

Tall Jerry



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TALL JERRY  
AND THE  
DELPHI FALLS TRILOGY

Post War  
Historical Fiction  
CLASSICS

ECHOED LEGENDS

Legend One

TALL JERRY  
*in*  
*Summer of Shadows,*  
*Bodies and Bridges*

First Edition

JEROME MARK ANTIL

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(Summer vacation to Halloween.)

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*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 from combinations of Jerry's siblings (James,  
Paul, Richard, Frederick, Michael, Dorothy, and Mary)

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*To Wyatt, J.O., and Hudson*





*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-crusted 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.



*The cliffs at Delphi Falls tower sixty-feet high.*

## CHAPTER 1

### EARLY SPRING 1953

The name is Charlie, and I'm a guardian angel.

You'd have no cause to know me lest you've read a book, *The Pompey Hollow Book Club*, by Mr. Jerome Mark Antil. That book was mainly the truth about a place in 1949, after the war ended. That story was about the year his momma, Missus, and his daddy, Big Mike, moved Jerry and his brothers, Dick and Gourmet Mike, from a house on sleepy Helen Avenue in Cortland, far out into a hinterland of wilderness, as eight-year-old Jerry chronicled it at the time. The twist was young Jerry never got to see where they were moving until after his family plumb upped and moved.

"Get in the car, son."

"Where we going, Mom?"

"Get in the car, son."

We'll get to the myth soon enough, but imagine you're eight years old and you've just climbed from the back seat of a car filled with cookware, shoes, and moving boxes at a house you've moved to only to look up and see your house setting in the middle of two sixty-foot tall stone cliffs as tall as high-rise city buildings with even taller pine trees, maples, and rotting elms on top.

"Where are we, Mom?"

"Carry a box into the house, son."

Trees on top of cliffs, doubling their height. If you can imagine that, imagine the lonely chill and shadows of darkness those giant stone walls laid on the house below. If the cliffs alone weren't enough to scare the lad, the house was smack in front of two giant sixty and

seventy-foot rock waterfalls, the Delphi Falls, one on top of another, water roaring day and night, crashing down like thunder.

Young Jerry made new friends in the country who, like him, grew up during World War II. They wanted to emulate war heroes, the brothers, sisters, fathers, and mothers they knew or had learned about. Jerry and his friends wanted to make a difference. When he was eight and his friends were nine and ten, they started a club of valor, to do good by catching a crook or two or save a farm animal from meeting up with an axe blade. Best you know the club wasn't about books, as the name implied.

The name was about the only lie in it, truth be told.

Jerry and his friends had saved rabbits from being slaughtered for food.

"Holbrook, I'm in big trouble," young Jerry said.

"Why?"

"I forgot to latch the doors on the cages."

"For what?"

"Three rabbits."

"What's the problem?"

"Now there's thirty-eight."

"Where'd they all come from?"

"Hell if I know."

Young Jerry and his friends were celebrating their bunny-saving victory in the hamlet's cemetery on an Easter morning when young Barber first dreamed it up.

"We need to start a club," Mayor said.

"For what?" Mary asked.

"We'll save more bunnies like we did and maybe catch crooks and stuff," Randy said.

"So, let's start one," Barber said.

"What do we call it?" Bases asked.

Barber climbed up on a cemetery stone.

"Barber, what are you doing?" Holbrook asked.

Barber raised his arm, pointed at the sky.

“Ain’t a mom in the county would stop us from leaving the house for a meeting, even on a school night, if we call ourselves The Pompey Hollow Book Club,” Barber proclaimed.

“Who can join?” Holbrook asked.

“How about anybody who shows up?” Tall Jerry asked.

Kids standing around favored the notion, spat, making the name official.

It was Mary who stood up and offered an afterthought. “With a name that literary we might consider stopping using the word ‘ain’t.’”

Not only could she spell, she could hit a homerun.

Mary was named president.

And here’s the good part.

Truth be told, the Delphi Falls are mythical waterfalls. That’s the legend, it surely is. Jerry didn’t know it at the time, as he couldn’t give much thought to such notions trying to sleep with his concentration being perplexed by a window frame that rattled from the sounds—wind howling through trees and water crashing down shale rock cliffs in his back yard.

It took months for him to get accustomed to the noise.

“Will somebody close the back door, please?”

“It is closed, son. Go back to sleep.”

