



LOLA SANBLOM

# *Collected Poems*

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EXTREMES AND MODERATIONS:  
EARLY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA POETRY

A TEXT-TECH PAPERS PROJECT

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# *Extremes and Moderations*

Early Southern California Poetry

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Extremes and Moderations is a Text-Tech Papers project devoted to recovering poetry written, published, and circulated in Los Angeles and Southern California. Each volume brings neglected books and poems back into view through carefully prepared texts, archival images, biographical context, and a clear record of the surviving sources.

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*Edited by Brian Kim Stefans*

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# *Collected Poems*

Lola Sanblom

*A Critical Reading Edition*

*Edited by Brian Kim Stefans*

*The Text-Tech Papers*

*Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry*

## Editorial Note

This edition is prepared from the original local scans, not from an earlier reader PDF. *Silk Purses*, *Buffalo Sod*, and the recoverable poems from *Every Child Can Write Poetry* are reset in EB Garamond. Every photographed page of *Silk Purses* was checked line by line; stanza breaks and meaningful indents are retained, while narrow-page continuation wraps are silently rejoined when the wider page permits. Book and periodical titles are italicized throughout.

The photographed source for *Silk Purses* is sometimes curved, faint, or interrupted by library ownership punches. Those defects have not been reproduced as poem text. Readings obscured in one exposure were checked against adjacent letterforms and the source's own contents and erratum; uncertain punctuation was left unchanged rather than modernized. A publication note identifies the exact source pages after every poem.

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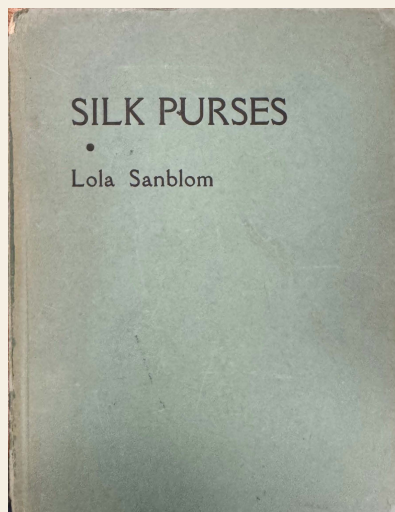
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## Archival Images



to have a biz brother to take one

*Lola Sanblom in the Los Angeles Evening Citizen News, November 3, 1936.*



*The original cover of *Silk Purses* (1932), the photographed copy used for this reset text.*

## Introduction

Lola Sanblom wrote from the distance between a pioneer childhood and metropolitan Southern California. Born Lola George on a Kansas farm and raised partly on the Wyoming plains, she married young, moved to Glendale, returned to school as an adult, and published *Silk Purses* (1932), *Buffalo Sod* (1936), and the teaching handbook *Every Child Can Write Poetry* (1938). Her free verse makes the unprestigious materials of women's lives—dishpans, starched dresses, livestock, children, weather, sod houses, and remembered disasters—carry questions of freedom, work, inheritance, and artistic authority. This edition restores her two poetry collections in full and adds poems securely recoverable from the later handbook.

## Biography

Lola Sanblom was born Lola George on March 4, 1904, on a farm at Oak Creek, Kansas. Her parents were William Shelby George, born in Illinois, and Clara George, born in Missouri. Sanblom later described herself as a descendant of pioneer families and linked her literary ambition to the inherited stories carried by family names. Her childhood moved from Kansas sod-country to the plains of Wyoming. She remembered blizzards, drifting fences, horses fallen on ice, warm chinook winds, ice-cold corn, tick fever, wagon wheels, squirrel hunting with an older brother, and the isolation of small western towns. The 1920 census placed the George family in Fremont County, Wyoming, while Sanblom's own later account supplied the emotional geography that became *Buffalo Sod*.

At nineteen she married Richard Sanblom in Pendleton, Oregon, in January 1924. By 1930 the couple and their daughter were living in Glendale, California, where Richard worked first as an electrical machinist and later as a landscape gardener. Lola Sanblom's formal schooling had been interrupted during childhood. When her daughter entered kindergarten, she went back to school herself and completed a high-school diploma in February 1936. The return to education belongs directly to her public account of becoming a writer: she repeatedly opposed the idea that poetry belonged only to distant canonical men or to the formally privileged.

Sanblom told the *Los Angeles Evening Citizen News* that her first magazine poem was the blank-verse "Just a Sprig of Sagebrush," published in

1927, followed by “Snow” in 1928. Those appearances have not yet been securely located. Her first book, *Silk Purses* (1932), took its title and governing metaphor from the belittling proverb that one cannot make a silk purse from a sow’s ear. John Steven McGroarty announced the volume in the *Los Angeles Times* as the arrival of a new poet; the book’s five-hundred-copy printing sold well enough to pay its own costs. Its poems turn motherhood, cleaning, washing, criticism, animals, mountains, and the 1903 Heppner flood into compact free-verse dramas of self-assertion and attention.

*Buffalo Sod* followed in 1936, privately printed in Glendale by the Pioneer Printing Company with a cover by Charles Owens and again limited to five hundred copies. Sanblom called it a contribution to the folk epic of western migration: the book moves from collective invocations of “farm folk” into dramatic monologues and remembered scenes of homesteading, hunger, illness, animals, school, music, snow, and Indigenous and settler history. Reviews appeared in *Los Angeles* and *Portland*, and the *Kansas State Historical Society* added the volume to its library. A 1944 *Poetry Society of Southern California* anthology reprinted “This Is a Great Land, Hard Come By” and “On a Long Rope,” evidence that her verse remained in regional circulation beyond the small editions of her books.

In 1938 Sanblom published *Every Child Can Write Poetry*, an illustrated handbook for parents and teachers. It treats rhythm as embodied experience and presents poetry-making as an ordinary human capacity rather than an elite accomplishment; several of Sanblom’s poems serve as demonstrations. She also reported writing plays, including the published “Just a Sprig of Sagebrush” described in a 1936 newspaper profile, although no complete play text has been recovered. Her poems were used in public recitation and musical settings, and later notices connect her with sculpture and other forms of community art. After her marriage to Richard ended, records show later marriages to Frank Moore in 1949 and Calvin Pfaff in 1951. She continued to be identified bibliographically under the name Lola Sanblom and died in Glendale in November 1973.

# Silk Purses

*Stage I | Self-making and domestic modernism, 1932*

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The complete first collection, reset from the photographed copy.

## *Silk Purses*

“You’ll never amount to anything!”  
“You can’t make a silk purse  
Out of a sow’s ear.”  
A silk purse!  
Who wants to be made into a silk purse  
To rot in a stifling dresser drawer?  
Better to be a sow’s ear  
Grown from a little pig’s fragile transparency.  
A sow’s ear that lifts  
To catch the far faint call—  
“Whooee—whooee—”  
When the evening corn is scattered,  
Or flops in the heat as she rolls  
In the stinking mud to keep off hungry flies.  
A sow’s ear, listening to the fall  
Of early apples or late acorns.  
What appeal has a silk purse  
Idling in the dresser drawer?  
Better by far to be a sow’s ear  
Even though it be torn by wild dogs.  
Do not sow’s ears carry the registry number?

---

From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 9.

## *Rebellion*

Get down under my feet,  
Get behind me,  
Be completely buried or submerged,  
Any irritating oft-repeated task,  
Any tiresome, necessary job,  
Anything that must be done  
That does not yield me  
Health or happiness  
Or judgment or satisfying experience.

Get down out of the way,  
Down so the sunshine can reach me,  
Down so my vision will be unobstructed.  
All degrading thoughts,  
All people who do not bring out the best in me.  
All slimy words.

But every thing yields me  
Health or happiness  
Or judgment or satisfying experience  
Or a deeper understanding  
Or a broader vision.

Still,  
Get down under my feet,  
Out of my way,  
All things that can not let me free  
Until they are done.

My dish pan,  
My mop stick,  
My darning needle.  
Let them become so habitual,  
Operated so mechanically,  
That they are like the dirt  
Under my feet,  
The foundation on which I stand.  
But not sticking up in my vision,

Not keeping the sun off of me.

Get down under my feet

Or behind me.

---

From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 10–11.

## *Tranquility*

I am sitting on a volcano.  
The sky is blue;  
The air stirs softly;  
A bird nearby sings to his mate;  
I'm pleasantly warm.  
I wonder what I'll do  
When the lid blows off?

---

From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 12.

## *Plug*

If you long for serenity  
Down through the years  
Find a nag  
That keeps in the rut.  
Wrap the lines  
About the whipstock  
And jog complacently  
Along the road.

---

From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 13.

## *Some Day*

Some day I'm going to climb the mountain.  
Some day I'm going to pack my lunch  
And walk, and walk, and walk.  
Some day my feet will feel along a shadowy path up that first hillside.  
From there I'll reach the hog's back  
And along its top I'll follow to the canyon.  
Some day.  
Some glorious day  
When toddler's feet have grown a little more.  
No longer shall these frail walls enclose me.  
I'll run away from tasks monotonous and long.  
Up on the mountain top I'll sit and rest,  
And those searching fingers of my vision  
Will caress each distant scene brought near.  
I'll take along those glasses  
Now tucked away and seldom used  
And Shep, the faithful dog, shall go.  
He'll see with me a thousand things;  
A rabbit trail,  
A dust bath for the birds.  
We'll hear and understand the friendly barking of a dog confined by fences  
Who is jealous of this treat he cannot share.  
There'll be ferns on the shady sides of canyons  
And chippy sparrow's nests dug out under sagebrush, lined with soft dry  
grasses and feathers from the mother's breast.  
The sun will settle slowly to the skyline.  
Soon smoke will curl from chimneys in the valley  
And lamps will shine their welcome through the windows.  
I'll hurry down the hillside  
And take a little hand in mine and race with singing heart along the narrow trail  
For somewhere down below among the pines  
A chimney waits for plumes of smoke to wave aloft,  
And lonesome windows wait for Mother's hand to light the lamps,  
And frail walls are standing guard for me and mine.

---

From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 14–15.

## *Garden of Friends*

Out on the front of the piece of ground which is I  
I have built a rough rock wall.  
I built in several formal gates  
But since then burrowing friends  
Attacking crumbly rock  
Have entered where they pleased.  
The wall is high,—and low.  
Rough in places,  
Smoothed in others by many entrances.

