
FAMILY TIES

A SHORT STORY

BY BOB GOODWIN

©2016



It was often said that Jack Morgan had a striking resemblance to a young Clint Eastwood. He had the handsome rough looks and the gravelly voice down pat, but that was where any similarity ended because when it came to intestinal fortitude he was just a big marshmallow.

He wedged himself hard into the corner, behind the open barn door and the wall, and peered through a gap between the palings. Naomi was standing about twenty meters away, looking about curiously.

She moved towards him. Jack gasped. He knew his choice of hiding place was poor, but now it was too late. He felt paralysed.

Naomi was twenty years old and a school companion of Jill, Jack's sister. This weekend Jill had invited Naomi and two other girls over to spend a couple of days at the hinterland farm. Since they had arrived they had done little else but tease and cause irritation. Jack wanted some peace. Why couldn't they just have gone to the beach or gone shopping like most young women of their age?

It was all so much better when it was just Mum, Dad and Jill, thought Jack. That's the way it had been for many years and that's the way it should stay. Visitors always seemed to be trouble makers, and the current crop were no exception.

Naomi entered the barn. 'Jack! I know you're in here.'

Jack moved slightly. He could see her quite well by using only small movements of his head to keep her in view. She fiddled with her singlet top pulling it down at the front so her cleavage was on full display. She adjusted her skimpy denim shorts.

'Come and play with Naomi. You know you want to.' Her voice had assumed a slower seductive tone. It was all part of the game, the teasing and tormenting. Jack could feel his pulse in his throat.

The temptress took a few steps back to the open door.

‘She’s leaving. It will be okay. I’m saved!’ he whispered.

‘Girls, over here!’ she shouted. ‘I’m sure Jack’s in the barn.’

There was silly laughter and squeals as Jill, Emily and Julie ran over to join her at the entrance.

A wave of nausea swept over him. Perspiration ran over his face and dripped from his chin. Why these younger women constantly sought his company had Jack perplexed, despite his mother’s explanation. ‘You’re a strong and attractive man,’ she would say. ‘Of course any girl would want you. The more you are evasive the more they want you. It’s a test, Jack. Are you up to it?’

Test or no test, there was no doubt this would be even worse than last night when they had all just sat down for dinner and Emily piped up with that stupid question...

‘So Jack, do you have a girlfriend?’

‘Would you like one,’ added Naomi quickly.

‘Maybe he would like three,’ said Julie.

‘That will do girls,’ cautioned Mrs Morgan. ‘Jack has always been very shy. He doesn’t like that sort of talk.’

‘Maybe he doesn’t like girls,’ Emily replied.

Jack’s Dad, Harry, raised his head, grunted and flicked a quick glance at each of the three guests.

‘Now, now, that’s enough girls,’ said Mrs Morgan.

'Please Mum,' declared Jill. 'Can we just say grace, I'm starving.'

Mrs Morgan smiled and nodded then lowered her head. Everyone else followed suit. 'Thank you Jesus for our wholesome food. And thank for providing us with the enchanting company of our three guests...

The three turned their lowered heads slightly and looked at each other with slightly unsure and bemused glances.

'...Let your gift cleanse and nourish our guests,' she continued. 'So they may be at peace in the company of our Lord. Amen.'

Everyone "Amen'ed" more or less at the same time, the three girls with a little less conviction than the others...

Now, back in the barn, they were back. This was his area. His retreat. It's one thing being harassed in and around the homestead but not here. *They better not touch my motorcycle.*

Jack had been working on a 1956 BSA Gold Star. It stood in the middle of the barn facing the door. The trimmings still needed some work, but he had just got the motor running after weeks of hard work and now this unwelcome intrusion.

The girls moved to the end of the barn. Naomi immediately scaled the long ladder to the loft. She poked around for a moment amongst some old paint tins, farm tools and boxes but no one was there. She stood high in the loft and pushed both her hands through her long blonde hair.

'Jack, I really wanted you to be up here. It's a great place for a special cuddle with your number one fan.'

She gave an exaggerated sigh of disappointment as she made her way back down the ladder.