As with country kids those days, young Jerry and his brothers were given chores. His was walking a mile regular on Saturdays, first down to Maxwell’s mill on the corner of Cardner Road then right and up the steep hill to my place to fetch a basket of eggs for Missus. That was when he still feared the country, and he’d walk the mile up and the mile back with sulks and moans, near scared to fright.

“Do I have to, Mom?”

One day ole Charlie here thought I’d set him down to explain just how lucky a boy he was, moving in front of the Delphi Falls that would protect him by giving him strength so he never had to worry

about critters like hoot owls or foxes or the night winds howling through crackling cold tree leaves, while ole Charlie here was stuck up on this side hill on a half-acre bog with a patch of reeds, an old barn, and a chicken coop. I remember like it was yesterday, young Jerry and me setting there on my porch while I was trying to calm his nerves. The boy turned and studied me straight in the eye, as if he was thinking of how he could stop feeling sorry for his own self and make ole Charlie here feel better about my lot. He reached in his pocket and pulled out a wrinkled road map. His daddy had marked his house with an X and mine with an X to keep him from getting lost. I'll be switched if the boy didn't take a pencil from his shirt pocket, lick on the point and start connecting the hamlets and villages on the map—looking up from time to time to be certain I was taking notice. He began at Cazenovia and ran a bold pencil line from it down to his house, Delphi Falls, then a line up to Pompey Center, then one down to Shea's corner near the school, then up to Pompey, down to Apulia Station, up to Lafayette, down to Tully, then a long line back through Gooseville Corners down the hill to Cardner Road and the Delphi Falls then on up to Cazenovia where he started. He sat back, taking a gander at his work. Then he held it up for me to see.

"Look," Jerry said. "The map looks like a crown. We both live in a crown, Mr. Pitts. Maybe you're a king, living up here so high on this hill."

In one breath an eight-year-old boy took his own fears and carpin' about his two-mile walk and turned them into an old man's coronation, just to make the point a body was consequential.

That happened in 1949.

I died before that book ended. Who better than me, ole Charlie here, their guardian angel to tell this Delphi Falls trilogy? I'll begin the trilogy with the first spirited yarn that began in the spring, just before their school summer break and led to a Halloween filled with spine-chilling valor.

It's the year 1953 I'll be telling you about.

Taking after his six-foot, six-inch daddy, Big Mike, and his six-foot momma, Missus, Jerry was twelve but had grown taller by more than a foot, but he was still a boy at heart. In the day most kids had nicknames for each other, and his friends called him Tall Jerry. His friends had grown, too—Bases, Mayor, Holbrook, Randy, Mary, and Barber, teenagers from thirteen to fifteen, Tall Jerry being the youngest at twelve and tallest at six foot two—but nobody much counted back then. I reckon you'll know the character in each of 'em early enough, as I tell you legends you won't soon be forgetting.

I'd been laid to my rest in the hamlet cemetery in Delphi nigh on four years by the time this one happened. Naturally not being a person any longer, I could be there only as a spirit, and I surely was. And just for the record we angels prefer *spirit* to *ghost*, thank you very much—although we can be ghostly when riled. As an angel I can see around and I can be just about anywhere I need to be at any time I want. Don't need specs no more, and my hearing's better than it ever was when I was alive. I see and hear everything. I can see and hear through eleven houses at the same time. I promise I won't miss nary a detail or blemish in my telling of it.

The club met in the cemetery. Tall Jerry could be seen climbing down from Farmer Parker's hayfield hill with the kerosene lantern I gave him when I was alive. He'd carry it like it was an old friend and set it on my gravestone to light their meetings. I joined them in spirit. They couldn't see me, but I would rise for the occasions. Their sitting around the glow of the lantern warmed the cockles of my heart like a golden yolk of the morning sun warms my cloud.

And bless my buttons, in their secret meetings, whichever wanted to take the floor to make a point over the others, they would stand up taller on my headstone just to give them the muscle their shout might need to make their point.

This spring the kids were coming to an age of leaving childhood ways behind after living through a war they were born into—the

war that taught them more about death and hate than people see in a lifetime.

Most of the kids, except Tall Jerry, who was still growing, were near full grown in body, near as tall as their folks. The boys' voices were changing; the girls blossoming, their brains playing a tug-of-war as they rediscovered the world through young adults' eyes and ears for the first time.

"Why is it I get one pimple right on the end of my nose?" Mayor asked.

