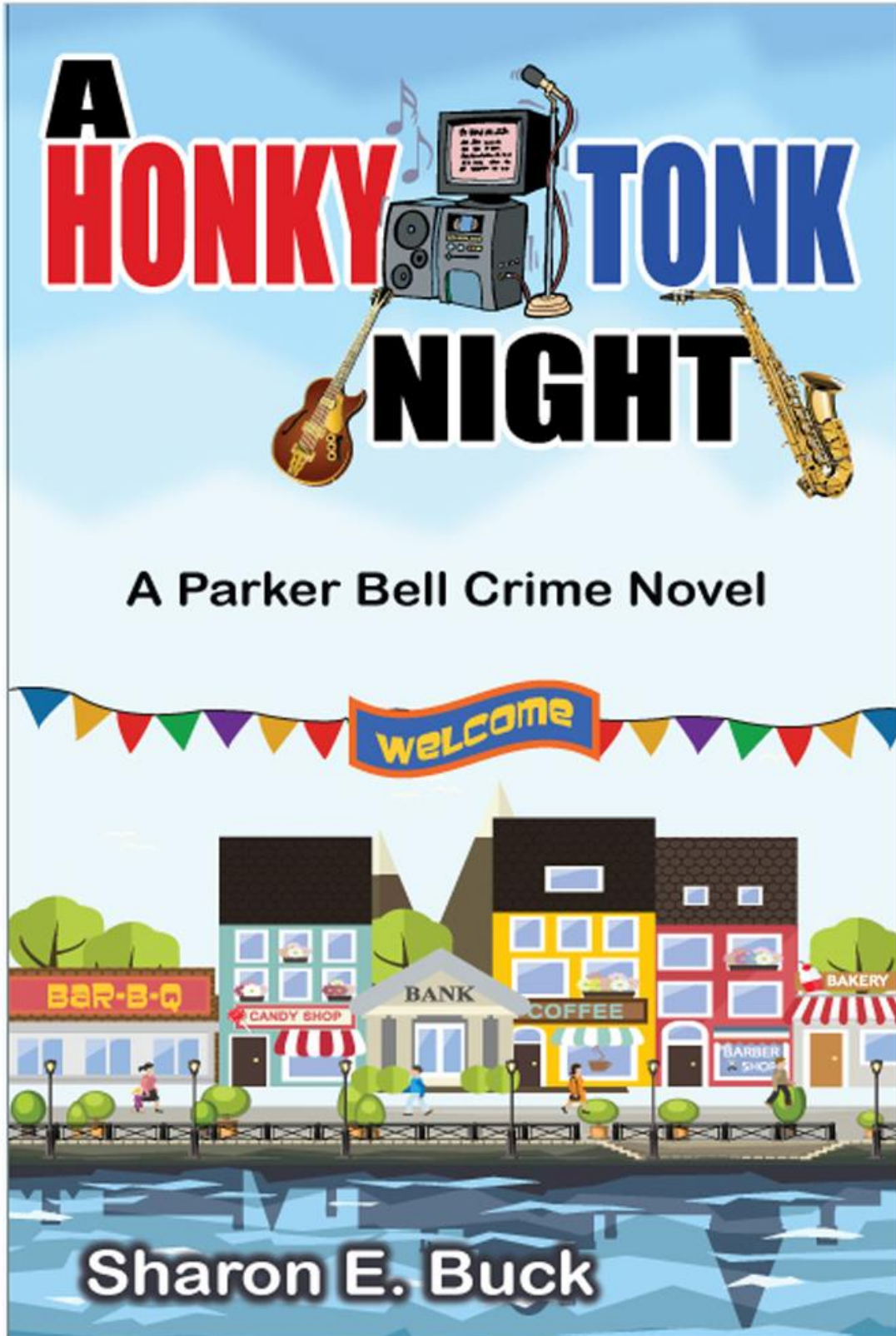


A Honky Tonk Night



## Chapter 1

“Is there really anything such as a honky tonk night anymore,” I mused, “or is it just karaoke gone bad?”

This is what happens when my brain engages with caffeine first thing in the morning. Random thoughts emerge with no apparent connection to anything going on in my life. Then the universe decides to play a cruel joke on me by dragging up something from the deep morasses of my mind and it suddenly appears in a weird life form in front of me. I love music.

