

C O L L E C T E D  
S T O R I E S



R · V · C A S S I L L

C O L L E C T E D  
S T O R I E S

R. V. Cassill

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS PRESS  
Fayetteville 1989 London

Copyright © 1989 by R. V. Cassill  
All rights reserved  
Manufactured in the United States of America

93 92 91 90 89 5 4 3 2 1

*Designer:* B. J. Zodrow  
*Typeface:* Linotron 202 Palatino  
*Typesetter:* G&S Typesetters, Inc.  
*Printer:* Edwards Brothers, Inc.  
*Binder:* Edwards Brothers, Inc.

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials Z39.48-1984. (∞)

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Cassill, R. V. (Ronald Verlin), 1919–  
[Short stories. Selections]  
Collected stories / by R. V. Cassill.

p. cm.

ISBN 1-55728-070-3 (alk. paper). ISBN 1-55728-071-1 (pbk. : alk. paper)

I. Title.

PS3553.A796A6 1989

813'.54—dc19

88-28614  
CIP

## Collected Stories

*Also by R. V. Cassill*

NOVELS

THE EAGLE ON THE COIN

DORMITORY WOMEN

THE LEFT BANK OF DESIRE

A TASTE OF SIN

THE HUNGERING SHAME

THE WOUND OF LOVE

NAKED MORNING

LUSTFUL SUMMER

NURSES' QUARTERS

THE WIFE NEXT DOOR

CLEM ANDERSON

MY SISTER'S KEEPER

NIGHT SCHOOL

PRETTY LESLIE

THE PRESIDENT

LA VIE PASSIONNEE OF RODNEY BUCKTHORNE

DOCTOR COBB'S GAME

THE GOSS WOMEN

HOYT'S CHILD

LABORS OF LOVE

FLAME

AFTER GOLIATH

SHORT STORY COLLECTIONS

15X3 (WITH HERBERT GOLD AND JAMES B. HALL)

THE FATHER AND OTHER STORIES

THE HAPPY MARRIAGE AND OTHER STORIES

PATRIMONIES

## Acknowledgments

"Larchmoor Is Not the World," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1950, 1978. Originally published in *Furioso*, vol. V, no. 1.

"The Biggest Band," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1957, 1986. Originally published in *Western Review*, vol. 21, no. 4.

"The Castration of Harry Bluethorn," reprinted by permission of *Epoch*. Copyright © 1980. Originally published in *Epoch*, vol. XXIV, no. 3.

"Bring on the Poets," by R. V. Cassill. Printed by permission of the author.

"The Covenant," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1965. Originally published in *Saturday Evening Post*, vol. 238, no. 7, April 6, 1965.

"The Sunday Painter," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1957, 1985. Originally published in *Esquire*, November 1957.

"The Life of the Sleeping Beauty," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1952, 1980. Originally published in *Accent*, vol. XII, no. 1.

"The Goldfish," from *15x3, Fifteen Short Stories* by R. V. Cassill, Herbert Gold, James B. Hall, published by New Directions, New York. Copyright © 1953, 1985. Reprinted by permission of the author.

"And in My Heart," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1965. Originally published in *The Paris Review*, #33, Winter-Spring 1965.

"Fragments for Reference," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1947, 1975. Originally published in *Accent*, Fall 1947.

"The War in the Air," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1952, 1980. Originally published in *Epoch*, Summer 1952.

"Convoy Sunday Morning," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1949, 1980. Originally published in *Perspective*, vol. 2, no. 3.

"The Outer Island," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1949, 1980. Originally published in *Accent*, vol. IX, no. 2.

"The Swimmers at Pallikula," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1955, 1983. Originally published in *Discovery*, vol. 6, no. 6.

"The Happy Marriage," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1955, 1983. Originally published in *Kansas Magazine*, Issue 1956.

"Love? Squalor?," from *The Father and Other Stories*, by R. V. Cassill, published by Simon and Schuster, New York. Copyright © 1965. Reprinted by permission of the author.

"When Old Age Shall This Generation Waste," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1955, 1983. Originally published in *Epoch*, vol. II, no. 1, Fall 1955.

"The Invention of the Airplane," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1970. Originally published in *Seneca Review*, vol. 1, no. 1, May 1970.

"Fracture," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1952, 1980. Originally published by *Epoch*, vol. IV, no. 1, Winter 1952.

"The Inland Years," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1954, 1982. Originally published in *Western Review* vol. 18, no. 3, Spring 1954.

"This Hand, These Talons," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1951, 1979. Originally published in *Western Review* vol. 16, no. 1, Autumn 1951.

