

Tall Jerry



The Crown

Copyright The Historical Research Center, Inc. 2008

[CLICK HERE TO ORDER THIS BOOK ON AMAZON](#)

TALL JERRY
AND THE
DELPHI FALLS TRILOGY

Post War
Historical Fiction
Classics

ECHOED LEGENDS

Legend Two

TALL JERRY
and the
Sideshow Pickpocket

First Edition

JEROME MARK ANTIL

Copyright © 2019 Jerome Mark Antil
All rights reserved.

ISBN-13: 978-1-7326321-8-9 (Paperback)
ISBN-13: 978-1-7326321-6-5 (Trilogy Set)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2019904864



SCENE: RURAL AMERICA
TIME: POST WAR 1953
(2 weeks after Halloween)

Historical references offered by
Judy Clancy Conway; Marty Bays; Dale Barber;
New Woodstock Historical Society; Cincinnatus
NY Historical Society; Pompey NY Historical Society; Cortland
NY Historical Society; Cazenovia Public Library; Carthage NY
Historical Society; Binghamton NY Historical Society

*This is a work of fiction. Names, characters and incidents either
are a product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously
and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business es-
tablishments, events or locales is entirely coincidental.*

Some characters are made from combinations of Jerry's siblings
(James, Paul, Richard, Frederick, Michael, Dorothy, and Mary)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1	1
BOYS WILL BE BOYS	
CHAPTER 2	11
LIFT THAT CAN, TOTE THAT PAIL	
CHAPTER 3	21
DYING IS A PART OF GROWING UP	
CHAPTER 4	27
SMALL TALK OF NAKED LADIES	
CHAPTER 5	38
DUCK AND COVER!	
CHAPTER 6	47
FRENCH, MAIS OUI. VICHY FRENCH, MAIS NON!	
CHAPTER 7	55
MARTY OPENS A CAN OF WORMS	
CHAPTER 8	64
GETTING IT ALL OUT ON THE TABLE	
CHAPTER 9	73
DARKNESS AFFECTS US ALL	
CHAPTER 10	82
DOWN-TO-EARTH PHYSICS	
CHAPTER 11	86
THE DICK TRACY CURSE	
CHAPTER 12	96
LATE NIGHT SOS CALLED	
CHAPTER 13	106
THE PLOT THICKENS	

CHAPTER 14	114
BARN DANCE	
CHAPTER 15	124
FAIR DAY	
CHAPTER 16	130
FRIDAY THE 13TH	
CHAPTER 17	135
THE DAY OF RECKONING	
CHAPTER 18	140
THE SETUP	
CHAPTER 19	152
WATER WITCHERY	
CHAPTER 20	168
WHO'S ON FIRST?	
CHAPTER 21	175
FINDING THE CAMP	
CHAPTER 22	190
THE JIG IS UP	
CHAPTER 23	201
SIGN FROM ABOVE	
CHAPTER 24	212
A RIGHT PROPER SEND-OFF	
EPILOGUE.....	221



12-year-old Tall Jerry, his mom and dad. 1953

Tall Jerry in the Delphi Falls Trilogy are of a time filled with characters that show true heroism. Of legends that happened after the war and before there were cell phones and an internet, and not every house had a telephone or television. Of a time when a full, hot meal at school cost a quarter. It was a time when you could leave the house and go off to play without having to ask. The people are real, and the fictionalized legends are based in truth, give or take a stretch or two. The Delphi Falls with its shale-crustured cliffs, big white rock, my boyhood home, campsite and barn garage are there to see today if you have a mind to head on up to the town of Cazenovia, New York—near the hamlet of Delphi. Both waterfalls are magical to this day, I promise. Oh, they may not grant a wish or turn tin into gold, but they will make you feel good about yourself and give you confidence.

CHAPTER 1

BOYS WILL BE BOYS

Being a guardian angel makes my telling how a naked lady led to catching the pickpocket varmint from London awkward, if you catch my meaning. Worse, my trying to explain why ole Charlie here, a kindly guardian angel, had to up and wrench Farmer Parker's back, for a few days. Most know birds and animals can talk with angels. It was pigeons, it surely was, what helped me this time, and they began a week you won't soon forget. You're about to hear the second legend of Delphi Falls, that started, as be said, on a rafter high up in Farmer Parker's hayloft.

