

*A Montana Inheritance continues the story of Rusty Blackstone and Warren Weston, from A Montana Rivalry, as they try to straighten out their personal lives while they chase their rodeo and ranching dreams in the year of Covid.*

## **A Montana Inheritance**

By Jim Overstreet

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BOOK TWO OF THE RODEO IN THE BLOOD SERIES

# A MONTANA INHERITANCE

JIM OVERSTREET

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## Chapter 28

**February 19, 2020**

**San Antonio Livestock Show and Rodeo**

**San Antonio, Texas**

Ruby picked Rusty up at the airport and drove him back to the Stock Show. When they pulled out of the parking lot, she said, “I hear things went well in Tucson.”

“I’d say so. I picked up a check in the first go round and am sitting good for one in the second.”

“I heard Amanda was there.”

“How’d you know that?”

Ruby laughed. “When you have a brother who keeps secrets, you have to have a few spies around.”

“We had a good weekend. If that’s any of your business.”

“Of course, it is. You’re my brother and I have to look out for you.”

“I know, men are so stupid,” Rusty conceded ruefully.

“That’s true,” Ruby agreed with a smile in her voice. “Besides, what little I’ve seen of the woman, I like. I also heard you rode a bronc. You made Dad’s day. He’s running around with a proud papa grin. Bronc riding is your natural event, you know.”

“Do you think I’m being foolish?”

“Dad’s right. You could have been really good at it,” Ruby said. “Now back to business. Since you left Apache in Arizona, we’re going to have four people riding Boots in the semi-final on Thursday.”

“If I happen to make the finals here, I won’t have time to haul a horse to Tucson. I’ll have to fly.”

“Don’t get defensive. I’m not telling you that you did anything wrong. I’m just saying we’re going to have to be changing stirrups pretty damn quick. Warren made the semi-finals on Friday and with a little luck, one or two of our other guys will, too.”

“You’re getting awful friendly with Warren,” Rusty said.

“I’m not his biggest fan,” Ruby replied. “But I don’t believe he’s as bad as I thought he was. Not as arrogant as he used to be, anyway. I’d like to get along with him if I can, after all he’s marrying my sister.

“Our sister,” Rusty said.

Ruby grinned. “I threatened his life last summer. I think he’s a little scared of me. I like that.”

“He and I tend to avoid each other, but we’ve have been civil since he took up with Corinne. I don’t have to like the guy but if he’s going to be my brother-in-law, I’d like not to worry about having a fist fight every time I see him. I hope something else doesn’t mess things up.”

“Like what?” Ruby asked.

“Oh, I don’t know, just something.”

“What aren’t you telling me?”

“Nothing.” Rusty figured if Corinne hadn’t already told her about Todd, he could continue to keep it a secret.

“It’s something. I can tell,” Ruby said. “But I won’t pry any farther so long as you assure me that whatever it is won’t hurt Corinne.”

Rusty nodded. “Nothing to do with Corinne.”

—

Before the evening performance of the rodeo, Rusty wandered out back where the stock contractors parked. A series of amber toned streetlights provided some illumination. He caught Chip,

who was one of the pickup men at the rodeo, saddling a horse. When he looked up, Rusty said, "Well, Dad, I did it."

"I know. Wally Pruitt took a video with his phone and sent it to me. The horse did just what I said, didn't he?"

"Yes, he did."

"You rode the shit out of him. Did it feel good?"

"You know it."

"I expect so," Chip said. "I always felt good when I made a ride. Almost drunk from feeling good after fitting a ride on a nice buckler like that."

"He wasn't all that tough. Hung in the air a long time."

"He bucked harder than you think," Chip said and pulled out his phone. "Look at your video."

Rusty watched himself ride and was impressed. "I did look pretty good."

"I've told you a hundred times. Bronc riding is your natural event."

Rusty grinned and said, "Are you sure? I never remember hearing that before."

"Your eighty-two ought to get you a check and put you in the short-go. Are you going to go back?"

"Probably. I was sitting real good in the bulldogging. If I make another decent run, I should pick up an average check and maybe a check in the finals."

"Draw the right horse and you'll win something in the broncs, too. Timing's going to be a little tight if you make the finals here."

"I've been looking at the airline schedule. They've got flights on Saturday night and Sunday morning that will probably get me there. I left my pickup in the parking lot at the Phoenix airport and Apache down by Casa Grande."

Chip finished saddling his horse and climbed on. As he rode away he said, "It's good to see you finally playing to your strengths instead of just that damn bulldogging."