"The Crime of Mary Lynn Yager," from *The Happy Marriage and Other Stories*, by R. V. Cassill, published by Purdue University Press. Copyright © 1966. Reprinted with permission of Purdue Research Foundation, West Lafayette, IN 47907. All rights reserved.

"The Suicide's Cat," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1981. Originally published in *December*, vol. 23, nos. 1/2, 1981, a double issue of *December* magazine, by December Press.

"The Pursuit of Happiness," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1957, 1986. Originally published in *Northwest Review*, vol. 1, no. 2.

"The Black Horse," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1951, 1979. Originally published in *Furioso*, vol. VI, no. 3, Summer 1951.

"A Journey of the Magi," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1958, 1986. Originally published in *Texas Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 3, Summer/Autumn 1958.

"The Hot Girl," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1955, 1983. Originally published in *New Directions* 15.

"My Brother, Wilbur," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1965. Originally published in *Northwest Review*, vol. 7, no. 1, Spring/Summer 1965.

"Frost and Sun," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1960, 1988. Originally published in *The Dial* #3.

"The Squeaky Wheel," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1957, 1985. Originally published in *Epoch*, vol. VIII, no. 3, Fall 1957.

"The Waiting Room," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1951, 1979. Originally published in *Perspective*, vol. 4, no. 4, Autumn 1951.

"The Winchester Papers," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1960, 1988. Originally published in *Northwest Review*, vol. 3, no. 2, Spring 1960.

"The First Day of School," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1958, 1986. Originally published in *Northwest Review*, vol. II, no. 1, Fall/Winter 1958.

"The Romanticizing of Dr. Fless," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1956, 1984. Originally published in *New World Writing*, 9th Mentor Selection, by The New American Library of World Literature, Inc.

"The Martyr," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1979. Originally published in *Ploughshares*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1980.

"The Knight and the Hag," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1958, 1986. Originally published in *Dude*, vol. 2, no. 5, May 1958.

"Shadow of a Magnitude," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1956, 1984. Originally published in *University of Kansas City Review*, vol. XXIII, no. 2, Winter 1956.

"The Father," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1962. Originally published in *Esquire*, June 1962.

"Where Saturn Keeps the Years," reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1978. Originally published in *The Missouri Review*, vol. 1, no. 1, Spring 1978.



# *Contents*

Larchmoor Is Not the World	1
The Biggest Band	18
The Castration of Harry Bluethorn	35
Bring on the Poets	47
The Covenant	64
The Sunday Painter	83
The Life of the Sleeping Beauty	97

The Goldfish	121
And in My Heart	135
Fragments for Reference	186
The War in the Air	197
Convoy Sunday Morning	214
The Outer Island	221
The Swimmers at Pallikula	235
The Happy Marriage	249
Love? Squalor?	258
When Old Age Shall This Generation Waste	283
The Invention of the Airplane	300
Fracture	319
The Inland Years	333
This Hand, These Talons	352
The Crime of Mary Lynn Yager	367
The Suicide's Cat	390
The Pursuit of Happiness	400
The Black Horse	415

A Journey of the Magi	430
The Hot Girl	445
My Brother, Wilbur	464
Frost and Sun	474
The Squeaky Wheel	514
The Waiting Room	528
The Winchester Papers	538
The First Day of School	548
The Romanticizing of Dr. Fless	554
The Martyr	569
The Knight and the Hag	580
Shadow of a Magnitude	590
The Father	608
Where Saturn Keeps the Years	631

# *Larchmoor Is Not the World*

In the winter the glassed arcade between Thornton and Gillespie Halls was filled with potted flowers so it smelled and looked like a greenhouse. Last night's storm, blowing in across the athletic fields of the Northwest campus, had left a shape of frozen snow like a white boomerang in the corner of each pane behind the rows of geraniums and ferns.

The first time Dr. Cameron walked through the arcade on this particular day, he stopped to point with his pipestem at the ranked greenery so slightly and perilously separated from the outside cold. "There," he rumbled to Mr. Wilks of History, "is your symbol for this young women's seminary. There is your Larchmoor girl cut off by a pane of glass from the blast of your elements. A visible defiance of the nature of things, made possible by a corrupt technology."

Mr. Wilks grimaced and chuckled, weighed this illustration of their common attitude toward the college in which they taught, finally amended, "The glass is wrong. Glass they could see through. See the world in which they don't live, even though . . ." His thought trailed off in a giggle. At Larchmoor, Mr. Wilks seemed to spend most of his energy looking behind him to see if he had been overheard.

"True," Dr. Cameron said. As they loitered through the arcade the music and the rumble of the student lounge rose to them from the floor below. It rose, mixed inextricably with the smell of baked goods from the dining hall and the moist smell of steam from laboring radiators. Now and then a cry, barbaric, probably happy but otherwise meaningless, punctuated the noise. "The analogy breaks down, true. Listen to them down there. One gets to be like an animal trainer. Sensitive to their noises. If I had no calendar I could tell by their tone that Christmas vacation started this afternoon."