Behind the wall which fast wears down  
To an inviting seat on which to perch  
While choosing sun or shade  
Or pungent marsh or desert sand  
Where can be planted each new friend

    So he can grow his best—  
Behind this wall stands a little house  
Where dishes must be washed and wiped  
And tables dusted once a day,  
And babies bathed.

People passing see the wall  
And catch a glimpse of house,  
So I must yearly put on paint  
And keep my blinds half drawn,  
For if the house be mussy, uninviting,  
No one will wish to visit me  
And plant themselves in my spacious garden.

The garden is where I really live  
For the center pool is the real I.  
Some folks strolling past  
See a glimpse of flashing gold;  
Some see a lily pad;  
Some see a roiled waste of murky water;  
Some see the mirrored sun shining in my depths;  
Some see the midnight moon;  
Some gather cat tails at my brink;  
And some  
Pass by

Unseeing.  
All around that center pool  
Are radiating friendly paths,  
And far, or near,  
Stately, prim or spreading,  
In groups inseparable  
Or standing out alone  
Beautiful, complete,  
Are my friends.  
And this is my garden of friends.  
Perhaps you find your own face blossoming here.  
God grant it may be so,  
And if you've never walked in my garden at eventide,  
Perhaps you'll come, and if there's soil  
Where your roots can find sustenance  
Won't you anchor and be another charming plant in a welcoming garden?

---

From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 16–17.

## *Mirror*

I am a mirror  
Reflecting your face.  
Not just a looking glass  
That finds your face alone;  
I am a mirror of deep water,  
Sometimes roiled,  
Sometimes stormy,  
Sometimes calm.  
I am a mirror  
Reflecting your moods and mine.

---

From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 18.

## *Motherhood*

I traveled far  
Across a dusky valley.  
The forked lightning split the dark  
And long will I bear its burning scars.  
Jagged stumps rose up  
And tore my flesh asunder.  
I tried to shrink back,  
But there was one who pulled me through  
By his hands in mine;  
There was one whose earnest voice spoke low to me.  
And all at once  
I saw her,  
And I was safe in the sunshine,  
And a tiny baby cried.

---

From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 19.

## *First Child*

I am like a lively young Airedale pup,  
Full of life,  
Loving; rambunctious.  
Into my yard comes a downy chick.  
It drives me into ecstasies.  
Eagerly I lick it to show my affection;  
Tenderly I pat it.  
I cock my ears in an attempt  
To understand its plaintive weeping.  
Carefully I lie down with a paw  
On either side of its young body.  
I mouth it lovingly.  
It lies limp, no longer weeping.  
I whine disconsolately.  
Why is this beloved new plaything dead?

---

From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 20.

## *My Baby*

Sometimes when I think of my baby  
I think of the lily of the valley  
Growing in the seclusion  
Of many big and rather awkward leaves.  
She is sometimes so quiet  
And her eyes such a far-away blue  
That I speak her name  
To bring her back to me.  
She will laugh  
And try to talk,  
And stretch one arm out  
Far toward me,  
And tuck her head down while she looks up at me.  
What can I do?  
She is like a bunch of lilac  
Calling.  
I go and fold her soft sweet body  
Close to mine  
And snuggle my nose down in her neck.

---

From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 21.

## *Mighty Men*

Working men's clean, sweaty faces.  
Working men's steady calm eyes.  
Working men's muscles bulging under their faded blue shirts,  
And their capable hands cupped from long labor.  
Mighty hands. For a woman to put her hand in safely;  
A woman or a little child.

---

From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 22.

## *Eventide*

Eventide  
Shadows  
And we three,  
Baby and I  
And you, dear.  
Baby and I  
In the twilight  
Waiting.  
Waiting for you, dear.  
Firelight  
Dancing,  
Lighting your face  
For me, dear.  
Baby sleeps,  
The moon swings low.  
You're at my side,  
I'm glad, dear.

---

From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 23.

## *Old Hen*

I am an old hen,  
Hunting for worms.  
My nails are long and aggressive.  
Sometimes the biggest worms  
Are under such hard, cold rocks  
That I almost have to use dynamite  
To get at them.  
In weepy weather  
The worms come out  
And beg to be taken.

---

From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 24.

## *Children Marching*

March. March. March.  
Before my open window pass my children  
In their splendor.  
Paper hats and shouldered arms.  
March, March. March.  
Drum beat  
And beat of my heart.  
Marking the minutes  
Marking the years away.  
March. March. March.  
Soon will these minutes be measured;  
Memories only these heart beats.  
So you in your make believe splendor  
March. March. March.

---

From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 25.

## *My Boys Have Been Here*

There's a hole in the lawn,  
There's a limb off the tree;  
There's a nice pile of wood  
That they chopped for me.

There are tracks on the floor  
And my eyes still smart  
From the tears at their going  
There's a hole in my heart!

---

From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 26.

## *Wash Day*

Tired.  
White sheets popping  
Gay frocks bulging  
On the line,  
A thousand needles in my feet  
A throbbing in my back.  
A joyous thought of work well done  
As I lie down.  
Tired,  
Linens billowing  
Long towels cracking  
Stockings swinging in the sun.  
Washday.

---

From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 27.

## *Little Starched Dresses*

Little starched dresses  
Hanging in the sun.  
There'll be no little dresses  
When Baby's twenty-one.

Little starched dresses  
Laughter mixed with tears.  
There'll be no little dresses  
In a few more years.

---

From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 28.

## *Dishwashing*

Dishwashing is a privilege  
Perhaps you'll never know  
When I am washing dishes  
How far away I go.

---

From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 29.

## *Balky*

Sometimes I kick through the traces  
And run away,  
But that does no good  
For my harness still clings  
And instead of being in the pasture  
Where there is food, water, and shade,  
I'm out in the hot dusty road,  
And till I go back into the traces  
And pull my load to the journey's end  
I cannot be unharnessed,  
But, knowing this,  
I sometimes kick through the traces,

---

From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 30.

## *Critics*

One took my poor attempts at verse  
And read it in a slow, rich voice.  
She saw my heart and life  
Expressed therein.  
She helped me as a mother  
    Helps her babe to talk.  
    For as a babe, my thought  
    Is sometimes none too clear.  
The other critic held my verse  
Up in two slim fingers  
By the title I use for it.  
She quickly, surely scanned it.  
Pointed out its lack of balance,  
Lack of rhythm,  
Lack of music.  
And there it hung—my verse—  
As a half-drowned kitten  
Held by a boy by the hide on its neck;  
Poked here, pinched there,  
Pulled in other places.  
So it is. My verse may lack in all;  
May have no virtue.  
But I prefer to keep it sheltered  
As a kitten in the hay loft,  
And let it be only a barnyard cat—  
Rather than send it out into the world  
Poor verse; a dripping alley cat.

---

From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 31.

## *Ruffled Hair*

When I see worry  
On my mother's face—and care,  
I put my face up very close,  
Her burdens I would share.  
My mother's face is beautiful  
When calm, both sweet and fair.  
I'd rather have her tender smile  
Than all the jewels rare  
So I do all I can to keep  
Tired lines from settling there.  
I lavish baby charms on her  
And ruffle up her hair.

---

From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 32.

## *Flies*

Sick in bed.  
Flies a sitting  
Waiting till I close my weary eyes.  
Little black imps  
Staring;  
Rubbing their hands at my helplessness,  
Sitting on the hump that is my knee.  
Waiting till my eye lids close  
To land on my arm  
And drag their cold bellies  
On my warm skin.

---

From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 33.

## *Little Pigs*

Nine little pigs  
Sucking in the sun.  
Hair black, white and spotted red  
Barely covering their glowing skins.  
Daintiest pink forked hoofs  
And cleanest of pink noses.  
Hind feet bracing into the dust,  
Fore feet kneading the old sow's belly  
While they nuzzled her big teats,  
And she, content in the spring sunshine,  
Lay at ease, her eyes half closed,  
Grunting a happy remonstrance to her young.

---

From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 34. The source's pasted erratum changes "nuzzle" to "nuzzled"; that correction is incorporated here.

## *The Captive Crab*

Twilight.  
Low tide.  
Let's go for a run up the sandy beach—  
You and the pup and I.  
The bean clams are out  
See them move in the sand  
Where the waters receding  
Left them high and dry.  
And here in this hole  
That the clam diggers left  
Is a creepy, crawly, indignant crab.

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From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 35.

## *The New Colt*

Walk along up the hill  
Along the winding trail—  
And there is Nancy  
With a colt born dead.  
Run helter-skelter down the hill.  
“O Dad, O Dad,  
There’s Nancy on the hill  
With a colt born dead.”  
Hurry back up the hill  
Keeping up with Dad’s long legs.  
“Whoa, Nancy,  
What’s the matter, girl?”  
“Stay back, little one,  
She’s rather cross.  
She’s nuzzling the newborn colt  
That you thought was dead.”  
“Fine colt, Nancy.”  
“Stand up, little fellow,  
Stand on your wobbly legs  
And shake your curly tail.”

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From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 36.

## *Fog*

Cloudland  
And fog.  
Drifting,  
Clinging,  
Dusky gray,  
Sometimes it opens  
And we catch a glimpse  
Of mountain above  
Or valley below.  
But always the fog  
Closes in  
And we are alone.  
Alone,  
And the world  
Is far away.

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From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 37.

## *Solitude*

Giant pine tree  
Gnarled and twisted,  
Bent and broken,  
Shaped by icy winter winds,  
Hanging to your rocky hilltop  
With crooked, heavy roots—  
Do you find sweet pleasure in giving  
Shelter to singing summer birds  
And sleeping winter squirrels?

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From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 38.

## *Red Violet*

High up in the Rockies  
Above a thousand glacial lakes,  
With mountains built of rock on rock  
That tumble down from perpendicular masses  
Standing thousands of feet  
Above the great lake at its base;  
Above the patches of soggy snow  
That hug the sheltered side of the mountain;  
Above the piping cry of the marmots  
Somewhere underneath the piled rocks;  
On up to the mountain top  
Where soil gathers and August snow  
Chills the air, and melting  
Wets the dirt and rocks,  
Near tall fragile columbine  
Growing in sunkissed corners  
On a snow-wet rock,  
Its sturdy white roots crinkled in the water,  
Its dark green leaves spread out to find the sun,  
I found on a slender stem  
A bright red violet.

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From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 39.

