

RESCUING NORMAN  
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“Just what the hell did you think you were doing?” bellowed Brody the cattle boss, red in the face and large in the gut. He glared at the vacationers in their cycling gear. They stood in the shade of a large aspen near the door to the resort ranch’s Clubhouse. He stood in the hot sun in the parking lot. Golfers strolled by on their way to the Clubhouse, some looking curiously at the adversaries, but most oblivious to the little drama that was reaching its climax.

The standoff was a modern twist on an age-old Western conflict. Urban versus rural, city slicker versus cowboy, Ralph Lauren and Maui Jim versus Wrangler and Justin. It pitted city folks’ affection and compassion for anything furry against a rancher’s pragmatism and hard-heartedness. There wasn’t a barbed wire or a fence post to be seen, but there was a six gun present. It was strapped to the hip of the Deputy Sheriff who stood next to Brody in the hot sun. “We have a serious problem here,” the Sheriff intoned as golf carts whizzed behind them in the parking lot.

The protagonists, the city slickers, numbered about 15 adults and a handful of children in bicycle helmets. They formed a protective semi-circle behind the object of the dispute, a newborn calf which they had named Norman. Norman could barely stand and was being cradled by Veronica, one of the city folk. She sat on the cool grass beneath the aspen and Norman lay across her lap. Veronica held a bottle of water to Norman’s lips and scowled at Brody beneath the visor of her bicycle helmet. “You watch your language,” she said. “There are children present.”

“How did you think you were helping that animal by moving it from the pasture?” Brody roared. Veronica replied calmly, “We kept him alive.”

Two hours earlier, on an otherwise quiet Saturday morning, Norman was just an abandoned and unnamed newborn calf lying by the fence that enclosed the ranch’s 400 acre meadow. He made a little moo as a family of vacationers cycled by on the asphalt bike path. Actually, the sound was more of a “maaap” than a “moo.” They stopped and soon a crowd of cyclers had formed to see the gray and white baby calf. “Where’s his mommy?” a little girl in a bicycle helmet asked. Her father replied, “He’s abandoned, honey. His mommy’s gone away.” Indeed, there wasn’t a cow to be seen anywhere in the meadow. The bicycle path soon was blocked by parents and children who interrupted their morning ride to see the unusual sight and express concern for the calf’s well-being.

At this point, Stan, the chief protagonist, and his family arrived. They were cycling from their home on the golf course the long way around the meadow to end up at the Clubhouse for breakfast. Stan looked at the calf through the fence and said, “That calf was probably born late last night.” A man said, “How do you know that?” “I was raised on a ranch,” Stan replied.

“He’s dry, and his mother hasn’t licked him clean yet. Look, there’s his umbilical cord.” The calf struggled to his feet and tried to walk to a patch of shade, but fell. He maaaped pitifully. “That calf is in very bad shape,” Stan said. “He needs shade and milk right away.” The little girl who had asked about the calf’s mommy began to cry.

The maaap, the tears and Stan’s pronouncement jolted the crowd. The Type-A personalities, subdued until now by the ranch’s serene beauty, spurred into action. “We’ve got to do something to help the calf!” someone said. “Who’s got a cell phone?” A woman in an orange tee-shirt held up her I-Phone. “I do. I’ll call the stable,” she said. Stan scanned the meadow. “There aren’t any cows anywhere in this meadow,” he said. “The ranch hands must have moved the cattle to another pasture after this little guy was born.” He paused and said, “They must not have realized he was here.” Orange tee-shirt said, “I’m getting voice mail.”

Stan considered the calf and the increasing heat of the day. “We’ve got to get that calf out of the pasture and into some shade,” he said. A man said, “You shouldn’t touch him. His mother will reject him if you do.” “That’s birds, not cows,” his wife shot back, as if scoring a point in another argument. A little boy said, “Is he going to be OK? Please don’t let him die.” Orange tee-shirt said, “I’m going to try ranch Security.” Stan said, “Does anyone have any milk? We need milk or water.” Stan’s wife said, “I’ll ride to the Clubhouse and get some water.”

Stan shimmied under the iron gate in the fence between the bike path and the meadow. “Look, here’s where his mother dropped him,” he said pointing to a patch of flattened grass next to the gate. “OK,” he said, “I’m gonna lift him over the gate. I need someone to take him on the other side.” Veronica, whom we’ve already met, strode to the gate and said, “Give him to me.” “Now I’m getting voice mail at Security,” orange tee-shirt said. Someone said, “Try the Welcome Center.”

