

*Noel Not an Angel*

*A Christmas Novella*

*Richard W. Kelly*



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Noel Not an Angel: A Christmas Novella Sample

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## THANK YOU

To all the creators of the great Christmas tales. I think of a Christmas Carol – Charles Dickens, Christmas Story – Jean Shepherd, How the Grinch Stole Christmas – Dr. Seuss, and Elf – David Berenbaum. Hopefully this story warms a few hearts as those did mine.



# *December*

## *15th*

Ernie Sparks was proud of everything that his life had brought him. At thirty-five years old he had a wife, two children, a big house in the suburbs, the car of his dreams, a career that was skyrocketing, and a community that he played a big part in. But he still did not wake up every morning thinking of how lucky he was and how happy he was to be able to live another day in his perfect life. He, just like most people woke up feeling overloaded with responsibility.

It was December fifteenth. The snow had been falling for over a month, the streets were white although the banks of plowed snow were a bit greyer. Every morning when he would step outside for his morning jog the cold crisp air would give his lungs that alive feeling that he interpreted as the cold death of winter.

That morning was like all the rest. He woke up to the soothing sounds of waves crashing on a beach thanks to the modern technology that is the smart phone. He opened his eyes to the familiar ceiling and took a deep breath to prepare for another day of responsibility and endless work.

He leaned over and kissed Lizzy, his wife, on her forehead just gently enough to keep from rousing her from sleep. He slipped out of bed and put on his sweat pants that were conveniently stored in a pile on

the floor next to the bed. Rising to his feet he stretched letting his back and neck pop as they aligned for a day's work.

Ernie threw on a hoodie and headed downstairs to get his morning coffee and running gloves. He wandered through the darkened house as he did every morning first maneuvered by the various illuminated clocks shining 6:48 at him. But once he got to the kitchen and started his coffee it was the lights of the coffee maker that gave him the brightness to put on his gloves and get his running thermos.

He felt like everything was in preparation. Just getting up in the morning was preparing to work, getting downstairs was preparing to get his coffee which was preparation for his run. He wanted to feel like something was just for that moment. He pondered his own self-imposed depression when the little ding of the coffee maker snapped him back to reality.

He poured his coffee into his thermos and headed to the front door. He opened the door and the wave of crisp cold hit him. He took that deep breath he always did and cursed the cold in his mind. He contemplated why he did not live in Texas or San Diego.

He took a couple steps, closing the door behind him and looked at the beginnings of the sunrise over his neighbor's house. The image was amazing, it belonged on a jigsaw puzzle, but he would not notice.

His mind went to his jog as he started heading down towards the sidewalk. Although he would never realize it, it did not matter where he lived, he would always dislike it. If he lived in Texas he would complain of the heat in the summer. If he lived in San Diego he would complain of the winds and the lack of seasons. He currently lived in Vermont and he was determined to complain about it.

The sun came over the houses as Ernie jogged through the neighborhood. It was his normal one mile jog up around the pond, through the park and back down his street. The ambiance was perfect, there was no wind to make things frigid, there was just enough light to appreciate the well decorated yards for the holiday, and the old-fashioned white picket fences that protected each of the northeastern

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style houses with the big porches with swings.

He did not care for the decorations as he was under the impression that Christmas was just a commercial holiday. He felt that society had foisted a day of high capitalism based around a day ancient people believed to be sacred. He did not believe in anything of the sort.

It was a jog that should have been the highlight of anyone's day, but Ernie could only focus on his breath, his steps, and the idea that he did not want to be doing the jog at all. As he rounded the pond, he made sure his steps were solid, the dirt around the pond was the only place that tended to freeze into ice and he needed to make sure the spikes from his removable microspikes stuck into anything that may be ice.

He made his final turn away from the pond and into the park. He kept an eye out for the crazy lady that lived there. He assumed she lived there, just some poor homeless woman that always seemed to be hanging around their neighborhood park. She never really bothered anyone other than her consistent requests for money. But that was enough for Ernie to dislike her.

He jogged down the path that was randomly flanked by pairs of benches. The sun had fully risen over the houses turning off the streetlamps that nestled into the trees in the park.

He ran around the bend in the path when he almost ran into the crazy old woman. She was picking through the trashcan. Ernie hopped to the side narrowly avoiding a collision. The sudden appearance of another person startled the woman causing her to slip and fall in the slick snow.

Ernie turned back to see what happened and could not help but focus on the deep lines in the woman's face that looked as if they housed extra dirt and muck. Instead of sympathy, instead of stopping to help, Ernie just shivered in disgust and wondered why the police they pay so many taxes to could not keep such low life's out of his neighborhood. Afterall, he had complained to both the police and the home owner's association.

