

# *Millie West*

*Author of*



*Featuring cover art by  
Rick Reinert*



*Clockwise from top:  
Millie's son Micah and  
husband Tony duck  
hunting; Millie's  
daughter Whitney; the  
family home; family  
friend in the garden...  
On both pages is a look  
at Millie's garden.*

A graduate of the University of South Carolina, Millie West has a background in aviation, as well as in real estate, and has owned and been the broker of her own company. A licensed pilot, Millie was one of the first pilots hired by United Parcel Service when they started their flight crew department.

An artist in her own right and a collector of regional art—especially from Charleston—Millie is a supporter of charitable organizations, higher education, and the preservation of South Carolina's historical treasures. A South Carolina history buff, Millie has spent countless hours exploring the rich historical vestiges of her home state. Her love of the fascinating, complex, and compelling history of the South is expressed in her writing.

Millie resides with her family near Columbia, South Carolina, and is an active participant in her local writer's group, the Chapin Chapter of the SC Writers Workshop.

# Sneak Peek at The Cast Net by Millie West

As the Miss Elise entered Charleston Harbor, Cooper pointed out Morris Island and Fort Sumter. Mills had read in Ellen Camp’s journal about the horrendous fighting that had occurred on the island in defense of Charleston during the Civil War. The Confederate defenders had been forced to abandon their fortifications because of a lack of potable water. She had been shocked to read that the decomposing bodies of soldiers in mass graves had contaminated the water supply.

They passed Fort Sumter and the ruins of an old fort named Castle Pinckney. The container cranes from the Columbus Street Terminal towered above the waterfront, and Cooper pointed out an enormous freight ship making its way out of the harbor.

Once on the Ashley River, Mills marveled at the waterside view of Middleton Place where the impressive grass terraces rose from the river to the hilltop home. Entering a section of the river that was pristine, Cooper pointed

out survey tape that marked the boundaries of the Camp plantation. “I told the surveyors to open up a pathway from the river to the interior of the property.” As they rounded a bend in the river, the cleared area came into view and Cooper maneuvered the Miss Elise to the bank. He handed insect repellent to Mills and told her to be liberal with the application.

Together, they set off to explore the property on the pathway. Cooper pointed to his left and said, “The Camp mansion was in this direction.” They walked through an area of heavy forest and the air became cooler under the trees.

“This is beautiful. How old do you think these live oak trees are?”

“Maybe 150 years old.”

“They’re huge. Don’t you think they could be older?”

“I don’t think there’s a first growth forest around here. Centuries ago, most of

the original trees were harvested for ship building.”

As they made their way through the forest, Mills ran into a spider’s web, coating her hair and clothes. Cooper brushed the former inhabitant of the web off of her shoulder.

“The spider was on me?”

“Yes, but they’re harmless to humans. When I was a boy, some of the locals around Edisto used to say that if a writing spider wrote your name in its web, an unfortunate fate awaited you.”

“Have you ever heard of that happening?”

“No. It’s just an old superstition.”

At one point, the forest became so dense that the sun was obscured and the ground was covered in a thick field of ferns. Two columns appeared in the near distance and a brick wall ran in either direction away from the structures. “This should be the river side entry to where the house was situated.”

As they passed the columns, the crumbling walls of an ancient home foundation were apparent within the forest growth. A large oak tree grew in the center of the foundation wall and Cooper said, “This is what’s left of Crescent Hall.”

“What happened to the house?”

“It burned down in 1917, destroying many pieces of George Camp’s creations—I’d like to show you something.”

They emerged onto a lane that suffered from neglect, but was still navigable. A short distance away were a dozen small cabins surrounded by thick brush. “I think before we venture any closer to the cabins, I’ll have a crew clear out the growth around them.”

At the end of the lane was a large wrought iron fence with ornately designed gates, which displayed crescents in the metalwork. The grounds around the fence were well manicured—ancient roses and camellias grew within the

enclosure. Mills realized that a cemetery was inside. There was a pristine view of the Ashley River from this knoll of graves, and wilderness surrounded the enclave in a setting of peace.

“This is a Camp family cemetery. There was an easement to the graveyard, so, over the years, the grounds have never suffered from neglect.”

“Cooper. The wrought iron gates are magnificent and look at the crescent designs.”

“The crescent denotes peace, prosperity, and order; it has been a South Carolina symbol for many years.”

The gate squeaked as they entered the cemetery and Mills noticed some of the markers dated to the eighteenth century. On the marker of Ellen and Michael Camp were the Latin words: NEX MOS SINGULUS NOS PROTANTUM A BREVIS DUM.

“Can you read Latin?”

He studied the inscription before saying, “It reads, ‘Death will separate us for only a short while.’”

The words gave her cold chills, and he said, “Grey and George moved Michael’s body home from the widow’s property in Virginia a few years after the Civil War. Ellen said she could not rest unless she spent eternity beside her beloved.”