Stan lifted the calf over the gate into Veronica’s outstretched arms. She carried him, long legs dangling, to a shady spot beside the bike path and sat cross-legged with him in her lap. He looked at the crowd of humans with huge eyes and maaaped. “He’s so warm,” Veronica said. “And I can feel his little heart beating.” Stan’s wife returned from the Clubhouse with two bottles of Fiji Water. She handed one to Veronica, who gently parted the calf’s lips and inserted the bottle. The crowd sighed as he began to swallow.

“The woman at the Clubhouse says that they’re aware of the situation and that Brody has been notified,” Stan’s wife said. Someone said, “Who’s Brody?” “I guess he’s the head wrangler for the cattle,” she replied. “Well then, where is he?” demanded Stan. “This calf is in bad shape and needs attention right now. I’m afraid he’s going to die before anyone sends help.”

A man wiped his forehead under his bicycle helmet and said to his friend, “I had no idea it gets so hot in Central Oregon.” He drank from his water bottle and continued, “This is right out of City Slickers. What was the calf’s name?” The friend said, “Norman,” and the calf was Norman

from then on. A little girl in a Hello Kitty tee-shirt said, “Mommy is Noman going to be OK?” “I hope so, sweetie,” the mother said. “We’re all trying to make him OK.”

The heat was becoming intense, even in the shade where Norman lay next to Veronica. Stan contemplated him, and began thinking out loud. “We can call the fire department, but the bike path is too narrow for their truck. I wonder if they have a helicopter?” He turned to orange tee-shirt. “Call the Sheriff, will you, and tell them that we have a baby calf here that’s about to die. Tell them that no one at the ranch will help us and we need help right away.”

Orange tee-shirt said, “I got the girl at the reception desk. She says Brody knows about the calf and will get here when he can.” Stan said, “It’s already been an hour. He’ll be dead by then.” “I’ll call the Sheriff,” orange tee-shirt said, “but they’ll need to hear a man’s voice.”

Two teenage girls stopped their bikes. “Look, a baby calf,” the first one said. “Eeewww,” said the second one, “he’s all crusty.” The first one said, “His nose is so cuuute. And look at his long eyelashes. I wish I had eyelashes like that.” They looked at Norman, one lovingly, the other distastefully. “Can I pet him?” the first girl asked. “I got the Sheriff,” orange tee-shirt said. “Here you talk,” she said handing the phone to Stan.

Veronica gave the girl permission to pet Norman. They stroked Norman’s nose and talked about his eyelashes. Veronica said, “I could take you home and make you better. I’ve got nine acres. You’d be happy there.” A man in a Minnesota tee-shirt, who must have been her husband, said firmly, “No you can’t. He belongs to the ranch.” Veronica glared up at him and said, “Oh yes I could. Billy Crystal took his calf home, and he lived in an apartment in New York City.”

Stan was talking to the Sheriff’s office. He explained that he knew about newborn calves because he had grown up on a ranch, that the calf’s mother had abandoned him, and that he needed to be treated by a vet right away. He explained that the calf was getting weaker and needed nutrition immediately. His face grew red as he listened to the Sheriff. “Look, deputy,” Stan said, “we’re just trying to do the right thing here. We’ve got kids here watching the calf die. What would you do?” He listened again and finally said, “OK, I hear what you’re saying but you’re wrong. You have a nice day, too.” He turned to the crowd and said, “The Sheriff says it’s not their responsibility and it’s up to Brody.” He thought for a moment and said, “We’ve got to get the calf to the Clubhouse, and then someone will have to do something.” “It’s at least a mile away,” Stan’s wife said, still catching her breath.

As if scripted, two elderly women in a golf cart whizzed up the bike path and stopped to see what the crowd was looking at. “My word,” said the driver, “is that a baby calf? What in heaven’s name is going on?” A woman explained that Norman’s mother had abandoned him and that he needed a vet’s attention right away. The little girl in the Hello Kitty tee-shirt added, “Noman’s going to die soon.”

Stan eyed the golf cart and said, “Ma’am, can we use your golf cart to take this calf to the Clubhouse?” The driver was dumbfounded. She said, “Well I don’t think so. My companion can’t walk, so we don’t have any room. And there’s the question of liability ....” Stan walked to the back of the golf cart and looked at the little platform where golf bags would go. He said, “Ma’am, this woman,” he pointed at Veronica, “could sit back here and hold the calf.” Everyone looked at Veronica, who nodded vigorously. “Would you drive her to the Clubhouse? Would that be OK?” The driver said, “Well, I don’t know.” She looked at Norman for a long moment. Finally, she said, “Oh, I suppose so. I just don’t want anyone to sue me.”

