

CHAPTER 1 The Calgary Stampede

Jim Dorcey World Champion Saddle Bronc Rider. Yeah that's what the Belt buckle said . " Damn !" he said to himself , " How many long years ago was that?" He couldn't remember. " Couldn't a been that many. Hell I'm only forty years old. There's still plenty cowboys making a living at my age Rodeo riding !" Jim knew he was lying to himself, but "What the heck?" he said out loud. " I just took first money in that Austin Roundup at the Fair Ground. Yeah, I know it was mostly amateur, but \$700 is good money for two rides." Jim was talking to himself as he drove north. His old bones had taken a beating and he hurt most every where, but the thrill and the adrenalin high from busting outta the chute on a bull or a bronc just couldn't be beat by anything else.

"One more Rodeo. Just one more and I'll hang it up." These words were familiar. How many times had he made that statement? He couldn't even remember. Now he had a plan though. He was headed up into Canada for the Great Calgary Stampede. They were offering \$10,000 dollars to anyone that could make a qualified ride on "Black Spider" the Champion Saddle Bronc of four years running and still undefeated. It was rare to find a Stallion in the rough stock herd, but Black Spider was an exception and because of his ability and reputation he was worth the extra cost of stabling. Jim wasn't too sure about that undefeated claim, but there hadn't been anyone saying it wasn't so. He had too many dealings with crooked Rough Stock Contractors and unfortunately, he had some bad memories in dealing with the Collins outfit that owned Black Spider.

Jim had a big score to settle with ol'Spider. Three times he'd tried him when he was included in the Saddle Bronc draw and three times he'd lost the battle. On his last wild ride, disqualified for touching his saddle with his free hand. Spider had a wild spin and a tremendous

rearing high dive reversing direction that was almost impossible to ride. His arguing with the officials was no good. To Jim's knowledge , he was the only rider that ever made the full eight seconds without getting thrown. His last attempt in Denver had cost him dearly though. Spider had evaded the pick up man taking Jim right into the fence slamming his knee and breaking a bone. Jim lost the rest of the season nursing a broken leg. "Yeah! He had a score to settle with ol' Spider and he thought he had figured out a way to beat the ol'son. He'd have to cheat a little but with a little luck and the spectator crowd behind him , he just might pull it off. It was worth a try!"

Two days later and here he is at the big Stampede Park and located a room at the Days Inn just a short way down the road. Most of the Cowboys not in the high earning bracket grabbed the cheaper rooms like he did. The Calgary Stampede was an annual event that lasted for ten days with tournament style Rodeo competition. Jim was gonna risk half of his last rodeo earnings in an attempt to ride Spider, and win that \$10,000. Spider's reputation had grown to almost supernatural abilities. An undefeated saddle bronc was unheard of.

Jim suspected that AJ Collins, the stock contractor and owner of Spider was being very careful as to whom he accepted to try riding in the Rodeos. One good eight second ride and there goes that \$10,000; not to mention an end to a crowd drawing, good paying, unbeaten Champion. AJ had quickly retired Spider and made a good payday at all of the big shows with his big prize money. As a Stallion, Spider was not included in any of the Rodeo stock . He was a star attraction and was only ridden for performance. Almost every special event around the country used his reputation to draw a crowd. Many politicians in the Western states recognized his star drawing power and included Rodeo skill demonstrations as a drawing card for their Rallies. A featured performance of Black Spider was always included.

All kinds of amateurs were willing to pay up the \$350 for attempting Ol'Spider just for the thrill. The Stampede had him scheduled for five rides during the ten day event and Jim had been accepted as Jimmy Dorcey amateur performer. Jim knew that no one in the current list of riders would recognize him by that name. Around the circuit he had always been known as Buck Dorcey. Jim's attempted ride was scheduled for the big afternoon show on July 4th. There would be an oversized noisy crowd and he knew if he made the ride regardless of any slight infraction , they would have to award him the big money prize. His biggest concern was , “ Would his plan work and was he still a good enough rider to pull it off?”

