



“The Feeling of Being at Home”¹
By Matt Mason, Nebraska State Poet



FOR THE DEDICATION OF THE WILLA CATHER CHILDHOOD HOME
JUNE 8, 2024



“Here where the girl first dreamed the dreams that led to greatness; here where so many of the people of the living world she built in story moved briefly in the flesh...”
—from John G. Neihardt’s address at the opening of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Museum; May 26, 1962

Willa, I know your house
by way of books
and stories;

yes, there are bits
mixed different—
wallpaper roses

more red
than they really bloom
in your attic room—it’s

the word
I pronounce wrong
having only read it, never heard;

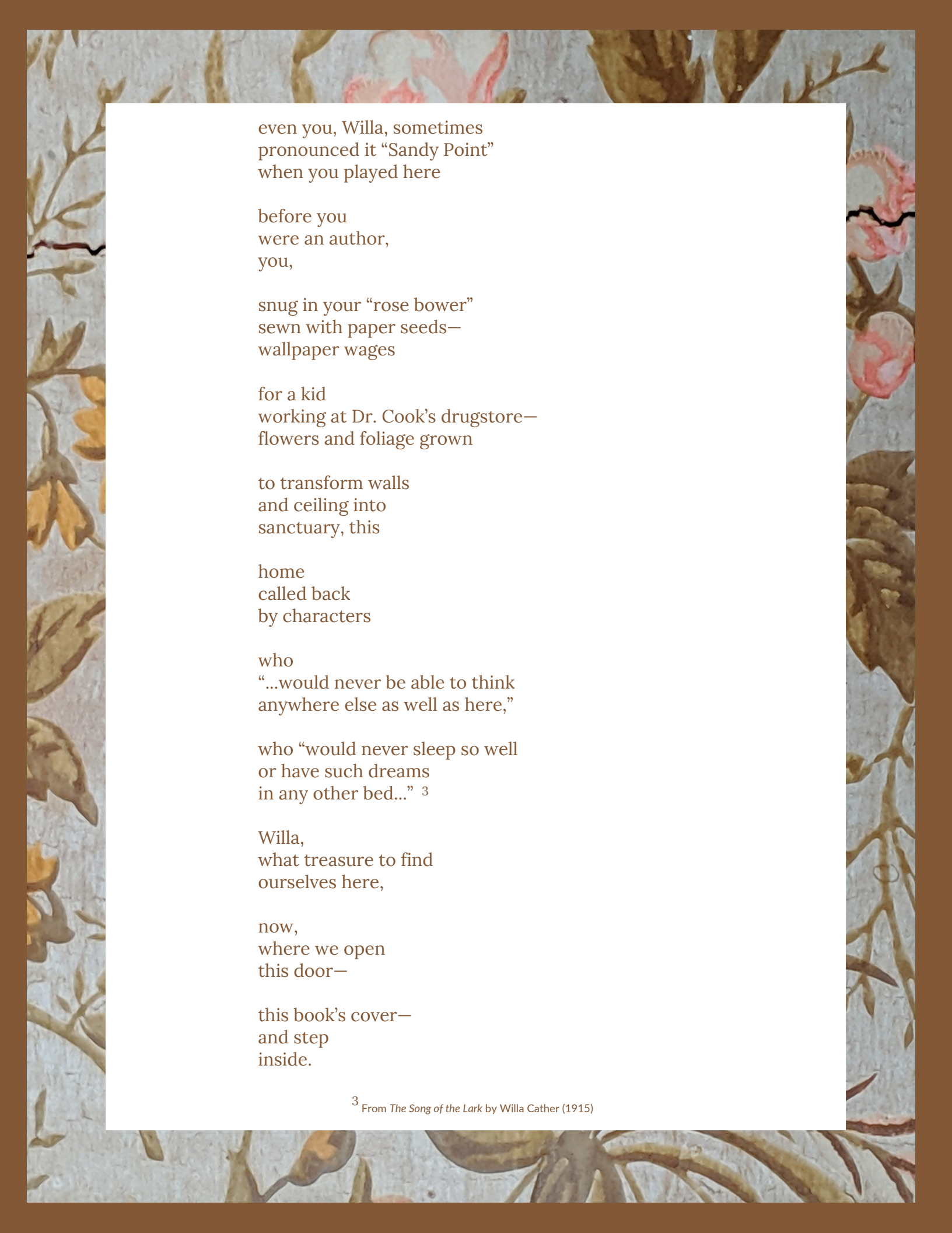
so,
this is a gift
here,

in Red Cloud—though
I have pronounced that name
“Skyline,” “MacAlpin,”
“Moonstone”² —

to see this
brick foundation,
these fence slats;

¹She gave herself up to the feeling of being at home. It went all through her, that feeling, like getting into a warm bath when one is tired. She was safe from everything, was where she wanted to be, where she ought to be.” —From Willa Cather’s short story, “The Best Years” (1948)

²Skyline is from “Old Mrs. Harris” (1932) • MacAlpin from “The Best Years” • Moonstone from *The Song of the Lark* (1915)



even you, Willa, sometimes
pronounced it “Sandy Point”
when you played here

before you
were an author,
you,

snug in your “rose bower”
sewn with paper seeds—
wallpaper wages

for a kid
working at Dr. Cook’s drugstore—
flowers and foliage grown

to transform walls
and ceiling into
sanctuary, this

home
called back
by characters

who
“...would never be able to think
anywhere else as well as here,”

who “would never sleep so well
or have such dreams
in any other bed...”³

Willa,
what treasure to find
ourselves here,

now,
where we open
this door—

this book’s cover—
and step
inside.

³ From *The Song of the Lark* by Willa Cather (1915)