Ever since they moved to the Delphi Falls when Jerry was a pup, on Saturday mornings he'd often ride with Big Mike the twenty-four miles to the bakery in Homer. A mug of hot chocolate and a warm, glazed donut or two waited as a reward for walking to the post office for his dad. The bakery offices were on the second floor behind Leonard's Coffee Shop, just across the alley. He'd lift the PO drawer key from a hook on the wall and go get the mail.

The calendar that started it all with the naked lady on it had been on that coffee shop kitchen wall for some time, but fact was small Jerry was never big enough to get a full-on gander at it the other times he'd cut through the kitchen. Now he's Tall Jerry, at six foot three and with a shoe size to match his age of twelve. This morning he cut through the kitchen carrying the mail and came plunk face-to-face with the calendar. First time he laid eyes on its naked lady, Tall Jerry bolted, clanking his noggin on cooking pots hanging over the butcherblock table behind him. He grabbed his head with one

hand and the pots with the other to settle their clanging, turned about again, stepping in for a closer look, and this time one of his size-twelve Buster Brown shoes went under a side table and stepped on the tail of a sleeping cat.

Bolts out of the blue like this calendar girl hangin' there for the world to see could happen without warnin' to young boys in 1953, and getting stepped on, to cats of any age.

Guardian angels call them curveballs from Lucifer.



Spellbound to near stupor, the lad stood there, staring. In her full glory the lady was naked as a jaybird—and at his eye level to boot, her magnetic, blue eyes followed his eyes the way those calendar-girl eyes have a way of doing—salacious being the word.

The cat yowled a cobra-like hiss. It woke the boy, keeping him from going into a spell where he mightn't remember he had mail to deliver.

The lad gathered himself while the cat eyeballed a rip in the screen door as an opportunity when Tall Jerry might be considerate enough to lift his foot.

Turning about to see if anyone could see him gawking at the calendar lady, he took a last look and backed away. With a hiss, the cat parted company.

It was Saturday morning, around nine-thirty.

That explains things up to now.

It was a Saturday morning that would begin a week-long odyssey of a kind that could earn guardian angel wings. It's a story long since a legend in the Crown, but one that needs to be retold for the great-grandchildren. This is exactly how it began just about a week after Halloween.

The air was crisp. The leaves were bursts of reds and yellows and burnt orange as far as you could see.

Not making it easy for ole Charlie here, Tall Jerry began making inquiries that his seeing the naked lady had churned up.

Problem was he was askin' the wrong sorts. His first mistake was talkin' to his brother, Dick—known to be a scoundrel. Jerry went next to Duba—Dick's friend, and another rascal of disrepute, ready to cloud an innocence at a moment's notice.

Both were older by enough years to stir this sort of kettle to boiling. Good young men, but scamps if given opportunity to take sport in a lad's naiveté. They'd bellow foolishness, strutting about waving their arms like Gospel preachers. They were jubilant in their illustrations of seamy illusions of purposes meant for certain body

parts in God's creation, pausing only to watch the lad scratch his head and squirm.

A guardian angel worth a salt knows to come up with a path to alternatives, keeping moral perspective intact. If we've done our job proper, a lad could reflect on his past to find his future paths.

It's called character.

Jerry and his male friends were in the awkward stages of development. Oh, they had a healthy respect for womanhood, they truly did, but as far as birds and bees learnin' went, they was pretty much dumb as a stump.

I had good reason to want to maneuver around this Saturday morning's interruption. I'll share it in a minute, but first I'll do my best to get through Dick and Duba's braggadocios.

Struttin' around like peacocks, stompin' in the crackling leaves, they told the lad they were going to the New York State Fair in Syracuse, sneak under the tent on the Midway and sit in front-row seats to watch the breathtaking *hoochie coochie* all-girl peep show.

"What!?" Tall Jerry queried.

"It only stars *Beauteous Bombshells from a Paris Review*—least that's what the poster promises," Duba said.

