

Selected by CHRISTOPHER CARDUFF

Introduction by JOHN UPDIKE

THE  
GOLDEN WEST

H O L L Y W O O D S T O R I E S

B Y D A N I E L F U C H S



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# CONTENTS

*Introduction by John Updike* · vii

Writing for the Movies:

A Letter from Hollywood, 1962 · 3

Dream City, or The Drugged Lake (1937) · 23

A Hollywood Diary (1938) · 29

Florida (1939) · 39

The Golden West (1954) · 53

Triplicate (1979) · 75

The Aftershock:

A Letter from Hollywood, 1971 · 131

West of the Rockies (1971) · 141

Strictly Movie:

A Letter from Hollywood, 1989 · 235

*Sources and Acknowledgments* · 255

# DREAM CITY, OR THE DRUGGED LAKE

Alastair and Hilliard, the boy and girl of the original story, work on a radio program. Frank Pulps is the son of their chief advertiser, a dog food called Bandolo. He is a Robert Young type and loves Hilliard, who, however, loves Alastair. That is the springboard.

Pulps Senior is disappointed with advertising results and the boy-girl are fired, leaving Junior feeling bad since he is a Robert Young type. The boy-girl celebrate their discharge—this is a smart comedy—by throwing a party. At the party Alastair gets an advertising idea that is so good that Senior rehires them. Alastair is kidnapped, the work of rival dog-food makers. Junior rescues Alastair, and when he brings him back to the arms of Hilliard, he, a Robert Young type to the end, leaves them gaily but underneath feels that Biarritz, Long Island, and Newport will no longer mean much to him now as an extension of the Princeton campus.

That is the story, and my producer, Mr. Fox, told me it was great. Everybody liked it, only it wasn't so hot, and he asked me to see what I could do with it.

I tried hard in a half-hearted way, and I changed the story around

here and there. It made no more, no less sense than before. That was not important. What disturbed me, from the beginning, was the complete pointlessness of the work. It was like a hot day, with the perspiration on your face glazed, a dry taste in your mouth, no ambition, nothing to do, nothing you want. It was like being in a pocket somewhere where nothing existed.

I finished the work and turned it in. Mr. Fox searched honestly in his mind for a moment or two, seeking a reaction to the stuff. He found none, said nonsense to fill in the time, knew he was saying nonsense, suddenly found no hope for himself and collapsed all at once. He just got tired of everything, I suppose. I went back to my office and waited.

Some days later the telephone rang. It was a sort of salesman and he asked me whether I would like to go to some hotel in Mexico. I said maybe. Somehow he understood me and let it go at that, but as an afterthought he left me with the statement that here, at that hotel, was the finest fishing in the world. I told him I was glad to hear it. After him, I read three acts of *King Lear*. The telephone did not ring.

The next day I looked at picture magazines. A man stuck his head into my room about noon and asked if I was Mr. Gordon. I thought about it until I was able to say, no, I wasn't Mr. Gordon. He shook his head in an understanding way. Later in the day I had another such visitor, who stayed about a half hour.

The funny thing for Wednesday was the men's room. I spent most of the day there. The first time I kept soaping my hands for twenty minutes, I think, just working the lather up in a dreamy way. Then I dried my hands and went back to my office. The telephone rang and a girl who talked as though her talking mechanism worked on compressed air asked me to find Mr. Astar or Astarre. I told her all right, all right.

"Don't you forget!" she barked at me. "Yes! Yes! We've been waiting an hour! Find him!"

"Yes! Yes!" I answered back to her. "I certainly will!"

"Don't you make fun of me!" she cracked. "See, I don't want it! Do you realize who you're talking to?"

I began to feel funny. "Yes! Yes!" I cried, mimicking her in a crazy way. I meant nothing, I was just unable to help myself. Then the man outside on the lot started playing his piano and singing probably a great

hit that he was composing. It went like this: Oh, I **A**D**O**R**E** you, **A**D**O**R**E** you, **A**D**O**R**E** you—you **W**O**N**D**E**R**F**U**L** thing! Well, I grew mixed up and I tried to assure the girl I would certainly unbend every effort to find Mr. Astar.

“Don’t you call me a wonderful thing!” she bit off at me. “Don’t you dare get fresh with me! You haven’t heard the end of this, and what do you think of *that* for a fact?”

