



## Silent Night

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It's December in Boston, and Spenser is busy planning the menu for Christmas dinner when he's confronted in his office by a young boy named Slide. Homeless and alone, Slide has found refuge with an organization named Street Business, which gives shelter and seeks job opportunities for the homeless and lost. Slide's mentor, Jackie Alvarez, is being threatened, and Street Business is in danger of losing its tenuous foothold in the community, turning Slide and many others like him back on the street. But it's not a simple case of intimidation – Spenser, aided by Hawk, finds a trail that leads to a dangerous drug kingpin, whose hold on the at-risk community Street Business serves threatens not just the boys' safety and security, but their lives as well.

Unfinished at the time of his death, *Silent Night* was completed by Parker's longtime agent, whose decades-long association with Parker's work gives her unique insight and perspective to his voice and storytelling style. Her contribution also speaks volumes about their enduring friendship.

## Silent Night Details

Date : Published October 2013 by Putnam Adult

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# From Reader Review *Silent Night* for online ebook

## Hapzydeco says

For Spenser followers this short read is a holiday treat. While Helen Braun did not insult Spenser, Ace Atkins does Spenser better.

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## Mike Jensen says

Parker did not get very far into his last Spenser novel before dying, so it fell to his literary agent to finish the book. She does a credible job of imitating Parker's style, though that would not be much of a challenge. He had lots of quirks that can be imitated. The plot is utterly predictable, but so were many of Parker's when he bothered with a plot at all. Indeed, the plot and its resolution, mostly the responsibility of agent Brann since Parker left no outline, is so obvious from the formative pages that it would be fair to give it away without altering to spoilers. If you are so dumb that you can't see it coming, you deserve to have it spoiled. Because it is so obvious, however, I see no need to dwell on it further.

The real mystery here is how much of the book was written by Parker and how much by Helen Brann. My best guess is that the first four chapters are Parker's. My reasons: Parker wrote short chapters, usually three to seven pages. Chapter 5 is eleven pages, though the next few are short. Parker tended to end each chapter with a line that he seemed to think was clever, but seldom was. He toned that down in the last couple of books, but did not get over it. Chapter 3 ends with one such line and 4 ends in what might be one in the latter style. These are mostly missing thereafter. A possible description of Parker's style in this series is "smart-ass." Though Spenser has his smart-ass moments after chapter 4, the later style is not infused with it to the same degree. Parker put an usually gratuitous and usually unacknowledged Shakespeare quotation in most of his books, and indeed there is one from *MACBETH* past midway, but Parker's quotes usually fit the situation where this one really does not if one understands the meaning of the words as Shakespeare used them. That is certainly Brann.

I do not argue that Brann wrote chapter five and after. A case could be made that she did not begin until chapters 8 or 9 when the longer chapters become normal, but the last lines of 5 and later are purposeful instead of show-off, so that is my guess. Please let me know if you learn the facts that I have looked for, but cannot find. Brann was been very closed-mouth beyond saying that Parker had written very little of this book at the time of his death.

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## Jason Koivu says

I decided to include one of Robert B. Parker's Spenser books as one of my Christmas reads. Not a lot of time is spent on Christmas related details upon the pages of *Silent Night* and that's all right by me! One doesn't want to become too saturated in that holly jolly bs!

*Silent Night* is not one of Parker's best. It's not baaad per se, it's just not good. It is, as the experts say, good enough.

Boston-based private investigator Spenser is tasked with discovering who is trying to put an end to a youth club and why. I didn't really feel engaged with the story, perhaps because there isn't much story. This is very straightforward, too damn straightforward. The characters don't feel fleshed out. They were more like caricatures than people. The dialogue is simple to the point of feeling unpolished. Probably all these problems can be explained by the fact that this was finished posthumously by Parker's agent Helen Brann.

Would I recommend it? Nah. But is it all that bad? Nah. It's fine.

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### **Dave says**

Yes, by this point, it's not merely rote, it's over-rote. Spenser is wry, Hawk is black, and Susan is annoying. Many women are attractive. Men underestimate Spenser. Much description of clothes, food. Pop psychology. Stilted exposition. Etc.

But at least this one (unfinished when he died) has a point or two to make about family and caring. I don't know what his literary agent had to add to finish it, but I hope it was this joke:

"Spenser, we're improvising here. When you do that, a lot can go wrong in a hurry. The whole thing can turn to shit pretty quick. Do you understand?"

Healy sighed. "He understands, Goldberg. You pretty much just described his entire career."

Anyway, it's Christmas.

