

JOSEFINA STORY QUILT

Coerr, Eleanor

Good-bye, Josefina Pa reached for the cage to thank Josefina, but the poor old hen was lying on the cage floor. Faith hid her face against Ma. "You must be brave," Ma said softly. "Josefina lived a good long life." "You can be proud of her," Pa added. "She died helping us," said Adam. Faith did not feel better. She cried and cried. Ma hugged her for a long time. The next morning they had a funeral for Josefina. Faith wrapped her in the prettiest scrap of cloth. Adam buried her under a tall pine tree. "I miss her so!" Faith between sobs. At last Faith dried her eyes and reached for the ragbag. "I will sew a pine tree patch for Josefina," she said. Soon the wagon train found food and water. When they reached California, Faith finished the patches. Pa built a quilting frame in their

new cabin. The family helped Faith stitch the patches together into a quilt. The quilt covered Faith's bed. Every day the patches helped them remember the good times and the bad times on the wagon train. And every night Faith felt warm and happy under the Josefina story quilt squawked and ran. "Come back!" yelled Faith. But it was too late. Josefina was in the middle of the animals. Horses snorted and reared. Cows kicked and mooed. Oxen bellowed. "That pesky hen!" Pa shouted, and ran after her. "She almost started a stampede," Pa said angrily. "OUT SHE GOES!" "Please, Pa," begged Faith, "give her one more chance. It was the dog's fault." "Faith was right," said Ma. "I saw the whole thing." Pa put Josefina back in her cage. "Just one more chance," he said. That night, Faith whispered, "Josefina, please try to be good." "Cluck!...Cluck!...Cluck!" said the hen. They understood one another as true friends do.

The Rescue For a long time Josefina was good. She quietly watched Faith sew patches for the quilt. She didn't make a sound when hail beat down on the roof, or when spring rains blew in and soaked her feathers. She made just a little cluck when coyotes howled at night. But how Josefina fussed when they crossed rivers! One day they came to a wide, muddy river. Josefina made so much noise that Faith had to take her out of the cage. She held her close. "It's all right," Faith crooned. Pa was driving the oxen into the river, when S QUO O O O S H! A back wheel sank into a hole. Faith let go of Josefina. Josefina fell into the river. The current carried her away. "Help!" cried Faith. "Save Josefina!" Adam jumped into the river, but the current was too strong. It took three men to get them out. "That doest it!" Pa shouted. "She is too old to lay eggs, too tough to eat, and she falls into rivers. OUT SHE GOES!" Just then Josefina ruffled her

feathers, let out a proud "Caaaa-CACKLE-ackle!" and laid a beautiful big white egg. "By thunder!" Pa said. "She has begun to lay eggs again." "Wonderful!" said Ma. "Now we will have fresh eggs." So Josefina stayed. Faith found a white scrap .for the egg patch.

Robbers Spring turned into summer. The desert was hot and dry. Faith counted her patches. Now she had fifteen. It was time to sew one about the desert. But one bad thing came after another. Wagon wheels kept falling off. There was not enough food for the animals. Then three oxen died. Pa had to throw out his heavy tools and Ma's black iron stove. Two old people died. They were buried beside the trail. Nobody laughed or sang or smiled anymore. Faith was always hungry, but she walked on and on. She looked for grain or seeds for Josefina. It was worse in the hills. The trail was rocky and steep. One morning Indians came to trade buffalo meat and water. They wanted Ma's quilts. "Never!" said

Ma. "I would rather starve." They wanted Josefina. "Never!" cried Faith. "I would rather die." So Pa traded extra clothes for food and water. Everyone felt better after a good meal. Soon the food was gone. "If those Indians come back," Pa told Faith, "we must trade Josefina for water." Faith prayed hard that they would never return. The night was bitter cold. Men slept under the wagons. Ma gave the quilts to Pa and Adam. She and Faith bundled in old blankets. About midnight two robbers crept into camp. They sneaked up to the wagon. When they reached for the quilts, Josefina heard them. "CACKLE! CACKLE! CACKLE!" she squawked. Everyone woke up and the robbers ran away. Pa laughed for the first time in days. "Josefina may be old," he said, "but she is a humdinger of a watchdog. "

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