



Chapter 10

That name jolted me. What were the chances of having three friends in the hospital, a piece of paper with a Russian billionaire's name on it, and then receiving a phone call from him?

That was way too many coincidences...and I don't believe in coincidences.

Which reminded me, I still had Missy on hold. "Rhonda Jean, I'm heading back. It should take about two hours." I took a deep breath and said, "If ya'll want to stay at my house until I get back, go ahead."

I was crossing my fingers she wouldn't do it.

Rhonda Jean said, "I've got to go home and fix Big T's dinner. Mary Jane can though."

Priorities. A brief moment of discussion and then, "Mary Jane says she'll have a nice dinner waiting on you so you don't need to stop at some truck stop and eat some of that nasty greasy food. I'll come on over later."

Oh, great! I had been thinking about going into the gas station again and getting some tacos to eat on the way back. Maybe Mary Jane wouldn't notice my taco breath if I ate some mints and, for sure, I'd eat her meal when I got back. A gal's got to keep her strength up, after all.

"Okay." I clicked over to Missy and discovered she had already disconnected me. Calling her back as I walked into the gas station, I eyeballed their fast food selection and decided that two tacos from the national chain of Tacos R Great wouldn't kill me. I would, however, pay the price about an hour later with acute indigestion.

"Parker, what's going on?" Missy did sound concerned after I called her back.

I brought her up to speed on my and Rhonda Jean's phone call.

"Do you want me to order security for the girls? I can probably have someone there within an hour."

I cleared my throat, a truly ladylike thing to do. “If there are Russians involved, my first question is why, and my second question is are they professionals? If that’s the case, it’s truly overkill no pun intended, in this area.

“Yes, on security. Make sure whoever you get isn’t a run-of-the-mill security guard; otherwise, we’re going to be having a ton of hurt people. What the heck is going on, Missy?”

“Maybe you should call this Anatoly Petrov guy and find out. Maybe he’s behind it.”

I snorted, “There’s no reason why he should be. I think he’s calling about us doing some computer work for him.”

Surprisingly, I got through to Anatoly on the second ring. He must have given me his direct number. Usually on very high-profile people, I still have to go through a personal secretary or assistant to get to them.

“Mr. Petrov, this is Parker Bell returning your call.” I could be very professional when I needed to. My dead mother would be so proud to know I retained some of her training for good manners.

“Ah, Ms. Bell, thank you for returning my call.” His English was very good, a slight accent but I could certainly understand him much better than my tv cable company’s “customer support” team based in India or from some planet in a solar system far, far away.

“I understand you know about a Fabergé Easter Egg being in Pothole.” Yes, indeed, he did say Pothole and not Poat Hole or even Po Ho. What irritated me more was that he KNEW where I was, not a good sign. So much for me thinking I had a low profile or that I could be a great spy.

I was stunned. How did he know about that?

My voice was very clipped. “Mr. Petrov, I own a high-tech computer security company and I was under the impression that you might want to secure our services for a particular project.”

A slight chuckle, one that caused the hair on the back of neck to stand straight up. “I am very aware of your services and how you have helped many different companies and

countries with various problems; however, this is a personal call.” He paused, “You may not be aware of this, but I collect Fabergé Eggs for my personal collection. In fact, I own the largest collection of Fabergés in the world.”

I swear, I wish my lips would clamp down sometimes and refuse to let potentially acrimonious words slide out of my mouth and into open air where they could do a lot of damage. That didn’t happen.

“Seems fitting that a Russian billionaire would collect Russian Fabergé Eggs,” I retorted.

“It is part of our history, our culture, that our eggs be kept by Russians.”

Did I have the sense to be quiet and see where Petrov might take the conversation? But, no, I did not.

“It would probably be nice if they were showcased where the Russian people could actually see them and appreciate them like you do, like in a museum.”

I probably hit a raw nerve because it took about five seconds for him to respond. I actually looked at my phone to make sure I had not been disconnected. When he did I could tell from his tone that he probably thought I was a capitalist idiot. Whatever.

“So, you do know about an egg there.” His tone was very cold and more of a statement than a question.

“No, sir, I do not. First of all, why would you think that? And, second, how do you know where I am?”