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### **Mark says**

When Robert B Parker died this story was in the works by him, his Spenser Christmas story. His literary agent since 1978, also a close friend of the Parker family offered to finish the book. And thus we have some of Robert B. Parker and some of Helen Brann.

All the usual suspects are in the story that plays around Christmas in Boston and concerns a charity that works with runaways and street kids. These kids and the charity seem to get hassled by some folks that want them out of the neighbourhood. Enter Spenser & Hawk as the well known katalysator in situations that need to be solved. The story does not require a lot of smarts by the reader, which is the case with most Spenser novels, it is a pretty straight forward story that ends with a grand Christmas dinner prepared by Spenser of course.

It has some of the smart dialogue of Parker and some dialogue that could use that touch. Overall a fairly decent written novel that makes a nice addition to the Spenser series.

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### **Richard says**

I don't know why we all care so much, but many stories in this genre are not especially well written. In fact,

many of all fiction published is not, even though some of that is ridiculously successful.

Okay, Mr. Parker left an unfinished manuscript, and his widow okayed his long term agent and friend completing it. I think she did a good job. No, she is not Mr. Parker, but then neither are all the others writing under his name.

For me, it is time to say goodbye to an amazing man. Enough. RIP, RBP.

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### **Janie Johnson says**

Chose this as my 2nd Christmas read for this month. This is book 41.5 of the Spencer series, that of which I have not yet read. After reading this one though, I decided I like Spencer as a character, as much as I like Jesse Stone. This type of character is what I describe as a laid back tough guy. They have a softer side, but look out if you cross him kind of guy.

There is not a whole lot of action in this one but it is a Christmas mystery, so I did not really expect it to be very dramatic, but it did have a good storyline that I really enjoyed. I like Spencer a lot so this may push me towards reading the whole Spencer series, all 40+ books since I like his writing style.

However, Robert B. Parker passed away in 2010 which saddens me and I can tell slight differences in the writing styles of those who carry on with his work. This one was done by Helen Brann, who was Parker's Agent and close friend. She did a great job with this one.

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### **Brent Soderstrum says**

This is the book Parker was writing when he passed away in 2010. A holiday Spenser novel. Really no reason it was advertised as such but for the story taking place right before Christmas. Parker's literary agent finished the book up and didn't do much to rescue a yawn of a story.

This is tale of a rich evil brother and a poor good hearted brother. Drugs v. helping the parentless youth. Good Alvarez is being forced out of a property he has built into a rescue shelter for impoverished boys. His bad brother is helping him get by because he is family and all. Spenser to the rescue to find out who is trying to get rid of the homeless shelter and why.

Not too hard to figure out who is behind all of this. We get some Hawk and some Susan. Not too much of Susan to curdle your eggnog. Not much for Christmas celebration or for Hanukah. Not horrid but really not very good either.

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### **Jodi says**

This Spenser novel was finished by Parker's agent after Parker's passing. She did a pretty good job of keeping the tone and pacing of the characters. There was some interesting byplay between Spenser and Hawk that I wasn't sure felt entirely right. The story centers around Street Business, a place that helps homeless kids. It's run by the younger brother of a wealthy import/export kingpin who is on everyone's radar

as dirty with no way to prove it. The younger brother is very well meaning. The Kingpin has a girlfriend who has heard more than she should and has gotten closer to one of the boys at Street Business than she intended. There's a shakedown. Hawk basically tells Spenser that he, Spenser, is one of the good white hats while Hawk lives in the gray areas and doesn't want that to change. But I am not sure that is completely accurate. While it is true that Hawk has always killed with fewer regrets than Spenser, Hawk has Spenser's back and he has put himself on the right side more often than not. While he may not be in a long-term relationship with a woman, Hawk's relationship with Spenser and Susan and Henry Cimoli and others is definitely long term. Nevertheless, it was still enjoyable. I'm a sucker for anything Christmas.

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### **Lilyane says**

I had promised myself that I wouldn't read any more Robert Parker books that weren't actually written by Mr. Parker. I'm not sure how much of what was or wasn't written at the time of his death is truth or clever marketing to keep the brand alive. This holiday novel, however, was written by Parker's longtime literary agent and friend - a woman he knew well for decades - and I was curious.

I could tell within a page or two that it was not Parker - the sentences were too long, and the dialogue was not as crisp or as sharp as it ought. The plot was increasingly contrived, and the ending was tied up with a holiday ribbon that was far too neat and tidy. Hawk as warm and fuzzy is absolutely not vintage Spenser.

I hope that the contractual obligations and monies owed will soon be met. I shall try harder to keep my promise not to read any more of these pseudo Parker works - he was far too good for all of this.