It had been three long years since he'd had that leg injured and rodeo luck had really deserted him the last two years. Some of the entry fees were too much for his pocket book and he couldn't seem to get good horses in the draw. What he didn't acknowledge was the fact that his showmanship ability and Devil may care riding techniques that always brought high scores had faded with age and injury. Judges saw him as an average performer and scored him accordingly. He forgot a cardinal rule for Saddle Broncs. Always put on a money ride even when you draw a dog, and don't let your performance show your disappointment in your horse.

Jim figured that this might be his last chance for a good Rodeo payday for this year. If he didn't make it, then truck driving or farm laborer work was where he was headed. He had Bills to pay.

A hundred times he went over in his mind how to defeat ol'Spider. He had studied this horse a number of times in films and many rodeos . He always performed the same route because it worked !, So ol'Spider had pretty well trained himself . Three leaps to the left outta the box and a high jump clearing the ground and rearing nearly vertical as he made a tremendous leap then a quick jack knife, burying his head almost in the dirt as he hit the ground. This tremendous

jarring hit usually threw his rider forward over the saddle swells and in a perfect position for ol'Spider to spin right and dump his rider.

Twice before Jim had eaten arena dirt in just that manner. Most of the riders didn't get that far. They feared his high dangerous life threatening rearing and possibly falling over backwards. They were usually on the ground just outta the gate. Jim had determined that most riders lost the fight before they left the chute.

His plan was really pretty simple. First he'd allow himself an extra few inches on that bucking rein so he didn't get jerked forward when Spider put his head in the dirt and secondly he had sharpened his right spur to sharp points and hopefully he could surprise Spider with some really painful work on that right shoulder when he made his high dive causing the horse to continue his spin left. Jim was betting his bank roll and future on making a ride on Black Spider. Hopefully those sharp spurs wouldn't draw enough blood to be noticeable and he could get his payday before AJ figured out what had happened.

Four days into the Stampede and Jim was a nervous wreck. A rank amateur cowboy from Toronto had almost made a ride on Spider. Thankfully ol'Spider had not disappointed. His high dive and spin had sent his rider flying at the six second mark. Jim knew that if he could weather that rearing bounce and dive, his spurs would hopefully put Spider into a full left spin which would easily eat up the remaining two seconds.

Jim's excitement level was increasing. Today was his turn and he went to take a look at Spider in his private Stallion stall. Jim was thinking out loud and said, " Ol' Son you shore don't look like much, but I know how much dynamite is packed in that devil black hide of yours!" Spider turned a quick head and looked Jim straight in the eye. Jim was startled by the horse's action and felt a sense of guilt as he looked Spider over.

“ Yes , it was Black Spider all right. He carried that C6 brand on his left hip.” Jim felt a kinda weird friendship for the horse and a little guilty about what he planned to try and defeat him. Telling himself, “ Hell! He laid you up for pretty much a whole season and twice cost you top money. It’s your turn now Jim! That \$10,000 will pay off that little spread of yours and allow you to get away from totally killing yourself in Rodeos.”

Ten years earlier when Jim was in the money , he had bought a small ranch in the foothills north of Tucson, Arizona. Almost every dollar he could make had been put into paying off his mortgage. He still owed \$4400 , but if he won that big prize money; his worries were over. He could settle back and raise a few cows, pick up a part time job, and only visit the rodeos as a spectator.

He realized that any kind of injury like his broken leg of three years ago would ruin him and cost him his Ranch. He’d been lucky at that time and was far enough ahead in payments to hold his Ranch. Today was different. He was two months overdue . \$4400 dollars wasn’t a whole lot of money and he knew he could sell his equity and come out OK, but he’d looked long and hard to find just the right place and he didn’t want to lose what he considered his home.

“Thank God !” He was thinking , “I don’t have a family to worry about. Had a number of girl friends over the years but never been tied down. Came close to asking a number of times, but thanks to luck, came away single. Now all I gotta worry about is this forty year old broken down bronc rider.”

Jim was musing these thoughts over as he joined the group of cowboy contestants in the chute area. He had dyed his hair and beard to appear younger and purposely bought bright rookie looking shirts and boots. Anyone would take him for a real wanna be Bronc rider. His outfit was perfect for AJ’s crew. Jim figured that he was just what the

doctor ordered for a 4th of July exhibition of ol'Spider cart wheeling a fancy dressed Cowboy into the dirt.