"Then there's an identifying noise that distinguishes Christmas vacation from the beginning of—say—spring vacation?"

"Hmm. Yes, that's right. In seven years my ear has become acutely attuned to it. You'll pick it up eventually. Unhappily, in learning their mass sound you'll become unable to distinguish one of them from the others. Compensation at work. They will seem to you one single enormous female juvenile named Shirley or whatever the name would happen to be of the child movie star ascendant in the year of their birth." Dr. Cameron's baby-pink face grew almost radiant. "Tomorrow," he said, "the sons of bitches will all be gone home and we'll have three weeks of peace. Shantih."

The second time he went through the arcade that day he met Sandra White, dressed for her journey with high heels now and a fur coat, looking like the ads in the fashion magazines with the good sharp empty Nordic shape of her head an appurtenance to the excellent clothes—looking five years older than she had looked that morning in his American Literature class. Her manner, too, had been changed with her clothes, so that she spoke to him as a young matron patronizing an old and crotchety, really lovable duck who had "made his lah-eef out of literature."

"Dr. Cameron. Thank *you* for the list of books," she said. "I don't think I'll give any presents this Christmas except books and I . . ." Yet because this was so obviously a statement coined

to please him, both became momentarily embarrassed. It was the girl who first recovered and went on, "I think I'll get Daddy the Dos Passos' *USA*."

"Hmmm." He chewed his pipestem and stared at the glass roof of the arcade, then smiled.

"Well," she said in defense, "Daddy is really searching . . . for . . . *that* kind of Americanism. He's not just a businessman. He's really—"

"Yes," he said. "I understand you to say you wanted this list of books for yourself, not just for presents."

"Oh. I'm going to ask for the Yeats for myself," she said. Her tone, demanding that this would please him, produced from the efficient catalog of his memory the image of her eyes becoming feminine-dramatic in that class hour a week before when he had quoted, "An aged man is but a paltry thing . . . unless soul clap its hands and sing and louder sing for every tatter in its mortal dress." Well, the quotation had been an indulgence for him and not intended for the class at all. It had been a parade before their innocent minds of a conscious expression of his own dilemma. He had spoken the lines to his class with the motives that lead a man to confess to his dog the sentiments for which he has no human confidant. But this little female, Sandra, whatever those words may have meant to her, had caught something of their importance to him and trapped him now into paying for the indulgence with a compliment to her taste.

"Fine," he said, "that's fine."

With a still doubtful look she said, "Merry Christmas," and let him go on to his office.

Here was the sanctuary which he had been seven years in building. A desk barred off one corner of the room. When students came in he sat behind it like a magistrate at the bar. Three walls, excepting door and window spaces, were lined to the ceiling with books. "I bought them," he once told Wilks, "but only for insulation and display. It's fatuous to assume that anybody can own books. I think that President Herman is pleased to find them there when he brings down parents and the prospective customers to exhibit me as a mechanism of the English department."

His swivel chair took most of the space behind the desk. It made of the corner an efficient nest, for he could swing to any of the cabinets and drawers in which he filed themes. Also within

reach were the two material items he needed for his intellectual life. One was a bolt tied on a length of wrapping cord that he sometimes swung as a pendulum. The other was a motto that he had lettered painstakingly on colored paper. Originally it had come from an examination paper handed in to him during his first year at Larchmoor. "Shelley's main purpose was to write a lot of poems," it said. "This it came easy for him to do." Sometimes, when he was alone, he would place the inscription before him on his desk and sit laughing crazily at it until all the stains of teaching at Larchmoor were washed away. Then purified, without moving except to throw his shoulders back, he would watch that fraction of the campus where the pendulum of seasons appeared before his window.

This afternoon, the sunlight was a strange and clamorous orange that moved on the black tree trunks and the snow. Here nature dramatized the quality of a Beckmann painting—*Black Cedars over Water*, it might have been, or such a landscape as the horns in Sibelius presented with not so much art as longing, such a landscape as might contain a golden mute princess called out by Death, that central myth that all the Romantics had exploited.

The embroidered, death-bidden, golden will-o'-the-wisp (and Sandra White now drifted on his mind's screen in a role that would have surprised her. Not as an intellect that shared his understanding of poetry but, wrapped in a rich cocoon of fur, wool, and silk that protected her delicacies from the blowing cold, as the image itself which the poets had conceived and desired—the figure on the Grecian urn, the witchlady on the mead, or that which Malraux's Dutchman saw on the Shanghai sidewalks, proud and strutting beyond the reach of the proletariat's desire), like Shelley's Beatrice, must be the fairest, youngest, purest of flesh to satisfy the snowy mouth of the Death the Romantics had imagined.