"Shut up!" Jerry growled.

"Why would we waste a day gawking at a stupid wall calendar when we can see the real thing in person?" Dick asked.

"Insalubrious," Duba shouted.

"Shut up!" Jerry grunted, defending his first calendar girl.

"A bevy of ladies from the world over," Duba affirmed.

"A plethora. A virtual harem," Dick reaffirmed.

"That means a bunch," Duba offered.

Dick and Duba would punctuate inappropriate innuendo with devilish snorts, choking on cigarette smoke. They were putting on a big show in front of an innocent kid.

Normally a guardian angel would handle matters like Jerry and the calendar in due course, but adding Dick's and Duba's taunting

TALL JERRY AND THE SIDESHOW PICKPOCKET

meant ole Charlie here was about to run out of time with the state fair opening this week. I had to think.

I remembered my flock borrowed Farmer Parker's hay forklift on Halloween to hoist Conway and the two girls up top of the tree the night they caught the POW escapees. That hay forklift got me thinking. I knew Tall Jerry needed distraction from Dick and Duba's talk of calendar girls and girlie-girl shows, so I would have me a talk with some pigeons, and I'd see to it the ole man wasn't hurt permanent at the same time.



It happens that Farmer Parker got laid up a few days when he reached off his tall barn ladder trying to rehang the forklift to the top of his hayloft cupola.

That was just what I needed. The flock of pigeons fluttered from a rafter, spookin' him and causin' him to lose footing, but with my

help he caught himself, with a slight wrenching of his back. It was slight, but a wrenching it was, and Dr. Brudny came in from Ridge Road shakin' a finger at him for trying to climb such a tall ladder at his age and ordered him three days bed rest.

A flock of pigeons setting up in a barn's hayloft stirred a distraction in 1953, and the second legend of Delphi Falls had begun.

"Mrs. Parker, make this geezer lie still and get this here liniment applied—like it or not—every few hours," the doctor said.

Well, pained as he was, Farmer Parker was a-grinnin' and snickerin' a mite into his pillow. Had been since the night he helped run those POW escapees off to their just desserts—making him feel young and alive again.

Thing was, here in the Crown, *bed* and *rest* were two words that didn't often appear together in a farmer's vocabulary. Least not in 1953 they didn't. They couldn't. Cows had to be milked twice a day—before sunup and after sundown. Manure had to be spread, and even though the sun was good on the field for now, he couldn't take a chance on rain coming. The cut hay on top of the hill looking down over the cemetery had to be barn-lofted before rain tainted it in the field, leaching out its nutrition.

Thinking all what had to be done and nobody to do it was when Mrs. Parker set her cup and saucer down and picked the wall telephone earpiece from its cradle. She cranked the handle and asked Myrtie, the operator, if she would kindly get Missus, across the way, on the wire. She then proceeded to tell Missus their woes, holding back the weepy tears of despair in her tone.

Mrs. Parker was a strong woman. Farm women were—like the roses behind her porch she raised mainly on supper dishwater. She just needed a good ear for now and maybe some ideas—some time to think.

"Fay doesn't cotton to being laid up," she said. "Worse, he says he won't be still. He's determined to work the farm."

“No husband does,” Missus said. “Like to stay put. They’re such boys when they’re sick.”

“I’m afraid he’ll hurt himself permanently,” Mrs. Parker said. “Without this farm, I don’t know what we’d do.”

“Now don’t you worry, dear,” Missus said. “There’re plenty of friends around to help. Let me find my boys, and I’ll call you back. No need to fret. Sit by the phone.”

Before hanging up, Mrs. Parker added, “He’s worried because the almanac says a rough winter is coming.”

Missus walked through the house looking for either Jerry or Dick. Their brother, Gourmet Mike, was away at college. This being a Saturday neither were to be found. No telling where they were off to but, in her mind, Dick was most likely with Duba under the hood of a car somewhere. Jerry, she thought, was probably back from his Saturday morning trip to the bakery with Big Mike and up under the second falls with Holbrook, plinking cans with the .22, or above it, watching beavers build a dam for winter.

Not certain, Missus picked up the phone.

