good times; but these are rarely lingered on, whereas the painful episodes get lots of space and detail. I'm not suggesting that you change the balance to 50/50; but I would say that at least 1/3 of the scenes should be "up." You will find many of these opportunities marked in my marginal notes on the manuscript.

The sympathetic characters, Mack, Lizzie, and Peg, on the whole work well; but with these too, I have some suggestions as to how you might make them even more interesting than they now are. Lizzie, as you portray her, is highly sexed; but in the manuscript

we have not nearly as much sexual tension as I think this story merits. Early in the novel, she should be aware of it with Jay, and also feel a bit with Mack. Whenever she feels her blood go warm around Mack, she should castigate herself for having such sensations around an uneducated miner, but still she definitely should have them. With Jay, while she's still supposedly being courted by Robert, she could do some of the same kind of thing; but she ought to be having these feelings all through the novel at the same time as she's fighting them off.

She seems to have quite a nice relationship with her mother in the first part of the book, and then the mother appears to disappear off the face of the earth. It's unclear to me why the mother should lose her property as soon as Lizzie marries. I assume that must have to do with the satisfaction of the mortgages, but this is totally passed over. In a more normal situation, wouldn't the mother continue to own the property until her death? Coming back to the relationship, I think it would enrich the story for Lizzie to correspond with her mother once she goes to Virginia, so you could still keep events in Scotland at least peripherally in the novel. Lizzie certainly has plenty of trouble with Jay; but she would be a "bigger" character if she had someone to worry about other than herself, and I suggest that her mother would nicely serve this purpose.

Mack is a wonderful hero, but in my view, he's just a little too saintly. When he organizes the coal heavers, for example, he ought to take something a little extra for himself. Maybe he feels a little guilty, but if he is so perfect, he doesn't seem quite human. His concerns in Scotland are selfish, and that works well. He can't help them all, but he can help himself, and that's what he does. In London, however, we have no sense of his having any kind of a life other than organizing the coal heavers. Does he drink, gamble, screw whores, go to church, read books, attend free concerts? And who does he love? There must be some miners who were good to him when he was an orphan child and for whom he feels deeply, and the same may hold true for certain coal heavers and certain slaves. And there ought to be some mention, too, of his saving up some money, or starting to save up some money to send for Esther. This is not mentioned.

Peg is pretty great as she is; but she, too, could use a predilection or vice or idiosyncrasy. She drinks, but that seems normal under the circumstances. Could she have a fascination for collecting (even stealing) buttons or bits of cloth? Maybe she likes to sew and make odd looking outfits from snippets of rags and textiles that she somehow gathers together. Maybe she somehow got her hands on a canary in a cage and a lot of her love and passion goes into imaginary conversations with the canary.

Robert is a potentially useful character who I think ought to remain in the story and ought not to disappear to Barbados. If he

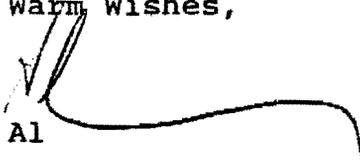
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were to be in London at the same time as Jay, you could keep alive some of the family tension which you have in Scotland, and which disappears from the novel once we get to London. And Robert, conceivably, could even go to Virginia to look after his father's warehouses and shipping interests; and there, too, we could have all kinds of interesting tension between him and his brother and in some of that, Lizzie could also become involved.

My final comment at this stage has to do with your research. Every now and again the action appears to stop while we get a disquisition on how coal was mined or how deer were hunted or how certain laws were enforced or not enforced in London in this period. You will see in the manuscript again and again that I've marked these scenes, pointing out that the research needs to recede to the background while the interpersonal drama between the characters gets brought to the foreground. Frequently, you build a whole scene around a business negotiation; and that's okay if there also is an emotional subtext between the characters, something going on between them which is as important or more important than the deal that they're making. Again and again you'll see that I've marked these scenes and tried to suggest possibilities for the kind of subtexts which I think might work in each of these.

Ken, I may have more to present you with when we get to work Monday morning, by which time I will have marked up hopefully the rest of the manuscript; but for now, I hope you have some good stuff to chew on till we see each other.

Warm Wishes,



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