

June 15
1951

Dear Nelson Algren:

I am writing this letter in the off-chance that you might be interested in an occasional piece of dirty money. I'll outline the possibilities as briefly as possible.

I have always been rather good at knowing what this town will buy in the way of original stories. After the blacklist, during the years of 1948-49, in order to support my family and a rather costly number of aged dependents, as well as to provide cash for legal fees and a year's enforced vacation, I wrote five original stories for the screen. Two of them sold for \$40,000 each; one for \$35,000, one for \$11,000 and one didn't sell at all. In each instance I used the name of some friend who was at least somewhat known in the motion picture industry, which is to say, the story was by the friend and I had no connection with it whatever. In each instance the man who provided the name took one-third of the price and I took two-thirds.

Since I have been released from jail I find that most of the friends who accommodated me have either left town or are themselves blacklisted or are under some kind of cloud---the variety of clouds in Hollywood is enormous. Likewise my agent has been forced out. I hasten to add that none of the misfortunes befalling these people had anything to do with their black market connections with me, for the whole thing was quite secret.

In considering how to resume operations again, it has occurred to me that you might find such an arrangement acceptable. The procedure would be very simple. I would write a story which I considered saleable and mail it to you. You would send it on to your agent in Hollywood as yours. If it sold, you would transfer to me my end of the cash made out in my wife's maiden name. You would report the whole sum as received in terms of your income tax, and deduct therefrom the sum remitted to my wife, either as payment for her literary services, or as your outright purchase from her of a literary property. My wife, in our own income tax, would report the money as received from you, and all the legalities would be satisfied. The reports are, of course, confidential, and could be even less specific than I have suggested, provided that the money is honestly accounted for.

I am obliged to warn you in advance that an original story, designed for sale on the local market, involves a combination of prose and construction and sentimentality and vulgarity that appalls even me, who am used to it, and would appall you even more. The only thing which makes it possible for a self-respecting writer to engage in such an enterprise is that the story is never published, and is read only by Hollywood. A good rule, which I have always ob-

served in the sale of such material, is never to permit oneself to be inveigled into taking a job to develop the material for the screen, because such stories are not really designed to make motion pictures; they are only designed to sell to them.

Also, in contrast to the \$126,000 worth of stories I sold under this method in 1948 and 1949, the present prices are on the downward side and purchases are fewer. Hence, while in those two years I sold one out of five, the percentage of hits would be likely to diminish, and the income from those which did sell would likely be less. Even under present conditions, however, I think we could reasonably expect a gross income from about two sales a year of \$50,000 per year.

When I get ideas for such stories they write very quickly, never more than two weeks. Since I started a book in jail, it is my idea that some such arrangement would permit me a good ten months a year to work on serious stuff without money troubles. It has occurred to me that your end of the loot---if such a percentage were satisfactory---would perhaps do the same for you.

I need not add that secrecy is the first element of success in such a scheme. If I sent you a story, you could be assured that no one, not even my wife, would have read it. You, I am sure, would wish to be equally discreet on your end.

If you have any moral compunctions about such a procedure in relation to motion pictures, please forget them. Hollywood is a vast whorehouse, and any scheme by which tolerably honest men can abstract money from it for their own purposes is more than praiseworthy. If, however, you have compunctions in terms of your own personal convictions about such matters, then of course I shall forget about the matter entirely and with complete understanding.

In any event, I'd like to hear your reactions to this suggested bit of thievery. And regardless of them, I add my good wishes to this tedious message.