The peacefulness of snow is pure commercial folklore, he speculated, and in art the cold North always somehow emerges as the symbol of hungry frenzy—like the gelid and perfect tyranny which Plato described as the worst disaster of all that society can manage. The disorder of cold which had wrought the counter disorder of Northern art—the wind-whipped fires in the snowfield—with its load of desire protesting too much.

If Dr. Cameron had moved closer to his window, he would

necessarily have seen more than this private landscape of a few trees, snow, and sun in which his mind pursued the lost girl. He would have seen more than twenty Larchmoor girls standing in the slush in front of the Kampus Kabin while they waited for taxis. They bounced, giggled, sang ("a woman, a woman, a woman without a man, teedlededum, bumph"), chewed gum, shifted packages or suitcases from hand to hand, stamped their fur-topped boots in the muck of the road. He knew they were there, not five degrees outside the arc of vision which the window gave him. "But I have the right not to look."

With the arrival of each Christmas vacation since he had come to Larchmoor, he had discovered himself confronted with a particular crisis of fatigue and depression. The beginning of yet another school year and the first exacting months hollowed him emotionally, and the pleasures of intellect had lost their recreational power. While the girls went off to whatever indulgences the society provided for its most expensive and pampered stock, he went to his bachelor rooms to read and smoke incessantly and consider how he might get a job elsewhere until always, with the passing of the actual and figurative solstice, the change of renewal occurred. What was compounded of hatred and contempt for Larchmoor led him first to review the other places he had taught—the two big universities where the younger assistants whinnied like mares around the head of the department, and the religious college where he had been forbidden to smoke on campus and was required to attend chapel daily—then led through a couple of drinking bouts with some one of his friends, like Mr. Wilks. There had always been younger men like Mr. Wilks coming and going as Larchmoor instructors. Just out of graduate school, they regarded Larchmoor as a stepping stone to bigger schools, but while they stayed—one or two each year succeeding those who had gone—they formed a fit audience though few for such occasions as the Christmas drunks. Those times gave him the chance to elaborate with perverse brilliance on the attractions Larchmoor had for him.

They would be sitting in the easy chairs of his rooms with a litter of crackers and cheese on a card table between them, the black windows frosting over, and in the late hours the monologue would pause only when one or another went unsteadily to the bathroom. "Do you remember reading about that Jap general on Iwo Jima . . . said, 'I will die here' . . . the component of all



the forces of his life . . . so that even the melodrama was right for the bandy-legged little bastard. Fitting. The answer is a kind of balance—not balance—but that second in the pendulum's swing when all the forces are composed so there must be an instant of harmony that the eye isn't quick enough to catch when one reasons that there must be no motion. Still . . . the effort of the mind to perpetuate that second by selection out of all the comic and vicious flux in us and around us is the same as the slave's impulse to throw off his ropes. . . . Larchmoor locks up kids that should be out and doing things. Their bad luck is good for me. There are different ages, and for me freedom doesn't exist in the world. It's an asylum growth. . . . I've got my office for asylum like a rat's nest in the corner of a busy house. I don't huddle there because I'm interested in the house. Nobody but a damn fool would be concerned with Larchmoor as Larchmoor. . . . It gives me a stable place to sit and watch the 'pismires'—here he smiled—“‘and the stars.’ And don't you know, Wilks, that a man has to actually utter his ideas? Your gloomy newspapers tell you that. It's such an undeniable premise of the search for freedom. Here I can say whatever I please to my classes. Elsewhere, in these days, I might be quickly apprehended as a Communist or an atheist, but when I say something to my girls they put it in their notebooks and there's an end to it. Oh, I have my disguises here. On another level I can talk to the vermin Herman”—Larchmoor's president—“the same way. As far as that goes. When he asked me what I thought of the new dormitory with the air-conditioned bedsprings, I made some trivial remark about painting 'our outward walls so costly gay.' And he thought it was my stamp of approval, yes he did. . . . And then we mustn't fool ourselves. Where else could I go? I'm not a scholar in the sense that I've ever felt a mission to get my name in *PMLA*, or write a book on Chaucer's cook's marmal. I'm a reader, that's all I amount to. 'Whatever games are played with us, we must play no games with ourselves, but deal in our privacy with the last honesty and truth.' Larchmoor not only lets but forces me to be honest with myself. The games it plays with me are not much bother. To them I'm just an old gaffer that talks like Bartlett's quotations. I have a place here. They pay me as a fixture. . . . The girls are pretty. Like old David's, my bones need the warmth provided by a moderate proximity of young female flesh. My disguises . . . I look too old to notice them. I *am*