Veronica handed Norman to Stan and stood up. Norman maaaped in complaint as Stan carried him into the hot sun. Veronica sat on the little platform at the back of the golf cart and looked at her feet resting on the blacktop. She said, “Hmm, this is going to be difficult.” She held out her arms and Stan handed Norman back to her. His hooves touched the asphalt. Veronica held him higher and said, “OK,” and the golf cart accelerated up the bike path toward the Clubhouse. The crowd watched the golf cart as it sped away with Veronica and Norman, her arms and legs sticking straight out and his long legs hanging straight down.

“You’ve caused me no end of trouble,” Brody yelled back at Veronica. “That calf’s mother is gonna reject him and I’m gonna havta bottle feed him. That’s time and money I don’t have.” He glared at the city slickers in the shade. “If I’m lucky, some other cow will mother him up, but I may havta raise him by hand.” He shook with fury and his paunch jiggled under his plaid shirt.

Changing his tack, Brody yelled, “You coulda been seriously hurt. You don’t never take a newborn calf from its mother. That cow coulda charged and killed you ....” Stan interrupted him, “Now hold on there, cowboy.” He said “cowboy” with just a hint of sneer, as one who had been might speak to one who still is. “The mother was nowhere to be seen. And there weren’t any cows in the meadow. That calf was abandoned.”

Brody focused on Stan. “You don’t know shit. A mother cow’ll go off and leave its newborn for awhile, but it always comes back, and this one woulda if you hadn’t of moved the calf.” Stan strode into the hot sun and stood face-to-face with Brody. “I do know shit, cowboy. I grew up on a ranch, and I’ve birthed calves and raised them.” He looked Brody squarely in the eye. “That calf would’ve died if we hadn’t given it shade and water.”

There was a brief silence, which the Deputy Sheriff interrupted. “You people don’t seem to understand that at least two crimes have been committed here,” he said to the vacationers. “You trespassed when you entered the meadow and you rustled the calf when you moved it without permission.” “We wouldn’t have had to do either if Brody had been doing his job,” one of the city folk said. Brody erupted. “I’ve been getting calls about this damned calf all morning,” he roared. “I woulda got to it when I was damned ready, but you all hadta go and screw up my

entire day.” Veronica said, “You watch your language.” She gestured at the children, who were glued to the spectacle of grownups arguing with a cowboy and a cop.

A woman said to the Deputy Sheriff, “We didn’t trespass. We’re all homeowners here. We own that meadow.” The Sheriff’s face went blank for a moment. “You still rustled that calf . . .,” he countered, but Minnesota tee-shirt interrupted him. “OK people,” he said. “Let’s calm down. Everyone’s angry, and that’s not helping to solve the problem. We need to focus our energy on what needs to be done, and that’s getting the calf to a vet right away. That way, it’s a win-win for everybody.” Brody made a move to punch Minnesota tee-shirt, but the Sheriff touched his arm and shook his head ever so slightly. Brody paused, took a deep breath and pulled out his cell phone. He punched in a number and said into the phone, “We need the truck and a horse trailer at the Clubhouse right away.” He turned back to the crowd and said, “That’s the owner of the cattle, and is he pissed at you.”

The standoff continued for another 15 minutes with the vacationers and Norman in the shade and Brody and the Sheriff in the hot sun. Golf carts whizzed by and there was the “pling” of golf balls being hit at the driving range. The tension was broken, but neither side looked at the other. The children lost interest and fidgeted with their bicycles. Veronica stroked Norman and gave him sips of water.

Finally, there was the sound of a diesel engine, and a truck with an eight-horse trailer roared up to the Clubhouse. A girl in a pink crop-top and overalls got out and opened the trailer doors. Brody looked at Veronica. She kissed Norman on the top of his head and carried him to where Brody stood. Brody took him from her outstretched arms and carried him, long legs dangling, to the trailer. Norman maaaped one last time before Brody closed the doors. The girl got in the driver’s side and Brody the passenger’s, and the truck roared out of the parking lot. The Sheriff, sensing that his services were no longer needed, strutted to his patrol car.

The city slickers smiled at each other and told themselves that they had done a good deed and had done it well. Veronica fretted that Brody would decide the calf was too much trouble and let it die. Everyone assured her that he wouldn’t dare. The children and adults picked up their bicycles and the adults said “good job” and “goodbye.” They were strangers now, without the bond of Norman, and dispersed in different directions to continue their bike rides or to find lunch.

The modern western standoff had ended without a shot being fired.

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