



Chapter 1
Narrabri Station

It was going to be a stinker! Already the day was hot, and yet it was still morning. Darcy walked over to the cattle yard. Resting one foot on the lower rung of the steel fence, he spread his arms out on a higher rung, and hung there like a scarecrow.

He looked down onto the parched, brown dust of the empty yard. How he hated this time of year. It was too hot, too dry, and people went mad. Most of the swimming holes had dried up and wouldn't be full again until the big rains fell. All around the cattle station, as far as you could see, there was nothing but endless plains of hot, thirsty dust and colourless buffalo grass.

Darcy lived on Narrabri Station with his mother, Nancy, two younger brothers and a baby sister. Darcy's father, Tony, worked as a stockman for different stations in the area. Right

‘Next rider in the ring will be Darcy Calgett,’ squawked the loudspeaker.

Darcy slid off the drum he was sitting on and began to stride over to the holding yard. His throat tightened and his hands throbbed with fear. The spurs that he had put on his boots started to clink, and he dipped his head as he passed by the small crowd that hung on the steel rungs at the back of the cattle yards.

‘Good luck, Darcy. All the best, mate,’ he heard from a few different voices.

As Darcy approached the yard he could smell the animal. The beast wedged inside the steel fence snorted and stamped. Its ears were back, its eyes pulsed red, the nostrils flared and now and again it tramped an angry hoof. Darcy knew it was going to be a difficult ride.

‘Come on, Darce, up ya come,’ said the marshal, who was waving his hat in the air to keep the horse terrified.

There was no way out now. Darcy had to ride the beast with all of his family watching. Not only that — biggus mobs of kids from school were there, and to back out now would be even more shameful than backing out in front of your mum!

Darcy climbed the rungs and stood on the top two so that his body formed a triangular bridge above the horse. For a brief moment he looked down onto its filthy, shabby rump.

Then Darcy lowered himself down on to the animal's back with only his backside on its spine, his legs bent up in the air as he had seen so often done by great bronco riders. Next, he slowly slid his legs down the horse's ribs. He could feel it twitch underneath him, and the dung smell hit his nostrils like a whip. He wedged his left hand under the leather surcingle strap around the horse's girth, clenching and opening his fist a few times to get a better grip.

'Give us a nod when your'e ready, Darcy,' yelled out Tony, who was just as anxious as his son.

The adrenaline pumped through Darcy's body, all the saliva left his mouth, and in a flash of a second he dipped his head and the chute swung open.

The horse heaved its entire body into the air, all four legs leaving the ground, and Darcy rose with it. It spun and dipped and bucked and swung from side to side. Darcy gripped harder. He felt his body bang and jerk and twist and