

# BRENTWOOD

By Grace Livingston Hill

## FOURTH INSTALLMENT

**Synopsis**  
When the wealthy foster parents of Marjorie Wetherill both die she has 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 Ewinger, 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. Marjorie goes out and buys food, coal and other supplies which are joyously welcomed by her sister. Her father comes in sick and hungry but hurries to the cellar to build a fire and get the house warm.

Marjorie was at her side at once, her arms about her, soothing her, putting the hair back from her tired forehead, putting a warm kiss on the back of her neck.

"Why, you're cold yet, you poor dear!" she said. "Come into the hall and sit over the register and get your feet warm."

"No! No, I'm all right," insisted Betty, raising her head and brushing away her tears. "I just can't understand it all, everything getting so different all of a sudden. Food in the house, and heat, and a chance to sit down."

"But my dear, you've scarcely eaten a thing. Come let me get you a nice little lunch."

Marjorie made Betty sit down and eat.

"Mother said the soup was the best she had tasted in weeks," she said as she ate hungrily.

"Have you—told her about me—yet?" Marjorie asked anxiously.

"No," said Betty. "I didn't have a chance yet. I didn't want to excite her while she was eating. And besides Father had come in and dropped down on the other edge of the bed. He went right off to sleep."

"You spoke of Ted. Is he our brother?" Marjorie asked.

"Of course. Hadn't you heard of him, either? He's almost seventeen, and he's a dear. I don't know what we would have done while Father was sick, if it hadn't been for Ted. He worked early and late, just like a man. He's out now hunting for some kind of a job. And he hasn't had much to eat for a day and a half. He had a real desperate look on his face when he went away this morning. I wish he would come back and get something to eat. But he won't come until he finds something."

"Oh," said Marjorie, "couldn't I go out and find him?"

Betty's eyes filled with tears, but she smiled through them, and shook her head.

"I wouldn't know where to find Ted. He goes all over the city when he gets desperate. He'll come pretty soon perhaps, because he said if he couldn't find something else this morning he'd come back and get that chair and take it to the pawnbroker. He felt we ought to have some coal as soon as possible, but he hated to give up the last chair."

"Then she remembered the pantry which she had been putting to rights, setting the supplies up in an orderly manner on the shelves. She stepped on a box to reach the top shelf, and there she discovered a handleless cracked cup with little tickets in it. Were they milk tickets or what? She wiped off the shelf, stepped down with the cup in her hand, and stood there examining the bits of paper. Each one had something written on it.

"Six plain sterling spoons," one said. "One brussels carpet," said another. "Three upholstered chairs."

Marjorie stared at them in dismay as she realized what these bits of paper must be. They were pawn tickets! They represented the downfall of a home! A precious home where these her own flesh and blood had lived!

She went on with the tickets. "One child's crib-bed." "Six dining room chairs."

She stood studying them, trying to make a rough estimate of the entire amount loaned for all those articles, when suddenly she heard the kitchen door open and a boy's voice said:

"What's the idea, Betts, of having the cellar window open? Did you think it was milder out than in?"

Marjorie turned startled, letting the pawn tickets fall back into the cup, and facing him, not realizing that she still held the cup in her hands.

She saw a tall boy, lean and wiry, with a shock of red hair and big gray eyes that had green lights in them.

He stared at her first with a bewildered gaze like one who had come in out of the sun and could not rightly see in the dimmer light.

"You are Ted, aren't you?" He stiffened visibly, realizing that he was in the presence of a stranger.

"Yes?" he said coldly, lifting his head a trifle, with a gesture that in a man would have been called haughty. He was alert, ready to resent the intrusion of a stranger into their private misery.

Then he saw the cup in her hand, and putting down the bucket of coal he had picked from the dump he stepped over and took the cup possessively.

"That wouldn't interest you," he said coldly, reprovingly.

"Ted!" said Marjorie impulsively, "I'm your sister! Don't speak to me that way!"

"My sister!" said Ted scornfully. "Well, I can't help it if you are, that doesn't give you a right to pry into our private affairs, does it?"

An angry flush had stolen over the boy's lean cheeks and his eyes were hard as steel.

"Oh, please don't!" said Marjorie covering her face with her hands, "I wasn't prying. I was trying to help!"

"Well, we don't need your help!" said the boy with young scorn in his eyes.

"Oh, my dear!" said Marjorie, her eyes clouded with tears of sympathy. "Oh, if I had only known sooner!"

"Oh, don't you cry!" said Betty. "You've come, and I can't tell you how wonderful it is just to have it warm here again and have something to eat, and not be frightened about Mother and Father. I'm sure I'll love you as long as I live."

"But you can't help being thankful for the things you've done. Maybe I can make you understand sometime, when I'm not so tired. But you see I've hated you and blamed you for being better than we were so long! I see now it wasn't fair to you. You couldn't help what they did to you when you were a baby of course. Only I never dreamed they wouldn't tell you anything about us. Mother said Mrs. Wetherill had said they would tell you you were adopted, and I supposed of course you knew, and didn't care to have anything to do with us."