While he was waiting for the calf roping and Barrel racers to perform, he tried to make himself as inconspicuous as possible . He knew most of the performers, but didn't want them to recognize him. He didn't realize it , but his beard took care of his disguise. No one but very close friends had ever seen him with a beard. It was while seated near the barrel racer group that he overheard a disturbing conversation.

Bet Collins , daughter of AJ had to give up Barrel Racing. She was the top money winner of this year and a shoo-in for the Championship , but of all things dumb, she was pregnant! The Stampede would be her last run of the season. Jim took extra care that he could watch her run without her seeing him. She had been a hot number eight years earlier and Jim had a real fling with her until AJ cut him off. His daughter was not gonna get tangled up with some small time Two Dollar has been rodeo bum!

Today , as Jim watched; it was obvious that she was way too far along to be riding a barrel Racing horse. She was wearing a very loose over shirt, but that girl was risking the life of her baby and maybe even herself competing. "Think what you like and form your own judgement." he said to himself , holding his breath for her whole ride. " But she won, anyway!"He wondered, " Which one of the high dollar Rodeo winning cowboys was the Father of her child. And where was he at this time? Maybe she don't even know. She'd gone through a bunch of them over the past five years. No concern of mine, but she's a hell of a rider . Guess I've still got a soft spot for her. Must be in my head. Still and all, a really tough break for her and it being her best year, ever. Wonder what ol'AJ thinks about his darling upper crust daughter, right now? "

Jim didn't have long to wonder. Millie Hunt, a close friend and chief competitor of Bet's was saying to another girl, " That skin flint son of a bitch AJ, is throwing Bet out. Told her to git! He don't want no Bastard kid for a Grandson. She's his daughter; worked for him doing PR, scheduling and advertising for 15 years and look what the Bastard does. Christ almighty, she's thirty years old and don't have a thing to her name but her horse and equipment."

" Bo James was her latest; claims he ain't the Father and Bet wouldn't hear of an abortion. Reckon that's what AJ blew up about. She wouldn't abort and AJ knew it would cost her the Championship, not to mention losing his right arm Secretary and girl Friday on the road right during the heavy Rodeo season. No, I don't know what she's gonna do. Right now I think she's still competing trying to get her Bills all paid up. God! She's got a ton of fancy clothes. I bought this out fit from her. I never could ever afford anything like it, but it sure is pretty, don't you think?" Millie clammed up when she noticed the nearness of Jim on the other side of the fence.

Jim moved away hoping Millie would continue talking. Her voice was a little high pitched and easily understood even at a distance. He found his interest in Bet's affairs was more that idle curiosity . Thinking to himself, " Damn! I wish I had some way to help her out, but I'm kinda on the knocks myself. She ain't my concern and right now I gotta get ready for ol'Spider. Win that ten grand and then I can have another look at my hole cards."

Jim went to his back pack and pulled out those fancy new red chaps and began to rosin up the high inside of the thighs. He knew that he'd need all the stick-um he could get to stay with ol'Spider. He never rode saddle bronc with gloves, so a little powder on his rein hand is all he used. Very carefully he donned that right sharp spur and made sure his levi pants leg covered it . He knew that his jeans would pull up when he sat down on the hull in the chutes, but he hoped to

hide that sharp spur as long as possible. Carefully, he tightened the straps for his chaps. The tighter the better. Normally , he'd only tighten them high so he could really pop those spurs against the back of his saddle for the Judges to score, but today all he needed was a qualified ride. A high score didn't matter too much.

Once again he checked his hull to make sure that AJ hadn't had one of his boys do something to insure a buck off. Carefully , he inspected everything . Earlier he had noticed them carrying in a hull for Spider and he could have used it, but he insisted that he had bought his new one just for this ride. It would be the most wonderful ride he'd ever make and he wanted everything for keep sake and memory. AJ's hands just rolled their eyes. Jim tried to hide his smile. Everything looked good.