My cell phone rang interrupting a perfectly good train of thought going nowhere. Reaching for it on my kitchen’s Ooba Tuba granite countertop, I chuckled to myself. The real reason why I had purchased this granite countertop was because I just flat out liked the name. I mean, come on, who couldn’t like a name like Ooba Tuba?

Pink’s “So What” was still merrily playing when I picked up the cell phone. I groaned as I recognized the number on caller id. I seriously debated about whether or not to answer the phone but I knew the caller would just call me every fifteen minutes if I didn’t answer.

“Hello, Dewitt.” I chugged some of my freshly brewed nectar of the gods better known as the latest offering from the coffee of the month club, Moroccan Heaven. It was delicious.

“Parker, Parker! How are you, girl?” Dewitt Munster, yes, that really is his name, is the local sheriff in River County, Florida. He wasn’t the brightest bulb in the box and had barely skated through on his last election. He won by one vote over the local drug dealer who had run against him...twice. The drug dealer demanded a re-count and it showed the drug dealer winning by two votes. Ballot box counting was not at its finest in River County, especially when it showed two different results two different times.

The case zoomed up all the way to the Florida Supreme Court where the great and almighty justices decided it was probably better to have the bumbling incumbent sheriff in office versus a known drug dealer who had twenty-seven pages of arrests. There might have been, allegedly, some fairly hefty campaign contributions made to a couple of the justices.

This, of course, made national news and the drug dealer was on every major daytime television show. Screaming he was being discriminated against, here he was now trying to go on the straight and narrow road of the great American Dream and mainstream America did not want him and others like him succeeding.

It made for great television. Unfortunately, he was arrested twice more for alleged threats of intimidation on female hosts. Still, it did put River County back in the national news.

I answered cautiously, "I'm good, Dewitt."

"So, when are you coming back to Po'thole?"

And there it was. The dreaded question of going back to my home town. I live in Atlanta and I love Atlanta but Po'thole -- technically pronounced Poat Hole, called Po Ho by the natives and Pot Hole by anyone north of the Georgia border -- seemed to have an umbilical cord attached to me during the past however many months and I couldn't seem to get loose of it.

Carefully drinking some more of the delicious dark aromatic brew in front of me, I replied, "Well, I hadn't really planned on going down there, Dewitt."

"Parker," he cleared his throat, "ah, you know we've had a little problem down here and..."

I snorted, "A little problem, Dewitt? Let's see, you had three murders back in May. Still unresolved. You have a major disappearance of a well-known CPA. Your election went all the way to the Florida Supreme Court because of voter count issues. They determined you only won by two votes, and that was against a known drug dealer. Problems, Dewitt? You've got a boatload of them."

He became defensive. "Well, we know who murdered them people."

I interrupted him, "You have no, I repeat, no evidence against Misty Dawn. It was circumstantial and you still haven't found her. All you're doing is speculating."

I sighed, "Cut to the chase, Dewitt. What do you want?"

Long silence. I drank some more coffee.

“There’s been another murder.”

I really wasn’t surprised. Small towns out in the middle of God’s green acres in Northeast Florida were ripe for all sorts of craziness. People disappeared all the time. Usually the story line was someone fell out of a boat or off the bank fishing and a gator ate them. River County must have some really fat gators out in the St. Johns River then.

I didn’t say anything.

“Parker? You still there?”

“Yes, Dewitt, I’m here.” I sighed, “I know I’m going to regret this but who was murdered and why does it have anything to do with me?”

“Well, it was Scooter Travis and he was found dead at The Last Drop Saloon. And, I thought that maybe, um, you might come down and, um, see what was going on.”

I started to laugh. After being a New York Times bestseller on my last book *A Dose of Nice*, I knew it was just a matter of time before Dewitt called me.

“No.”

“What do you mean no?”

“No, Dewitt, I am not coming back down to Po’thole. I don’t like Po’thole and, besides which, you arrested me over nothing. Nope, I am NOT coming back down to Po’thole.”

“You mean you’re not going to help Gracie Blanche with the Harvest Full Moon Festival?”

Po’thole had more full moon festivals than pagans did from the Middle Ages. Sad to say, many of the full moon festivals were not held on full moon nights.

“Dewitt, I have absolutely no, I repeat, no desire to come back to Po’thole. Have a great day. Besides, what the heck is a county sheriff doing calling a bestselling author for advice?! That’s just crazy!” I pushed End on my cell phone.

