

# NESTERS

By Sam Craig

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## **STORY OF THE PLAY**

A magazine reporter interviewing 95-year-old Caddy Miller, expects to hear the story of a woman who tended house and stood by her man while they homesteaded. Instead, the reporter finds a real pioneer who took her fate in hand and carved a place for herself in the Wyoming Territory of the 1880s. In flashbacks we see how, with almost naive courage, young Caddy arrives out West with her dour husband, Albert Haeffen. All they have to do is make three improvements to the land and it is theirs. While they make a good start building a wooden house, Caddy finds her new life increasingly difficult. Albert becomes bitter and mean when things don't go his way. To make matters worse, Ben Rawlins, a local rancher resents the "nesters" moving in. He first tries to control county elections, then resorts to killing stock in order to drive out the homesteaders. Determined not to be ruined by a petulant husband, Caddy divorces Albert who has drunk and gambled away their winter supplies. Surviving a bitter winter, Caddy spurns Rawlins' marriage proposal and advertises for a partner. Just as Rawlins is poised to have Caddy evicted, Nate Miller shows up and Caddy accepts him as her partner, and eventually, her husband. Based on diaries and accounts of women on the frontier, *Nesters* tells the story as gripping as the land is expansive.

## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(5 M, 5 W)*

**CADDY MILLER** - 95-year-old pioneer who looks back on her life with wry humor.

**LISBETH WALKER** - A forward, efficient interviewer who at first doesn't care for this particular job.

**CADDY HAEFFEN** - Caddy as a young woman, an honest optimist who loves the challenge the land affords.

**ALBERT HAEFFEN** - Caddy's husband, a hard-working, yet sullen man without dreams.

**EMILY BROTHWELL** - A young, nervous settler whose only dream is going "home."

**JACK BROTHWELL** - Emily's embittered husband.

**BEN RAWLINS** - A rancher, perhaps 45, who feels threatened, and so uses any means he can to protect a lifestyle he has worked hard to create.

**BLANCHE LAMONT** - An opportunistic school teacher.

**NATE MILLER** - About 30, a hired hand who long ago decided he would succeed.

**OVERMAN** - The land inspector.

## **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

NESTERS was first presented at the American Theatre of Actors in New York City as a workshop presentation, July 6, 1988.

## **PROPS**

CADDY MILLER: Needlepoint, tea cups, small copper tea kettle (identical to Nate's) with cover, sewing bag with old note inside.

CADDY HAEFFEN: Bread dough, loaf pans, small pamphlet, box with seed packets, cake, plate of biscuits and preserves, shawl, coat, scrap wood, hammer and nails, paper, pens, writing box, letter, cloak, bucket.

LISBETH: Tape recorder, paper and pencil, watch.

ALBERT: Cup, suitcases, change, revolver, whiskey bottle.

EMILY: Shawl, small tin, knitting, rifle, bouquet of purple flowers, mason jar.

RAWLINS: Ballot box, ballots, ledger and forms, pencils, box of cigars, gun belt with gun, newspaper, huge coat, picture, hat.

BLANCHE: Purse with money, cloak, books, small lunch pail with dead frog inside.

OVERMAN: Papers and pencil, hat.

NATE: Hat, saddlebag, frying pan, tin cups, tin plate, small copper tea kettle.

MISCELLANEOUS: Spices, canisters, kitchen utensils, photographs, deer rack (if possible), coffee pot, fine lamp, kerosene lantern, clotheslines with laundry.

## ACT 1

*(AT RISE: As the LIGHTS gradually come up we hear an old voice softly humming a western tune. The lights reveal CADDY MILLER, the old woman, DSR, gently rocking in her chair hunched over her needlepoint. At her right is a small table set with several teacups and a covered teapot. A vacant chair is to her left. After a moment, LISBETH WALKER enters briskly SL with tape recorder, paper and pencil.)*

LISBETH: Is there a Ms. Miller here? Caddy Miller?

CADDY: That's me, young lady. Caddy Miller.

LISBETH: My name is Walker. Lisbeth Walker. I'm a writer. From *Women's Life* magazine? Perhaps you've seen a copy of our publication.

CADDY: Last magazine I looked at was *National Geographic*. Saw some mighty pretty scenes of Pago Pago. That was just 'fore my eyes decided I ought not read anymore.

LISBETH: Well, Ms. Miller ... our magazine is devoted to raising the consciousness of the American woman. *(CADDY nods. LISBETH sits.)* We feature articles on fashion, political movements to secure women's rights, and profiles of famous women. Women who have contributed to this country in some way. I've been asked by my editor to interview you for an article we're going to feature in our ... let me see ... *(SHE checks her notes.)* ... April issue.

CADDY: Well, now ... isn't that nice, Miss Walker. But why me? If you do articles on fashion, I sure don't know much about it 'less you want something on bathrobes and slippers.

LISBETH: You don't understand, I'm afraid. You were a pioneer out here, weren't you?

CADDY: I guess I was that, all right. That make me famous?

LISBETH: In a sense, I suppose. My editor wrote to the Chamber of Commerce here in town and asked for the names of pioneers. I've been told you were the first woman in these parts.

CADDY: (*Chuckling.*) Makes me the oldest, too. Oh, you don't have to worry 'bout me hiding my age, Miss Walker. I try to get one wrinkle ironed out and a thousand more pop up while tryin'. When you're 95, what's a decade one way or another?

LISBETH: You're 95? That means you were born in -

CADDY: 1863.

LISBETH: (*Making a note.*) I do hope you won't mind me asking you a few questions about your life, Ms. Miller?

CADDY: And you're gonna put me in your *Women's Life* magazine?

LISBETH: That IS the idea. Providing, of course, what you have to tell me is ... appropriate material for our readers.

CADDY: Well, if it's juicy stories you're after, you'd better go talk to Mrs. Appleby next door. She's always got a peck of 'em ...

LISBETH: We're looking for a story on what it was like to be a woman out here long ago when it was nothing but wilderness. What was it like to settle this land? How did you carve out a life in a man's world?

CADDY: Man's world, ha? I wouldn't rightly call it a man's world. It was our world just as much as theirs. And they knew it.

LISBETH: Would you mind if I recorded our conversation?

CADDY: You go right ahead and make yourself at home. Long as you don't mind my sewing a bit.

LISBETH: Of course not. I'm surprised you're still doing household chores.

CADDY: Chores? This is for the bazaar coming up in November. I always do my share ... always.

LISBETH: I see. Perhaps we could start by your telling me why anyone would want to come out here in the first place. I stepped off the puddle-jumper at the airport and looked out over miles and miles of nothing! So much wilderness still!

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