“Myrtie, can you connect me with the Barbers, please?”

“Are you looking for your boys, Missus?”

“Desperately! The Parkers need help.”

“I’ve heard,” Myrtie said.

“I need to find either of them.”

If any one person could thread a needle of where every living soul was in the Crown in 1953, it was the rural telephone operator out of New Woodstock. From her second-floor walk-up telephone exchange board Myrtie could smell a trail of anyone who’s picked up a telephone better than a bloodhound. She’d even been known to help the club solve a crime or two by using her talent for listening.

“Dick called for Duba this morning to meet him in Manlius for something or other. It seems to me it was about getting car parts—spark plugs or something,” Myrtie said.

She spared Missus from what else she learned listening in on Dick and Duba's conversation—their going on about wondering if they'd get seen by any teachers or caught by any parents when they sneak into the "girlie-girlie" show tent this coming Friday at the state fair.

"They were both going to drive and meet up in Manlius," Myrtie said. "Jerry's at Barbers, helping shovel manure into the honey wagon. Big Mike dropped him there not long ago. According to Tommy Kellish this morning up on Berry Road, Holbrook isn't working at the Tully bakery today and is being dropped off at Barber's as soon as Mr. Holbrook comes home from the railroad and can drive him. He would have walked, but he had to hang wash on the clothesline for his mother. They're going to a picture show in Cazenovia. Jerry with the money Mr. Barber pays him for shovelling manure."

Myrtie took a deep breath.

Young Bobby answered, "Hello?"

"Here you go, Missus, good luck," Myrtie interrupted. "If I hear anything, I'll ring you."

"Hello, I'm looking for Dale. To whom am I speaking, please?"

"Hi Missus, this is Bobby."

"Bobby, it's good to hear your voice. Hello, and how's your father?"

"Daddy's good. They're putting up silage today."

"Tell him hello for us."

"I will. Dale's in the barn with Tall Jerry."

"Sweetheart, would you please run out and get Jerry and put him on?"

"Hold on, I'll get him."

"Thank you, dear."

While she waited, Missus thought of Mrs. Parker's plight, a farm with no hired help, in need of a helping hand. She knew Jerry and others would be there for him.

She thought back to the time (not that long ago) her Big Mike was taken away for a year with tuberculosis.

Dick and Jerry had stepped off the school bus and saw a car they didn't recognize driving toward them from the house, crunching down the ice-crusting, snowy drive...they could tell by the stature of the silhouette they were able to make out that Big Mike was in the back seat, a passenger. Big Mike's tests had come back positive for TB, and they were afraid the boys could be infected, so they drove on. The car didn't stop or even so much as slow down for the boys to get a look.

Thinking back to that day Missus remembered that Jerry started to cry. Like he cried when ole Charlie here died. Their dad had never left the family like this before and neither of the boys had any idea why—or why he didn't stop to talk. That's how Jerry and Dick learned their dad had tuberculosis and they wouldn't be able to see him for the year and few months he would be in a "sanatorium."

"He and his brother Dick took charge and ran the house while their dad was away," Missus said to herself. Jerry wouldn't let his friend down, she thought; it wasn't in his nature.

Hearing sounds of footsteps coming through the earpiece, Missus started from her daydream, sitting up straight.

"Hello?"

"Jerry, Farmer Parker is hurt. He needs help."

Click.

It wasn't but forty-five minutes when Tall Jerry, Barber, and Bases were standing on the gray back porch talking with Mrs. Parker about all there was to get done. In another hour Randy's pap, Carl Vaas, dropped Randy, Holbrook, Mary, and the Mayor off to help.

Things were going to happen.

Tall Jerry and his friends were about to get it done for Farmer Parker. A friend was in need.

A legend was beginning to unfold. A legend you won't soon be forgetting.



Big Mike's and Missus's house and Delphi Falls.

CHAPTER 2

LIFT THAT CAN, TOTE THAT PAIL

For a Border Collie, Buddy was gettin' on in years. 'Bout blind with cataracts, but he surely knew Farmer Parker's young friend by scent and gentle manner. He missed Tall Jerry but hadn't stepped off the back porch to run greet him like in the old days for more than a year.

