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January 5, 1995

Mr. Ken Follett  
 Cannes, France  
 BY FAX: 33 93 90 87 36

Dear Ken,

it was a delight for me to read **A PLACE CALLED FREEDOM** and see all the really ingenious changes and improvements you've made. It was interesting and gripping in its previous incarnation, and now it's even more exciting and also more fun to read.

But a lot of the new material, good as it is, is necessarily first draft stuff. That means, I think, that you may have to do a bit more work than is usually the case on one of your second drafts. In this letter, I'll make a few general suggestions; but you'll find the bulk of them on the manuscript itself when you get back to London.

① The Scotland section reads wonderfully well, and I have little to add or suggest. I did find myself wondering if there ought not to be some basis in fact for George's thinking so ill of his son Jay. I thought Jay might have done something silly or foolish to incur his father's displeasure. Later on in the book, for example, we learn that Jay is an improvident gambler. What if prior to the start of the story he lost money in a way that was embarrassing to his father? As you've written it, George thinks that this son of his is incompetent (which of course he is), but it would help, I think, if we knew why George thinks this--even though Alicia might dismiss whatever Jay has done as a normal boyish prank which ought easily to be forgiven.

② In the same vein, I think it would help if there had been some recent interaction (prior to the start of the novel) between Jay, Robert, George, and maybe even Alicia which would provide some kind of instigation for the hostility between them and Jay's attempted

murder. Certainly George's gift of the horse as Jay's total inheritance is a kick in the teeth; but I think that Jay also needs to feel wronged in some way by Robert. Maybe it was Robert who lured him into the gambling game which incurred George's wrath?

I think you might consider reversing the order of two of your scenes. Wouldn't it make more sense for Jay to invite Lizzie down into the mine after Alicia has suggested that he propose to her rather than before? As you have it, this invitation seems to come out of a pure desire to be with this girl and have some fun, which is fine; but if we knew Jay had a larger motive, and was pursuing a somewhat more serious goal, then their going down together could be even more interesting, I think. No.

③ I also found myself puzzled by the relationship between Alicia and George. Has she been at war with him for years, or is this new? Again, if we knew about some precipitating incident in the recent past, I think we could more easily understand this relationship. It then might be clear that over the years, the two of them had gotten along pretty well, until Jay did something to upset his father, and now Alicia is boiling mad that George is not giving him a decent portion.

④ In the rest of the novel, the work to be done involves mainly texture. The scenes themselves are strong and well-written, but their background seems vague. In London, we're in good shape; but once we get to Virginia, I think you need to create an ambience as rich as we find in **GONE WITH THE WIND**, **THE THORNBIRDS**, or **THE PILLARS OF THE EARTH**. The size and scope of the plantation is unclear. How many acres? Is it all flatland or rolling hills? Are the fields separated by hedges, rows of trees, ditches, fences? We know that they grow tobacco on this plantation and cure it there; but are there no other crops? We know that the slaves and convicts are not fed fish or meat; but do they grow vegetables? Are there cows who give milk and from whom they might make butter or cheese? How is the field work done? Are plows pulled by human beings or by horses or by oxen?

⑤ I'm also curious about the house. If it's large enough to have a ballroom, then there must be many other rooms; and the design and decor of the place, as well as its layout, are a little unreal. Maybe we could see it better if we knew that it had many fireplaces and tall chimneys or if the front was landscaped with azaleas or magnolias, or maybe evergreens of some kind. I wonder too if the place ought not to have a name? One of the great things about **THE MAN FROM ST. PETERSBURG** were your descriptions of that country house; and something similar here would be good. Mockjack Hall

⑥ Mac arrives at this plantation in company with, I believe, nineteen other convicts; and he's there for, say, roughly a year. There is never a mention of any of these other men (I'm assuming they're men). he has no significant interaction with any of them; and that makes it a little hard to believe in their existence. In London we had a good sense of his close associates; but at the

plantation, he seems to interact with no one but Lizzie or Lennox, and very occasionally Kove. True, fairly quickly he becomes a house servant; but by the same token, we have very little sense of his interaction with the other house slaves; and the slaves themselves are somewhat shadowy. I'm not suggesting that scenes be added involving any of these characters, only that they pass in and out, be noticed, liked, disliked, reacted to; and it's conceivable that one or another could cause problems of some kind. True, we have the girl who faints in the field and gets kicked and beaten; but I'm talking more about everyday kinds of annoyances and encounters. We could use a little more, for example, about the weather, extremes of heat and cold, terrible rain, maybe a leaking roof. I'm sure, too, that their people suffered from all kinds of illnesses, including parasites, and terrible rashes from poison ivy and poison oak, awful stings from bees and hornets.

What about so everyday a thing as food? And how do Lizzie and Jay feel about what they eat every day as compared with their diet back in Britain? Living in the country as they do, the food could be better, more fresh, or it could be worse.

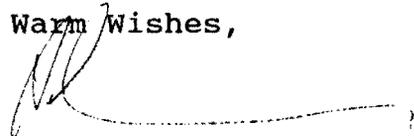
Also, I very much like the way you introduced Jay's interest in and love for horses early in the book; but I think it would be good to sustain this just a bit more in the second half. Maybe there could be some kind of a row between him and Lennox about using horses for field work. Lennox would want to do this, and Jay might want to shelter his fine animals from getting themselves worn out.

When Mac and Lizzie run off, we see all the slaves lined up warmly bidding them farewell; but prior to that, we have little sense of any kind of close or affectionate relationship between Lizzie and her house slaves, and I think that easily could be worked in.

Ken, I may well have gone into overload with the suggestions; but if you end up using only some small fraction, I think they'll help the book.

I hope you and Barbara are enjoying Cannes, and the marked up manuscript will be waiting for you when you get back to Cheyne Walk.

Warm Wishes,



Al

Sarah  
Belle  
Mildred

Kobe  
Carr  
Ben

Sweeney  
Kennex

Jimmy - stable boy

- ✓ 1. George's room for having Jay
- ✓ 2. Some recent incident inflaming the hostility.
- ✓ 3. George and Alicia.
4. The plantation
- ✓ 5. Morgack Hall
6. Other slaves and servants
7. Food, horses and house slaves.
8. (A) People more shocked by hygiene.  
esp. Jay. Also her <sup>education, upbringing</sup> and social life.
9. x (AP) Imp. the water subplot
10. (AG) More smell of places.