



FANCY TIES AND TARZAN GAMES



The small town of Charlotte was relatively quiet until the town clock read thirty minutes after three. Then, as the school bell chimed and the doors to Sharon High opened, a throng of young people spilled out on to the streets. It was a typical day in a typical southern American town, but two young men were chatting intensely as their classmates made last-minute preparations for going home.

One was heard to complain, 'If I looked like Billy Graham I'd have a date every weekend too.'

The other youngster pushed himself back off the fence he'd been leaning on and sighed, 'Well, you may be right ... but it's more than looks you know. He treats those girls real nice. He might be tall and blonde, but my sister says he's a gentleman.'

'Yes,' the other guy grimaced, 'He's got the looks alright. All the girls go for that blue-eyed boy and he's got all those fancy ties! A right ladies' man.'

'Come on! Not even you can call him that! He's really into baseball and he's strong.'

‘He’s not exactly muscular though.’ This guy was determined to be down on Billy.

‘Skinny he may be, but he gets up before dawn to go milking,’ was the retort, ‘just like any normal country boy. And then it’s back to the farm straight after school to do it all again.’

‘Yes,’ agreed his friend, as he looked at the town clock’s hand creeping on around the face. ‘We should get going then, shouldn’t we?’

‘Yes, and there’s the bus! It’ll serve you right if you end up sitting next to Billy Graham after all that griping you’ve been doing. But knowing him he’ll be sitting beside that girl who’s just turned you down.’

With a scowl on one face and a grin on the other, the two boys made their way to the school bus.

Billy Graham was sitting at the back with some classmates beside him. There was not a girl to be seen anywhere. Almost every child on the bus that day was from one farm or other and they were all on their way home from school to pick up where they had left off in the morning. Farming families had a lot of chores to do, and there was always plenty of work. Everyone had to do their share. Billy Graham eventually got off the bus at Park Road, not much more than a little dirt lane surrounded by 200 acres of farmland. Peaceful hills were dotted with trees and cattle all round about. A picket fence or two, a corral and paddock could be seen in the distance. Some Jersey cows and calves grazed in the field. This was Billy Graham’s home and he loved it. Waving goodbye to his friends, he was soon making his way down the farm track – away from the jealous eyes of

one young man towards the smiling eyes of his mother, whose unusual Christian name was Morrow.

‘Come on, son. Reese is waiting for you over by the barn. There’s plenty work to be doing.’

Billy grimaced, ‘Back-breaking work, I’m sure,’ he thought to himself. But there wasn’t anyone else to do his chores, and a guy had dignity. Even if the last thing in the world he wanted to do was farming, Billy had to do it. So he smiled at his mother and broke into an easy trot towards the barn.

Farming had been in the Graham family for generations, Billy remembered, as he rounded the corner and stopped for a second to scratch the ear of the family pet goat. As kids they had always been hitching some goat or other to a little cart. Billy and his sister Catherine had great times being pulled around the place. There were good things about living in the country. Farm life wasn’t all that bad.

As he came up to the barn, fifteen-year-old Billy patted the flank of one of the cows that was batting her eyelashes at him from over the gatepost. ‘We’ve got old Grandpa Graham to thank for the farm I reckon, even though folks call him a bit of a rogue. It’s a good job that Dad and Uncle Clyde managed to pay off Grandpa’s debts because now we’ve got a prosperous business.’

And that was certainly true. Holstein, Jersey and Guernsey cows made up a really good herd. All the hard work, which included getting up at three in the morning to milk, had definitely paid off. Billy looked along the field towards his family home. One of the best things about their new-found prosperity was the two-storey house they had been able to buy – and the fact that it

had indoor plumbing. 'No more baths in a washtub on the back porch,' exclaimed Billy. That was a big plus.

In the distance Billy spotted Reese Brown heading towards the barn. Earlier that day Reese had dehorned a bad-tempered young bull. Billy wished he'd seen it. Reese was the family's foreman, an ex-army sergeant who had fought in the First World War. Billy looked up to the man with admiration. There wasn't anyone else he knew who could handle a difficult bull like Reese could. He was something else. Just then a dark brown hand ruffled Billy's hair. 'Hey Billy,' Reese smiled down at the young man. 'Going to help me today, son? Or are you just too rowdy and mischievous to be any use?'

Billy grinned. 'Yes sir, I mean, no, sir, I mean – I'm your man!'

Reese laughed out loud. 'You sure are! Come on, we've got a couple of Jersey cows to shift to the pasture over there and then my lovely wife has a whole stack of buttermilk biscuits all fresh from her oven just waiting for us.'

Billy let out a little whoop of joy. He knew his mother would say not to spoil his appetite, but with a growing boy like Billy there was little danger of that. As his mother watched them through the kitchen window she turned towards her husband, who had come in from the farm, and sighed. 'I still say Billy Frank's got too much energy. That boy never runs down.'

Her husband looked up from what he was doing and nodded, 'That might be, Morrow. But just remember what the doctor said, "It's the way he's built." We must accept it and learn to live with it.'

Morrow Graham took another look at her son and the foreman handling the cows. 'He does all his work on the farm and still has time to play Tarzan in the woods.'

Mr Graham laughed, 'Do you hear all that yellin' and hollerin' he does. He frightens the wits out of the horses.'

Morrow giggled, 'Sure does. He's quite a prankster our son. Do you remember what he used to do to the bus driver?'

Mr Graham raised his eyes to the ceiling. 'Uh-huh. Good job the old man took it so good natured. Every afternoon, as our Billy Frank and his mates got off the bus, they'd reach underneath and turn off the valve to the gas tank. The engine would only go about a hundred yards before it would splutter out.'

Morrow laughed into her apron at the memory. 'What was worse was how that poor bus driver would get out to check what was wrong and there'd be Billy Frank jumping and skipping about, a big grin plastered all over his face. I suppose the driver had a good sense of humour or Billy Frank would have gotten in trouble for that.' Billy's mother wiped some crumbs off the sideboard, a warm smile on her face. 'Well, my son – I wonder what God has planned for you.'

'I sure don't know the answer to that,' Mr Graham said, stretching out his legs before the stove. 'But if we leave the lad to his own devices he'll not do much more than baseball.'

'That's not true, dear,' Billy's mother protested. 'Why he just loves to read those history books of his.'

'Maybe. But if you were to ask him what the most important day of his life has been so far, he'd say, without a doubt, "The day I met Babe Ruth."'

BILLY GRAHAM

‘Well, Babe Ruth is the most famous baseball player this country has. Any boy would have been proud to meet him. All lads his age have big dreams and plans. I’d just You know ...’

Mr Graham nodded his head in understanding. Both parents wanted to see their son show an interest in his spiritual life.

Mr Graham headed back out on to the farm once more. There was a lot to do before the evening meal and family devotions. ‘Billy Frank never really strikes me as being that enthusiastic about the Bible. His mother and I’d just love to see that youngster turn to the Lord and love his ways. Maybe tonight he’ll be more receptive when we read the Scriptures.’