

Chapter 5

Mugsy Malone's sounded like it should be a pizza type place. It wasn't. It was a sports bar with all sorts of gangster type memorabilia all over the walls. The servers, god forbid I call anyone a waiter or a waitress because that is sooo politically incorrect, wore black pants, black suspenders, long sleeve white shirts with red armbands and a red string tie, with little black aprons and black Dr. Scholl's non-skid sneakers.

In short, this is considered fine dining in Po'thole. For some of these folks, the uniform was the nicest thing they owned.

Surprisingly, the décor was reasonably bright and cheery despite seeing grisly crime scene black-and-white photos plastered up on the walls. I guess since the photos were from the '30's then it shouldn't upset your appetite.

Let me be fair and say the really grisly ones were plastered high on the wall where it would be difficult for kids to see them. The standard tommy guns and 1930's memorabilia covered the rest of the walls.

The ubiquitous greeting of "Hi, I'm Sarah, and I'll be your server for tonight. What can I get you?" rubs raw on my nerves. They're either annoying perky, probably graduating from the Katie Couric School of Perkiness or the flat one-note 'I'd rather not be here' tone. Sarah graduated the perky school with high honors. Katie would be so proud.

"Do you have any coffee beers?" I did my best to smile sweetly.

It was like watching Bambi in the headlights. Her eyes opened wide, they blinked furiously, the smile slipped from her face, and you could see various facial expressions flitting across her face, ranging from the 'I don't have a clue' to 'is this a trick question' to 'how am I supposed to answer this'?

"Ah, um, let me check for you." She backed up and did a wonderful three-point turn heading for the inner sanctum of Mugsy's for assistance. The military would have been proud of her turn.

While I was waiting on her to return, at least I hoped she'd return, the tabletop tri-folds brightly announced the trivia contest would start at seven. Glancing around I noticed the sports bar was starting to fill up. Spotting Anne and Chauncey coming through the door, I waved for them to come over and join me.

Anne turned her head to Chauncey, said something, he glanced over at me, shrugged slightly, and they turned their steps towards me.

"Hi, guys," I stood up. "Would you like to join me? I understand ya'll are killer trivia night players and this is the first time I've come down for it."

"Sure, that sounds like fun," said Anne sliding into the booth on the opposite of me. She had a big smile on her face. Chauncey handed Anne his backpack and slid in next to her.

Sarah popped back over about that time. Ignoring me for a moment, she said, "It's so nice to you again. What would you like to drink?"

I interrupted her. "Chauncey, I'm getting a coffee beer. Would you like one? The first round is on me."

A happy smile broke across his face. “Sure, that sounds fine.”

Anne ordered a hot tea.

Sarah turned back to me. “I checked. We just got in Coffee Bender by Surly Brewing Company and it’s supposed to be really good. Would you like two of those?”

“Yes.” It was the best of both worlds, having the nectar of the gods in an adult foamy liquid libation. Life was good.

Anne and Chauncey had a beautiful aura surrounding them. The little I knew about was they had traveled a great deal, seen much, made little to no judgments on anyone, accepted folks as they are, and were very happy people. We won’t talk about me.

Anne was an energetic, thin, medium tall, mature lady with curly silver hair with a few streaks of black thrown in for good luck. Chauncey had brown puppy dog eyes, was a more puckish, professor-ish looking gentleman with an impish grin under a white bushy mustache and had a thick shock of snow white hair he kept contained under a Bora Bora Booney hat.

As Chauncey and I hoisted our mugs along with Anne’s cup of tea, I spotted Gracie Blanche barreling across the floor, heading toward us like a heat-seeking missile. She slid into the space next to me in the booth. Although I thought sitting in the middle would dissuade her from sitting down, I was wrong. Because she was not quite the height of short grown women, she fit fine on the tiny little bit of space I wasn’t occupying.

“Hi, Anne and Chauncey.” She ignored me. They glanced at me, I rolled my eyes upwards. Gracie Blanche couldn’t see my eye-roll and they turned their attention to her.

“You know the annual Full Moon Spring Solstice Antique Show is the first week in April, right?”

Anne and Chauncey exchanged a cautious glance. Gracie Blanche plowed on, ignoring their look.

“I’m in charge of it,” she smiled enthusiastically. I’ve seen professional salespeople who weren’t this good. “I heard you have a Fabergé Egg and we would like to make it the star of the show! In fact, I took the initiative and had some posters made up so you could see what it would look like.”

She unrolled the poster in her hand and spread it out on the table. She was looking at them with the assurance that it was a done deal. In sales, this is known as the assumptive close.

I had immediately noticed when Gracie Blanche was unrolling the poster that Anne’s eyes had narrowed, and not in a good way. This was going to be interesting to see how this played out.

“What makes you think that?” Chauncey softly asked. “What makes you think I have one of those eggs?”

“Well, I saw a picture of you on Facebook standing next to it.”

“Ah, well, I was standing next to it an antique show and a friend took my picture, tagged me on it, and posted it on Facebook.”

“Okay, I get that,” Gracie Blanche said, “but you still haven’t answered my question. Do you have a Fabergé egg? I want to feature it at our antique show in April.”

“No.”

“No, what, Anne? No to the...”

“Oh, my, Gracie Blanche, no to everything.” Turning to me, Anne said, “Parker, we might have to do trivia night another time with you.”

Gracie Blanche, not having the sense God gave a goose, ignored Anne’s gentle admonishment and said, “Why not? This would be great for our community! We could get national publicity...”