She hung up on me and it was so quiet, so I said “Yes! Yes! Yes!” into the dead receiver. Some people were passing my window and they looked at me. I think I made a good impression on them because I sounded forceful and tired, a good combination, indicating that I knew exactly what I wanted and was just a little impatient with the person on the other end of the telephone, but I wouldn’t be giving in.

Then I went up into the men’s room again and began hollering for Mr. Astar, but he wasn’t there apparently. So there was nothing I could do and I began to soap my hands. I think this lasted at least an hour, although I want to be careful not to exaggerate anything here since it would ruin the whole intention of my report.

I didn’t realize I was so long at the basin until my friend George came in. He told me it was funny but he was certain he had just seen me washing my hands. It was an illusion, he said—but it seemed to worry him. He asked me whether that had ever happened with me. I told him very often, especially with type: I’d read something and as I read it I’d begin to feel I had once read the very same words before. Only, the trouble with this, I said, was that actually I *had* read the words before. I grew a little confused about this, and George wasn’t comforted by me. He said he would mention the phenomenon to his psychoanalyst. Then we got to talking about reincarnation, and he had to leave. He was waiting for his producer to call him, and I said that reminded me, I had something to do, too. I dried my hands, which smelled very clean by this time, and went back to the telephone. The composer outside was still working on the song about the wonderful thing I adore you, but now he was angry because he was singing everything in capitals, shouting out. I could illustrate this, but I suppose it really isn’t necessary.

My wife telephoned. I asked her what was on her mind.

“That’s good,” she said. “Here you tell me to telephone you and I call you up and now you ask what’s on my mind.”

“Oh, yes,” I said. “I must have been thinking about something else.”

“This is sort of silly,” she said. “You ask me to telephone you. I telephone you. Now what?”

“Oh, don’t worry about it. I mean, it’s nothing so terrible that you have to worry about it.”

“Listen,” she said, “something funny’s going on.”

“No,” I said, hoping she would not get impatient with me. “By the way, what time is it?” She told me the time and I thanked her. Then we talked about what day it was. It was hard to settle, the way things sometimes are, and we fought about it for a little while. This kept up until she became annoyed and asked what difference it made what day it was, we had to stay in Hollywood ten more weeks anyhow.

“Well, anyway,” I said, “it was nice to hear your voice. Call me up again, will you?”

“What for?”

“Oh, nothing. Just call me up.”

“All right, what time?”

“Oh, about three or four.”

“It’s almost past four now!”

“Well, O.K. then. In that case just call me up when you feel like it.”

The next morning Mr. Fox outlined a new story. It was a wonderful one, he said; the studio had paid twelve thousand dollars for it. It went like this: Harvey (a Robert Montgomery type, serious but funny) wants to study archaeology. That’s all he has on his mind. But his father, a self-made businessman, wants him to learn a trade, to go into the plumbing business. They make a bet: If Harvey will prove a satisfactory plumber, go for two weeks without making a single slip, the father will be convinced that the son can take care of himself. Harvey can then go to Greece and explore. Otherwise he goes into the plumbing business. Harvey, now a plumber, meets Rosanna in a rich man’s home. He mistakes her for a maid when in reality she is the daughter of the millionaire who owns the house. Their love story proceeds until they discover they are both rich men’s children and can get married. Mr. Fox said there was room for many hilarious situations here because the premise, the spring-board of the story, was a dandy one. He wanted to know what I thought of it, and whether I would be interested in working on it.

I said the story was terrible, really impossible, there was no use even talking about it. Mr. Fox didn't say anything but hovered, uncertain in his mind, looking at me in the meanwhile. I think he didn't know whether to get angry at me or what. Then suddenly he capitulated and agreed with me. He said I was right, what was the use. For some moments we both just sat in his office, looking sad, listening to some man outside on the lot yelling: "Oh, Charlie Humphries! Oh, Charlie Humphries!"

The silence, gentle as it was, was growing impolite. Mr. Fox slapped his thighs and hummed cheerfully, and I went out to my office. I sat down at my typewriter and began writing:

Is money worth everything?

Honesty is the best policy.

Life is too short.

Now is the time, etc. etc. etc.

I kept on typing like that, smoking my pipe and giving everyone who passed my window the impression I was a writer busy with my writing. Then I started studying the calendar I had on my desk, jumping the weeks to the time my contract would end. On the calendar that date didn't seem so far at all. It was something of a consolation, and I put on my hat and went home.