# CHAPTER ONE

The Holstein cow had been in the second stage of labor for over three hours, yet no muzzle appeared in the vulva when the cow strained, not even the tip of a little hoof. Too exhausted to stand, the cow lay on a bed of straw, straining, relaxing, and straining again as it struggled to expel the fetus. The veterinarian summoned that cold March day would have to work quickly, or the unborn calf would begin gasping for air, breathe in uterine fluid and die.

When the veterinarian inserted her hand into the birth canal, she felt rump and tail, not head or leg, confirming her suspicion it was a breech presentation. Being a small woman she might need another pair of hands if the cow stopped straining and the calf had to be pulled. The farmer hovering nearby was prepared to use ropes, but Jordan Miller, still perfecting her veterinary skills, didn’t want to use ropes unless it was absolutely necessary.

With one cheek pressed against the cow’s buttock, she firmly but carefully began pushing the calf back into the cow’s uterus, hoping to reclaim the few precious inches of space needed to straighten the calf’s back legs and use them to pull it out backwards. This took strength and a keen sense of timing because she could only reach inside the cow when it wasn’t straining.

As the minutes ticked by without much progress, and the farmer started pacing outside the stall, Jordan began to sweat. Each time she pushed she could only get the calf to move a fraction of the distance it needed to go. Meanwhile, the cow was pushing, too, but in the opposite direction.

“Stop straining, I’ve almost got it,” she said to a cow focused on ejecting the sizeable lump of protoplasm wedged in its birth canal.

Jordan’s small hands could work their way into places too narrow for a big-knuckled man. Slowly working her fingers, then her hand between the fetus and the uterine wall, she finally gained enough space to grasp one of the calf’s hind legs and maneuver it into the birth canal without tearing the uterine wall. After turning the first leg around it was easier to reposition the second one; however with both hind legs extended, the calf would soon begin breathing if it hadn’t already.

She swatted the cow on the rump. “Now push. Push!”

With Jordan pulling the calf by its hind legs and the cow straining, the calf shot out of the birth canal and right onto the surprised veterinarian’s lap.

Steam rose from the black and white calf sprawled across Jordan’s thighs. Moist warmth soaked the fronts of her jeans, but the little Holstein wasn’t moving when she placed the small wet creature on the straw next to its mother.

While poking her finger inside the calf’s mouth to check for an obstruction, she saw the tiny animal’s rib cage lift, then fall. She watched for more movement and felt a wave of relief when the rib cage expanded again and the calf began breathing in a steady rhythm.

 The calf raised its head, its brown eyes looking first at Jordan, then at the farmer squatting next to her in the straw, then at its mother. It snorted a glob of fluid out of its nostrils as it wobbled to its feet.

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When Jordan and the farmer left the barn, the cow was giving her spotted bull a tongue bath while he suckled his first liquid meal. Bonding moments such as this warmed Jordan’s heart, clearing her thoughts and helping her justify the years and the money she spent training for afternoons like this. Normally she would have stayed with the farmer and his new calf for a few more minutes, but she had another emergency to attend to—a human emergency based on the few words she was able to get out of her mother during their phone conversation that morning.

Her mother never called long distance during peak hours and wouldn’t think of interrupting her daughter at work, so the jumbled, one-sided exchange had been on Jordan’s mind all day. Although the call lasted less than two minutes and her mother barely spoke above a whisper, Jordan was certain the emergency had something to do with her father, and she was pissed.