A large marker caught her attention and as she walked closer, the epitaph was arresting. There was an engraving of a man throwing a cast net and the words: CAST OUT THY NET TO ALL MEN.

George and Grey Camp were buried side by side, and Mills began to read aloud the eroded inscription, “FAMILY, BROTHERS, AND THE B—”

“—AND THE BEST OF FRIENDS,” Cooper finished. “All the talent in those two graves.”

An iron cross designated the resting place of a Confederate veteran and graced the grave of Grey Camp, but not that of

his cousin, George. “What does the cross signify?”

“It’s a replica of the Southern Cross of Honor Medals that can only be placed on the graves of Confederate veterans who served honorably. George was not officially a Confederate soldier, although he served with the Army—I

think out of loyalty to Grey.”

“What led them back to Charleston?”

“Both George and Grey married after the war. Grey remained in Virginia for a number of years until after his mother-in-law passed away. While George lived in Virginia, he sold his woodwork at a local mercantile for extra income.

A businessman from Philadelphia noticed his craft and persuaded him to relocate and work full-time as a cabinetmaker.

“Grey and George decided at some point that they would be interred side by side and with George’s successful business, he had the means to secure this marker. George and his wife didn’t have any children who survived to

adulthood, and some of their fortune was left to care for indigent youths of Philadelphia and Charleston.”

Mills nodded, listening.

“By the time Grey passed away, our family had diminished wealth and our properties were sold to outsiders for subsistence.”

Mills read the epitaph again, “‘CAST OUT THY NET TO ALL MEN.’ That’s what the elder Mr. Camp told me one afternoon while we were restoring the Freedom School House.”

“He said those words to my brother and me while he taught us to throw a cast net. It was good advice.”

“But he changed the last word in the epitaph from ‘men’ to ‘people.’”

On their way back to the Miss Elise, Cooper pointed out a brick structure off the pathway. “That’s one of several wells on this property, and a good reason to be careful when we walk this land. They should be secure. I’ll probably wait until after the first frost to have them inspected.”

After they picnicked on the boat, Cooper told Mills he was going to shorten up the return trip by using the Intracoastal Waterway. They encountered several rain showers on the way home and the waterways were busy with weekend boat traffic. Mills was at the helm of the craft, and Cooper sat by her side. As they neared home, the sky was becoming dark in the west, and above the sound of the engines, thunder began to rumble.

By the time they reached his dock, strong winds whipped around them and the sky opened up with a deluge of rain. They secured his boat on the lift, and then ran up the lane to his house. Drenched by rain, they removed

their topsiders before entering the darkened house. Mills felt chilled, and she crossed her arms in front of her when she realized her body was reacting to the cold. Cooper turned on the light switch, but the electricity was off.

He retrieved a towel for her and said, “There’s a pair of shorts and a T-shirt in the bathroom for you. I think you should get out of the wet clothes.” A hurricane lamp illuminated the bathroom, and Mills changed her clothes, hanging the wet garments to dry. She ran her fingers through her hair, and when she came out, there were hurricane lamps lighting the hallway

and kitchen. Cooper had changed into dry clothes and was mopping up water puddles off the floor when she entered the room.

“Would you like a glass of wine?”

“I’d love one.”

“Come with me to the cellar, and we’ll pick out a bottle.”

She held the hurricane light, and they descended the steps into the cellar. Cooper read several labels before making a choice. They were standing against one another, and Mills could feel the warmth of his body against hers.

Looking into each other’s eyes, he slowly said, “I think this will make a good accompaniment to the cuisine.” They continued to look at each other until Cooper broke the silence, “Come on, let’s go upstairs and make dinner.”

They cut up vegetables from the garden, and Cooper removed a large frying pan from the rack above the island. He heated olive oil and sautéed the vegetables with some marinated venison before they sat down to dine.

“Have you forgiven my behavior on Monday?”

“Of course. Thank you for showing me the old Camp farm this afternoon.”

“I enjoyed seeing it again myself.”

“Do you know how to Shag?”

He laughed and said, “You mean the dance?”

“Yes, of course I mean the dance—while I was downtown this week, I saw that a Shag contest would be held tonight at ‘Rembrandt’s on Society.’”

“I don’t think we’ll go to Rembrandt’s, but what if I show you the dance steps on the porch after dinner. I’m surprised that you, a Virginia girl, never learned to Shag.”

## Symbolism in The Cast Net

*A “cast net” symbolizes humanitarianism to me. The woven strands of the net reflect the common threads that bind all of humanity together and the need for kindness and dignity in our lives. A successful cast in life means opening your heart to, and accepting those individuals who are different from you. These are central themes that are woven through my story. I hope the symbolism of a cast net becomes a part of your life like it has mine. ~Millie West*

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