"I don't think Mrs. Wetherill knew much about you either," said Marjorie, thoughtfully. "Not till Mother came to see her. And she never told me about that at all. She just left a letter."

"I see," said Betty sadly. "I was all wrong, of course. But I guess that was what made Mother suffer so, thinking she had let you go. She has cried and cried over that. Whenever she wasn't well, she would cry all night. She said Mr. Wetherill came to her when she was weak and sick and didn't realize fully what she was doing. Father was threatened with tuberculosis and Mr. Wetherill promised to put him on a farm and start him out. Besides he gave them quite a sum of money to have me treated. It seems I wasn't very strong and had to be under a specialist for a long time. They said I wouldn't live if I didn't have special treatment."

Betty's eyes grew stormy with bitterness.

"I used to wish sometimes they had let me die. I thought Mother didn't love me at all, she mourned for you so much."

"Oh, my dear," said Marjorie coming close and putting her arms about her sister. "My dear! I think we are going to love each other a lot!"

It was very still in the little dreary kitchen for a minute while the two sisters held each other close. Then Betty lifted her head.

"I'm glad you've come, anyway!" she said. "You've been wonderful already. And I'm glad for Mother that she needn't fret for what she did any more. As soon as the doctor's been here I want to tell her. It will cure her just to know you are here, I know it will."

"Well, you'd better ask the doctor if it won't excite her too much. There! Isn't that the doorbell? Perhaps he's come! But it isn't quite two o'clock!"

Betty hurried to answer the bell and Marjorie lingering in the kitchen saw through the crack of the door that it was the doctor. Betty took him upstairs at once, and Marjorie stood for a minute by the kitchen window looking out.

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"But you see, Ted, I'm not a visitor. I'm one of the family, and Betty and I are working together."

"Betty! Does my sister Betty, know you are here? Where is she?"

"She's upstairs now with the doctor."

"The doctor! Is my mother worse?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen her yet, but as soon as I heard she was so sick I begged Betty to get the doctor. You know pneumonia is a very treacherous disease."

"Yes, and who did you think would pay the doctor?" asked Ted in that hard cold young voice so full of anxiety and belligerence.

"Oh, Ted, I'll pay, of course!"

"Yes, and what do you think Mrs. Wetherill will say to that?"

"She won't say anything, Ted. She's dead!" There was a bit of a sob in Marjorie's voice in spite of her best efforts.

The boy looked at her speculatively and frowned.

"If you are family why didn't you ever turn up before when Mother was fretting for you?"

"Because I didn't know anything about her or any of you except that you had let me be adopted!"

The hardness in the boy's face relaxed.

"Then they heard the doctor coming downstairs, with Betty just behind him, and by common consent they froze into silence. Marjorie with a hand at her throat to still the wild throbbing of her pulses. Then they heard the doctor's voice:

"No, I don't expect her fever to go higher tonight. Oh, perhaps a little more. All she needs is rest and nourishment and good care. Be careful about the temperature of the room. Of course don't let her get chilled. That is the greatest danger. No, I don't think her lungs are involved yet. Good care and rest and the right food will work wonders."

"Doctor, my sister—has been away some time. She has just come back. Do you think it will hurt Mother to know she has come? She has been grieving to have her at home."

"What kind is she? Will she worry your mother, or will she be a help?"

"Oh, she'll be a help. She's rather wonderful!"

Ted stole a sudden shamed glance at Marjorie, with the flicker of a grin of apology in his young face.

"Well, then, tell her about it by all means. Joy never kills. Per-

haps you'd better wait till she wakes up."

When the door closed behind the doctor Marjorie had a sudden feeling of let down as if she wanted to cry with relief.

Betty's face was eager as she came out into the kitchen. She looked straight at Marjorie. PERBRENTWOOD GAL 3

"He thinks maybe she won't have pneumonia after all," she said with relief.

"Oh, Ted, you've got back. I've been so worried; You went off without any breakfast, and you had no dinner last night!"

"Aw, whaddaya think I am? A softie?" said Ted.

"I've been keeping the soup hot for him," said Marjorie. "Here it is, Ted." She placed a bowl on the box and brought the thermos bottle. "There's coffee, too, and a plate of sandwiches." She set the things before him.

"Gosh!" said Ted dumbfound-

ed. "Where did you get all this layout?"

"You don't know what happened since you left, Theodore Gay! A miracle has come, that's what!" said Betty. "We've got another sister and she's just like Santa Claus. She did it all!"

"Gosh!" said Ted, wrinkling his nice mahogany brows, "but I don't think we ought to take it."

"Well," said Betty, "I thought so too, but I found out it was a choice between that, and dying, and she seemed determined to die with us if we did, so I let her have her way."

Marjorie felt a sudden lump coming into her throat that betokened tears near at hand. She felt so glad to have got here in time before her family starved to death! How awful to think they had been in such straits while she feasted on the fat of the land!

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