## *The Heppner Flood*

Sleepy Sunday afternoon,  
Quiet after mid-day,  
Peaceful little scattered village  
With its dusty streets  
Lined with empty hitching posts.  
Warm, pleasant valley  
With rolling wheat land  
On either side.  
Little gully, where the rain water  
Not soaked in by the dry hillsides  
Trickles away.  
Tiny, inadequate gully.  
Sunday,  
Day of rest  
And visiting.  
Strolling out through the stable yards,  
Walking along the garden paths,  
Washing up the dishes,  
Rocking on the front porch,  
Reading and smoking,  
Writing and playing,  
Happy Sunday afternoon.  
A pale gray, uninteresting cloud  
Lifts serenely over the head of the valley,  
Rises above the horizon,  
Hangs there unnoticed,  
And disappears in thin wisps  
As if it has lost its strength.

“Run!  
Run!  
Oh, old faithful horse,  
Run down the valley road.  
This strange, distant, thundering wall,  
This menacing, towering, rolling,  
Growling wall of water  
Will surely catch us.  
Run! old buggy horse!

While I lean  
Far out over the dashboard  
And frantically lash you  
With the ends of the lines.  
My hat is gone;  
My hair is loose.  
Now turn from the valley road  
Toward safety.  
Your nostrils quiver;  
Foam flecks stick on my face.  
Run!  
Run!  
My husband stands at the yard gate.  
He sees the flood,  
The bellowing, moaning  
Wall of tumbling water.  
Look!  
He is running.  
Running up the hill  
Away from me.  
I call.  
My voice is lost,  
Drowned  
By this smashing, tearing  
Icy welter of water.”

“Mother!  
Where are you?  
Why does the house shake so?”  
“Hush, child.  
I will put my arm around you.  
Thank God I brought you up  
To tuck you in for nap time.  
Come.  
Here are the attic stairs.  
We will go up.”  
“Mother!  
There is water in the upstairs.  
Why?”  
“Come.

We will climb the ladder to the roof.  
There now.  
Sit on Mother's lap.  
Mother will sing to you.  
I will sing 'Rock of Ages'  
For Daddy and the family  
While we ride  
This unknown water  
In our boat."

"John!  
The children!  
The eight little girls.  
John!  
They can't go floating away like that  
On a flimsy porch  
That's torn away.  
John!  
John!  
Oh, Mary!  
Sit down on the porch floor  
All of you little girls,  
Sit down on your rickety boat."  
So they went floating away,  
Frail little porch torn loose  
With a girls' tea party  
Set on the table.

"Run.  
I must run,  
Take my sleeping baby  
And leave this house.  
Run for the hills.  
Nearer and faster  
The grumbling, swearing,  
Bulging wall of water comes.  
I must find nearer refuge.  
Box car at the siding,  
Climb up the ladder at its side,  
Climb with my baby in my arms.  
Shaking, paining muscles,

Icy water at my ankles,  
Climb faster.  
Swirling debris about my waist.  
One more step and baby will be up.  
A floating log,  
A ramming, jamming log.  
My baby dead,  
Dead within the circle of my arms.”

Devilish water,  
Rush and plunge  
And suck and eddy,  
Tumble and twist and turn,  
Sweep onward in your mad, careening way,  
On to the Columbia.  
There spread your strength  
And leave your floating bodies,  
Not the ones you left behind,  
Not the broken bodies buried  
In the frozen banks of muddy ice  
And wrecked house lumber  
And tangles of barbed fence wire  
And mangled farm animals.

Slowly,  
Carefully,  
Step by step  
In the soft spring mud  
I drive my team up the valley.  
Carefully  
Because it carries human bodies.  
Up past dug-over, frozen banks,  
Up past tortured shells of houses,  
Up past a boy burying his mother  
In a coffin made of wet house lumber.  
Stop quietly in front of the two-story plumbing house  
Standing lonely on the higher edge of town.  
Floor covered by heavy mud.  
Up the stairs to the second floor,  
Up the stairs.  
Help me, men.

Up again with another load.  
Slowly,  
Step by step.  
Lay them in these bath tubs;  
Wash them off;  
Wrap them in muslin  
Brought from town in bolts.  
Lay them carefully  
In the back of the spring wagon.  
Slowly,  
Carefully,  
Drive my team up the hillside road  
And stop again at the graveyard.  
The tired grave diggers  
Lean on their shovel handles.  
Washed, dead faces  
Lie uncovered for identification.

I pass by, hoping  
To see my loved one.  
Hoping . . .  
I scream.  
My search is done.  
A neighbor pulls me back,  
Holds me tight.  
I cover my face.  
The wet dirt falls thuddingly into the grave.

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From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 40–46.

## *Deep in My Heart*

Whence cometh this urgent longing  
Deep in the heart of me?  
When the strange soft breeze of springtime  
Finds answer, deep in the heart of me.  
Deep in my heart is a long-crushed love  
For sage covered hills and big bare rocks;  
And the whisper of spring floating into my room  
Has reached deep into my heart.  
The love I thought crushed is stirring.  
Deep, deep down in my heart—  
And I long to stand on the brow of a hill  
With my arms outstretched so the breeze may reach  
And soothe the ache in my heart.

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From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 47.

## *Song of the Lark*

*On Seeing Millet's Painting.*

If I could but write  
With ink and pen  
The feelings that come to me  
You'd understand my dormant longing  
For trees and hills  
And good clean fragrant earth.  
But I cannot convey the yearning I have,  
The yearning tinged with joy  
Of the morning when the sky is turning pink,  
And the sunrise breeze stirs about my face  
And gently loosens my hair.  
The youthfulness of my feeling  
Includes the freedom I felt  
When I stood in the dirt of the garden  
Resting after I'd hoed a long clean row  
Through the tedious young beans.  
Now do you understand?

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From *Silk Purses*. Montrose, California: Privately printed, 1932, pp. 48.

# Buffalo Sod

*Stage II | Pioneer memory and western migration, 1936*

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The complete second collection, reset from the original scan.

## *This Is a Great Land, Hard Come By*

This is a great land, hard come by.  
Far back, unmentioned in history, were vague wonderings in the minds of youths  
As yet unbound and unprejudiced by necessities of living;  
And old folks  
Whose inner mirrors had not been too greatly shattered to reflect portions of their dreams;  
And other wonderers and other dreamers  
Who with mathematical and instrumental reasoning questioned beliefs and accepted facts of preceding times.  
There were the busy dreamers;  
The visionary students;  
The practical makers and doers of new inventions and deeds.  
There were the unquenchable few  
Who could not keep groping ideas from forming and shaping themselves into great remonstrances and great realizations of a yet unexpressed racial advancement.  
Strange, almost insurmountable were the difficulties that advanced unseen to endanger the slight foothold of the pioneers.  
Long and cold the dreary winters.  
Strong and unwavering the abiding faith of the daring dreamers  
Who purchased at so high a price our inheritance.  
Bleak winters, Indians, droughts, swollen rivers, new places, strange soils, homesickness, and strange wild terrors beat at the settlers.  
“We suffer gloriously if we but build for those who follow a firm foundation congealed in the mold of our hopes and silent strivings.”  
Here is my land of inestimable natural wealth:  
Wild meat, fruit and vegetables that grow without tending;  
Timberland for fuel and building;  
Water waiting to be dammed and spread;  
Materials for food, shelter, and clothing;  
And room for dreams to reach the stars at night and sun by day.  
Material wealth is the birthright of the children of the pioneers,  
Material wealth superseded and encompassed by a spiritual wealth of inheritance and tradition braver and more noble than any preceding nation or people ever dared to dream.  
This is my land, great and noble.

Following in humility those illustrious predecessors who, in joyous faith,  
endured unfamiliar hardships,  
My untieable thoughts reach up above niggardly measures to the quiet  
communion of those from whose dreams and wonderings came the possibility  
of a great land, hard come by, truly appreciated, sanely awake.  
This is my wealth, my land, making for me a I security from primitive foes that  
may build high and delicate a fitting superstructure piercing the clouds that veil  
me from the sun.

II

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 10–11.

## *Farm Folk*

I am farm people,

I am contented patient America.

I am the pioneer.

I am the spirit of the land of the free  
And the home of the brave.

Give me a piece of clean land  
And a team of sturdy horses.  
This strip of land is mine to work,  
This strip that runs from Pacific to Atlantic  
Is mine, the poor folk of America,  
Mine to plow and mine to plant,  
And mine to reap the harvest.  
I am the caretaker of the land.

Content with little-  
A field of wheat to trade to the miller for flour,  
A field of corn to feed the shoats,  
A field of hay for winter milk,  
A garden of green and growing things.  
Oh! I am contented, slow thinking, slow moving farm people  
Slow of thought, slow of anger, forgiving, generous.

I will build me new spinning wheels and new churns,  
I will plant my own forest and cut my own wood.  
I will raise my own chickens and cows  
And build me strong fences.  
I have watched sage hens and pheasants  
Scratch out my garden and pull down my heavy headed grain  
While my gun stood useless behind the door.  
I have been upright and honest,  
My children are good and kind,  
Thinking long thoughts and wondering strange things,  
Weighing values:  
Honor, personal honor, such as country people know against wealth,  
Generosity against security,  
Security against taxes,  
Dictatorship against old Anglo-Saxon freedom,

Farming against white slavery.

Oh! I am the spirit of the dream

Of the land of the free and the home of the brave.

I am the honorable pioneer who makes trails into unknown places

So that slick lawyers and wise investors can gain it easily.

I am slow, soft-hearted America, slow thinking,

Uncovetuous, generous,

Asking no help.

I am farm folk standing barefoot in the stubborn soil

With my dreams of peace and comfort.

Hear me! Hear me!

I am slow of speech, slow of thought, my words come hard,

My movements are slow as cooling lava—

Slow as cooling lava.

I am farm folk.

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 12–13.

## *Tinder Box*

Here is my tinder box, invisible:  
Ideals, customs, ways of thinking, ability to weigh values,  
Appreciation of gifts and costs borne by others, happy outlook,  
Courage with no whimpering.  
This tinder box holding my dry, well shredded tinder,  
Ready to catch a flint spark and spread a flame,  
My heritage of flint and tinder, tinder box and ready flame.  
Ready for time of need:  
When fires are out and cold winds howl through fallen chinking,  
When timber wolves from out their fastnesses cry  
And raise the flesh along my spine.  
I will take my ancient heritage,  
My well shredded tinder and hard flint,  
And re-kindle fires that will beat back cold winds  
And night wolves that slink in only in darkness  
Or follow lone travelers, unarmed.  
Here is my tinder box, well filled and dry,  
Heritage of fearless pioneers whose land is mine  
Through dint of foresight and dint of courage,  
Whose tinder box was kept well filled and dry.