“If you would like to discuss something computer or security related, I’d be happy to discuss that with you but, otherwise, I don’t believe we have anything else to discuss.” I paused, giving him an opportunity to have a change of heart and throw some money my way.

He chuckled, “Ms. Bell, you’re in the computer security business, you know how easy it is to tag certain words on the internet. You also know how easy it is to find out where someone lives based on their liking something, like a picture of Chauncey Livingstone, on Facebook.”

“Gracie Blanche liked the picture of the Fabergé Easter egg and then wrote, ‘Cool huh Parker?’ It doesn’t take a genius to figure out you’d probably be going to Pothole sometime in the near future since you and Grace Blanche are friends.”

He laughed and said, “I also pinged your phone and it triangulated where you probably where.”

Note to self, get someone in my office to fix my phone where that couldn’t happen again.

He paused and then said, “Ms. Bell, I want that Fabergé Egg. You tell whoever has it that it is mine. I am willing to pay for it but it’s mine and I want it.” He hung up the phone. So much for détente between the East and the West.

I was still totally flummoxed on *why* he thought I had anything to do with the egg? Being friends with someone on Facebook does not constitute an actual knowledge of the whereabouts of this sacred egg.

Never let it be said that I am not a risk-taker. I dialed him right back.

“You have had a change of heart.” No warmth there.

“I do not now have nor have I seen a Russian Easter Egg. Why you think I have this egg or know of its location is beyond me.

“Also, I would strongly encourage you to not to send your people to beat up women and put them in the hospital.”

“You might not have it, but you know who does.” He actually seemed to be surprised about the hospital reference. “What are you talking about?”

“Some Russians, rumored to be Spetsnaz beat up three women earlier today over your precious egg. All three are in critical condition in the hospital. Don’t you think that was a bit of overkill?” I was fuming, and my voice was very clipped.

“Ms. Bell, I had nothing to do with that. I know nothing about that.”

“Mr. Petrov, take this as a well-meaning warning. Do not do that again.” I hung up the phone.

I called Missy and told her the entire conversation. “Get one of our guys to run the tapes on that call and see if they can detect any stress factors in his voice. I almost got the feeling he really didn’t know anything about the girls getting beat up.

“Also, find out why my phone number can be pinged and my location can be found out. I thought my phone didn’t have that capability.”

Taking a deep breath, I asked, “Is, ah, Denny still around the Po Ho area?”

Denny Rowe, my former head security guy, and I had gotten into a bit of an argument awhile back and I had fired him. He and I both had had a bad hair day on the same day and our egos got in the way. Mine more than his. But I was right and I was the boss so I fired him.

He, Misty Dawn, and her husband John Boy apparently all took a liking to each other and I was guessing that he was still in the area hunting and fishing with them. Whether or not he’d come back to work with me was somewhat debatable. He had been black operations at one time for our government and I had a reasonable belief that he could easily handle a Russian Spetsnaz if need be. Plus, I knew that he could call upon specially trained security personnel to protect the Lady Gatoresses and Gracie Blanche.

“Maybe.” Missy was somewhat guarded in her reply.

“Missy,” I was grinding my teeth, “do you think he would come back and protect everyone?”

“Maybe.”

“Aw, come on, Missy! Give me a break! Can you find him or not and can you find out if he’ll come back?” My temper was starting to flare up. Well, who could blame me? It had been a stressful day. Plus, I was out of coffee. I couldn’t even inhale a drop from the Styrofoam cup I’d been driving around with. I tried shaking out a drop but apparently the last drop had evaporated into the air.

“Give me a few minutes and I’ll call you.” She paused, “If he does come back, he’s probably going to want an apology...”

“Not happening!” I snapped. I was still right, and I owned the company. Okay, maybe I was being a bit of a witch but...

“I’ll call you back in a few minutes.”

Bless her heart, in a good way. Southerners have at least one hundred sixty meanings of “bless your heart” depending upon the tonal inflection. She did call me back.

“Well, I do have good news for you.” She was too perky. Not a good sign because this meant there was getting ready to be a negotiation and, as much as I hate to say it, Missy is a really good negotiator.

“Denny is still in the Po Ho area and he is willing to come back at our standard independent contractor rate and, yes, he’s willing to get some of his guys down there within the next twelve hours.”

“But. I feel a but coming on.” I held my breath. “What’s the bad news?”

