

DAMN

Written by

Elise Van Pelt

INT. RANCH KITCHEN - EVENING

WILLIAM "BUCK" TRENT, 19, had always dreamed of being a cowboy. It was just his luck to be born in 1893, long past the golden age of cattle driving he so wished to be part of. His uncle, Ulysses S. Meyer, had lived that life, and now Buck worked on his ranch in a feeble attempt to live it too. He endlessly quizzed his uncle about his former life. What had he eaten on the trail? What color were his boots? How many types of lasso knot were there? He received begrudging answers and implemented all this knowledge into his everyday life.

Like now, for example. Buck stood over the fireplace with a pan of hash and eggs, just like Uncle Ulysses had described. Buck wasn't really sure how to prepare such things, the cook at his family home back in the city made most of the meals, but he was doing his best. He would usually go bother his aunt and uncle about his problem, but they had left to go visit his aunt's poor dying granny in the next town over. Spanish flu is no joke, especially for the elderly. He shook his head as he stirred his meal. It's a damn shame.

He peered into the pan, supposing it was finished cooking. He placed the pan on the handmade old dining table and plopped into a chair to wait for the food to cool. He turned a piece of paper that had been waiting on the table towards him with a frown. His uncle had made him a list of chores to complete before they returned. His uncle couldn't read or write that well, he had been pulled out of school young, so the list was a series of one-word commands. Cow. Fire. Tie. Buck understood well enough; feed the cow, put out the fire, tie the dog up at night, but it all seemed rather primitive to him. It's 1912 for god sakes, you need to know how to read!

He picked up a fork and poked one of his eggs. It wiggled stiffly. Maybe he had overcooked it. Damn. He sighed and stood, deciding to take care of some of his chores before dealing with that problem. First, Bessie. Uncle Ulysses' ranch was home to 450 head of beef cattle but only one milk cow. Her name was Bessie, and she was his uncle's pride and joy. Ulysses had kept one cow from his cowboy days, Bessie's great grandmother, and he spoiled her lineage as a way of holding onto the past. Aunt Mamie joked that Ulysses loved the cow more than he loved her, which would have been funny if it weren't so clearly true.

Now, it was Buck's job to do the spoiling. He stood and walked through the ranch house, through his uncle's office, to the door leading to the back yard.

INT. OFFICE - EVENING

He paused for a brief moment to ogle the tarnished old shotgun hanging over a formidable wooden desk. He didn't understand the obsession with Bessie, but he did get his uncle's love for his gun. It was the coolest thing Buck had ever seen, and many of his questions revolved around the workings of the gun and begging for a chance to shoot it. The answer was always no.

EXT. BESSIE'S PEN - EVENING

Buck sighed, stepped outside, and dumped corn into Bessie's trough. He stroked the coarse hair between her ears and stepped back inside. Chore one: complete.

INT. OFFICE - EVENING

He stopped again at the desk, the gun calling his name. He suddenly realized that this might be his only chance to even touch it. He clambered excitedly onto the desk and gently lifted it down off of its hooks. It was beautifully heavy in his grasp, and it filled him with an energy he had never felt before. This must be what it felt like to be a real cowboy! A boyish grin lit his face as he returned to the kitchen, gun in hand.

INT. RANCH KITCHEN - EVENING

Buck went to sit down again but suddenly stopped, fear replacing his joy. Dangling above his food was a spider. Buck, not being a real cowboy, was scared of very many things, spiders being chief among them. He shifted the gun to his left hand and was struck with an idea. He raised the gun to his eye, aimed at the spider, and fired. The spider was blown off its string and into smithereens. Buck was pleased both that the threat was gone and that he figured out how to shoot, but he was startled out of his glee by the sound of glass shattering in the back of the house. A distressed MOO was heard, followed by a loud thump.

INT. OFFICE - EVENING

Buck ran through the house and saw the large glass window in his uncle's study had broken. Outside lay poor Bessie in a pool of her own blood with a hole blown clean through her head. Buck looked down at the gun still clutched tightly in his hand, then back at the murdered animal. He sighed. Damn.