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 14.

## *I Am Common Folk*

I am common folk from the beginning of the world.

I am the savers.

I gather the crumbs into loaves.

I take the waste, make home and food and shelter.

I am of the soil-

I am the soil itself.

My feet are in the ground,

My head in the shade of a tree.

I am the gleaners, the burden bearers,

The backbone of the nation.

I am the axis on which the world turns.

I am the lowly, the humble, the ignorant.

I am the noble, the honest, the wise.

Contented, happy, clean.

When I fail, nations fall into ruins.

Sing of me, value me, honor me.

I am common folk from the beginning of the world.

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 15.

## *There Are Bumper Crops to Be Remembered*

There are the bumper crops to be remembered  
And the lavishness of the good years.  
There are the full corn bins  
And the hay stacks standing over from one year to the next,  
Standing in time of need.  
There are the few wells that never run dry,  
Where neighbors may get water for stock.  
There is the attic where dried apples wait for long winters,  
And the cellar stored full of canned stuff and extra things  
Not needed in the good years.  
Then there are the poor years when south winds curl the corn blades  
And cook the new tassels,  
When only the wild hay is good for food,  
And the shoats have to be butchered early and salted down,  
When the faded hay stacks are cut into  
And the sealed corn bins are opened.  
There are the dreaded poor years in the prairie,  
But there are the bumper crops when summer rains fall  
And no hail beats young crops into the ground,  
When the colts are fat and shining  
And the milk buckets are piled with foamy milk  
And the good earth is kind  
And remembers.

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 16.

## *Homesteads*

I will go out into the prairie and build me a sod house;  
Dig me a house in the side of a hill and build it up with sod.  
There will be peace for me in my old age  
And land for my boys—  
Land to be homesteaded in twenty -one years  
When the boys are grown.  
I will build schools, survey townships, open up new roads,  
Fight rustlers and distances in a strange land.  
When my babies are twenty -one, they'll homestead these sections.  
  
My babies came scattered along twenty years.  
Then came a foreigner who had lived six years in this land.  
Been in this country six years.  
Why! My father fought in the Civil War,  
There was a great uncle in the War of 1812,  
Grandfather chased the red coats.  
My sons stand at the line fence and watch homestead cabins  
Built on the adjoining section.  
My sons, who had lived in the country sixteen, eighteen, twenty years.

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 17.

## *I Am a Bull-Headed Farmer*

I am a bull-headed farmer  
Knowing my own mind,  
Minding my own business.  
My boys are nearly grown.  
We've worked.  
I surveyed and built this ditch around the mountain.  
I stocked these hills with cattle  
  
I contracted debts and mortgages.  
Then came the war and cattle prices rose.  
The boys all said to sell this last shipment and buy no more,  
The prices couldn't last.  
I went to Omaha and sold them.  
Then bought a train load of young thin steers  
To fatten on the range with winter feeding.  
The boys said the money would have paid all debts and mortgages  
As we had planned.  
Ma was unusually quiet.  
The cattle market broke,  
The range dried,  
Hay was scarce.  
The ranch is gone, the debts remain.  
I am a bull-headed farmer  
Knowing my own mind,  
Minding my own business.

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 18.

## *Pioneer*

“Where are you going, young man  
With a typhoid-crooked back?  
Where do you think you can go  
With a baby and a big heavy wife?”  
“I’ve hitched up my team,  
I’ve put in my bed and my grub.  
I’m leaving over the prairie,  
Leaving Iowa for Kansas.”  
“How are you going to ride?  
You can’t sit in your wheel chair!  
You can’t sit on the wagon seat.”  
“I’ve slung my bed under the wagon.  
Rain or shine I’ll be all right.  
I’ve hitched up my team for Kansas!”  
Mile on mile on mile on mile  
With nothing for markers.  
Broad, level, open prairie,  
Soft yellow buffalo sod,  
Shallow black buffalo wallows,  
Nodding sunflowers,  
Whir of grasshoppers,  
Steady fall of horses’ feet,  
Rhythmic sway of wagon,  
Weary fret of baby,  
Or peaceful sleep,  
Or quiet play.  
And a heavy young mother  
Sitting on the spring seat of a covered wagon,  
Holding the lines  
Of a quiet team  
That has been hitched for Kansas.

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From *Buffalo Sod*. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 19.

## *Frozen Stars*

It's a long hard trip from Iowa to Kansas;  
A long hard trip in a heavy overjetted wagon on rutted roads.  
Expecting my fourth child,  
My body aches, my eyes burn, the children fret.  
I am thankful for my thin bed at night under the stars,  
Tired enough to sleep the whole night through  
But not so sound asleep that I am not disturbed  
By faint sounds, vague whisperings.  
The bed beside me is empty.  
I hear my older, widowed sister's soft laugh.  
I stare dry-eyed into the darkness.  
What can I do?

---

From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 20.

## *Sod House*

### SOD HOUSE

Ma goes out with the milk pail on her arm.  
Pa lies on the sofa with his crooked back toward the wall.  
Corn meal mush pl-lops from time to time  
In the black iron pot at the back of the stove.  
Sod walls, black as the native loam,  
Show weird patterns of light from the door of the hearth  
While Minnie and I rock back and forth,  
Back and forth,  
In the old rocker.  
Pa smokes his pipe,  
Or lays it in the hollowed niche  
In the thick sod wall.  
All is quiet and dreamy  
While Ma is gone at milking time.

---

From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 21.

## *Shining Knives*

“Skite out of here,  
All you little tykes!  
Skite!  
I can’t get Sunday dinner  
With you under foot.  
Here, take the knives out into the garden.  
Shine them well.”  
Sitting on the potato row  
With their feet down in the ditch  
Five stair-stepped children  
Jab the knives deep into the ground.  
Slowly, up and down, up and down,  
Shining the knives.  
“My knife hit a potato!”  
“So did mine.”  
“Let’s dig potatoes to eat.”  
Sweet, crisp, new potatoes  
Full of juicy milk  
To fill hungry waiting-for-Sunday-dinner stomachs.  
Munching away, talking and singing,  
Sitting a-straddle of a potato row  
With their dirty hands, juice streaked faces,  
Hair tousled by the wind.  
“Clara! Aren’t you about through with those knives?  
Dinner’s ready. Aren’t you hungry?”  
“Hungry?”  
Five silent, potato-filled children  
Run to the pump to wash knives  
And potato stained faces for Sunday dinner.

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 22.

## *Hunting Eggs*

“What shall we do, Minnie?

Shall we go to the creek?”

“Let’s go to the barn.”

“Whoa, Lizzie.

Stand over, Kate.

You look for eggs in that manger.’

“No, Old Jim will kick.”

“Oh! Come on.

You look here.

Lizzie and Kate won’t kick you.

Stand over, Jim.

Stand over there, you old bay cross patch!

You don’t need to lay your ears back at me!

Did you eat the eggs?

Here they are, where you nosed hay over them.

Now, get over, Old Jim,

Or I’ll get the pitch fork after you.”

---

From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 23.

## *Let's Hitch the Calf*

Let's make a sled and hitch the bull calf to it!  
Come on, Clara, you girls go get that old harness  
Hanging in the lean -to.  
Vic, you bring the hammer and those bob sled runners.  
I'll get the calf.  
He doesn't like this.  
He tried to knock me down.  
Hear him bellow.  
Cliff, put the collar on him.  
Clara, come get this other horn.  
Stay out of the way, Minnie,  
You'll get hurt.  
Now, fasten the tugs to those hooks on the sled.  
Get on, everybody!  
Jump for the sled, Clara, when you let go.  
We'll go over the prairie faster than we ever went before!  
Hear him bellow!

---

From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 24.

## *Wild Hay*

Every day,  
Whether sunshine or bitter cold or blizzard,  
The fires must burn.  
Some one must bundle up against the cold  
And go to the barn where wild hay,  
Cut while the long stems were thick and full,  
Is piled against the north wall to keep out winds.  
A long thick strand is slowly twisted  
Between outstretched hands  
Until the twisted strand  
Twists back on itself firmly.  
The doubled end is held under the elbow  
While the twisting is continued  
Until only the ends are free.  
Then they are closely wrapped  
Around the end of the twist and deftly tucked in  
So the hay will stay tightly twisted  
In the big piles on the floor of the lean -to  
Off the warm kitchen.  
The kitchen where fires must be kept burning  
With wild hay, rich and dry.  
Twisted into stove lengths  
Every day  
Whether sun shine or blizzard howl in biting cold.

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 25.

## *Sauerkraut*

Warm fragrant evenings in the squat sod house.  
Fall frost in the ground.  
The big boys tired from a long day on the stalk cutter and behind the plow.  
Supper cleared from the big table and the clean dishes piled away in the  
cupboard.  
Solid heads of cabbage carried in arm loads from the deep cellar.  
Ma at the table quickly cutting off outside leaves,  
Quartering the heads and cutting out the cores.  
The big boys standing by the big oak barrel  
Taking turns at the brightly scrubbed and sharpened spade  
Chopping the snowy crispness of the cabbage  
As it is thrown into the barrel.  
Sauerkraut in the making ready for the winter's cold.

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 26.

## *The New Plow*

Pa ought to be coming home from Cawker City pretty soon.  
It's almost dark.  
He's been gone two long days.  
I've been waiting here sick in bed  
To see what he'd bring me.  
He said he'd bring me something  
When he went to Cawker City.  
I've lain here thinking about what he might bring me.  
"Clara, Pa's coming.  
He just turned the corner down by Warner's.  
He'll be here in a little while.  
What do you suppose he brought you?"  
Maybe some sugar?  
Maybe a new dress?  
Maybe a singing book?  
"Pa's in the yard, Clara!  
Come and see what he brought you!  
I'll carry you out.  
Put your arms around me."  
A new plow!  
A new red plow!  
All shiny red and green paint with glistening steel.  
A new plow to be mine as long as it lasts.  
"In the morning John and Charlie will be hitched  
To your new plow, Clara!"

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From *Buffalo Sod*. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 27.

## *Tune Up the Fiddle*

Milking is done and the chores are through.  
The calves have been fed.  
The morning kindling is in the box.  
Come, Clara, play the organ while I tune up the fiddle.  
Get your instruments, all.  
Tirzah, your thin -voiced flute.  
There's "Fisher's Hornpipe," and "Napoleon's Retreat," and "Money Musk."  
Milking is done and the kindling in for morning.