“No, Gracie Blanche! What part of them telling you 'no' did you not understand?” I was irritated. Of course, I had an ulterior motive. I wanted the Livingstones to see me as their savior from Gracie Blanche and they just might tell me if they actually have a Fabergé Egg. Yes, I'm just as nosy as the next person.

For those who aren't aware of the significance of an honest-to-goodness real Fabergé Egg, grab a cup of coffee, and see why I wanted to know if they have a genuine Fabergé. Owning an egg is equivalent to owning a priceless piece of history.

Peter Carl Fabergé was a Russian master jeweler and became known for his elaborate and intricate designs of jeweled Easter eggs he created for the Russian Tsars. He is particularly known for the ones he created for the Tsars Alexander III and Nicholas II. Yes, the same Nick II of Anastasia and Rasputin fame.

Fabergé created two Easter eggs a year for the royal family, one for the Tsar’s mother and one for his wife. I'm taking a wild guess here but if mama, both of them, didn't get her egg there wouldn't be any happiness in the palace.

Anyway, they were dubbed the Imperial Easter Eggs. Each egg took approximately a year or more to make because of the intrinsic detail and the special surprise that was hidden inside the egg itself.

It's not the jewels that make the eggs valuable, it's the incredible attention to detail and the craftsmanship involved.

Here's where it gets really interesting if indeed Anne and Chauncey did have a genuine Fabergé, the real question becomes how and why do they have one? It seemed a little strange that these two people would have one. Usually you only find the eggs in a museum somewhere.

Since record keeping was a little dicey back then, what with the Russian Revolution and all, the actual number of Fabergé Imperial Easter Eggs created isn't exactly known. It's believed to be fifty, but it could be fifty-one or fifty-two and it's widely believed that only forty-three are still in existence but that's not a sure thing either.

Since only forty-three are suspected to have survived, then how did they get one? Why do they have one? Are they part of Russian nobility? If so, what were they doing here in the United States? And, lastly, why on God's green earth would they ever want to have it front and center at a little town's antique show?

What if one of these exquisite eggs has been passed down from generation to generation in one family? I would think it difficult to keep something like that a secret but those folks who are very wealthy do tend to keep things like that to themselves or it is only know in certain social circles. Not being mean, but I didn't think Anne and Chauncey fell into either of those categories.

My mind was dancing with all of the possibilities, playing the what if game about the Fabergé egg.

“Gracie Blanche,” said Chauncey quietly. “The Tsarina has spoken.”

“Yeah, but...” she protested.

“Go away, Gracie Blanche.” I snapped. “Go annoy someone else but you gotta leave.”

She finally turned her head to face me. I felt myself crumbling inside while I kept my face impassive although my heart was racing and my stomach was doing the dance of the seven fat ugly women.

I’m pretty sure if she ever came face-to-face with the devil, he’d back down in a heartbeat. Me? I was hoping all of my internal organs would stay intact and I wouldn’t turn into a human grenade and explode everywhere. I didn’t much think Sarah, our perky server, would appreciate having to clean up dead human debris.

It was the longest five seconds of my life. Gracie Blanche continued to glare at me before she slid out of the booth, didn’t say anything to any of us, and marched out the door.

Chauncey started to chuckle. “You know, I thought she was going to explode. Glad she left.”

I nodded. We enjoyed another beer, ate the standard sports bar food, and played trivia night as a team. We didn’t win first place, but we did come in third which was good enough for another round of beer.

Since I knew Anne and Chauncey walked everywhere when they were in town, I offered to give them a ride home. It wasn’t particularly late, but I hated the thought that

they had to walk two miles home. They accepted and we continued to shoot the breeze and get to know each other.

Inquiring minds are probably asking, did I say anything to them about the Fabergé Egg or ask if they were Russian nobility? The answer is no. I wanted to build up the know, like, and trust factor...then I would ask them.

Chapter 6

“I told you having your picture taken with the egg and then putting it up on Facebook was going to create problems, Chauncey.” Anne mildly admonished him as she twirled her tea bag in a cup of hot water. “I do wish you hadn’t done that.”

“Well, I didn’t know that Emma was going to post the picture with me, Uncle Chauncey, and the egg on Facebook. Taking it to the antique show was okay because no one really believes an authentic Fabergé Egg would be in Maine, much less our small hometown.”

“Yes, well, with social media someone might want to track it...and us...down to see if it’s real. That’s opening up a lot of doors from the past, doors that I thought we agreed to leave closed.” Anne shook her head. “I don’t know if I’m willing to go through all of this again.”

Chauncey just nodded his head. In one sense, he was excited about getting possible answers to long held questions but, in the other sense, was this opening up doors to possible violence? At his and Anne’s age, he wasn’t sure if he wanted to go through a lot of toil and tribulation any more. They had both left that life many, many years ago.

He vaguely wondered why he agreed to have his picture taken next to the Fabergé Egg in the first place. Was he toying with the universe or tempting something worse than fate?

Anne was right. There were certain doors that were closed from their past. Doors that, if opened, could wreak havoc on the peaceful life they had come to enjoy and one that they had carefully cultivated.

They both quietly wondered if they were willing to start a new life elsewhere...again.

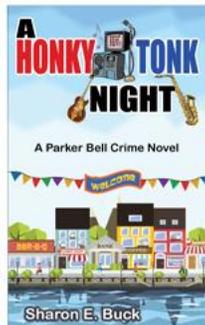
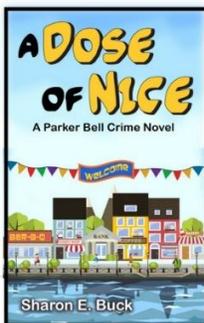
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About Sharon E. Buck

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.