

CHOICE CUTS

Our new city-shiny butcher is a rabid self-promoter, conning the locals into sampling the specials he touts: quality cuts, treats for dogs.

A fleshy-faced 'ranga' of Anglo-Celtic background, he thinks he'll fit in up here in our small Victorian community, far from the Big Smoke of Melbourne. The shop sparkles and the cash register rakes in the rewards of his advertising onslaught. I too succumb to his theatrical cheer, his flying knives, his winks, his constant stream of jokes. I leave loaded down with a sagging bag of high quality off-cuts for Timmy. For good measure he throws in a couple of dinosaur-sized bones.

Timmy, my black lab and protector, is a worthy friend who keeps me fit and sane with the demands of his regular routine. For that, I am rewarded with his undying love. Considering the early loss of his virility and his small demands, the least I can do is attend to his beloved dinners. So it was of some moment when our long-standing and trusted butcher recently retired and sold his business to Mr 'Tree-Changer' whose brazen deception triggered in me the white flame of vengeance.

Once at home, I am confronted with a mass of yellowish fat clinging to a squirming mess of flesh and organ. How does TC Butcher define 'quality'? Does he think we're savages here? Or does he think I'm a just woman? That I won't have the temerity to speak up?

I go back in the following day, "I'm not sure you looked at this before you sold it to me yesterday."

He narrows his eyes, peering at the opened package, "Oh?"

"Yes," I poke around in the opened package spreading out the congealing mess, "Is this the quality meat for dogs you advertised?"

TC Butcher's corpulent face peers at the slithering mass. He fake-laughs casting his piggy eyes around the clientele, basking in his own wit, "Oh, we all make mistakes sometime, sweetie," he scoops it up and dispatches it. "Here, this should do the trick," he hands me a new package with a swish of his bulgy pink hands.

"Look at this," I say, the following visit. "I thought we had this sorted. The first time I find the dog meat almost pure fat, this time it's laced with plastic." I hold up the roughly wrapped package for all to see.

"Oh, sweetie, we always freeze it between layers of plastic, that's how we do it. Nobody else has complained." He slides his eyes around, grins, seeking allies in the witnessing crowd. "Just thaw it out. That's what folk normally do. She'll be right, little lady."

She's a bit mad, he's letting them know. He's sharp as a professional fencer, scoring points. The spectators stand frozen in white space, wide-eyed, eyebrows raised. A nervous giggle erupts.

"Fair go, mate!" a checked-shirted man says to him. Murmurs of support rustle.

Fever burns my neck and cheeks. Am I the only one game enough to spell it out?

"No, I'm not happy about this. The defrosted strings of plastic are still stuck to the meat. Poor Timmy choked on his first mouthful." My throat constricts. I try to swallow but my tongue sticks in my mouth.

At that moment, images and words posted on social media swirl and rise before my eyes. Driven by a deep-rooted need for justice, I face him squarely, my arms slowly rise and my fingers uncurl mechanically, releasing the oozing package onto the floor. Steadily appraising the crowd, I say, "Oops! We all make mistakes, don't we?" Then I step back and take a photo of the scene.

"See you on Facebook," I smile to myself.