

A watercolor illustration of a boy and a girl sitting on a large log. The boy, on the left, is wearing a yellow jacket and brown pants, looking towards the right. The girl, on the right, is wearing a green dress and looking towards the left. They are sitting on a log that has some pink flowers growing from it. In the background, there is a green field, a small house with a chimney, and a pink sky. The overall style is soft and painterly.

Elfie

ADVENTURES *on the* MIDWEST FRONTIER

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TABLE *of* CONTENTS

	Preface	ix
	Loverin and Sheldon Family Homes Across the United States	xii
1.	Go West, Young Man	1
2.	A Nest of Loverins	7
3.	Double Cousins, Double Trouble	15
4.	Feathers!	20
5.	Uncle Will	26
6.	A Summer Day at School	31
7.	A Hard Winter	36
8.	Grasshoppers and a Horse Race	41
9.	The House on the Ranch	48
10.	Forty-Niners on the California Trail	53
11.	The Fourth of July	58
12.	Too Much Cheese	62
13.	Tilden, the White Crane	67
14.	Elfie's First Real Birthday Party	72
15.	A Marriage and a Move	77
16.	A Blizzard and a Bull	82
17.	Elfie's Adventures with Baby Guy	87
18.	Settled At Last	93
	Loverin and Sheldon Family Tree	101

LOVERIN AND SHELDON FAMILY HOMES ACROSS THE UNITED STATES



FEATHERS!

One morning when their fathers were still away in Nebraska, Elfie woke up to a great commotion in the yard outside the Sheldon cabin. Ma and Aunt Sarah kept a big flock of geese and ducks, and the birds were honking and quacking with all their might.

Elfie shook her cousin, who was still sleeping soundly. “Wake up, Burt,” she cried. “Some animal must have gotten into our flocks!”

Burt was suddenly wide awake. “Maybe a raccoon, or a fox! Let’s go see!”

The children pulled on their clothes and ran outside. There was Ma, sitting on the log bench, holding a big goose on her lap. The goose



was very much alive, and honking loudly as she plucked some of the soft down from its breast. “Did our noisy birds wake you, children?” she asked. “They get so excited every time we do this.”

“And when we try to catch them, too,” added Aunt Sarah as she walked up with a plump duck wiggling in her arms.

“We thought some animal was bothering the birds,” said Burt. “I wanted to see a fox or a raccoon.”

Ma smiled as she put the soft down from the breast of the goose and a few loose feathers from its tail into the cloth bag beside her. “Three or four times a year we catch our birds and pluck some of the down and feathers. They honk and quack but it doesn’t hurt them, and they will soon grow more.”

“Looks like we’ll have enough feathers and down to make one more featherbed to keep us warm when winter comes,” said Aunt Sarah.

“A featherbed?” Burt wrinkled his nose in confusion.

“You know, Burt, those thick quilts filled with feathers and down that we lay on top of our mattresses to keep us warm when it gets cold,” Aunt Sarah explained.

“Sometimes we cover up with the featherbeds, too,” added Ma.

Elfie and Burt watched their mothers catch and pluck a few more birds. Then they went back into the cabin to eat their breakfast.

“I have an idea, Burt!” Elfie whispered.



“Not another one, Elfie,” groaned Burt. “Your last idea got us into enough trouble!”

Elfie put her finger to her lips. “Shh,” she said. “My doll could use a featherbed too, and I think I know where we can get some feathers! When Ma and Aunt Sarah are busy in the cabin, let’s go catch some of the hens in the grove out back. You can hold them while I pluck some of their feathers, and then we’ll let them go again.”

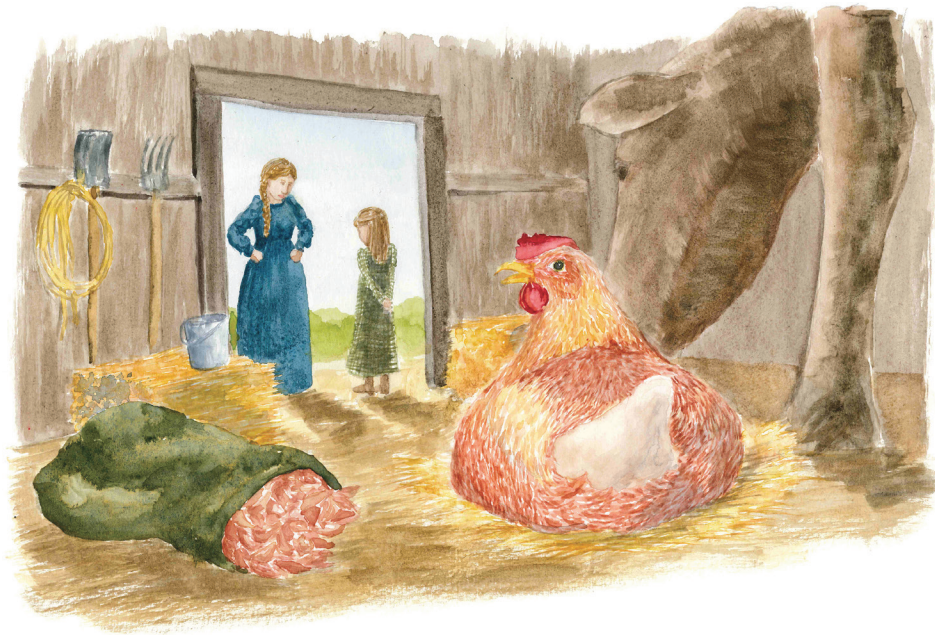
“I don’t think Ma and Aunt Fran are going to like your idea, Elfie,” said Burt.

“They will never know,” answered Elfie. “We won’t take that many feathers, and the hens won’t tell on us. Look at the geese and ducks. Who would know they had been plucked this morning?”

As soon as their mothers were busy in the cabin, and little Harry was down for a nap, Elfie and Burt went out to the grove to find the hens. Elfie carried a little cloth bag she had found to hold the feathers. They worked quickly and soon the little bag was full. They hid the bag of feathers in the manger in the cowshed.

“Do you think we plucked too many feathers, Elfie?” Burt asked, still worried. “Those hens look pretty bare.”

“Ma and Aunt Sarah will never notice,” Elfie reassured him.



But they did! At first, they thought the hens must be sick to lose so many feathers. Then they found the little bag the children had hidden in the cowshed!

Ma and Aunt Sarah looked at one another, and spoke as one voice, “The double cousins are in double trouble again!”

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

The mattresses that families like the Sheldons and Loverins used were filled with straw. Why do you think they covered the mattresses with featherbeds?

In the winter they used featherbeds like blankets to keep them warm. What do we call quilts today that are filled with down and feathers? Why is this a good name for them?