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### **Bruce Snell says**

Book number 42.5 in the Spenser series by Robert B. Parker (completed by Helen Brann) - 3.5 stars. This book was started by Parker, but after he died, Ms. Brann finished it with the consent of his wife. While it is not as good as the best from Parker, it is still nice to read the adventures of Spenser, Hawk, and Susan.

This story is Christmas themed, although why is anyone's guess - Spenser makes it clear that he has no real attachment to the holidays other than time with Susan, and Hawk is far more interested in watching the basketball game than celebrating (although none of that really has anything to do with the story, so it is more of an observation than a criticism). In what starts like a tribute to Charles Dickens and *Oliver Twist*, Spenser is asked to help a local group house that is attempting to rescue street youth. That leads to a murder plot involving a Puerto Rican gangster and his girlfriend.

As I said, it wasn't Parker (and it was clear what he wrote and what he didn't), but it is what is currently available of Parker's legacy, so I'll take it (and I'll be glad to see the next Spenser by Ace Atkins who does a better job of trying to fill Parker's shoes).

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### **Quillracer says**

This is the last Spenser book written by Parker. He started it and his long-time agent, Helen Brann, finished it. I don't know if that means Parker had written it and she polished it or it was incomplete and she wrote the

rest of it.

Either way, it didn't have quite the 'snap' that made Parker's books the unique novels they were. There are places where the writing wasn't as crisp, the dialog as sharp, the narrative as taut as usual. This makes me think Brann did some polishing of his work and wrote some chapters on her own.

Some chapters here are much longer than Parker normally wrote and some have two scenes in them – something Parker never did to my recollection. The wrap-up after the climax went on longer than Parker would have done it, too.

Still it is the last Spenser book to carry Parker's inimitable style and that makes it good.

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### **Larraine says**

This was Parker's last book. He was writing it when he died in 2010. His long time literary agent finished it, and it's pretty seamless. Parker's style was very simple which would lead some to say that it could be easily mimicked. Ace Atkins has done a good job with Spenser. In my own opinion, the Jesse Stone character has been less successful. It's impossible to know how far along the manuscript was for this one, but it really is Parker all of the way. From what I've seen of other "Christmas" books, they don't seem to have much substance. I still like a real story to go along with the season. That was true in the past when Christmas mysteries came out. I can remember getting several paperback Christmas mysteries just, as I told a bookstore clerk, "to take the edge off of Christmas." This one is a good example of a Christmas story with an edge. Parker is approached by an 11 yr old street kid who is living in an institution called Street Business. The founder, Jackie, is concerned about several attacks on the boys. He says that he is being pushed to vacate the building. The building is owned by his wealthy older brother who is in the import/export business. In the meantime, it's nearly Christmas. Spenser is planning his Christmas dinner, Susan has asked him to accompany her to a glittering affair where she is a speaker. That's when he meets the Jackie's older brother. This is a fun story. It was a fast read, and might even get you feeling a bit Christmasy!

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### **Dan says**

I approached this final Spenser book with caution. After reading 40 books about the character Spenser, since 1973, I wasn't sure if I wanted to read the one he'd left unfinished at the time of his death at his word processor. (Somewhere I've read he'd previously written a shorter version of the story published it for friends.)

But I ordered it anyway thinking I'd read it over the Christmas holidays. Instead on its arrival, I snuck a peek at the first chapter and I just kept reading. It is only 229 pages in length and its plot is not very complex, but it was very enjoyable. A good way to say goodbye to a favorite author. (I have read another 20 books or so by Parker, but they were for me never as catching as his Spenser stories. Great for airplane trips though.) This novel was finished and expanded by Parker's longtime agent and she did a fine job of completing the series. The first half, or more, of the book reads more Parker than Helen Brann, and the last section has less of Parker's touches and has less lively dialogue, but the overall impression is that this was a job well done. A most fitting tribute to the author and his readers of 41 years.

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## **Sue says**

It's been nice to be back with Robert Parker again, with the assist of his long-time editor Helen Brann who completed the manuscript he was working on when he died. Though in some ways the story seemed a bit slight, Spenser, Susan, Hawk and their various friends on both sides of the law still have the same appeal and a permanent place in my heart.

As always, there are good and bad guys and Spenser will try to even the odds that the good will, if not prevail, at least survive. As always there is talk of very interesting food, Pearl the wonder dog and hints of wonderful love-making.

If you have enjoyed Parker's Spenser books in the past, go ahead, treat yourself to this final trip into Boston, to the corner of Boylston Street and over to Susan's place in Cambridge. I think you'll be happy you made the trek.

3.5\*

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