“Well, he wants an airplane flown over Po Ho with a banner saying, ‘Denny’s the best’ with your phone number.”

“What?! Are you flipping crazy?! No, no, no! I flat out flipping won’t do that!” I screamed.

Then, it was like a two by four hit me in the head. “Okay, you got me. What does he really want?”

Missy was giggling. “Had you going there for a minute, didn’t I? Okay, what he really wants is for you to get John Boy a new John Deere tractor. Not a used one but a brand new one with air conditioning and heat in the cab and a CD player.”

“Really? That's all?”

“Um, Parker, do you have any clue how much that's going to cost?”

“No, but as long as it doesn't cost as much as buying Disney World, I'm okay with it.” I paused, “Oh, give him any color he wants.”

Missy started to laugh, “Parker, they only come in green and yellow.”

Yes, I knew that...maybe. What?! Do I look like I know farming equipment to you? Yeah, I thought not.

“Denny will come back at his regular pay but with the understanding that it has nothing to do with you but everything for Misty Dawn and the Lady Gatoettes.”

“Really? He said that?” I was a wee bit miffed. I would have thought he might have missed me but apparently not. Could I honestly say I missed him? Um, not really. So, I guess we're really even then.

“Yes, he did say that, but I don't think he really meant it,” said Missy. “I think he was just really burned out and needed a break. He may, and I emphasize the word may, have had a small touch of PTSD and the Po'thole area is a perfect place for him to decompress.”

I couldn't disagree with her. I'm guessing special ops probably took a toll on the human psyche and Denny needed a little R&R. This area had great hunting and fishing. I was guessing that held a certain amount of appeal for him. Plus, his bonding with John Boy and Misty Dawn probably added to the natural allure here.

“I do think he's missed you, but he'll never admit to it...and you won't either.” She laughed.

“Whatever,” I grumped. “What does he think has happened to Misty Dawn?”

“He doesn't know because both he and John Boy have been trying to reach her. In fact, Denny said the locator on her belt isn't sending out any signals but John Boy's really not that concerned about it because he thinks she was messing around with it and probably broke it. They're both convinced she's out fishing by herself.

“I hope it was okay, but I told him about Anatoly Petrov and the Fabergé Easter Egg. He wanted to know what the big deal is about the egg. I told him we didn't know.”

I love the way Missy said, “We don't know.” Trust me when I say, her using the “we” word indicates she totally has my back and is making sure all sorts of security precautions are being utilized and put into place. In fact, I would strongly suspect she had already talked to Denny before I asked her to.

Since we don't normally deal with Russians in my company, individually or as a country, I feel comfortable in saying she had probably already amped up my personal security without me even knowing it.

“Parker, you still there?”

“Yeah, I was just thinking.”

“You'll strain your brain if you do it for too long.” Missy laughed.

I snorted, “Probably. Okay, I'll be back in a couple of hours and would you...”

“You'll have a hot meal waiting on you and your coffee stash has been replenished.”

I sighed, “Missy, you'll make someone a wonderful wife one day.”

“Parker, get on the road and get back to Po'thole.”

Someone tapped on my window and caused me to scream. Potus let loose with his manic dog-barking, warning anyone who is even thinking about entering the party wagon that they were going to be severely maimed. Missy was still on the phone trying to make herself heard. It was a losing battle.

“Hold on!” I shouted at her.

I pushed the button on the window and let it down a little. There was a hideous dog-faced, flat-nosed, squinty-eyed, bald-headed man standing there with a gun pointed at me. He definitely was not local or state law enforcement. This guy looked like he'd slice and dice his mother-in-law for practice.

“Get out of that vehicle.” He growled.

My brain went into overload, and not in a good way. My nasty, big-city ways kicked into gear.

“Why?”

“Because I said to.”

I laughed, “That's not a good enough reason.” I punched the button and the window rolled back up.

Would you believe that jerk fired his gun into my window? I was furious. A few choice words not heard in any sanctified church escaped my lips. The good news is the party wagon can take a bigger hit than that.

Missy was shouting in the phone. “Parker, Parker, what's happening?” And then her voice went into a totally calm 9-1-1 mode and said, “You have two approaching the back

of the party wagon and one is standing at the door. They only have handguns and those won't penetrate the walls. I do suggest, however, that you get out of there as fast as you can.”