Puberty ain't pretty, but if they must get stretched out, gangly, pimply, awkward, and tripping over their own selves, best early sprouting happens somewhere close to home, or as in this case near the Delphi Falls, with friends around.

This story happened just as I'm about to tell it.

## CHAPTER 2

### OLE CHARLIE BECOMES AN ANGEL

With a world at war, the '40s was a frightful time for kids to grow up in. Now in '53, it's summer vacation for my flock, with no more fears of Nazis in Germany, only thoughts of being high school freshman in the fall. Oh, there was the two Nazi escapees, but most folks had forgotten them by now.

Pine Camp was an army military base in upstate New York that held prisoners of war captured in battles in Germany and Africa and places ole Charlie here can't spell. Story was two varmints escaped daily work release while workin' a farm. POW escapees could be scary stuff to a twelve-year-old during the war.

Tall Jerry's dad was Big Mike. Six-foot-six inches tall, smilin' and happy, wearing suspenders and nice ties. The nicest man a body could ever meet. People liked the adventure yarns he'd stop and tell. He had bakeries in Homer and Carthage, and he and Missus owned a barn dance hall over in Cincinnatus, at the Y in the road where there'd be dancing on Saturday nights when the guitars and fiddles would play while caller Wayne Schram would sing out.

*"I like mountain music, good ole mountain music, played by a real hillbilly band. Give me rural rhythm..."*

Missus had her boys, Dick—the scallywag I'll be tellin' you about—and Jerry, selling soda pop, boiled hot dogs, and chips from behind the snack counter while they watched the dancers twirling and spinning about.

Life was good with the war bein' over, but then Big Mike caught tuberculosis in '51 and had to be alone in a TB sanitarium for more

than a year. Jerry grew a whole foot before his daddy got to come home.

Tuberculosis was a disease in the '50s what laid a mean curse. The others were polio and cancer.

Most folks were dying of TB.

Cancer was what ole Charlie had. Like termites in a fencepost. Got it from the sun, they said.

Now I was an old man and had my life and two wars to learn what a friend was, so I'll tell you what a friend is. Big Mike (or Missus if he was out of town) knowing I had the cancer, came up the hill to my farm every other week and drove me, setting right next to them on the front seat of his Oldsmobile or her Chevy, to the University Hospital in Rochester to be treated. Every other week for seven months, one of 'em would come, and I'd be setting next to them talking normal. Right up until the week I died.

Sometimes it's hard to best describe people—like trying to find the right chaw of tobacco—but that pretty much describes Big Mike and Missus. They had hearts as big as Big Mike and Missus were tall.

I sensed when ole Charlie's time come, from my heartbeat the night I lay watching lazy ripples of moon shadows on my bed sheet in the dark. I hankered to waste no time helping Jerry get over his city fears of country night winds and dark howling wood's noises before I left, so I'd talk with him best I knew about taking charge and showing critters who's boss at night outside in the chill and not being afraid of what's natural—snakes, owls, foxes, and the like. While I was able, I showed Jerry how to proper care for chickens and geese and gather eggs—not telling him why he needed to know soon. I gave him my carrying lantern, a full bottle of kerosene, kitchen stick matches, a few wicks, and my hunting knife, case he run into the escaped POW prisoners.

Ole Charlie here died the day I walked out to my barn, stood and gazed at it a spell, the way a body might if they know they were leaving a place forever. I thought of times when Jerry and his

friends would play in the hayloft and tell me all smiles how my barn reminded them of hand-painted Christmas cards, the certain way it glowed with golden straw hanging over the loft and the bright blues and yellows flickering off two lanterns. It wasn't much of a barn—only had one stall for my horse, Nellie, another for my cow, Bessie, a corn manger in the middle—but memories were tucked away in those old rafters. Standing there, I had a feeling come over me that this ole farmer's eternity was about to begin from whatever made me the happiest during the times I was hurting most with the cancer and packing up to go to another place, as be said.

My understanding now, as an angel, is, if something can make a body happy while the body is in pain and the mind knows it's failing, that special happiness is a special kind of heaven-sent sedative for the soul. And that's when I got the big message, saw the light and figured my destiny was going to be guardian angel for Jerry and his friends from the moment that thought came to me. I smiled and said goodbye to my old barn one last time, to my Bessie, promising her someone would come milk her soon enough. I walked to the back gate to say goodbye to my horse, Nellie, and that's when my heart give out.