



JOANNA SIMS ROMANCE

PRESENTS



*"Jed was about to turn back toward the arena to watch his competition ride, but a willowy woman with dark auburn hair caught his eye."*

**The Brand Family Trailblazers  
Short Stories**

Travel back in time to the late 1940s, when an earlier generation of the beloved Brand family put down roots alongside the Continental Divide and founded Bent Tree Ranch.

Author Joanna Sims is pleased to present these serial short stories to introduce fans of her Brands of Montana books to some of the family's legendary matriarchs and patriarchs. Please enjoy her short story below.

---

Setting: Midland Empire State Fair & Rodeo, Billings, MT  
Circa: Late 1940s

---

Jed Brand couldn't hear the roar of the crowd gathered at the bull riding arena. All Jed could hear was the loud grunting of the bull beneath him as it twisted and jerked, throwing its head down and bucking wildly to dislodge him from its back. Eight seconds felt like a lifetime; sweat burned his eyes, his thighs ached, and his mouth felt dry and gritty from the dust and mud kicked up by the bull's hooves. But Jed refused to give up; he held on. He'd drawn a nasty son-of-a-bull named Bush Hog, and Jed had known, way back in the chute, that he was gonna have one heck of a time not getting bucked off to high heaven. Out of the blue, Bush Hog switched directions and started spinning to the right – spinning and spinning, sending his cowboy hat flying as his body jerked forward so hard that their skulls met for a split second.

Sit up and ride! Sit up and ride! Sit up and ride!

With his father's words seared in his brain, Jed spurred Bush Hog hard and kept on ridin' the bull until he heard the sound of that blessed eight-second bell. Jed reached down with his right hand, yanked his left hand out from under the rope they all affectionately called a suicide wrap, and tried to get off Bush Hog's back without getting gourd in the gut. Bush Hog snorted, spun like a corkscrew and then flipped his body so his belly was facing upward toward the sun. Instead of rocking backward to step off the bull like he was trained to do, Jed somersaulted over Bush Hog's stout head and slammed into the dirt, face first. The cowboy scrambled to his feet, just in time to avoid from being stomped by Bush Hog's back hooves.

“You'd better hustle, cowboy!” Buck Barnes was perched on the top board of the fence, flapping his faded brown cowboy hat wildly in the air. “You'd better hustle!”

Jed ran as fast as his tired legs would go, leaning down to snatch up his cowboy hat, before grabbing Buck's outstretched hand and scrambling up to the top of the fence.

Not known to give-up so easy, Bush Hog charged the fence and slammed his head into the boards, trying to take one last shot at the cowboy who'd managed to ride him for eight seconds.

Laughing, Jed and his best pal, Buck, hopped down to the safe-side of the fence while the rodeo clowns wrangled Bush Hog back to the pens.

Buck tipped back his head, hands cupped around his mouth, and hollered. “Ooh-wee! You dang well beat Bush Hog!”

“I tell you what.” Jed spit the dirt out of his mouth with a shake of his head. “That bull's one heck of an arm jerker. He just kept on spinin' and spinn', takin' me to the well - I thought he was gonna yank my arm right out of the socket.”

“It's gonna be worth it if you walk away with that first place belt buckle.” Buck gave his friend a slap on the back.

“True that.” Jed wiped the sweat and mud off of his face with the tail of his plaid shirt before putting his hat back on.

Jed was about to turn back toward the arena to watch his competition ride, but a willowy woman with dark auburn hair caught his eye. Without thinking it through, his boots started walking after her.

“Where’ya goin’?” Buck called after him.

Jed spun around, walked backward for a couple of steps, and said with his signature, confident smile. “I’m gonna go introduce myself to my future wife!”