He finished his jog a bit out of breath from the brief encounter with the homeless lady. He walked back into his house entering into a

blast of heat and feeling annoyed by how hot his home suddenly felt to him.

While he was showering, Lizzy awoke and went into the bathroom. She stood with her lower back leaning against the vanity while she watched her husband through the fogged and frosted glass of their two-person shower. The scene was so common she did not think twice about him showering just a few feet from her.

“How was your run?” She asked the same questions every morning.

“Would have been fine, but the trash lady was hiding around a corner. Thank God I had my microspikes or I might have ended up on my butt or worse, a broken leg.” Ernie shouted over the pouring of the showerhead.

“That’s terrible. Has the HOA still not said anything about that woman? Can’t they get her to leave or go to a shelter or arrested or something?” She did not care as much as her husband. The woman had never rubbed her the wrong way, but it was best to encourage his distaste for the woman rather than argue.

Lizzy returned to her typical questioning. “I’m going to make breakfast. You want some eggs and toast?”

“Yum. Thanks honey.” And with that Ernie went back to focusing on cleaning up.

Even the simple gift of being served breakfast fell off of Ernie’s appreciation radar. The routine had become so customary that he no longer appreciated it as much as he expected it.

Lizzy and Ernie sat at the table having their breakfast, talking about the normal mundane things that couples speak of. They mindlessly ate to accompany their hum drum conversation.

“What do you have today?” Lizzy mumbled as she scrolled through her Facebook posts.

Ernie was doing a Hashi puzzle on his phone, the latest brain teaser everyone was using as a daily brain exercise. “Today...” He took a deep breath as he tried to remember his schedule. “I have an interview

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with some podcast that is into horror novels. Then I have to talk to a couple book stores about keeping my books in stock. Then I need to get a couple hours of writing in and a couple hours of reading in.”

Absent-mindedly, “Sounds fun honey.”

“You know all those years of dreaming of being an author, I never once dreamed of talking to bookstores or kids pretending to be radio hosts. I wish I could just write.”

“Mm-hmm. I know honey.” Lizzy had the perfect half-assed response. It never mattered what Ernie actually said because it was always accompanied by a complaint.

“Then I think Silas wants to me to play in the snow with him after school. Liz Lil will need to be napping while I’m doing that podcast or I will look like such an amateur.” He paused while his mind considered his children as additional chores for the day. “My God, I’m going to be busy until nine o’clock tonight.”

The mention of the evening broke Lizzy from her morning routine. “Sorry honey, but we’ve got the dinner at the country club tonight. You can’t work all night tonight. You may have to make up some of your writing this weekend.”

Ernie groaned at how unfortunate his life was, but he put on his fake happy dad face as his seven-year-old son came bounding into the room.

Lizzy reached out to hug her son. “Hi Silly!”

Ernie rolled his eyes, he hated the stupid nickname his wife gave their son. He was always worried other kids would latch on to the moniker.

“Silas, your lunch is in the fridge and from the kitchen clock you have six minutes to eat and get to the bus.” He tapped his wrist as if he ever wore a watch.

Silas bounced across the kitchen in his puffy red and blue ski coat and matching beanie. His small four-foot-tall body made him seem like a strange oversized berry like he came right out of Willy Wonka. Silas reached into the pantry and pulled out a silver wrapper before he

grabbed his lunch from the fridge. “Pop tarts to the rescue!” He said as he ran out of the kitchen towards the door.

“We love you!” Lizzy called out as she watched her eldest grab his backpack and half eat the wrapper along with his toaster pastry.

“I love you guys too!” The door opened, “School bus to the rescue!” The door slammed closed.

“I need to have that much energy again.” Ernie said as he usually did when he saw his son.

“Mm-hmm. I know honey.”

The morning continued as normal. Ernie got a couple hours of reading in. He was reading the newest popular indie horror author. He liked horror and that is why he wrote the genre, but he often times kept his reading lists filled with the competition so he knew what the marketplace looked like.

The novel was a generic ghost story that took place in a dorm room. Something about a murdered girl who looked over the girls in the dormitory, but over the years it had become a coed dorm and the ghost terrorized the boys.

Only a quarter of the way through the book and Ernie could tell there was no real competition here. He even mentioned it on the podcast he was on later in the afternoon.

“So, what kind of books do you read?” The twenty-six-year-old still living with his parents asked him through the video conference tools.

