

BRENTWOOD

By Grace Livingston Hill

THIRD INSTALLMENT

Synopsis
When the wealthy foster parents of Marjorie Wetherill both die she finds a letter telling that she has a twin sister, that she was adopted when her own parents couldn't afford to support both of them and needed money to save her sister's life and that her real name is Dorothy Gay. Alone in the world, but with a fortune of her own, she considers looking up her own family whom she has never seen. A neighbor, Evan Bower, tries to argue her out of it, and tells her he loves her and asks her to marry him. She promises to think it over but decides first to see her family. She goes to their address, finds that they are destitute, have sold all of their furniture, have no coal, her mother is sick and her father has no job. Her sister treats her like an enemy and resents her offer of help, but finally, after many explanations, agrees to take money to buy coal and food in order to save her mother's life.

"But it isn't her money now! It is mine! And I am going to look

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after my family. We are going to do it together! Quick! Tell me where to go, and I'll have the fixings here in short order."

"It's two blocks down, and a block to the right. Brown's Coal Yard. But there's a bill for twenty-three dollars. They won't send any coal till it's paid. Here! Take back the money!"

She held out the roll of bills half reluctantly, looking at it with a sort of fierce wistfulness.

"No," said Marjorie. "You keep that. I've more in my purse. You might have need for it while I'm gone. Don't worry, I'll find my way. But say, what shall I call you? I can't exactly go around calling my own sister 'Miss Gay' can I? And you know I never knew your name."

The other girl stared. "You don't mean they never told you your own sister's name? Well, that certainly is funny! I'm Elizabeth. They call me Betty."

Her voice was a trifle warmer. "That's a pretty name. Betty Gay! I like it. And—I'm Dorothy—isn't that it? The letter told me that."

"Yes, but they call you Marjorie!" Betty's voice was suddenly hard again.

"Well, I couldn't help that either," grinned Marjorie. "Say, suppose you stop having grudges awhile."

Betty suddenly softened again and almost smiled, and Marjorie saw that her eyes were really lovely when she smiled.

"I'm sorry!" said Betty. "I guess I've been pretty poisonous to you. But maybe if you'd been here and seen your people you loved suffer, you'd be poisonous, too."

"I'm sure I should!" said Marjorie with a sudden quick setting of her lips. "I'm quite sure I would feel just as you feel. And

now let's forget it till we get this place comfortable for you all."

Marjorie turned and put her hand out to open the door, but before she quite touched it something fumbled at the knob from the outside, the door was suddenly flung open with a bang letting in a rush of cold air, and someone stumbled into the hall bearing a heavy burden.

Marjorie stepped back startled, staring at the tall man carrying a heavy sack of coal upon his back and another of small pieces of wood in his arms.

But Betty rushed forward and put up her arms to take one bag from him.

"Oh, Father!" she cried, "where have you been? How did you get it?" And then, giving him a quick searching look, "Where is your overcoat, Father? Oh, you didn't sell your overcoat, did you? Your nice overcoat? Oh, Father, and you are sick!"

"It couldn't be helped, Betty," said the man in a hoarse voice. "I had to get this house warm somehow for your mother. I couldn't let her freeze to death!" There was something warm and tender in his voice that brought the tears to Marjorie's eyes and a great rush of love for her unknown father to her heart.

Then the man suddenly dropped the bag from his back to the floor, put his hands up to his head with a bewildered look, and staggered over to the stairs.

"Father! Oh, Father! What is it?" cried Betty rushing over to him.

"Oh, it's nothing!" murmured the man with an effort. "Just a little dizzy, that's all. I'll be all right in a minute!"

"You had no breakfast! That's what makes it!" cried the girl in deep distress.

That picture of her father sitting on the stairs, his head bowed in his hands, would stay with her always, she knew.

"I'll get you a drink of water!" Betty was saying, "Thank fortune, they haven't turned off the water yet!" and she vanished through the door into the kitchen.

Marjorie saw there was a door from the little parlor where she

stood and opening it she followed and found her sister as she brought back the water.

"I'll get him something to eat right away," she whispered. "Is there a restaurant or any place nearby where they have food?"

"Only the drugstore. You can get a bottle of milk. Yes, bring it back quick."

Marjorie ran down the uneven little sidewalk, breathless with the thought of her father sitting there in the bare ugly house, cold and hungry, dizzy with faintness, and her mother, not telling how sick upstairs! It was too dreadful!

Arrived breathless at the diminutive drugstore she found to her joy that they had a soda fountain and served soup or coffee with sandwiches. There was hot coffee and there was hot tomato soup, that is, it wasn't hot yet but the man said he could heat them both in a jiffy. And he had just two thermos bottles left. He hadn't had such a large order in weeks.

While he was getting them ready Marjorie hurried across the street to the grocery and bought two baskets big enough to carry her purchases, and also a dozen oranges, a loaf of bread, a pound of butter and a pound of sliced ham.

Back at the drugstore she added a quart full of milk to her other purchases and started back to the house.

Arrived at the house she found the front door unlatched, but her father was no longer sitting on the stairs, and she heard sounds from the cellar.

