

KRISTIN KIMBALL

hammer falling easily from the hinge of his shoulder, his focus moving between the fire and the anvil.

As soon as we'd cleared space in the west barn, we bought a milk cow. She came from a dairy just two miles down the road from us, the Shields farm, a father-son operation that had survived the bad decades by staying on the small side. I'd been reading books about cows—my bedside table held *The Family Cow* and Juliette de Bairacli Levy's *Complete Herbal Handbook for Farm and Stable*—and was eager to deploy my newfound knowledge in the form of incisive questions. I knew that we weren't shopping for the black-and-white cows. Those were Holsteins—big, high-volume producers. The hegemony of Holstein genetics is so strong today that, if in an ad or in

THE DIRTY LIFE

She was a small-boned Jersey, sloe-eyed and fawn-colored and pied with big patches of white, like a map of lost continents. Her face was delicately dished, and her ears were soft and ladylike, and she stood a little away from the rest of the herd, her hooves deep in the muck. When Mark touched her udder she bent her head around and regarded him with her tolerant, maternal look. She had given birth to two calves, so she was called a second-calf cow, and she was in the middle of her lactation, pregnant with her third. According to her records she was a good milker, giving forty pounds—a little less than five gallons—of milk per day, which made her a steady, if not spectacular, producer. I checked her parts against what I'd gleaned from my reading. Her udder looked firm and well-connected to her body. Her legs were straight and sound. She was registered and in her prime. The Shieldses would part with her because she was a little too meek for the dairy's herd. The Hol-