“Like you didn't think I was in the process of doing that,” I snarled. “By the way, can you rotate the cameras on top and see what kind of vehicle they're driving?”

There was no way the party wagon could outrun a fast car.

Potus was standing guard at the door and growling. All I had to do was say the word “cat” and he'd go through the door and kill whatever or whoever was out there.

Everyone seems to expect the word “kill” or the German word “toten” as the only words socially acceptable to be used against intruders. The word “cat,” however, causes intruders' brains to go ‘what?’ and that's long enough to slow them down for just a second while Potus will make them wish they had never entered into a life of crime.

Before I start getting hate mail, let me re-assure you that cats were never used to train Potus. Keep in mind, any word would work. Why? Because animals don't speak English, they go by the sound of the word and base their actions on how they've been trained to respond to that sound.

Potus would definitely shred someone who was trying to enter into his domain, particularly if he had been told to guard that area...EXCEPT for the Lady Gatoettes. He loves them, particularly Misty Dawn. I have absolutely no clue why he's so drawn to her. While in some primordial way that made me jealous, it did provide a sense of comfort knowing that both of them would die in a valiant effort to save me. Let me hasten to add, I don't want either one of them to die.

“Parker, they're in a Mercedes and,” slowly she said, “it looks like they have some type of diplomatic plates on the front of the car.”

“What? You've got to be kidding me! In South Georgia, there's someone who has diplomatic plates on a car?” I snorted, “Let me guess it's Russian, right?”

I was really just making a joke as I mashed the gas pedal and left the gas station. I merged back on the interstate heading toward Florida. Unfortunately, diplomatic license plates could be purchased online and I had no way of knowing if they were legitimate or

not. That guy, though, was so grisly-looking an anteater wouldn't claim him as a kissing cousin.

Okay, so I'm a snob when it comes to male looks. I prefer guys who are at least five-foot eleven or taller and look like a ruggedly, handsome model. Realistically, I usually end up dating nice looking men but ones who will never grace the cover of GQ.

Is that superficial? Well, yes, and it probably explains why I'm still single. Also, I think it's a step in a twelve-step program somewhere for superficiality.

BUT, I can afford to be picky and, honestly, I've never seen myself as part of a Mr. and Mrs. combo package. I like being single. Dates are good but I'm just not into long-term relationships. I have the attention span of a gnat and the patience of someone who is undergoing dental surgery without Novocain. I've found very few men who can handle that combination. In short, I get bored easily.

“I can't tell on the diplomatic plates but they're hours away from Atlanta where, if they had offices, that's where they should probably be. Parker,” she slowly said, “are you sure you don't know anything about the Fabergé Easter Egg?”

“No, a thousand times no.” I gritted my teeth as I was looking in the mirrors to see if I was being followed. So far, I didn't see them but, then again, it's hard to outrun a cell phone call to someone ahead.

“I don't understand any of this. See if you can get hold of Anne and Chauncey and find out why people think *I'm* the one who knows something about this egg. Maybe they have a clue. Whatever is going on is just flat out weird.”

“Okay, later then.”

I was truly perplexed. This was starting to turn into something very twisted and convoluted. It was something I didn't want to be a part of.

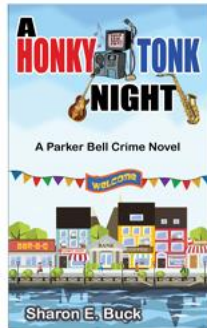
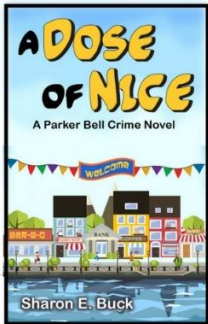
To read the rest of “***The Fabergé Easter Egg***”, [click here](#), or go to Amazon.

I hope you enjoyed this chapter of “***The Fabergé Easter Egg***.” Would you be kind enough to leave a review on Amazon? Writers love, and need, reviews.

Next week you will receive a totally new chapter from another one of Parker Bell's Cozy Mystery series.

Be sure to tell your friends about the **FREE** chapters! Click on the books below to be whisked over to Amazon. They are available in print and ebook.

Be sure to check out my website www.SharonEBuck.com.



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.