---

From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 28.

## *Buffalo*

The sun is a red blur over the hazy Rockies.  
The twitter of small birds fills the heavy evening air.  
The ruts of the South Pass road lead over the hill.  
Behind lies the long road,  
The long, tedious road,  
The hard road back to the old homes we have left.  
Below us lies the wide valley with the divided, meandering creek  
Flowing through grassy banks shaded with willows.  
“This is home, “Pa points to the broad peaceful valley.  
“This is home. “Ma answers like a prayer.  
“We’ll camp here on the hill tonight.  
Buffalo are bedded down, across there.”  
Buffalo! Warm robes and good meat!  
Bedded down from the foot of the hill  
Way over there, two miles away!  
“We’ll camp by the South Pass road tonight.”

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 29.

## *Lions*

Here stands the new log house on the homestead.  
There is the tall central chimney  
That will warm the upstairs.  
Here is the doorway  
That looks out on the old small house.  
There are no windows yet in the new log house,  
No door hangs in the doorway.  
A warm fire burns in the big old range,  
And the chill air of late autumn  
Is warm in the house.  
Children are scattered about,  
One in the straw -covered chicken house  
After the eggs,  
One giving warmed milk to a hungry calf  
Staked near the house.  
Pa is at the stable,  
Sparingly giving oats to thin horses.  
Slowly, gauntly, with careful dignity,  
Down through the sage -brush of the big back hill  
Come two mountain lions,  
Father and mother, curious, lean.  
Ma's calm voice calls,  
"Come!  
Leave the bucket of milk.  
Come to the house.  
Come to the new house,  
Quick, children!  
Where's little sister?"  
"After the eggs."  
  
Again Ma's calm voice called,  
"Stay where you are, little sister.  
Shut the door and put the nesting barrel against it."  
Slowly, gauntly, tails twitching,  
Two hungry lions enter the hard-baked dooryard,  
Round the old house,  
Pause near the doorway of the new log house.  
Cautiously, with quiet dignity,

Two hungry lions circle a milk-smelling calf.  
“Ma! Where is Pa going  
On the bareback horse over the hill?”  
“He’s going after the neighbor’s gun.  
But he’ll get back too late.  
They’ll kill our only little heifer calf.”  
Stay in the house, children.’  
“Ma! Don’t go out there!”  
Slowly, with quiet dignity,  
One lone woman walks out of the gaping doorway.  
She holds no stick.  
Her hands are quiet.  
“Go on away!  
Go on away!”  
Two lean, dignified, hungry lions look up curiously.  
“Go on away!  
Go on away!”  
Longingly they smell the warm milk smell  
And with calm courtesy  
They walk leisurely across the hard packed dooryard,  
Across the little gulley,  
And over the hill  
While a quiet woman follows:  
“Go on away!  
Go on away!”

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 30–31.

## *Cold and Biting Is the Wind*

Cold and biting is the sudden wind  
Sprung up from some distant snow.  
The clouds bank up against the hills in sullen darkness.  
An early snow finds me unprepared in lonely mountains  
Far from home  
In timber land where thin logs grow  
For homestead cabin.  
Impatiently waiting for the last logs to be rolled  
With great effort onto the load,  
The restless horses champ their bits,  
Distend their nostrils, flick their ears  
While I make fast the logs and climb on.  
Snow falls, big white feathers,  
Before the wind, covering the ground.  
I hunch my head into my shoulders,  
Letting the load ease down the mountain side  
My hand on the brake lever rope.  
Snow no longer falls,  
Dark skies threaten.  
The wind in ever increasing strength and depth of coldness  
Sweeps out again.  
My thin clothes cannot protect me.  
Shivering follows gooseflesh.  
Aching hands cling stiff to the lever rope.  
At last the foothill levels off to prairie.  
The horses, knowing the long road home,  
Slowly pull through the soft deep snow.  
I fight drowsiness, sitting on the logs.  
Knowing the unerring homing of my team,  
I wisely knot a rope about my waist  
And slide down to walk behind the wagon.  
After interminable time the team stops in front of the postoffice.  
I push the door open and stagger in.  
Before I enter I am knocked out of the building into the snow.  
“God! Man, don’t you know you are frozen to death?  
Go on home. Keep walking.  
Tell your wife to pour cold water over you till you thaw out.  
Keep walking!”

She stands at the gate, holding it open.  
She unknots the rope about my waist.  
She drags me into a chair in the lean -to  
And all night long goes to pump buckets of water,  
Carries them in in the cold and snow  
And dumps them over my head.  
I am covered with ice, frozen water,  
But slowly the ice melts,  
Slowly I thaw out,  
Slowly I am made a living man.  
The sudden wind was cold and biting,  
The early snow unexpected.  
The mountains where the timber grew far from home.

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 32–33.

## *If I Could Stay in Town*

Pa, if I could stay in town this winter  
And go to County Normal School,  
I could teach our school next winter.  
I've gone through all the books  
Except the arithmetic.  
Every year I begin at the beginning  
And work every problem on each page,  
But I can't get through the book by spring.  
If I could go to town this winter,  
And go to normal, I could teach our school.  
Mat Strickland went to Normal years ago  
And taught schools around here.  
She went to Salina for another year at school.  
She's back here now.  
Back to the sod houses and the prairie.  
I saw her at singing school.  
She's a cultured lady now.  
Not put on, but real.  
Pa, if could stay in town this winter,  
I could teach our school next fall.

---

From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 34.

## *Lonely Are the Days*

Lonely are the days, and tiresome  
On a freighter's wagon.  
Welcome is a clump of cottonwoods and an Indian camp.  
Warm food waiting with a welcome.  
Fragrant beans in hot soup.  
I sit on my heels among friendly Indians  
And accept a tin plate of bean soup.  
Without spoons, they drink their soup.  
I am proud of my heavy long mustache,  
But it strains back every bean.  
Lonely are the days on a freighter's wagon.

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 35.

## *My Lord Is Gone*

My Lord is gone.  
Early one morning he said:  
“I’m going to Kingfisher  
After a load of wheat flour  
To take to Taloga.  
I’ll be gone six days  
Down the road past the Gyp Hills,  
Across the Canadian river,  
On down to Kingfisher.  
You milk the cow  
And shut the hens up at night.  
If the dogs bark in the woods,  
You stay in the house;  
Panthers out in the dark.”  
And my Lord was gone,  
Gone with the team for six long days,  
Gone to Kingfisher where a company of people dwell.  
I am forsaken  
With two small children about my feet,  
Three loyal dogs roaming the woods,  
And the nearest neighbor a mile and a half away.  
But my Lord will come back to me  
One of these evenings.  
The children will cry:  
“Mother, there’s someone making a dust down the road.”  
We will strain our eyes to see  
And strain our ears to hear.  
Slowly, ploddingly, the dusty horses.  
Will pull their heavy load  
Of wheat flour up the low grade.  
The children and I will run to meet him.  
He will stop the team and set the brake  
So we can climb onto the seat with him: Our Lord.  
The horses will take a breathing  
And then, when the brake is let go,

They'll prick their ears  
And nicker softly  
And gaily we'll ride with our Lord  
To home.

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 36–37.

## *Winter*

Come down, clouds, and cuddle me in.  
Blow, winds, and beat against the place.  
Burn brightly, fire, and warm these cozy rooms  
While fragrant beans steam on the stove.  
Baby coos and claps his hands  
In his padded box on the table  
And little sister breathes on the frosted window panes  
To make pictures.  
I treadle away with the sewing machine  
Near the long window,  
Piecing, piecing quilts  
From scraps of calico and gingham  
That made school dresses and school skirts,  
While the winds blow and beat against the house  
And the clouds come down and cuddle me in.

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 38.

## *Contentment*

“Will, let’s go home today.

I haven’t seen the folks for almost a year.

I have the work done up and clean clothes for the children,

And the horses didn’t work in the fields yesterday.

Let’s drive over and have Sunday dinner with the folks.”

“Damned women, always wanting to gad around.

Never satisfied with what you have.

What you need is a baby.

Then you’d behave.”

---

From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 39.

## *Overalls*

Washed blue overalls  
With ragged holes in the knees.  
Patches cut from the backs of legs  
Of overalls, badly torn.  
Turn the leg inside out,  
Pin the long slim patch in place,  
Stitch it securely down.  
Turn the leg and trim the ragged edges off.  
Stitch again with strong new thread.  
Click of needle on heavy thimble  
And every stitch a tiny thought.  
Stitching a patch on overalls,  
On faded washed blue overalls.  
Stitching the eggs that didn't hatch;  
Stitching the hay that mildewed;  
Stitching the cow that climbed through the hole in the fence and ate the green  
alfalfa;  
Stitching the pigs that chilled to death;  
And the mares that found no colts;  
Stitching the bees that swarmed away-  
Stitching on faded blue overalls.

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 40.

## *One Needle*

"Here comes Pete, poking along.  
Must not be very happy.  
Maybe his pa whipped him.  
Maybe he is hungry.  
Let's go meet him."  
"Hello, Pete.  
Where you going?"  
"To see your mother."  
"Why?"  
"Nothing."  
"Your mother sick?"  
"No."  
"New baby at your house?"  
"No."  
"You come after milk for supper?"  
"No. You kids go on and play."  
"Hello, Mrs. George."  
.  
"Hello, Pete. What do you want?"  
"Ma sent me over to see you."  
"Run on out and play, children.  
Now what is it?"  
"Ma wants to know if she can borrow a needle.  
She lost hers."

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 41.

## *Pack Rat*

"I tell you, woman,  
You stole my seeds!  
My gallon bucket of pumpkin seeds!  
Think what they mean to me.  
Pumpkins for my children to eat next winter.  
Pumpkins for the cow so my children can have milk.  
Milk and pumpkin and sorghum and bread,  
And now the pumpkin seed is gone.'

"Neighbor, I didn't take your pumpkin seed.  
Were you not kind enough to give me pumpkins  
If I'd make you pumpkin butter?  
Did not your pumpkins feed my family, too?  
And if your pumpkin seed be gone—  
Where will I get pumpkins for this winter?  
Oh! I did not take your seed!  
But I wish I had!"