Betty came hurrying up the cellar stairs as she came out to the kitchen, a long streak of soot on one white cheek and her eyes wide and worried.

"He would go down and start the fire," she said in distressed voice. "I couldn't do anything with him." Her voice was almost like a sob.

"He always thinks a woman has to be waited on, but he's had another dizzy spell and he's sitting on the cellar stairs now. Did you get anything?"

"Yes," said Marjorie eagerly. "I brought hot soup and coffee, and here's some aromatic ammonia. Perhaps that will help too. And here, I have two hot-water bags and put it on his lap. Haven't you got a flannel or bit of old something to wrap it in? He ought to get warm right away."

"Oh, you're great!" said Betty and the tears were rolling down her cheeks, tears of relief.

She snatched a nickel cup from the shelf and poured out coffee and with a hot-water bag under her arm hurried down cellar again.

Marjorie hunted around and found plates and more cups and a knife, and cut some slices of bread, buttering them and putting ham between them. When Betty came back upstairs she had a plateful of nice sandwiches ready for her, and a cup of coffee.

"Take a swallow of this," said Marjorie holding out a cup of coffee. "and take this sandwich in your hand. You'll be sick next if you don't look out."

Betty looked hungrily at the food.

"But I must take something up to Mother first," she said.

"No, drink this first, quick. It won't take you but a minute, and you can work better with something inside of you. Take this sandwich in your hand, and carry a cup of something up to Mother. Which should it be? Coffee first, or soup, or isn't she able for those? I've got oranges here. I can fix her a glass of orange juice in no time."

"Oh, wonderful!" said Betty gratefully, her eyes filling with relieved tears again. "I don't know what we would have done if you hadn't come!"

"There! Never mind that now. Just drink a little more and then go up to Mother. As soon as she knows about me I can help you care for her. I know how to take care of sick people. And now, shall I just slip out and have that coal sent up? You haven't enough to last long in those bags, and the house ought to get thoroughly warm and stay so. And while I'm out I'm going to order some groceries. Is that store I went to the best, or is there a better one somewhere else?"

"That's the best near here. They're all right. Ted will be home by and by perhaps and bring the things up for you."

Betty with her sandwich in her hand went down cellar, and hurried up again.

"He's eaten all the soup and is eating his sandwich now. I think he feels better."

So Betty flew away up the stairs, and back again in a moment.

"She is still asleep," she whispered.

"Has she had a doctor?" asked Marjorie. "No, she wouldn't let us. She said we hadn't the money to pay him. But Father is almost crazy about it. I think we ought to have him come just once, anyway, don't you?"

"I certainly do!" said Marjorie. "Where is he? I'll get him before I do anything else!"

Betty gave the name and address. "He's supposed to be a good doctor. I guess his prices are rather high," she said sorrowfully.

"What difference does that make?" said Marjorie. "We want the best there is. I'll send him as soon as I can, and you'd better make him prescribe for Father, too. I'll tell him about it, and you make him. And, where do I talk to the gas people to get that gas turned on? We want to be able to cook some real dinner to-night!"

"Oh!" said Betty quick tears stinging into her eyes. "You are

going to be wonderful, aren't you?"

"No," said Marjorie, smiling. "I'm just going to be one of the family, and try to make up for lost time. Does the water bill need looking after, too? We can't have that shut off. And what about electric light?"

"Oh!" cried Betty softly, sinking down on the lower step of the stairs, "you'll use all your money up!"

"Well," said Marjorie happily, "that's what money is for, isn't it? To be used up?"

"You're really real, aren't you?" said Betty, "I can scarcely believe it."

"What did you think I was, a spirit? Here, write those addresses quick. I want to get things started and get back to help."

She handed her sister a little note book and pencil from her handbag.

"You'll be sorry you ever came near us," said Betty sadly, "having to spend all this money and go all these errands."

"I'm already glad I came," said Marjorie, "and if Mother and Father get well, and you don't get sick, I'd say I'm having the time of my life. It makes me greatly happy to be able to help and I only wish I'd known before that you had all this suffering. And me with plenty!"

Then although she was almost choking with tears, she gave a bright smile and hurried away on her errands.

She betook herself to the drugstore where there was a telephone booth and did the doctor, the coal, the gas and electric light by telephone, and her crisp young voice, accustomed as it was to giving orders that were always promptly obeyed, brought courteous service at once, especially since full payment of the bill was promised when the agent would call.

Then the groceries arrived and filled the shelves with stores.

In the midst of it Betty came down with round eyes of astonishment at the magic that had been wrought.

The chill was partly gone from the house by this time and Marjorie took off her fur coat and her smart little felt hat, and hung them in the almost empty hall closet.

"Now!" she said, "I'm ready to work! Where do I put these things? Are there special places for them, or do I park them wherever I like?"

"Wherever you like!" said Betty throwing open the little pantry door and displaying a vista of empty shelves.

"And there comes the coal!" said Marjorie. "You'll have to tell him where to put that!"

Marjorie enjoyed putting away the things.

Betty came up from the cellar and looked at her.

"Well," she said in her sharp young voice that had a mingling of tears in its quality, "I suppose

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