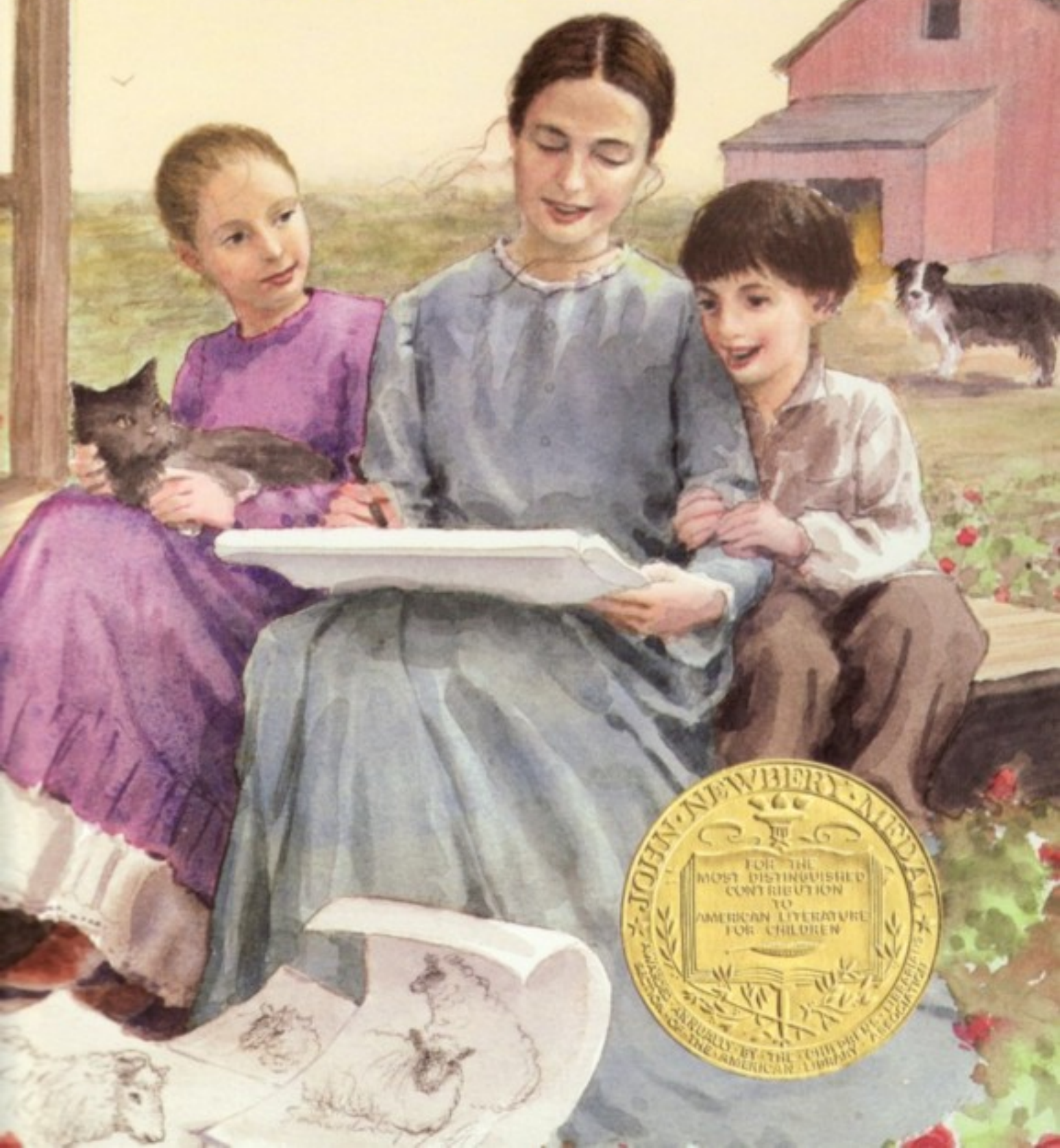


Winner of the Newbery Medal

PATRICIA MACLACHLAN

# Sarah, Plain and Tall



# 1

"Did Mama sing every day?" asked Caleb. "Every-single-day?" He sat close to the fire, his chin in his hand. It was dusk, and the dogs lay beside him on the warm hearth-stones.

"Every-single-day," I told him for the second time this week. For the twentieth time this month. The hundredth time this year? And the past few years?

"And did Papa sing, too?"

"Yes. Papa sang, too. Don't get so close, Caleb. You'll heat up."



He pushed his chair back. It made a hollow scraping sound on the hearthstones, and the dogs stirred. Lottie, small and black, wagged her tail and lifted her head. Nick slept on.

I turned the bread dough over and over on the marble slab on the kitchen table.

"Well, Papa doesn't sing anymore," said Caleb very softly. A log broke apart and crackled in the fireplace. He looked up at me. "What did I look like when I was born?"

"You didn't have any clothes on," I told him.

"I know that," he said.

"You looked like this." I held the bread dough up in a round pale ball.

"I had hair," said Caleb seriously.

"Not enough to talk about," I said.

"And she named me Caleb," he went on, filling in the old familiar story.

"I would have named you Troublesome," I

said, making Caleb smile.

"And Mama handed me to you in the yellow blanket and said . . ." He waited for me to finish the story. "And said . . . ?"

I sighed. "And Mama said, 'Isn't he beautiful, Anna?'"

"And I was," Caleb finished.

Caleb thought the story was over, and I didn't tell him what I had really thought. He was homely and plain, and he had a terrible holler and a horrid smell. But these were not the worst of him. Mama died the next morning. That was the worst thing about Caleb.

"Isn't he beautiful, Anna?" Her last words to me. I had gone to bed thinking how wretched he looked. And I forgot to say good night.

I wiped my hands on my apron and went to the window. Outside, the prairie reached out and touched the places where the sky came down. Though winter was nearly over,



*"Did Mama sing every day?"  
Caleb asks his sister Anna.  
"Every-single-day," she answers.  
"Papa sang, too."*



**T**heir mother died the day after Caleb was born. Their house on the prairie is quiet now, and Papa doesn't sing anymore. Then Papa puts an ad in the paper, asking for a wife, and he receives a letter from one Sarah Elisabeth Wheaton, of Maine. Papa, Anna, and Caleb write back. Caleb asks if she sings.

Sarah decides to come for a month. She writes Papa: *I will come by train. I will wear a yellow bonnet. I am plain and tall, and Tell them I sing.* Anna and Caleb wait and wonder. Will Sarah be nice? Will she like them? Will she stay?

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and the practical concerns necessary for a satisfying life.  
A tender story about the fragile beginnings of a family  
relationship on its way to permanence."*

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