Tall Jerry steered the book club with a jerking head motion down toward the barn. The old dog lumbered off the porch and followed alongside, nudgin' the lad's leg as if it was his compass.

Doc Webb turned onto the drive, and he and Mrs. Webb stepped out of his jeep. Catching Jerry's and Mary's eye, the doc waved a thumbs-up in the group's direction, claspings hands and wriggling them over his head like a boxer in congratulations for running off the Nazi crooks.

"Bully for you!" he bellowed his Teddy Roosevelt yell.

Halloween was still the talk in the Crown and promising to be for some time to come.

"We have potato salad," Mrs. Webb said. "Hope you like mustard. We have pickled beets and a dish of apple-crumb bake as well."

"Bless my soul," Mrs. Parker said from the porch. "Will you be taking a jar of my butter pickles back with you? I was hoping to enter them at the fair, but now I don't know. I have plenty, please take a jar home."

“We will, thank you. The apple-crumble is from the Butlers—best in the county—and the pickled beets are from the Chubbs,” Mrs. Webb said.

“More is coming,” the doc said. “Now if you or Fay don’t like apple-crumble declare now, and I will personally take it off your hands.”

“Oh, Doc—now hush!” Mrs. Webb chided.

“You concentrate on getting that fuddy-duddy back on his feet, Mrs. P. Let your friends keep you out of kitchen chores for a spell,” the doc said.

Jerry, Buddy, and the others stepped around to the side door of the barn. By the time they’d pulled the door open and found the light switches, more cars had dropped off dishes, baked goods, and well wishes before heading back to their own chores. Big Mike stopped to pass the word to the helpers in the barn that he was making spaghetti for whenever they were done. They would hold supper for them. He didn’t know Missus had already announced it to the lad when she walked a basket of Moore’s farm apples over to Mrs. Parker.

Club president Mary took charge.

“Tell us what to do, Tall Jerry,” she said.

“What?” Jerry asked.

“You know this barn and farm better than any of us, and you’ve talked with Mrs. Parker. Tell us what to do.”

Jerry bent down and scratched under Buddy’s collar, letting the dog know he was a remembered friend, and they appreciated him being there. He knelt and moved a pail from the concrete ledge Buddy was used to sleeping on while Farmer Parker milked. He lifted the dog onto it and let him “nest-sniff” around a circle or two to settle in. Maybe he’d take a nap.

“Okay,” Jerry said.

He looked around the barn, jogging his memory.

“Holbrook, reach up and switch on the radio. Cows like music.”

He pointed to a ladder built onto a wall in front of a cow stall.

"After that, go up and pitch hay down the chute. Mary and I will put it in front of the milking stalls. Pile it up under the chute."

"Okay," Holbrook said.

"What we don't use tonight we can use in the morning."

"Barber, you and Mayor get the milking machines hooked up and ready. There should be two of them. You guys know."

Barber and Mayor stepped toward the cabinet where the milking machines were stored.

"I know cows are stripped by hand after the machine comes off," Jerry said. "Will you guys need help stripping after you take the machines off?"

"We can strip them, no problem," Mayor said. "But with the two of us working them, we'll need two milk pails. Somebody taking the full pails and hauling them over and pouring them through the strainer and fetching them back to us for the next cow."

"Like a production line," Mary said.

"It can help make it go faster," Barber said.

Everyone nodded they would be watchful and grab the full milk pails, walk them to the cans for pouring through the strainers, and return them to Barber or Mayor empty.

"Randy, find the filter cloths and set up the funnels we'll need to strain the milk into the milk cans—and then can you put a scoop of silage in the manger in front of each stall?" Jerry asked.

"Sure can," Randy said.

"Bases, organize the milk cans, try to line them up, make sure they're clean for Randy."

"Will do," Bases said.

"It's colder after sunset, so if you can watch for the cows to come down the driveway when Mary and I call them in we won't lose heat in the barn if you slide that end barn door open wide for them to come in and close it behind. The cow's body heat will warm it up. They'll know their stalls," Jerry said.