The last of the Barrel Racers had made her run and they were checking the times for winners. His try at Spider would be next after they ran through all of the fan fare and bragging about how great a horse Black Spider was and how many riders he had thrown. Jim was a little skeptical of that 162 number they were claiming, but it sounded good and he didn't want to be 163. Watching the hands doing the rigging of Spider, he noticed one of AJ's long time workers, Jade Butler was setting his hull in place.

“ Christ almighty!” , he was thinking, “Jade's setting that hull way too far back on Spider . One good jump and that rig will be sloppy loose. That cinch will never stay tight like that!” Jim suspected Jade was doing this on purpose thinking, “ Hell! ,even a tight hull on Spider is still like riding a hurricane. A loose one guarantees a buck off! When he makes that high dive, that cinch will be useless when that saddle slides forward on to his withers I've gotta do something and quick. I can't let'em cheat me like that!’ Spider was moved forward into the chute. It was time for Jim to sit down on him.

The winners were announced and Bet Collins had won the go-a-round. She was up by a full two seconds after three rounds and only had two more runs to go. If she rode clean and average, she had the Championship money wrapped up. Jim took a deep breath and turned his mind off of everything but Black Spider and thinking, “ What do I do now? Damn it! I can’t come out on him rigged like that” Jim purposely sat down on Spider and gipped him lightly with that sharp right spur. Spider jumped forward and reared up angry at being spurred! The crowd all held their breath and let out a loud exclamation at the danger this act posed to the cowboy.

The announcer was telling the crowd that a Jimmy Dorcey from Arizona was gonna risk his life and attempt to ride the wild undefeated Stallion Champion Bucking Horse Black Spider ! Jim didn’t hear any part of it. He was deaf to everything but the horse. Bailing off of Spider to the cat walk behind the chutes, he jerked the saddle forward. The gate man saw the slack now plainly showing in the cinch and began to tighten it up. Jade came quickly to the chute, but the gateman had things under control. Jim had no idea what was taking place in the arena, but now that he had everything to his satisfaction. It was time to get back in that hull and ride!

Bet , upon hearing the name Jimmy Dorcey came running to the chutes. She was shocked and couldn’t believe it , “ Yes, this was the same Jimmy Dorcey that she had romanced years ago!” Quickly , the Judges and Clown shooed her into the Barrel Racer holding pen. It was time for the Star Attraction of the afternoon!

“Coming out of Chute number 4 is Jimmy Dorcey of Tucson, Arizona on Black Spider!”

Jim shoved his boots full into the stirrups , gave himself an extra few inches on that hand rein, Pulled his legs up to the top of Spider’s shoulders making sure that he kept that right foot toed in just a little to keep those sharp barbs away from Spider, tucked his chin in like he

wanted to see the back of his belt buckle and tipped his head saying
“Let me Have‘em!”

Spider leaped like dynamite outta the chute as Jim marked him . Jim tried to keep that right spur clean, but couldn't and Spider bellowed in rage feeling those sharp jabs and after just two bone jarring bucking spins , he did his high rear almost falling over backwards into the chute gate. Jim raked him unmercifully with that right spur . Spider made a grand leap upward from his high rear and jack knifed slamming to the ground burying his head between his knees . Jim fought desperately, leaning far back to stay in the saddle, then pouring the hurt to ol'Spider and he spun left.

Spider almost fell as Jim raked his shoulder ,but the great horse recovered and exploded bucking and twisting sideways . Jim could feel the weakening in his grip on that rein hand and twisted his wrist in desperation to bind the rein and keep his grip. Spider made two great twisting leaps, both to the left as the buzzer rang.

Jim was deaf to the buzzer, but getting weaker every second. He knew that he'd never make it till the Pick up got to him. He was ready to quit and bail, but Spider wasn't done! He evaded the pick up men reversing his spin and throwing Jim hard into the saddle swells and almost unseating him, but to the Judges and spectators it appeared that Jim had skillfully ridden through a violent reversal bucking effort by Spider.