“I write horror because I love horror. It should come as no surprise that I read horror as well. In fact, just this morning I was reading *The Maple Hall Vigilante*.” Ernie spoke as professionally as possible.

“Isn’t that the self-published guy who is getting all the buzz for the Bram Stoker awards this year?” Brent-A, the host of the show asked.

“Yes. He is getting a lot of buzz. And I guess it is a page turner, but I wonder how much buzz it would be getting if it was traditionally published.” Ernie chose his words carefully as he did not want to get a reputation for throwing his colleagues under the bus.

“Are them fighting words?”

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“No, no, no. As a self-published author myself, I get the feeling sometimes that we get more credit than we deserve. Almost like less is expected of us because we don’t have the machine of big publishers behind us.”

“Interesting take. So, what do you have in the pipeline?” The host was getting ready to end the segment.

“I have something coming out just in time for Valentine’s Day. It’s about a serial killer that haunts everyone who attended a speed dating meet up. The Polyamory Killer.”

“You heard it here on the Brent-A Show, in February keep on the lookout for The Polyamory Killer. Many thanks to our guest Ernie Sparks.”

He clicked the button to disconnect the call and left the office where he did most of his work. The sound of the door clued Lizzy in that she and Liz Lil could end their nap time and not worry about making some noise. The timing could not have been better as Silas came bursting through the door returning home from school.

Although he had not yet had the time to get any writing done, he knew that he had promised his son that they would be able to go out and play in the snow. He called out to the boy who just got back from the bus stop, “How was school, Silas?”

“Great! I swished a ball in P.E.” The boy ran through the house to find his father. “Are we going to play in the snow now?” Ernie patted his son on the head and nodded. Silas had a big grin across his pudgy face, “Snow to the rescue!”

All four members of the Sparks family got bundled up in their best snow playing clothes. They all had matching ski jackets and ski pants. Heading out the door, the reds and blues of their outfits mixed with the white of the snow, they looked like a patriotic parade heading down the street.

They walked the block to the end of the street where the park was. The same park Ernie ran through each morning. Ernie saw the old trash lady standing near the trees as they came into the park, but he gave her a glare that convinced the woman to head out of the park while they

were there.

As soon as they got there, Silas ran behind a bench and started shouting at his parents. "Pick a team. Snowball fight. The benches are base."

Ernie walked over to his son. "No, Silas. Let's make snow angels, a snowman, and throw some snowballs, but none of this team stuff." Ernie only wanted to spend thirty minutes so he could get back to work with enough time to finish up. It was typical of Ernie that even when he made time for his family he was not truly there. He was always counting down to when he could return to work.

Silas got out from behind the bench with a casual nod and headed back to where his parents were. They were a few feet off the pathway in a deep pile of snow.

Ernie said calmly, "Best snow angel wins."

Silas questioned, "Wins what?"

"Hugs and kisses, Silly." His mom responded.

"Hugs for the win!"

The four of them laid in the snow and waved their arms and legs about to make snow angels. Ernie got up to survey the creations. "I think Liz Lil won this round."

Lizzy picked up her little clone and gave her big hugs and kisses.

Ernie checked the time realizing he still had fifteen minutes before he needed to head back. He looked around the park at all the whiteness and called out, "Biggest snowball wins."

"Wins what?" Silas pipped back up.

"Hugs and kisses, Silly." Lizzy repeated happily.

"Kisses for the win!" Silas was already patting together snow in a little ball in his hands.

Ernie tried to pack the snow, but it was a bit dry as it hadn't got within ten degrees of freezing over the previous week. Lizzy and Liz Lil worked together to make a snowball, but the lack of moisture wouldn't hold them together.

"I guess the cold air has kept the moisture out of the snow." Ernie

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called out to the rest of his family.

“I know where there is wet snow!” Silas took off running out of the park back towards the street they lived on. He knew the cars always trudged up a ton of sludge which would hold his snowballs together very well.

Ernie held up his hand for Silas to stop but there was no use, his son was not paying attention. He did a strange jog after his son, but his lack of spikes on his shoes kept him from running with any confidence that he would not fall.

Silas, in a hurry to make his snowballs increased the distance between him and his dad until he was jut out of sight.

“Slow down!” Ernie shouted knowing it would do no good. But as he rounded the corner to where his son was in view, he was presented with the reality of his son kneeling in the street packing his snowball and a car coming down the street.

The sounds of the tires in slush increased as the driver slammed on their brakes to no traction. There was a slight squeal of the tires. Ernie looked on as the large sedan lost control and started to fishtail to the side directly at Silas. The helplessness gave Ernie a lump in his throat that threatened to never cease.