Mary, we'll go call the cows—and then we'll put the hay in front of their stalls."

"I'm impressed," Barber said, while rigging a machine to the teat cups. "Not half bad for a city boy."

"Can you guys be here in the morning to do this all over again?" Jerry asked. "Tomorrow we have to shovel manure into the spreader after the morning milking."

"Morning comes early on a farm, Tall Jerry. Can we stay over at your place?" Barber asked.

"It's already arranged. My mom said yes to your staying over and called your parents. She called the principal, too. He said if Farmer Parker is still laid up on Monday, we don't have to go to school so long as we're here, so we won't be marked absent or tardy."

"Perfect," Mary said.

"My dad's making spaghetti for whenever we get our work done here."

"Meatballs?" Barber asked.

"He makes meatballs and sausage and Italian garlic bread."

"Yahoo," Holbrook shouted while hanging from the hay chute's wall ladder.

Jerry and Mary stepped out of the barn and walked up the cinder drive toward the road.

"Did you ever think we'd be running a farm, even if it's only for a day or so?" Mary asked.

"I'm worried about the hay," Jerry said.

"What's to worry? Didn't you say there's a chute from the hayloft Holbrook can drop it through?"

"I mean in the field on top of the hill—the hay that's been cut," Jerry said. He pointed at the tallest hill on the back side of the place.

"That hill—it's the same one that overlooks the cemetery on the other side. I climb it to come home from our meetings."

"It's already cut?" Mary asked.

“The thing is I don’t know how to hitch anything up—like the horses, the hay lift, or the hay wagon—and we have to get the hay down into the barn before it rains, or it’ll spoil.”

“Seems you knew what needed to be done for milking,” Mary said. “Who’d-a-thunk that?”

“I’ve seen Farmer Parker do his milking a million times.”

“How about the music to make happy cows? I didn’t know that one,” Mary said.

“I don’t want Farmer Parker worrying about the hay,” Jerry said.

“I’m sure you’ll figure out the hay thing. Someone will help us,” Mary said.

Mary crossed the road and opened the barbed wire fencing at the base of the side pasture hill, pulling it back and out of the way.

Jerry rubbed his hands together to warm them in the dusk air. He cupped them into a megaphone over his mouth and copied Farmer Parker’s cow call as best he could:

“Cahobosse! Cahobosse! Cahobosse!”

(Come Home Bossy!)

He paused and looked up the hill.

“Cahobosse! Cahobosse! Cahobosse!”

Wasn’t long before Tall Jerry and Mary saw the Holstein heads appear way up the hill, bobbing up and down, up and down, back and forth, as the cows lined up single file and made their way down the steep, worn, cow path, around the briar bushes. The cows pretty much knew Tall Jerry by now. They seemed contented. Step-by-step they came through the gate, nostrils snorting steam. They crossed the road, looking forward to being milked, and to a manger of oats. Jerry waved a signal to Bases to pull the door open and the cows headed down the cinder drive and through the back door and into their own stalls.

“Let’s count them, Mary. Let’s make sure they’re all in and we didn’t leave any up on the hill,” Jerry said.

Ole Charlie here was busting my buttons watching the goins' on. Reminded me of the time young Jerry asked his brother, Gourmet Mike, when his mother would let him go out with girls, like to the picture show or to a school dance.

"Probably when you don't have to ask," was the answer Gourmet Mike gave him—and it was a good one.



Watching these young folks here—they ain't just milking cows or pitching hay or cleaning and filling milk pails. If someone was to ask a guardian angel to describe when a boy becomes a man and when a girl becomes a woman, I'd say this was about it. They were on the mountain tonight. I'd have to say full-grown the minute they didn't bother to ask—not a one had to ask—to step up and help. Put a happy tear in my soul, it surely did.

The chores done, pails and milking machines cleaned proper, Jerry told them to go to the hen house and use the garden hose to freshen up and then to head on over to the house across the way. He'd be along for supper after he gave a report to the Parkers and told them that they'd be back in the morning.

"You go on, I'll get the lights," Jerry said.