Once again he reared high and this time lost his balance spinning into the fence and coming down on the gate to the Holding pen . Jim was dumping his stirrups to bail ,and was catapulted over the fence into the Holding pen and into a face full of horse manure. The crowd had risen to their feet in fear for the rider. Spider came down hard against the gate and his right leg jammed through the gate panel. Jerking it out and still bucking , he was caught up by the Pick up men

jerking loose the bucking strap and leading him to the catch pen. His right leg was bleeding where he'd torn the knee on the gate panel.

Bet was in the Holding pen watching as Jim made his ride and here he came flying over the gate almost knocking her down.

Shocked and surprised, Jim sits up spitting and sputtering saying , “ Hi Bet ! Did I make the Buzzer?” Bet said, “ Hi Yourself , you crazy fool. You trying to kill yourself? Yeah, Jimmy. I think you did it . God, what a ride, ! I think you rode Spider! The Judges are out there talking to Dad right now. The Crowds going crazy out there, they want to see you. You better git out there. I'll see you later.”

Jim knew the Judges could disqualify him on some phony technicality especially since AJ could pay for it . He went out waving his hat to the crowd as everyone was in a tremendous up roar ,shouting for him. His plan had worked somewhat, but beyond that, he'd put a great ride on Spider finally conquering that high dive and that jarring spin. Everyone there knew that he'd done a great job on a great bucking horse. The judges were arguing with a furious AJ ,but finally Bob James, the lead Judge shook his head at AJ, held up his hand, and gave his message to the Announcer. Jimmy Dorcey had scored an 80 on Black Spider! “ He'd won! He Won ! He'd won the \$10,000! He couldn't believe it.” Jim was numb with excitement.

The stands went wild at the announcement and the Announcer called Jim to the podium for photo's and presentation of his award. AJ gave him a real hard unfriendly look when he had to hand him the Award check. Jim knew that his youthful look and beard had AJ puzzled. He just mumbled his thanks trying to keep his face down and avoid recognition . There was a lot of celebration going on and Jim wanted to get back to Bet and visit with her a little. He couldn't get away, The crowd wouldn't let him, and everyone was photographing or clapping him on the back saying what a great ride he had made .

Reporters from the local news and Rodeo Times Roundup cornered him wanting a story.

Jim , tried his best to put them off, but finally decided that he had better give them something or it could backfire and cause him trouble if it was discovered that he had ridden Spider under false pretence as an amateur. He decided to give them a heart warming story of his half Indian ancestry and his trial to become a rodeo performer. Most of what he related was true and they were happy with his childhood story and how he rode everything on the farm, horses, mules cows and pigs learning to ride. He went on to tell of his bare bones ranch in Arizona and how this prize money would pay off the mortgage and allow him to keep his ranch. Jim knew that his story, not exactly complete as it was, would still be appreciated by folks all around the country. Finally able to claim he needed to rest a little; he went back to the Barrel Racer Holding pen . Bet was no longer there. Hopefully, she would be at the big dinner and party that evening. “That \$10,000 check sure felt good!”

“Well,” he was thinking later, “ It’s a great dinner, but not really a party. The big celebration would come at the end of the Stampede. Then , there would be a real party.” Suddenly, he was recognized as the cowboy that had ridden the famous Saddle Bronc, Black Spider! He immediately had lots of company. Lotta questions and a lot of good wishes. As dinner wore on , he decided that Bet wasn’t coming and he got up to leave. He was thinking, “ It would be nice to visit awhile, but I’ve got what I came for ; so it would be best for me to hit a Bank and git on home.”

He was walking out past the entrance desk, when he heard an angry man down the hotel hallway angrily saying ,“No it’s not my damn kid! Hell, the way you been sleeping around it could be anyone of the hundred cowboys riding the Circuit! No! I don’t want any part of you. Just stay the Hell away from me! I got friends waitin!” Jim heard

a door slam and looking down the dark hallway he saw the figure of a woman. As she came walking toward him , he recognized her as Bet. She was crying!