"While you're here, neighbor,  
I wish you'd help me move the organ.  
Will's been gone three weeks freighting—  
Freighting down the Canadian river,  
And I'd like to have the cabin clean when he comes back.  
I've scraped the dirt floor nice and clean,  
All but behind the organ."  
Out of the corner goes the organ.  
"Oh! Look! Some stuff I've hunted for.  
Will's dirty socks!  
The baby's comfort!  
And look! neighbor,  
Some ears of corn  
And pumpkin seed!  
Not eaten yet.  
Oh! Thank the Lord!  
It's pack rats' work.  
They've carried away your pumpkin seed.  
And here's your old brown hat!"

We'll gather them up,  
You take them home,  
And put a lid on the gallon tin bucket  
Of pumpkin seed."

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 42–43.

## *Crazy Man*

“Say, Bill, let’s go up to Kansas  
To shuck corn this winter.  
We can leave your team here for the women  
And drive mine.  
We’ll make a little money and maybe trade off old Prince.  
He’s balky, anyway.”  
Slow and tedious is travel with a team of work horses  
And a lumber wagon.  
Monotonous the dusty plod of heavy feet.  
Uninteresting the landscape.  
Grasshoppers sing in the tall weeds by the roadside.  
A flock of grazing turkeys cross the road.  
“Slap the horses, Bill, let’s get a young Tom.”  
Two fine young turkeys fall under the trotting horses’ hoofs.  
“Hold a minute. I’ll pick them up.  
Here comes the man with a shot gun.  
We’d better hurry up.’  
“He’s afoot.”  
“He’s turned back on the run. After a horse.”  
“Prince, move along.”  
“Here’s the town. We can’t go through town this fast.  
Horses foamy on their flanks, breathing hard.”  
“Here, Bill, we’ll hook this log chain around my waist  
Let me out behind the wagon.  
Keep on going and I’ll run behind.  
I’m crazy.’  
“Hey, where you going in such a hurry?”  
“Look at that man!”  
“Crazy man! Look out everybody!  
Crazy man!  
I’m taking him up to Kansas to an institution.  
Look out, everybody!  
Crazy man!”

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 44–45.

## *Muley Cow*

“Where’s Papa Mamma?”  
“Gone after old Muley.  
She got out again into Hasting’s corn field.  
If the fence were fixed she’d give no trouble.  
You can’t blame a cow for wanting corn.  
Run play, Cecil.”  
“Mom! Mom!  
Papa! Out by the barn!  
Muley is dead. My old white cow!  
Mom! O Mom!”  
Muley is dead? Muley is badly beaten.  
Bloody bony hips.  
Bloody nostrils.  
One eye hanging on her cheek.  
Muley, who forages in dry pasture  
To give my baby and my boy their milk.  
Muley’s not dead!  
But dead the thoughtless man should be  
Who treats her so.  
“Get out of here! And don’t you dare!  
Dare ever again to beat old Muley.

—  
Not ever!  
I’ll horsewhip you!  
Husband or no husband!  
Get out of here.”  
“Muley! Poor old Muley.  
Cecil, run to the pump and bring cold water.  
I’ll get grease and rags.”  
“Muley. Poor old Muley.”

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 46.

## *Grandma*

Grandma is old, and frail, and thin,  
And she sits by the fire to sew.  
It doesn't seem that such a little thing  
Could have been the woman  
Who reared ten children,  
Who kept a store,  
Who bought five farms,  
Who plowed and harrowed,  
Who carried water and chopped fire wood,  
And bossed hired men,  
And broke horses,  
And now sits in a rocker in the glow of the fire  
And sews patches on little boys' overalls  
And little girls' dresses  
While she tells stories of her girlhood  
When she was young, and frail, and thin.

---

From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 47.

## *Oh! Abe!*

“Oh! Abe,  
Take me into town for just one day.  
I love this homestead, but I get so hungry

To see another woman! I pretend  
My dishes are women calling.  
The baby moves in its hanging basket  
And kicks my side.  
Take me away from here for just one day.”

“Oh! Abe,  
Is that a woman coming to our door?  
I haven’t seen a woman for almost three years.  
Three years! I wanted to go away before my first baby came,  
Now, with the third child almost here,  
I am afraid. What shall I say?”  
“How do you do, and what is your name?

You are so pretty, like the women I used to know.”  
“Martha! Shut up! There is no woman here.”  
“I saw her, she was nice—”

“Shut up, I tell you. You are crazy!”

They buried Abe Stevens’ woman today,  
From the town church.  
They say she was a beautiful woman.  
She’d never been off the homestead,  
She was crazy, couldn’t be trusted.  
Too bad. She left seven girls for Abe to bring up.

“Look at those funny girls.  
Why do they run hide when we walk past their  
gate?”  
“Hush, honey, walk past with your eyes straight ahead.  
They’re crazy.”  
“Why do they live here?”  
“Their Dad has lots of money.

He pays a woman to stay here with them,  
He has a ranch up Butter Creek.  
He froze his feet off on his ranch last year.”

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 48–49.

## *Grandma's Old Stone House*

Grandma is dead  
But her old stone house  
Still stands in the upper pasture.  
Built back into a southern slope  
So the winter winds  
Will have only the upper story to screech over.  
The cows walk in and out at will  
For no door hangs on the rusty hinges;  
The door where Grandma's little boys  
Went in and out;  
The door in the south wall  
Around which the trampling of feet  
And the beating sun  
Dried a little spot  
Where the hens came and ate the table scraps  
And basked in the sunshine.  
The old stone stairway  
Up the outside of the house  
Is strong as ever.  
Up there in the big loft  
Where boy after boy was born  
And little Milt died,  
Is only a pack rat's nest.  
I stand in the upper door  
And look down over the little hills  
To the valley  
Where her new frame house  
Was built for a married younger son,  
And on beyond the creek  
Whose fertile acres  
Were given to another son.  
The vast land that once was hers  
May have been sold to stranger hands,

But Grandma's old stone house  
Stands, a truer monument  
Than granite slab,  
In the old upper pasture.

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 50–51.

## *Fireflies*

Luminous after twilight,  
Moonglow over the trees along the creek.  
Crickets and the swell of frogs.  
Soft air floating past with changing fragrances.  
Curing hay,  
Orchard smell,  
A waft of cow's breath.  
Dad in the creaking rocker with his pipe;  
Mother sitting on the top step  
With tired body resting against the post.  
Sweet smelling baby cuddled against her breast  
And faithful Shep at Mother's feet  
Peaceful, understanding,  
Brown eyes carefully seeking her face.  
Sister's young lady face a soft blur in the darkness.  
Ears listening for familiar hoof beats and buggy creak  
Away down the road.  
Little sister and I swinging  
Around and around and around the porch posts,  
Laughing and dizzy.  
Fireflies sailing along through the night.  
Stingily spreading their diminutive glow  
Before the moon comes up.

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 52.

## *The Hearth Door*

Mamma's gone down to the corral to milk  
And we must wait for her here.  
I hold you, Lola, in my young arms,  
In the old rocker, in front of the stove.  
My toe just touches the tip of the hearth  
To keep us rocking.  
It's pleasantly light in the darkening room  
For the hearth door is open  
And the fire shows through the grate.  
Pull a chair up close, Geneva,  
And I'll sing "Rockabye Baby"  
Till we all three go to sleep.

---

From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 53.

## Co!

“Co! Virgil.  
Co! Nancy.  
Co, Co, Co.”  
Slowly the echo returns—  
“Co, Co, Co,”  
Dad’s at the pasture gate.  
“Co, Co.”  
Calling the horses to come.  
Hurry our homeward steps.  
Forgotten our tablets and books.  
Hurrying home from school  
We hear  
“Co, Co, Co.”  
See! There come Virgil and Nancy.  
Trotting along past the pond,  
Down past the pasture well.  
“Co, Co, Co.”  
Run a race with the horses.  
We are not far from the barn.  
Surely Virgil is lazy,  
Or thinking of grass in the orchard.  
Now they are trotting again.  
Hurry! We will run.  
“Co, Co, Co.  
Co, Nancy.  
Co, Virgil.”  
Dad’s at the pasture gate,  
Swinging it open wide.  
“Come through, girls,  
There come the horses.  
Run to the house.  
Mother is waiting,  
Good Virgil.  
Good Nancy.  
Sugar for you when you answer  
My Co, Co, Co!”

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 54–55.

## *Little Pictures*

### *I*

Come on, Marjorie,  
Let's go out to the new field  
Where Dad is plowing sod.  
Take a tin can to put grubs in.  
Come on. See the horses straining.  
"Get up, Virgil,  
Whoa, Nancy!"  
Hear the horses puff.  
Dad holds firmly to the cutting plow.  
See Dad drive the horses  
With the lines around his waist.  
The deep strip of sod rolls neatly  
To lay grass down,  
Half over the last layer.  
How good the fresh clean ground feels to bare feet.  
Here's a grub.  
Here's a grub.  
And another.

### *II*

"Look! How stiff and straight Cecil walks!  
What's a matter, Cecil? Seen something?"  
Never a word.  
"What's a matter? Horse step on your foot?  
You're white faced! You sick?"  
Never a word.  
"Come on, Lola, let's follow to the house.  
He's going to Mom."  
"I didn't bring the cows home, Mom."  
"They have to be milked tonight, Cecil."  
"A panther followed me  
From up the little creek.  
I was right on him before I knew."  
"How far did he follow you?"  
"Clear down to the place  
Where the road crosses the creek.  
I just walked along, without looking back."

“Go saddle Lady, Cecil.  
I’ll get the shot gun.’  
“You’re not going alone, Mom.”  
“I’ll bring the 22 for you.  
You can ride Floss, bareback.  
The cows have to be milked tonight.”

III

“Let’s go out to the corral to watch the big boys milk.  
Sit on the top pole of the fence  
And listen to the musical, foamy song of the milk.  
Hear the cows belch contentedly  
As they chew their cuds.  
Now Cecil’s going to milk old Cherry;  
Let’s have him milk into our mouths.  
Here’s the old house cat, come for her share.  
Now he has finished.  
Put us on Cherry’s back, Cecil.”  
“Up you go, girls.  
One, two, three, four,  
Now, Lola, up!”  
“Oh! Don’t put me up.  
Slap Cherry on the leg to make her go.  
Oh! She’s bucking!”  
Off you go, little girls.  
Off in the soft powdery dirt of the corral.

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 56–58.

## *Sheep Sorrel*

“Look, Mamma,

We found some new pink flowers

In the old peach orchard.

What are they?”

