

THE BUCK STOPS HERE: AGNES BANKS

'Meet Buck,' he says waving vaguely across the room. 'Shot him just up by Black Canyon.' I nod at the mounted moosehead, adorned with festive Santa cap.

Last night, Christmas Eve, we met Randy and Christie at the tiny mountain airport. They were so friendly, we immediately accepted their invitation to Christmas dinner, and here we are!

Buck was the first culture shock, then the lesson on how to pack bullets and finally the biggest shock - the meal itself.

'I don't cook', laughs Christie, 'like ever! So, I thought I'd heat up the leftovers from Thanksgiving, that okay with you guys?'

From the first mouthful I know I'm in trouble. My stomach lurches as my teeth and tongue roll the unidentifiable meat around my mouth. 'Anything wrong Hun?' Christie asks as I shovel the meat to the side of my plate. 'Oh no, sorry. I should have said I don't usually eat meat.' 'Aw! Now don't you go hurting Buck's feelings. Eat up, Hun.' This does nothing to quell my rising nausea.

Randy launches into Buck's story - the tent in the forest, the waiting and anticipation until finally Buck comes strolling in. 'I let him have it full bore', Randy roars. He waves his knife telling us how he butchered the moose. 'Buck was a bruiser. Jeez took my sharpest knife to hack through the sinews of that fellow.'

I try to fork a little of the fruit mix 'stuffing' and cranberry sauce into my mouth, but it's all too much and covering my mouth I mutter 'bathroom' and hurl down the corridor only just making it in time.

'Alright Hunny?'

'Yes, coming', I reply as I flush the toilet.

To my absolute horror, the water in the toilet keeps rising, and rising and rising. Up over the brim and out onto the floor taking the contents of the loo and my stomach with it. The disgusting mess seeps under the door and out along the corridor to be greeted by a screech from Christie.

Amidst frantic explanations and a flurry of towels, Christie remonstrates, 'It's a special sewage system that has to be treated gently.'

Needless to say we don't stay for dessert and no, we are not invited to eat there again.