Jim turned toward the entrance and then spun around like he had just seen her saying, “ Hey Bet! There you are. I was just looking for you. Hoped to see you at dinner. Thought maybe we could visit a little. It’s been a long time. Lotta water run under the bridge since last time I saw you.” Jim kept rattling on trying to give her time to gather herself and not be embarrassed. “ Hell, that was a great ride you made today. Been kinda following you in the Rodeo Times paper. Girl, you sure been making a name for yourself. You’ve got that Cannon horse turning better than I’ve ever seen. Makes those other girls look like they’re riding ponies. Hey whatta you say we go somewhere we can visit a little? I’m staying at the Day’s Inn and there’s a great little Bar next door. How about it? We’ve always been good friends , even after everything, you know that”

Bet replied , “I know that, Jimmy, Thank you. Thank you. I could use a friend right now. I’ve got my truck outside. I should get back to my trailer, but I’ll stop for a little while. I’ll meet you there.” Jim didn’t press her further and headed for the bar himself.

Later , seated across from Bet, Jim studied her face. He could see the worry in her eyes and the fact that she was on the verge of tears. He said , “Bet it’s been a long time, but I’m glad you were there today. Seemed kinda natural. I know you ain’t drinking with a baby and all, but how about a coke in celebration with an old friend.”

She said, “Jimmy, thank you for asking me, but I’m not into much celebrating; things are kinda hard for me right now. I’m sure you over heard the conversation between me and Bo James. Damn , I wish I could go back and start all over again. I was in love with Bo. Thought he felt the same about me. I thought he’d be pleased to know I was

pregnant and we could get married . Start a family. Start a life. No!, He blew up. Not his kid! Don't wanna have nothing to do with me!"

Then in tears, she went on, " Well . it's damn sure my kid and if it don't have a Father . So be it! I'll not kill my baby, like Daddy wants, and if I have to go it alone . I will!" Bet dried her eyes, and took a deep breath saying, " I'm sorry Jimmy, but I had to unload on someone. I'm at the end of my rope. I can't go on without some help. Daddy got terrible mad and threw me out. I'm buried in Credit Card charges. I know I shouldn't be riding, but I gotta have the money. Hell, the Marquee Hotel refused my Master Card."

" Been sleeping in that horse trailer of mine with the dressing room. Jimmy, that's all I've got right now. Some of the girls been helping me out. I gotta win this Stampede. I gotta have the money." Jim said , " Bet, I can make you a loan , but I really need most of that ten grand to get me outta hock and fix up my place in Arizona. I was planning on hitting the Bank tomorrow and getting it into my account in Tucson. I risked everything and my life almost to try and win that ten thousand."

Bet held up her hand saying, " No , Jimmy. I've gotta work this out myself. I've followed your riding and I know it's been a cold and long time since you had a descent pay day. That was a hell-of-a-ride you put on ol'Spider. You deserve every dime of that ten grand. I don't think there's another rider out there that coulda done what you did. I was pullin for you all the way until you almost bombed me coming over that fence."

" When I heard the name Jimmy Dorcey , I just couldn't believe there'd be two bronc riders with that name . I came running across the arena and even the announcer yelled at me. No, Thanks Jimmy, I appreciate the offer but I'm supposed to be a big girl. It'll all work out. Right now it's pretty tough with Bo and Daddy both turning their backs on me. " Once again , Bet broke up in tears.

Jim stood up and came around the table to put his arm around Bet saying, “ Honey, you’re taking on way too big a load for someone as nice as you. Look, I’ve got a room next door with two beds. Come on up and you can stay with me till the Stampede is over. No strings attached. It’ll get you a descent place to sleep and a good hot shower. Believe me you’ll feel a lot better tomorrow.” Bet stood up and gave Jim a big hug and as the tears continued she said, “ Jimmy, thank you , but I really can’t. What will people think ?” Jim replied , “ Who gives a Damn what people think, I sure don’t. You’re a good friend and you need a little help. People are gonna think the worse no matter what. Let’s get outta here!”

Later that night after Bet had gone to sleep, Jim lay awake a long time trying to figure out his feelings for Bet and trying to figure out a plan to help her when the Rodeo was over. “Yes, he and she had a stormy romance going eight years ago, but she was outta his class at that time and he was more of a plaything good time guy for her. He, on the other hand; had fallen hard for her and carried a lotta resentment for too many long years. But the long years had changed all that. Surprisingly this evening , he held no resentment, some of the old attraction was still there. He couldn’t understand his feelings; he just felt the need to help her. Tomorrow would get here soon enough and bring it’s own problems.”