“Oh! That’s sheep sorrel.

Much like pie plant.

Good for sauce and pies.”

“May we go back and pick you some?”

“Yes, if you wish.

We’ll have sheep sorrel pies for supper.”

“Come on, Marjorie,

Take my hand, Honey.”

Out past the milking corral,

Through the bars and up the lane

Past the tadpole pond we go,

Up the road that leads to the wild hay meadows

To the old peach orchard.

Beautiful, delicate sheep sorrel

Growing abundantly for supper pies.

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 59.

## *Squash Blossoms*

“Oh! Marjorie!  
The corn is in the silk.”  
“Corn cob dolls!”  
  
“Long silk dresses.  
Corn shuck cradles.”  
“I’ll make mine a squash blossom cape.”  
“And I’ll make mine a squash blossom hat.”  
Corn cob dolls in pale dresses.  
High green corn in a singing field  
And two little girls with braided hair  
In a corn field play house  
With corn in silk and squash in bloom.

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 60.

## *Recess*

Recess!

What shall we play?

Dare base!

Lightning bug!

Blackman!

Blackman!

Chester's it. He was caught yesterday.

"Take me through, Cecil!"

"Take me, too."

"One at a time, I'll come back for you."

"Pump, pump, pull away

If you don't come I'll pull you away."

"Give me a fair start."

"There's the bell."

"Everybody's caught but Sammy."

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 61.

## *Horse Bite*

“Virgil bit the hired man again today.

He’s surely getting to be a mean horse, Mom.  
Someday he’s going to get some one into trouble.  
It’s a habit with him now.  
He didn’t use to be so mean.  
He’s a good horse.”

“Who’s going to work him tomorrow?”

“I’ll have him on the buck rake.”

“Be careful, Cecil, keep your eye on him.”

“The men in for supper already, Cecil?”

“I came in early. This afternoon  
As I was taking my first load in  
A tooth broke out on a rock.  
I watched Virgil pretty close,  
But the wrench slipped  
As I was tightening the bolt  
And I lost my balance.

He got me underneath my shoulder blade.”

“Is it pretty sore? You should have come right in.”

“I turned around and hit him on the nose  
With the monkey wrench.”

“Oh Cecil! That was too severe!”

“He sat down on his haunches when I struck.

He’ll never bite again.”

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 62.

## *Big Brother*

“There’s Cecil, going through the cornfield.”

Where you going, Cecil?

May we go too?”

“Tag tails!”

High green corn above his head.

Corn silks high as ours.

Carpet weeds blossoming on the ground

And the split corn blades scratching together.

“Look, girls, see that big bird sailing up there?”

“Oh, Cecil! That’s only a crow.”

“That’s a turkey buzzard.

He could eat girls your size.

I’m going to the house.”

“Cecil!

Cecil!

Wait for us!”

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 63.

## *Carriage Team*

“Hello, Bill! Your horses all right?  
I just got word from Colorado.  
There’s a horse disease out there,  
Wiping out the stock.”  
“Coming East?”  
“Slowly. Don’t want to take chances.  
Thought maybe I could get along without your team tomorrow.  
Came to tell you.  
If we keep our horses home and off the road,  
The disease won’t spread so fast.  
Maybe can be checked before it reaches us.”  
“Surely. Thanks for coming.”

“Hello, Bill. How’re your horses?  
Disease has reached Western Kansas.  
Traveling like wildfire.  
Be here in a few more days  
Unless it’s checked.  
I won’t be here any more,  
My feet might carry the disease.  
Didn’t see any horses on the road  
As I came over.”

“What did that man say, Papa?”  
“We may lose some horses.  
You girls stay away from the barn.  
Go tell Cecil to come help clean the barn and the corrals.”  
“How are the horses this morning, Papa?”  
“Floss has it.” “Floss!”

“And Lady?” “Not yet.”  
“What are you going to do with the ax?”  
“Hit Floss in the head.”

“There goes Papa with Floss on the sledge.  
He soaked her and the sledge with oil.”  
“Why?”  
“To burn them, over in the deep gulley in the

hill pasture.”

“There won’t be any sorrel carriage team to drive to town  
With only Lady left.”

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 64–65.

## *The Old Cow Pony*

“Want to come along Lola?

I’m driving a bunch of steers out to the range.

You can ride Skinner.

He’s too old and stiff for me to drive steers on.”

Silent sunshine

And a tender breeze in hot sage brush.

A turtle dove twittering off on frightened wings.

A horny toad blinking from a hot flat rock

While the steers switch their tails

As they walk sleepily along the shallow trail.

The horses droop their ears and lift their feet patiently,

Waiting for the slow moving steers.

“Whoa, Skinner.

What’s wrong?

Where’s the saddle horn?”

“Ha ha ha.

Skinner nearly upset you!

He was the first to see that steer break for the alfalfa field.”

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 66.

## *Train*

We're going to drive to town tonight.  
Way into town, at night.  
We're going in to see the train pull up beside the depot.  
The railroad has been in thirteen years  
With a train leaving our uneventful valley every morning,  
And chugging in again at night like a tired child coming home.  
Now we'll see the lighted windows  
And we'll hear the bell ring,  
And we'll see people alighting from the train  
With their traveling bags.  
Maybe they have seen a street car and a zoo,  
A theater and a museum.

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 67.

## Threshers

"Threshing crew over at Aunt Molly's, Lola.

The boys will all be over there helping.  
You want to go along? We'll help get dinner.  
Jones' boys are threshing with the horse power."  
"That'll be fun. Aunt Molly'll need us,  
Her only daughter being gone."

"Why you're crying Aunt Molly?

We've got dinner almost ready.  
Everything is in good shape."  
"One of the Jones' boys brought some liquor  
In his buggy. Watch.  
Oh! Lola, when your babies are small  
They hurt your body,  
But when they are big they hurt your heart."  
"But surely your boys aren't drinking, Aunt Molly?"  
"The oldest won't, but the other two—"  
"Oh! I hope the man who married my sister—"  
"No, Lola, he is working all the time."  
"And the man I—?"  
"No, Lola, he is a manly man.  
"But his younger brother?"  
"Oh."

Dinner time.  
Some loud hilarity and much shamed silence.  
"The youngest of your older boys,  
And his small cousin, where are they, Aunt Molly?"  
"I don't know. Perhaps not able to eat."  
"Dinner's over. Now, Aunt Molly, we'll fix a bite.  
You'll feel better if you eat. Here's a chicken wing,  
And don't you like the back?"  
Oh! Here come the two who didn't eat.  
Sit still, Lola, keep your mouth shut.  
This is not your house.  
"You're drunk."  
"I'm not. You're drunk."  
"I'm not. You're drunk."

"I'm not, am I, Lola?  
You like me, don't you, Lola?  
I'm not drunk, am I?"  
"O God! Like you! Pity you.  
Been in a fight and lost that front gold tooth."  
"What's that noise in the yard?"  
"Dog fight."  
"Must they add dog fights to today's shame?"  
"Sic 'Im, Tige."  
Oh! Such men! Lower than the dogs  
Who will not fight male against female,  
Even when urged by their masters.  
"Quit that! Quit that, right now!"  
Oh! Shame that I, a girl, have spoken so before strange men!  
Out the door I go, over the hill  
To the sanctuary of that old log house.  
The dogs ceased fighting.  
Some one reached my side.  
"I didn't know you felt so strongly, Lola."  
"Strongly! For my people!"

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 68–69.

## *Cow Bells*

Almost dark and the cows not found.  
Milking time and I'm still on the range.  
I rode up the Sheepshed Gulch, over to the Mud Springs,  
Up through the Saddle Gap and down between the Hogs' Backs  
With never a cow bell heard.  
Evening haze is settling on the mountain side,  
Purple night is gathered in the gulches.  
"Whoa, Daisy.  
Stand still.  
We'll listen for the cow bells.  
Don't champ your bit.  
Can't hear a sound.  
You prick your ears?  
And turn your head?  
All right. The cows are there.  
Away we go down the hill and up the gloomy canyon  
Where the owl's nest is.  
You'll find the cows  
And off we'll be for home."

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 70.

## *Ranch Boys*

Ranch boys yelling in the night  
Drinking, noisy,  
Riding pell mell through the streets,  
Yelling, shooting into the air.  
Ranch boys from surrounding country:  
Shy, respectful, courteous,  
Each with a girl someplace,  
Thinking of him.  
Before the night is done they'll go down  
To the house the other side of the river.

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 71.

## *Harness*

Throw a creaking saddle on my tingling back,  
Tighten the cinch around my swelled out belly,  
Put a loose boned rider across me  
And remove the blindfold.  
Stiff legged let me jump across the yard  
And rear and strike and scream  
And, losing the rider,  
Let me race kicking and snorting across the sage  
Until I stand lathered and trembling  
Ready to come back to the water trough and hay,  
For someday some love -struck girl  
May need a sure swift horse,  
Someday a coming baby may need a way  
To send for help,  
Someday an old bent man may need  
A hang -head plug to ride-  
So saddle me  
And let me fight my terror out  
Across the dusty sage.

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 72.

## *Dished Wheel*

“Get up, Daisy!  
Trot along down this rocky canyon road to school,  
The sun will be up where the canyon  
Widens into the narrow valley,  
Where stake and rider fences  
Shut drifting range stock out of snow covered alfalfa patches;  
Where wintering cattle break through barbed wire fences  
To huddle under the heavy sides of hay stacks.  
Trot along, Daisy!  
It’ll be colder than this  
When we come home in the gleaming twilight.  
The wheels will sing and the dished wheel  
Will weave in and out among the rocks.  
The long hair on your sagging back  
And your heavy belly and your old gray sides  
Will be tipped with frost.  
My hands holding the lines  
Will be immovable in their thick wool mittens  
So that when we come to the gate  
I pull with my shoulder to keep you  
From eagerly swinging too soon and hitting the gate post.  
Get up, Daisy!

There’ll be oats for you and a thick log stable  
And a pan of cold water for my aching hands  
And mulligan and fresh baked bread for supper.’

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 73.

