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Only one first-calf heifer calved later than the rest of the herd. I am never sure, but I always think slow calvers and fast kickers go back to such ancestors as the ones who jumped out in the railroad right-of-way to hide their calves, or fell over in the squeeze chute and sulked until they starved for water.

The herd records at the ranch are based on resentments against individual animals. Old sisters are identified for tricks like tearing down gates, or putting cowboys on the fence. Using that system doesn't require formal recordkeeping or number branding. In case we forget what cow it was who took after Jose in the fall, the next time she is penned, she'll perform again on Andreas if he gets in her way.

The rest of the heifers fell within 60 to 70 days, a big relief to range and crowd pen gynecologists. We also pulled fewer calves than in other seasons, giving us more slack. An old boy on the east side of the shortgrass country raised one of the sires of these light birthweight babies; the other was a leased bull from my brother's cattle. I didn't hire a vet to measure the heifers' pelvises before turning out the bulls. Grass and money was so short at the time, I figured if there was going to be any extra dough left, it had better be spent on building the resident midwife's morale (myself), instead of blowing it forecasting

trouble. I already knew 16 good reasons and 32 minor objections to keeping replacement cattle on a plunging cow market and soaring protein prices, without a doctor diagnosing ahead of time how much more was going to be lost.

However, luck continued to hold on the vet bills during calving. The only town assistance needed was delivering a set of twins. Twin calves, as you probably know, on a young cow aren't like a hen laying double-yoked eggs. The only part coming out double in the twinning game, besides the numbers, is the amount of times the story is told and retold over at the coffee house.

It took 30 bucks worth of powdered milk to help feed the twins, plus extra care for the heifer, before we found a cow to adopt one of them. Sure wasn't any loss of love at adoption time on our part. Staying on their mother, not being fully dependent on the bottle, they never did gentle down like normal dogies. We nearly had to bulldog them to force them to suck. At one morning's feeding, I raised up to straighten my back from holding one of the black rascals between my legs, just in time to meet a deer hunter's eyes looking through the fence. Good thing his question required a yes or no answer. Not every day a fellow living in the suburbs of Houston looks out his picture window to see a grey-whiskered man stooping over to force-feed a baby calf. Quite a step down in image from the old days of Stetson hat boxes showing a boss of the range watering his horse from

his hat brim to the reality of being a nursemaid to a half wild calf and holding a slick bottle that leaked powdered milk formula out the nipple down your shirt sleeve.

The finale of the calving season, however, was yet to come. On a morning of thin ice and a light north breeze, I pulled a calf by myself. The delivery was an easy one after I fumbled the chains over the calf's ankles. She was already on her side, oblivious to the calf puller by the time the chains tightened to the rhythm of her labor. When the calf's hips passed free, I scrooched back out of the way and leaned my head against the cold pipe corral. After I arose, I didn't even bother to clean up the equipment. Just threw the whole mess down on the saddle house floor.

A cowboy at the old ranch named Barney Jones, or maybe his last name was Cox, used to walk stiff-legged after he had been in a bind from helping unload a boxcar of feed at the railroad switch, or from shoeing his horses for the spring work. Oh, how we laughed and called old Barney "Gimp" and "Step Along." Walking back to the house, I regretted that Barney wasn't around to watch one of his antagonists recovering from a case of post-delivery cramps. My shadow resembled the monster lumbering up a castle hall in the movie *Return of Frankenstein*.