Julie and Emily lifted up one end of a dirty tarp holding the edges between their fingers as if it was contaminated. Naomi stepped onto the opposite corner. She briefly studied a large bulging area in the middle, glanced at her companions, raised her eyebrows then jumped on top of it. It collapsed to the ground sending a puff of dust out one side and disappointing the three girls simultaneously.

‘Come on Jack. We want to be your girlfriends,’ announced Naomi.

‘I don’t,’ said Jill emphatically. ‘Why don’t we go for a swim in the dam?’

‘Good idea!’ said Julie. ‘Hey Jack, how about you come for a swim with us,’ she shouted.

‘Yeah, we won’t be wearing anything,’ declared Naomi.

‘I will,’ said Jill. ‘Let’s go.’

Emily looked around. ‘I think he’s near that old tractor.’

Jill shrugged her shoulders, ‘Well, I’m going for a swim and I’m going now! Is anyone coming with me?’

‘We’re going when Jack’s going,’ said Julie with conviction. She got immediate nods of approval from Naomi and Emily.

Jill marched towards the barn door. ‘Come on girls. Forget about Jack.’

‘But we like Jack,’ said Emily ‘We want him to have some fun too.’

'Yeah. Think of us as *therapists*,' laughed Julie. 'So you go. We will be there soon, hopefully with Jack.'

'I think you girls should stop this tormenting,' said Jill. 'It's not a healthy way to behave. It's sure to land you in hot water sooner or later.' The three paid Jill no further attention. She left the barn.

Jack watched as the girls fanned out and encircled the rusty tractor.

His tormentors moved about the building checking possible hiding places. Julie and Naomi climbed gingerly amongst a few hay bales pushing a couple away which fell heavily to the floor.

The three girls were making their way towards the front of the barn progressively checking everything as they went. They were only a few metres from Jack's pride and joy. He swallowed heavily and inched closer to the edge of his hiding place.

'Maybe he's somewhere near that crappy old bike,' called Julie pointing at the motorcycle.

'Let's have a look,' replied Naomi. 'I'm coming for you Jack!'

The critical point was approaching. Jack took another step and stood at the very end of the barn door. His body trembled. His eyes widened. '*Crappy old bike*. Stupid bitches! You know nothing,' he breathed.

A loud knocking sound emanated from the rear of the building. The girls all turned in unison and looked back. The knock, like a hammer on wood, sounded again three times. Naomi was first to dart back to the rear of the barn. Emily and Julie followed.

'We can hear you, Jack,' shouted Naomi eagerly.

This was the moment he was waiting for. Jack hurried from behind the door and went straight to the BSA motorcycle. Out the corner of his eye he caught a glimpse of some movement and a bright light, but he was focused only on the Gold Star. There was no time for anything else.

It wasn't until he kicked over the motor that the girls looked back. The bike lurched forward in a splutter then, after some nervous twists on the throttle, Jack and his bike shot forward and out of the barn.

The barn door began closing. Jill had hold of one of the large hooks on the outside and was pulling it shut. She had a brightly burning oil lantern in her other hand. Just before the door was completely closed she reached in and tossed the lantern onto the floor near where Jack had been tinkering with his bike. The oil and fuel soaked straw lit up immediately and tentacles of fire quickly stretched out in many directions.

Outside the barn Mrs Morgan dropped a timber beam across the four metal hooks and the closed barn door was secured. Jack parked the bike safely away from the building and dismounted.

A moment later Harry Morgan appeared from around the side of the building with a hammer in his hand. Jack sucked in a few deep breaths and was beginning to calm down.

'Thanks, Dad,' panted Jack with a wave of his hand. 'The possessed ones nearly had me.'

'You will always be safe with family, my boy,' replied his father.

'The BSA seems to be running nicely,' remarked Mrs Morgan quite casually.

‘Isn’t she just wonderful?’ nodded Jack. ‘A little bit more work and she will be perfect.’

He put his arm around his mother. Jill took Dad by the hand. The four sauntered back to the homestead as the flames consumed the barn.

The screams from Naomi, Emily and Julie had stopped by the time they reached the verandah of their homestead.

‘So, Harry,’ said Mrs. Morgan after a lengthy but relaxed silence. ‘How’s the new barn coming on? I hope it won’t be too long. There are some more guests we need to invite.’

* * *