## *Night Fire*

Black stand the mountains  
Against the clear, fall sky,  
Feelingless and distant.  
Here in the valley  
Nestles my home:  
Yellow lamp light,  
Clatter of after-supper dishes,  
Smell of juicy, red apples.  
Distant loom the mountains,  
Quiet and dark.  
Suddenly, high on the mountains  
Flickers a yellow star;  
Tiny night -fire of some sheepherder  
Alone in the mountains,  
Whittling away on a small bone trinket,  
Or patiently finding a tune on his fiddle.  
Sleeping white sheep bedded down for the night,  
Worthy sheep dogs quietly watching,  
Breeze in the aspen.  
Glimmering spark on the far distant mountain,  
Signal of one lone sheepherder  
Watching his flock  
In the mountains standing black  
Against the clear, fall sky.

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 74.

## *Spring*

May I go with you  
When you do your evening chores?  
Were I your wife  
I'd have the right to.  
I wouldn't need to ask,  
And have permission.  
I'll stand in the dim driveway of the barn  
While you throw down fragrant hay.  
I'll milk old Spotty  
While you milk the scary heifer.  
This old sow has pigs so early?  
It is not wise to have them 'fore the spring sun warms up.  
She has her pigs.  
Fat, curly tailed pigs,  
Shivering in the early spring sunshine.  
Mutely I stand beside you.  
When will you marry me?  
My body aches for babies.

---

From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 75.

## *Snow*

When I was still a little girl  
Too young to go to school,  
A great soft snow came floating down  
And Mother kept her babies in.  
The older children bundled up  
And plowed their way to school.  
It seemed much as if the great gray sky  
Was breaking into bits, not small,  
And settling down.  
All day and night the great snow fell.  
Next day the sky was growing light  
So mother wrapped her babies well  
From top to toe, to keep us warm  
And keep the soft flakes out.  
Once out, we lay down on our backs  
And spread our arms out straight above our heads  
Then carefully raising our arms  
And gently patting them down upon the snow  
We left our arm prints from head to hip.  
We called them Angel's wings.

A later year a great snow fell.  
We had to go to school.  
The cold wind whistled through the naked trees,  
The ice upon the creek was thick.  
Dad tucked us close into the buggy  
And gave his only boy the lines,  
“Don't let the horses fall,” he said, “And keep the girls warm.”  
The wheels creaked,  
The icy crust upon the snow was thin beneath the trees.  
The team broke through, and wallowed out,  
The guard hairs on their steaming flanks were growing white  
From steaming breath.  
The cut that led us through the hill was drifted full  
So brother turned the horses' heads  
Upon the crusted drift.  
We crossed the fence into the open prairie.  
The snow was bumpy ice, wind swept,

The wheels sang a song.

One Christmas time

My brother came to spend the week with us.

He was a young man then and proud I was and happy,

When he told me he would like me to go hunting with him.

Out through the barnlot I followed.

I held his hand as we slid down the ice to the creek.

The wind mill often pumped too much water,

And spilled over the horse trough,

Making a sheet of ice down the steep bank.

I stepped in his steps as we went down the soft snow of the creek,

Or over the slick ice of the water holes, where he took my hand,

And on.

One winter night when I was almost grown

My chum, her brother, with their aunt and uncle

Were going far out into the country

To a dance and I could go along, in the big bob sled.

The night was wonderful.

Starry cold, and brilliant with a low hung moon.

As we came home,

The aunt and we two girls

Were nestled down in the wagon box

Among the comforters, robes and hay.

Uncle was driving,

When the sled overturned.

The men jumped clear.

The aunt and chum were crawling out the open end gate,

But I lay still

I saw no need of screaming

The brother called, "Lola, Lola, are you hurt?"

Today the snow is falling

Great white fleecy flakes,

I'm busy cooking dinner,

The snow calls to me.

The one for whom I cooked dinner has been here:

He said he'd make a sled big enough for baby and me!

---

From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 76–78.

## *Sunflowers*

Why do the sunflowers bloom so bright-  
Sunflowers scattered along the road?  
Sunflowers bloomed where a child walked home from school alone  
Past a country graveyard where a new piled grave made loneliness the greater.  
Sunflowers bloomed along the road  
That led to town on circus day.  
And sunflowers bloomed, when, walking slow,  
A little girl pulled ribbed petals  
As she whispered, "He loves me;  
He loves me not."  
Sunflowers facing the east.  
Sunflowers facing the west.  
Sunflower companions down the road  
Leading me home.

---

From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 79.

## *Sacajawea's Grave*

It stands apart  
This grave of hers,  
Among the cluttered decoration of the other graves:  
Among their bedsteads  
And their blankets and riding gear,  
Among their knives and beads,  
Among the boasting feathered head dresses  
Swinging in the breeze,  
Among the forgotten sunkennes of the other graves.  
It stands apart,  
Among the rest,  
With its cared-for gently rounded mound,  
With its simple rock marking the head.  
Simple headstone of native rock  
With the bronze tablet inlaid.  
Simple inscription.  
Sacajawea, Indian woman.  
No praise, no blame.  
A few words about the trip with Lewis and Clark.  
Sacajawea, young Indian woman.  
Simple head stone that the little birds,  
The spi -deers and chippy sparrows,  
Leave their marks upon.  
Nearby the neighborly magpies  
Tilt and croak on the old fence posts.  
Cloud shadows chase across the curves  
Of her remembered grave.  
The warm sun caresses it,  
The gentle breezes whistle  
Through heavy headed wild grass.  
The hills, sage gray, curve and slope and roll away  
Out beyond old Father Robert's big brick house  
With its shadowing trees,  
Out beyond the scattered buildings of the Indian Mission,  
Out beyond the Popo Agie that flows into the Big Horn  
Out the way Lewis and Clark came.  
And the other way:  
Rolling, curving, sloping hills.

Rising higher and higher to the mighty Rockies  
With their strange, hidden pathways.  
On out the Snake River and down the Columbia  
To the great Pacific.  
Hills on every side  
Stretching away  
With the fragrant heat quivering just over the ground.  
That alive, peaceful silence of the prairie country  
Brooding over all.  
Brooding over her grave,  
Still rounded,  
Still remembered.  
Sacajawea,  
Indian woman.

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From *Buffalo Sod*. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 80–81.

## *Balance*

I read my city paper and I shuddered,  
Full of sorrow:  
The world is bad.  
There are only murderers and thieves,  
Only embezzlers and out-of-proportion people;  
People overly rich,  
Till I am very, very poor.  
Then comes my country paper:  
It's haying time, or threshing time,  
Or planting time.  
The worst are merely idle,  
Filling in empty hours with simple pastimes.  
The rest are working, saving, building,  
Quilting, schooling, and canning fruit,  
Planting potatoes and shearing sheep.  
The world's full of worth while people  
And I am one of them. Rich  
In happiness and health  
And crowded hours;  
Well balanced by the country paper.

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From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 82.

## *There Was the Hill at Home*

There was the hill at home—  
A common meeting ground for children.  
There were the spring time mountain flowers  
And the many colored rocks.  
There was the smell of sage brush  
And the click of chippy sparrows.  
There was the mighty mountain  
With the cloud shadows racing down its hills and canyons  
And there was you in your youthful dignity, in your graceful ease, and in your  
child's manhood.  
Great riches carry I, stored away, always obtainable:  
The boulder strewn hill at home with its carpets and patches of yellow violets  
and paint brush,  
With its balanced rocks and hot ledges,  
With its sego lilies and cow paths,  
With its fragrant sage brush and darting rabbits and statued horny toads,  
With the whirl of small birds breaking twigs and loosening leaves and the urgent  
cry of night hawks.  
There was the mountain in the background with its branded herds and pawing  
bulls;  
With its soggy spring and groves of aspen,  
With its wild rose thickets and coyote dens well placed beneath the rocks on  
sunny slopes.  
There was the brilliant happy sunlight and the quiet distance and the shadow  
of thunderheads racing over  
And there was you.

---

From Buffalo Sod. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 83.

## *Buffalo Sod*

Where are the buffalo?  
Where is the buffalo sod?  
Where are the pioneers?  
Where is the wealth of a prairie land?  
The fat backed buffalo but wait to return to their summer ranges.  
The cracked ground waits for the old trails to be hollowed.  
The water holes stand stagnant waiting to be pawed out in fly fighting.  
On the hills still show the salt licks needing only to be deepened  
By hungry tongues.  
Ready to spread a spongy carpet over the light prairie soil,  
The buffalo sod now waits for the plow to cease its quick turning,  
Waits to take up the warm summer rains  
And soak in the run-off of melting snows,  
Waits to filter little gulleys of soil-filled water and slow up  
The rain on the hillsides.  
The buffalo sod waits, waits,  
While the anxious pioneer, brooding in inconspicuous places,  
Leans on his tools  
—on his pick-ax, his shovel, his adz—  
  
Banks the fire in his forge and with a quick glance at his rifle  
Scans the far horizon of the prairie country;  
Remembering cyclone, prairie fire, stampede of buffalo,  
Remembering wild turkey, fish, and deer.  
Remembering—  
While the wealth of the prairie exposed to the winds and the rain,  
Fights a lone fight against its old foes.

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From *Buffalo Sod*. Glendale, California: Pioneer Printing Company, 1936, pp. 84–85.

# Poems from Every Child Can Write Poetry

*Stage III | Poetry as embodied learning, 1938*

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Two complete demonstration poems not duplicated from the earlier collections.

## *A Pair of Brown Shoes*

A pair of brown shoes and a long brown road  
Walking, walking, walking.  
Where are you going and what is your load?  
Walking, walking, walking.

The sun is warm and the sky is blue  
Walking, walking, walking.  
Just swing along with a friend or two  
Walking, walking, walking.

The shade of a tree's an inviting bed.  
Walking, walking, walking.  
With a granite boulder for my head  
Walking, walking, walking.

But I'm going today to the end of the road  
Walking, walking, walking.  
My heart is light and I bear no load  
Walking, walking, walking.

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From *Every Child Can Write Poetry*. Los Angeles: Wetzel Publishing Company, 1938, pp. 4.

## *Waltz Poem*

I will come see you some evening at twilight  
When moonbeams are slanting a-down through the trees,  
When thrushes are singing from nearby sweet meadows  
And fragrance of roses comes in on the breeze.

Wait for me darling among the pale lilacs  
Where moonbeams will fondle your soft golden hair,  
Where song birds will trill in their joy of the spring time  
And roses will make you entrancingly fair.

Waltz with me, darling, it's evening, it's twilight,  
The nightbirds, the roses, the moonlight and you.  
My heart's over-powered in ecstatic surrender—  
Say that you love me—I'll always love you!

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From *Every Child Can Write Poetry*. Los Angeles: Wetzel Publishing Company, 1938, pp. 4–5.

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