Thank goodness for Moroccan Heaven; otherwise, I would have thrown my coffee cup across the room. Also, since I had just paid an exorbitant amount of money to make my condo look like something out of Architectural Digest, throwing a cup of coffee against my newly painted wall would be foolish at best, stupid at the worst.

I’m Parker Bell, owner of a computer security consulting firm and national bestselling crime author. After escaping from the confines of a rural, economically depressed, and limited thinking little town located on the beautiful St. Johns River in Northeast Florida,

I had created a very successful computer security consulting company in Atlanta. Believing that both sides of my brain needed to be balanced, I started writing true crime novels. No one was more surprised than I was when my first and second books became New York Times bestsellers.

My third book, *A Dose of Nice*, had been written about the three murders in Po'thole. It had all the makings of a good movie: a young beer tycoon and the youngest mayor of Po'thole had been found all trussed up like a turkey roasting on a spit at his men only hunting camp, then the local delicatessen owner had been found dead in his riverfront home, and the local used car salesman – everyone's friend, it said so right on his business card – was found dead at his desk with a car purchase application under his hand. The only thing the murders had in common was they all had eaten barbeque dinners.

Well, there was one other thing they had in common and that was the Lady Gatorettes. It was highly rumored and speculated that the five hormonal, sugar and caffeine-infused women had murdered the afore-mentioned community leaders. Specifically, it had all the appearances that Misty Dawn, during one of her out-of-control menopausal moments, might have been the one who created the untimely death of them all.

The evidence, at best, against her was circumstantial and Dewitt had never been able to find or arrest her.

There was also the disappearance of my former first love boyfriend Joe D. Savannah, owner of We Make Money, CPAs. No one had seen hide nor hair of him since ground had been broken for the Florida Fishing Resort and that had opened on time, unlike anything else in River County.

The Middle Eastern owners had been interviewed extensively by the FBI, Homeland Security, and the afore-mentioned Sheriff Dewitt Munster regarding the murders and the disappearance of Joe D. The owners were making money hand over fist, the local economy was blooming with all of the new folks coming into River County and Po'thole. Things had settled back down into a dull roar, according to my best friend since fourth grade Gracie Blanche.

I blamed Gracie Blanche for turning my life upside down earlier in the year. My life had been calm until she called me to come help her out for the Florida Full Moon Crappy Festival held every Memorial Day weekend since World War II for the Old Fashion

Antique Show and Sale. Little did I know I was going to be embroiled with Homeland Security, the FBI, a Middle Eastern real estate development group, three murders, and the disappearance of a well-known thrice married CPA. Oh, yeah, did I mention the Lady Gatoettes who terrorized anyone who got within one hundred yards of them?

Still, I mused, why would Scooter Travis be murdered? Even though I wasn't wild about Po'thole I did keep up with their latest news on the internet. It had been heavily rumored for years that Scooter had murdered his first two wives and had gotten away with it. He had also been mayor at one point and his personal net worth had grown exponentially while he was in office. But, of course, that was because he was such a "good" businessman although he had filed bankruptcy in his first three businesses. No one talked about that out loud any more either.

He was just a good ole boy and had played on the only high school football team that had won a state title back in 1971. To say the guys that played on that team were tighter than super glue was an understatement.

I wondered if some of the team was covering up the local mayor's murder and it was really something else. Taking another sip of Moroccan Heaven, I said, "Not my circus, not my monkey." Little did I know.

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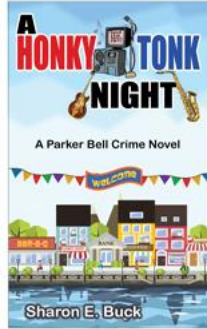
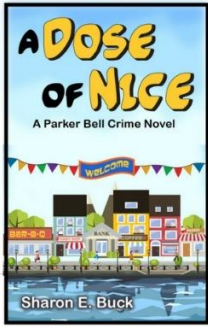
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## A Honky Tonk Night



## About Sharon E. Buck

Sharon Buck writes clean, funny, cozy mystery books. She resides in northeast Florida although she is somewhat concerned she may have to move suddenly if people in her hometown realize that her Parker Bell series is loosely (very loosely, according to her attorney) based on them. When Sharon isn't doing her favorite thing...writing...she enjoys walking her little rescue dogs, traveling, reading books, and cracking her friends up with funny stories and her wicked sense of humor. See more of Sharon at [SharonEBuck.com](http://SharonEBuck.com).