He reached out and screamed knowing what he was about to witness. Tears filled his eyes, curses against God filled his head, but just a few instances before the seven-year-old was crushed by the out-of-control car, the trash lady grabbed Silas’s hand and yanked him onto the sidewalk.

The force of the pull saved the boy, but tossed the old woman off balance and she fell face first into the passing car. Her body fell, lifeless to the curb as Silas cried in distress from all the sudden activity.

The car stopped and Ernie ran to his son. There was chaos as Ernie checked Silas’s well-being. The driver was in his late sixties, just old enough to have that grandfatherly feel to him. Someone who cares for everyone because they all remind him of his younger days. He pulled himself out of the car and onto the slushy street. He held himself up with

one hand while he screamed out, "Did I hit someone? I saw the boy and tried to stop. Is he ok?"

Ernie looked up holding his son in his arms while kneeling in the grey snow bank on the curb. "He is fine. She pulled him out of the way." The words came out in a rush as he nodded his head towards the old woman. He was in shock. Partially over the near death of his son, but also from the heroic act of the one person he thought of as complete garbage.

"She? Is she ok?" The man cried in panic as he came around to the passenger side of the car. As the fender gave way to the reality of the situation, he saw an old woman unconscious laying in the snow. "Oh my God! Did I run her over?"

Ernie still in shock from the entire situation mumbled out what he had seen, "No. You didn't hit her. She saved Silas and kind of fell into your car as you passed by."

Lizzy came around the corner from the park with Liz Lil riding side saddle on her mother's hip. As soon as Lizzy saw the commotion, she set her daughter in the snow and dialed 911.

The whole thing was an ordeal. The police, firefighters, and an ambulance came. Ernie, Silas, and the driver all had to give statements. The homeless woman eventually came to and was whisked away to a hospital.

Ernie did not get any more work done that day. Instead, the day was spent re-living the same moment over and over while the police questioned everyone. Then after the police left, Silas and Ernie had to give their statements again, this time to Lizzy so she could feel clued into what happened.

That evening sitting in the parking lot of the Eagle Pasture Country Club Lizzy could not drop the subject, "I can't believe that woman sacrificed herself to save our son. And to think I always tried to avoid her when I walked through that park."

Ernie by this time was annoyed with the constant focus on the woman, "It isn't like she meant to get hit by the car. She pulled Silas out

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of danger's way. And I appreciate that. But she lost her balance and fell. She didn't jump in front of the car to keep him from getting hit. She did what I hope everyone would do."

Ernie turned off the car and pulled out the keys to signify that it was time to head into the building. Lizzy wanted one last statement. "Well, you don't have to celebrate the woman, but can you at least stop calling her the trash lady now?"

All four of the Sparks family walked into their monthly dinner. At the club, Liz Lil was too old to be held and they were all treated as a unit. They were only as strong as their weakest member. Even though the girl was just over two years old, the scientific community felt that was time for her to walk on her own. It was after all the best for her growth.

They walked into the hall with the big chandelier and fancy curtains. Normally the ballroom was filled with people mingling, eating, and dancing. But this being the Christmas party there were huge trees with oversized ornaments and presents. They took up so much space that the party itself seemed to be spilling out into the walkways around the ballroom. Everyone was dressed to the nines while a live four-piece string quartet played soft Christmas tunes.

Ernie and family again had to tell the story of the homeless woman saving their son from an out-of-control driver. The reactions were all over the board. Some were relieved, some were thankful for God, and others just seemed annoyed that the homeless woman was still making waves in their neighborhood.

One of their neighbors from a couple streets over stopped Ernie by the bar. "I heard about the miracle that happened today." Tom said in his typical happy mood. Ernie rolled his eyes at the thought he would have to relive the story again when Tom continued, "Must have been a Christmas miracle. Glad your boy is ok. But, speaking of Christmas why don't you have any lights this year? Makes the whole neighborhood look like we are a bunch of Scrooges."

"Thanks for your concern, Tom. And yes, his is fine. The lights? I just don't have time. I have been trying to finish this book I've been

writing and all the family stuff, school stuff, kids and whatever else.” He shrugged his shoulder to convey just how much he really cared about the subject. It was all a lie to keep his neighbors off his back. He had not paid attention to Christmas in so long he did not have any lights to put up. As far as he knew his kids did not even know what Christmas was other than the time of year with all the decorations.

“I get it. But, next year just spring for the couple hundred bucks to the neighborhood kids so they can put them up for you. No big deal.” Tom raised his wine glass, “Merry Christmas Ernie.”