That afternoon Jim watched and once again held his breath as Bet sped around those barrels. Turning the last barrel her mare Cannon slipped almost going down causing him and most of the contestants to catch their breaths in fear for Bet’s unborn baby. Cannon , like the great horse that she was; recovered and stormed for the finish line. Bet won Day money by only a whisker three hundredths of a second. Jim was there to take care of Cannon ,but Bet fell to the ground as she dismounted. Her girl friend contestants rushed to her. One brought a canteen of water pouring it on a neckerchief to wipe her face. Bet sat up and allowed them to take her to a chair.

Jim tied Cannon up and ran to her side. Bet was deathly pale and Jim said, “ Bet hon, take a few easy breaths and sip a little water. If you’re dizzy, don’t try to stand, just take it easy for a little bit.” Bet was shaking her head, saying, “ Jimmy I’m OK, I’ll be all right in just a minute, I’m OK. How’s Cannon?” Jim replied , “ Bet don’t worry about the damn horse! What’s going on with you? Let’s get the Doc over here to see you. Girl, you’re pale as a ghost.” Bet snapped back saying, “ No! Damnit Jimmy, he’ll disqualify me from competing. Please Jimmy, I’ll be OK in just a little bit.”

Unfortunately, someone had already summoned the Event Doctor and Jim stood quietly and sympathetically by as Bet pleaded with the doctor to let her make one more run. The doctor was adamant, saying, “ Miss Collins, your condition has caused you to faint under the strenuous demand you put on yourself. You and anyone here knows that you , of all people know the rules. I’m sorry, but you’re disqualified from further competition! If you were in the US, they’d bar you for the rest of this year.”

Bet was devastated, crying and cursing; she said “ Damnit Jimmy, things were bad enough. Now I can’t even win the event money and I was better than I’ve ever been. Just one more damn run and I could make it. Talk about luck dumping on you; I guess things couldn’t get any worse.” She buried her head in her hands as some of the other girls came to console her. Finally , taking a deep breath, she looked up at Jim saying, “ Well Jimmy, guess I’m still a loser after all. Things can’t get a lot worse, can they?” Then she looked at Jim saying, “ No sorry, Jimmy, I take that back . You’re still here. Thank you. I just don’t know what to do next.”

Jim replied, “ Well, Bet the first thing I’ll do is take care of Cannon . You know the rules; go over and withdraw from the Stampede and collect your day money before the Doc disqualifies you. Don’t give him

a chance.” Bet brightened up right away, saying “ Damn Jimmy, you’re right! I’ve got a pretty good payday coming without the Event money. I’ll get over to the Office . Hang around , I’ll be right back. Thanks.”

Jim walked Cannon through the stock pens to check her legs. She appeared to be OK, but as he approached the back stalls, he noticed the Event veterinarian was just leaving Black Spider’s stall. Jim walked over and asked , “ How’s the ol’feller doing Doc?”

The Vet replied, “ Don’t know for sure. Looks bad for that right knee of his. I think he opened the joint. No broken bones, but it’ll be a long time healing. AJ says to stitch him up, but there’s damage there and I’m not a surgeon. He may need better treatment than I can give him. AJ says if he’s crippled , “ Put him down!” I think he’s gonna ship him back and turn him out to pasture.” Jim said his thanks for the update and went into the stall to get a closer look at Spider. Jim caught his breath as Spider turned his head and looked him square in the eye. Jim couldn’t believe the guilt he felt at that moment. It almost appeared that Spider knew Jim had cheated him .

Jim quickly walked away and told himself, “ There’s no way that horse knows what happened. He’s just another dumb bucking horse. I’m getting all worked up for nothing. I’ve seen too many horses just like him come and go . If he makes it, AJ will still use him , if not; he’s dog food. That’s the way it is in this business. I better get back and see how Bet made out.”