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Rusty was up in the semi-finals immediately following one of the other cowboys also riding Boots. When Bud came up the arena with the horse, Rusty was surprised to see Warren step up to Boots off-side. As Warren lifted the stirrup leather, Rusty said, "Top post in the red hole." When he climbed on, the stirrups felt even, and he hurried into the box. He'd drawn a good steer and flopped him flat on his side in 3.5 seconds, winning his semi-final.

Afterward, he booked himself on a flight with an ETA in Phoenix of 10:23 a.m. on Sunday. He would have flown out late Saturday night after the finals if there'd been a flight available late enough for him to catch. Still, if the plane wasn't late, he figured he'd have enough time to pick up Apache and make it to Tucson for the rodeo's two o'clock start time.

In the semi-finals on Friday night, Rusty helped Warren adjust stirrups on Boots even though there was enough time for Warren to do it himself. They didn't speak. Warren nodded his thanks as he mounted the horse and then went into the arena and threw his steer in 3.9, finishing second and qualifying for the Saturday night finals.

—

When Warren saw that he was up ahead of Rusty in the finals, he mentally grimaced. He knew he had drawn a good steer and knew that if he didn't screw up, he'd make a good run. Whether it would be fast enough to beat Rusty, he didn't know. Rusty had humiliated him so often that the mere knowledge that he was around always made Warren uneasy. So many times, when

they'd battled head-to-head, the smaller man had finished on top. Whether it was fighting on the playground when they were kids or steer wrestling at big rodeos, Rusty had made him look bad. That's the main reason he still savored his win at the Fourth of July rodeo in Cody the summer before, when he'd won first and Rusty second. That Harlan was there to see it made the victory even sweeter.

As he rode into the box that night, Warren told himself to relax, do it right without getting in a hurry. He let Boots go at exactly the right time and hit the barrier perfectly. The steer galloped instead of racing and went straight. When Warren saw how quickly they were overtaking the animal, he thought, 'hurry.' The rest came naturally, muscle memory rather than a series of mental decisions. Almost as soon as he got hold of the horns, he felt the steer's rear coming around. He twisted hard and stopped the clock in a time of 3.2 seconds.

Warren couldn't help but grin as he walked back to the chute and the announcer said, "The fastest time of the whole rodeo." When the announcer followed that by saying, "Only a tenth off the arena record," Warren had the sinking feeling that Rusty might still beat him. As he walked out of the arena, the roar of applause still echoed in his ears. At the gate, he heard someone say, "Nice run," and one of the other steer wrestlers offered him a high five. Having never been popular with his competitors, it took him a second to react, but he managed to respond before the other man dropped his arm.

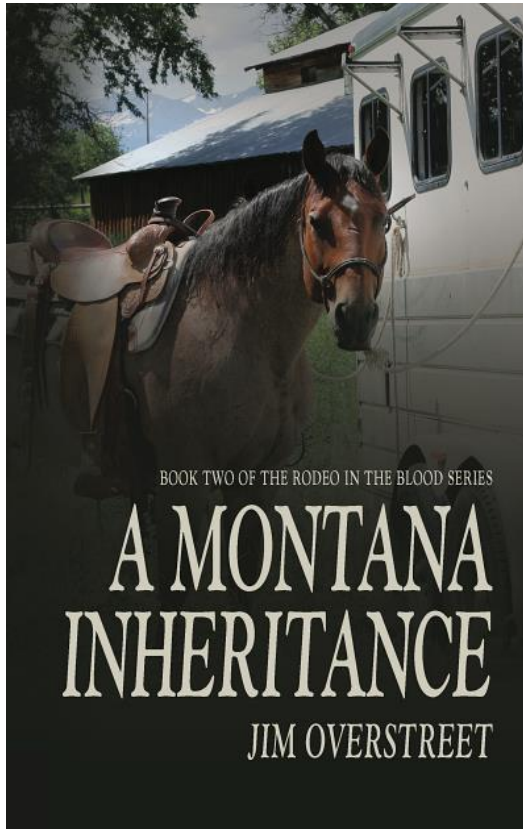
Bud brought Boots out of the arena and as Rusty began to change the stirrups, Warren moved to adjust the off stirrup. Rusty looked up and said, "You're making it tough on me tonight."

Warren knew Rusty didn't have as good a steer and it gave him hope. He held his breath as Rusty dropped onto the steer not far down the arena. Although his rival's form was flawless,



the steer handled slow and fell with one hind foot slightly tucked. By the time everything came right, Rusty's time was 4.7. As he breathed out, Warren felt a small blast of something akin to joy, something he could feel internally but not show outwardly. Even if someone else beat his time or even set a new arena record, this would always be a victory.

Nobody beat him. Warren became the 2020 steer wrestling champion at San Antonio. He grinned and waved his hat as he rode his victory lap. Rusty's time held up for fourth place money.



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