

BRENTWOOD

By Grace Livingston Hill

SIXTH 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 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. 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. Her father comes in sick and hungry but hurries

to the cellar to build a fire and get the house warm. Her brother Ted comes in, is resentful of her being there at first, but when he finds all that she has done both he and Betty decide they like their new sister. Meanwhile, Evan Bower finds she has disappeared and frantically tries to locate her.

"I'll carry you," she said brightly, struggling with the frantic child. "There! There, you're cold. See, I'll tuck you inside this nice kitty-coat!"

She unbuttoned her coat and put him within its folds.

It wasn't an easy trip, that, but Marjorie was very determined when she started a thing, and at last, breathless and aching in every muscle, she arrived at the house, a little behind Ted and his burden.

By the time Ted arrived with the hand cart the sisters had Bonnie established on a hard little bed on the floor in the kitchen.

What has Ted been after, anyway? Betty suddenly asked.

"I told him to bring that first and then go get a truck and bring all the rest of the things."

"Oh!" said Betty breathless with relief. "Oh! Won't that be wonderful! But—what a lot we'll owe you."

Then they heard the front door open and heavy footsteps tramping in, and the girls flew to caution Ted, and set Bud to watch the door.

"I found Bill hanging round with nothing to do, so we brought everything," explained Ted in a low mumble to Marjorie.

It proved a bit hard to subdue

Bill's voice and step, but Betty was vigilant, and Bud was delighted with his office of door-keeper, and it didn't take long after all to marshal in the poor bits of household comfort that had gone out one by one to supply necessities. When the door shut at last on Bill, and they heard his truck drive away, the brothers and sisters looked at one another in the garish light of a single stark electric bulb swinging from a long wire in the parlor ceiling and drew breaths of relief. Suddenly Betty dropped down in a big shabby faded chair, buried her face in her hands, her weary, slender young shoulders shaking with the sobs that she would not allow to become audible.

Marjorie was by her side instantly, her arms about her. "There, dear! Don't cry. Poor dear! You're so tired, aren't you? But listen! We're going to have a nice supper now and a good time getting things to rights. Come, cheer up!"

Betty raised tearstained eyes and began to laugh softly, hysterically.

"I'm—only crying—because it's so wonderful—to see our old things back again!" she gurgled.

Marjorie smiled. "Well, it does seem more home-like, doesn't it? My, that couch looks good to me. I'm going to try it after a while, but now I'm going to take Bonnie's temperature again and see whether we need the doctor."

But while she was taking the temperature, the doctor arrived.

"I've had a call out into the country," he explained as Betty opened the door for him, "and I might have to be gone all night. I thought I'd better just step in and see how the patients are before I leave. I want to make sure your mother's lungs are not involved before I go so far away."

Betty went with him upstairs. "All going well above stairs," he announced cheerfully when he came down. "Mother's breaking into a nice perspiration, and her lungs are clear so far. I don't expect her fever to go up tonight at all."

He glanced down at Marjorie. "You're the sister, aren't you? You two are very much alike. Well, I think you can be easy in your mind. Anyhow I'll be back in the morning."

"But we have another patient in here," said Marjorie. "I think you'd better look at her before you go. I've done all I know how to do but her temperature seems to be going up in spite of it."

She led the way to the couch. "I don't anticipate anything serious," said the doctor with a smile toward Betty, and another at Marjorie. "It's her stomach, of course. Children will eat all sorts of things, you know. It

looks like a light case of ptomaine, but I think she'll come out all right. Don't you worry," he added comfortingly, "everybody's going to be all right. They'll all be decidedly better in the morning, I'm sure."

Betty looked up and met his eyes wistfully, and Marjorie watching saw the glance and thought what nice eyes the doctor had. Nice brown eyes.

Dinner was ready in a surprisingly short time, and the starved young appetites were ready too.

Marjorie went out to the kitchen to get Bud his glass of milk, while Ted attacked the big beef-steak with the carving knife which had just been recovered from the pawn shop.

"It's almost too pretty to eat, isn't it?" he said. And then he heard a step behind him. They all turned and there stood their father staring at them all in wonder, and sniffing the air.

"I smelled something so heavenly," he said, and he smiled a tired little smile that made him look like Bud. "Where did you get the meat, Ted?" he asked, his eyes resting on the laden table.

"It appears you are having a feast."

"Sit down, Dad," said Ted laying down the knife and springing to draw up a chair for his father. "You aren't fit to stand up."

"Oh, I'm all right," he said, passing a hand over his forehead. "I thought I'd go out and see if I could get an evening's work. It might bring in a few cents and help to buy another bag of coal."

"My eye, you will!" said Ted. "You sit down and eat your dinner, that is, if you feel able to sit up."

The father sank back in the chair under Ted's powerful young handling, and looked about dazed.