When Bet returned , Jim had already stalled Cannon and stowed her rig in her trailer. Bet thanked him and said, “ Jimmy, I saw the Doc and told him that I was withdrawing from the event and he agreed not to disqualify me . I’m still listed among the four finalist for the Championship Showdown on Sunday, but they’ll have to move up one of the other girls to take my place. I withdrew claiming injury to my horse, so I will collect my Day Money and place standing for the Stampede. If any of these riders disqualify, I can still win Finish money

The only problem is, I won't be paid until it's over. I told Jeanie I'd call her with an address. Trouble is; that don't help me right now. I'm just about flat broke."

Jim replied , " Bet, I'm gonna run into town and get this check deposited. Why don't you load Cannon and meet me at the Motel. We can figure something out over dinner. I shouldn't be too long. How does a good steak sound?"Bet laughed and said, " Jimmy, you haven't changed a bit! Thank you. See you there."

Jim couldn't shake off that errie feeling he had about Spider and remembering that direct accusing look he got in his stall. He went through the motions of having his check sent to his bank and holding out fifteen hundred for expenses. He had no idea what Bet might owe here in Calgary, but hoped his money would cover it and still get him home. He also made arrangements to cover the back payments on his ranch. All of this , he took care of while still worried about Spider and trying to put a plan together to help Bet. It was almost a relief to get to his motel room and find Bet there. Great! Now he could concentrate on just her plans.

Jim said, "Bet, I can make you a loan until you get your winnings, but what are your plans. That baby's gonna be here pretty soon and where are you gonna go stay until then?" Bet answered in tears saying, " Jimmy, I have nothing and no place to go. Maybe, if I can find a job doing office work or something and rent an apartment. I'll have to go on State or Social security aid for the baby. I know a lot of girls that have gone through that. First, I'll sell Cannon. She'll bring a good price . I have to give up all of my Rodeo work and I'll probably never get another like her.

Probably won't ever compete again. If I'm gonna raise a kid, that's the way it'll have to be. If you're willing, I'll borrow a couple thousand and that should help me get a place. It's just a miracle that you showed up and another miracle that you rode Spider and won that

money. The biggest miracle and I love you for it is; after the way I treated you and Daddy ran you out, you still treat me like a true friend. I can't tell you how much I appreciate you."

Jim said, " Well I was a little hot headed in those days and there was a lotta misunderstanding on all sides. I was truly hurt when you took your Dad's side without hearing what I was going to say. Bet, I carried a lotta hurt and resentment for years after that. Right now, though; the past is in the past and I'm concerned for you and your baby. I've been thinking things over so; let me make you an offer."

" I have a small rundown ranch just a little north of Tucson. Gotta couple of range cows there and aside from pack rats , that's all the livestock I've got. It's kinda primitive and an old homestead of a house. There is about sixty acres of mountain pasture and it sits next to a creek. Cannon would love it and there's two bedrooms. Tucson is just down the road with good doctors and hospitals. Maybe some kind of work too. The house isn't the greatest and needs a lotta work, but you're welcome to come and stay until after your baby comes and then decide what you'd like to do."

" I had planned on quitting the Rodeo Circuit. Spider was my last ride win or lose , I was done! Bet, I'm making this offer as a friend. You're welcome to come and give it a try. Leave, whenever you please; no strings or obligations attached."

Bet was crying again! She said, " Oh Jimmy I can't do that . My God, do you know what you're saying? After the way I treated you! You'd still do this for me ?Jimmy, I don't know what to say. I don't have words to say anything. I feel so terrible. What can I say?" Jim said, " Don't say a word. Let's go have that big steak I promised you and tomorrow we'll load up and head for Tucson."

Bet replied, " Just like that huh! Yeah, you're the same ol"Jimmy. Got it all figured out. I shouldn't be surprised. You always seemed to

be in control, even when Daddy said, “Get outta the car!” Jimmy, I felt so bad about that. I’ve always felt so bad about how he treated you and I wouldn’t stand up to him. I could never forgive myself for that. You know I was always his little girl and I always took his side, but it wasn’t until he demanded that I have an abortion that I drew the line. Since then I’ve found out that I’m really just as hard headed as he is, but Jimmy I promise that some day I’ll make it up to you. Yes, you’ve given me new hope and your place sounds wonderful. Let’s go eat!”