TALL JERRY AND THE SIDESHOW PICKPOCKET

With the barn empty, he stood in the middle and took it in, slowly turning a full circle. The cows were quiet for the most part. Contented they were milked and staying in the barn overnight out of the cold. He thought back to the first time he came into the barn when he was nine. It was an autumn chill like tonight. He chuckled to himself about his first episode with his getting behind Farmer Parker's manure spreader—and that tomorrow he'd be certain to stay in front of it. He walked over to get Buddy and turn off the lights.

“Let's go, Buddy.”

Buddy didn't move when Jerry called. He didn't stand and stretch like the boy was used to seeing him wake up.



He felt the dog's heart, then sat down on the ledge beside him and scratched under his collar one last time. He pursed his lips and looked up on the wall at an emptiness of the moment, trying to get his mind around it, thinking what to do. There was a wall calendar with a picture of a Ford tractor.

“Farmer Parker always said when the horses, Sarge and Sally, give out he was going to get him a Ford tractor,” he whispered to Buddy.

He remembered that and the calendar in Homer and of Dick and Duba going on about sneaking in under a tent at the state fair.

Somehow tonight—in a moment like this—life didn't seem to be about sneaking in to Tall Jerry. Life was about leaving, as well.

"Mrs. Parker, is Farmer Parker still up?"

"Come in Jerry. He'd love to see you, come on in, dear."



Farmer Parker was resting back on two pillows. A rolled-up newspaper was in his hand, watchful under the bedside lamp for a bothersome housefly.

"Son, I can't thank you enough. Your friends are good people."

"We're your friends, too, Farmer Parker."

"We'll have to do something special when I'm up on my feet again."

"Farmer Parker, there's something I've got to tell you."

"How'd the milking go? All right? Find everything you needed?"

"We found it. It's all clean and put away," Jerry said. "We hosed it down good."

"Maybe we'll have a cookout," Farmer Parker said.

"In the morning we're putting the cans out for Mr. Vaas to pick up after milking. Barber and Mayor are good with the milking machines. We're lucky."

"Maybe a hayride."

"Buddy died."

The man's shoulders slumped.

"Sure enough?" He looked up at the ceiling, raised his fists, gently tapping them to his mouth.

"Buddy followed me down to the barn; I set him up on the ledge he liked. I'm sorry if..."

"Now that was one good ole dog. A friend if there ever was one. He'd wear himself thin running up that side pasture hill getting the cows down and into the barn."

"I know," Jerry said.

"That's right, you've seen him do it. Gave them fits, didn't he?" Jerry was silent.

"He surely did," Farmer Parker whispered. "Kept them in tow. A good ole dog he surely was—Buddy."

"What do you want me to do with him?" Jerry asked.

Farmer Parker looked over at Mrs. Parker standing in the doorway, then he looked back at Jerry.

"Where is he?"

"He's lying on the ledge in the barn."

"He loves that ledge," Farmer Parker said.

"I left the lights on out of respect until I talked with you."

Farmer Parker pulled on his bushy eyebrows thinking, then he looked over at Mrs. Parker, still standing in the shadow of the bedroom door, wiping her eyes with a hanky.

"Are the cows in pasture or in the barn?" the old man asked.

"We're keeping them in the barn tonight because of the cold. It'll make it easier than calling them in the dark in the morning."

"Ole Buddy surely needed the rest," Farmer Parker said.

"He was a good dog," Tall Jerry said.

"Let's let him be tonight. Let him get a good night's rest on his favorite spot, with his friends," Mrs. Parker said.

“Go ahead and turn the lights out, son,” the old man said. “I’ll have an idea where you might put him in the morning. Come ask me after milking.”

“I’m sorry, Farmer Parker. Buddy was a good dog.”

“Thank you, son, and thanks for taking Buddy with you to the barn. He loved that old barn—couldn’t have been a better place in the world for him to pass.”

“I’m sorry,” Jerry said.

“Night, son.”

“Good night.”

Jerry stepped away.

“Tall Jerry?”

He turned.

“Yes, sir?”

“Why not let’s leave the radio on for Buddy tonight?”

“Okay.”

“He likes to hear the music and Deacon Doubleday’s early morning farm report. Calms him.”