"But you haven't told me yet where you got all this dinner."

"Father, I'd better tell you right off quick. It's all in the family. You don't need to be troubled. My twin sister has come and she got all these things!"

The father looked up, with great startled eyes and turned perfectly white.

"Your sister has come? What do you mean, Elizabeth? Do you mean the little sister who was adopted? Do you mean that she has come and gone and your mother and I did not see her?"

"No, Oh, no, Father," said Betty, half frightened at what her revelation had done to her father. "She hasn't gone. She's right here in the house. Here she comes now!"

Marjorie stood there smiling with a plate of bread in one hand and the glass of milk in the other, looking so at home, and so sweet and domesticated that he had to look twice to be sure she

wasn't Betty. And Marjorie met her father's eyes for the first time in her young life, and loved him at once.

Suddenly she put down on the corner of the table the things she was carrying and went to meet the father who had risen to his feet and was staring at her, went sweetly across the years into his arms and laid her golden head on his shoulder looking up into his face.

"Father, I've come home! Do you mind?" she said shyly.

Hungry his arms went round her, and his face came down softly and touched hers.

"Do I mind?" he said wonderingly. "Do I mind? Oh, my little girl, whom I have never seen before! My other little Betty. Do I mind?"

He touched her forehead with his lips, almost as if he felt she was not real, and then he looked up again, while all the other children sat and looked on in wonder. A sadness had come over that sudden radiance of his face.

"But what a home you have come to, my child! What a home! All the comforts gone!" Then suddenly he looked around and saw the familiar sideboard and chairs and table, and bewilderment came into his eyes.

"Am I dreaming, Ted? Or is all this real?" He turned troubled eyes on his boy.

Ted gave him a sharp look. "It's all right, Dad, but you won't be long if you don't sit down and eat some of this beef-steak pretty quick, and I mean it!"

"But, my son, I cannot eat until I understand."

"All right, tell him, Betts!" said the boy.

"Why, Father, it's just that we have a fairly sister with pockets full of money, and she insisted on paying for everything," said Betty.

"Do you mean," asked the father, laying his fork down beside his plate with a look of finality, "that we are feasting on Mrs. Wetherill's money? I could not possibly do that, my dear."

There was such pain and pride in his voice that Marjorie's heart was thrown into a panic. Was pride after all to put an end to her new hopes and plans?

"Father—" she said earnestly, and did not realize how naturally she had called him that, "it isn't her money at all. It is my money. I didn't know whether you wanted me or not, or whether anybody was alive or not, but I had to come and see. I had to find out if there was anybody who really loved me a little bit."

There was the catch of a sob in her voice as she finished, and a mist in her eyes. Even young Bud paused in his chewing for an instant and looked at her sympathetically.

Then her father came out of his sorrowful daze.

"Want you?" said he tenderly. "How we have wanted you! How we have longed for you, and talked about you, and tried not to blame one another, your mother and I for having let you go!"

"Oh, dear Father!" said Marjorie, deeply stirred, and putting out a shy hand to lay upon his. "I'm so glad it is not too late for me to try to make up just a little for your suffering!"

He gathered her hand into his thin nervous one and clasped it close.

"Does your mother know?" he asked of Betty.

"Not yet, I thought she ought to get a good sleep first before we excited her. Besides, there was so much to do to get things going right again," explained Betty.

"Well, this will be meat and drink to your mother," said the father, gazing intently at the new unknown daughter.

When Betty came down to breakfast Marjorie was setting the table. She had cut the bread and laid out the eggs and bacon.

"You'd better make the coffee," she said to her sister. "I don't know how without a percolator, I'm afraid I would spoil it."

"We used to have a percolator when we were at Brentwood, but it got broken in the moving," sighed Betty.

"Brentwood? What's Brentwood? Was that where you lived before you came here?"

"Yes," said Betty, sadly. "It was swell! It was an old farm house that had got caught on the edge of a new suburb when the city grew out there, and it had been fixed up with a great big porch across the front. There was a view out across a valley, looking away from the city, and a little brook in a meadow next to our place. Then the man Dad worked for died, and the firm closed up, and here we are!"

Betty's tone was almost hopeless as she finished. Then after a minute she went on again.

"Can you blame Mother for getting sick and going all to pieces?"

Then the father's voice was heard calling:

"Betty!"

Betty turned and flew up the stairs. In a moment she was down again, her eyes full of excitement.

"Father's told Mother, and she wants you to come right up!" Marjorie turned on her eager sister and kissed her.

"Don't worry," she said softly. "It's all going to come right."

last she had a look upon her as if she had been crowned. The girls sat down in the kitchen for a minute.

"You'll want to fix Mother's room before the doctor comes, that is, if she wakes up in time. If she doesn't we'll just have to let it go as it is. Doctors always understand."

(Continued Next Week)
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