

BRENTWOOD

By Grace Livingston Hill

TENTH 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 and gradually persuades them to accept things they need. When the doctor calls to see her mother she notices that he seems particularly interested in her sister. Marjorie goes to church in Brentwood, where her family used to live, and becomes very much interested in the young minister there. She then sees the nice home there that her family had owned and determines to buy it back for them. She consults a lawyer and makes plans to purchase it in order to give it to her father as a Christmas present.

"Well, I should say not!" said Betty with a catch in the last word like a sob.
Suddenly a flood of happiness rolled into Marjorie's heart. This was her home, where she belonged! They loved her!
Mr. Gay came in a little after six, looking weary but with a strange new content upon him, a new self-respect. Marjorie, looking at the light in his eyes, realized what a hard thing it must be for him that he could earn nothing to support his family, and wished with all her heart that something might come of her request to the lawyer about a position for him.
It was not until the second day later that Mr. Bryant sent Mar-

lorie word that he had the papers ready for her. So Marjorie, amid a howl from the children, started off early in the morning again.

To Marjorie the day was full of excitement. It was so good to know that the matter of the house was going through all right and that she would carry home with her that afternoon the deed which she might do up in grandest wrappings for her father and mother.

Mr. Bryant told her that Mr. Melbourne had told him about her father, and he had been looking up several good openings that might materialize after Christmas. He didn't tell her that he had been commissioned to look up Mr. Gay's record and had found it absolutely unimpeachable, both as to ability and character, but she sensed that he spoke of her father with respect and it cheered her heart.

"Do you suppose it would be possible, if there were an opening, that it could come as an offer from somewhere, and not have him know that I asked about it?" she asked the lawyer shyly. "I think he would feel better about it that way."

And he seemed to understand for he smiled and said: "I should think that might be arranged."

So she went on her way to complete her shopping in a very happy frame of mind.

And then, right in the midst of the last few purchases whom should she come square upon but the young minister from Brentwood, Gideon Reaver!

"Oh!" she said, a quick color flying into her cheeks. "I didn't expect to recognize anybody in this big strange city."

He seemed as pleased as she was. He paused and talked to her a minute, told her how much he thought of Ted, and what a fine fellow he was going to be, and then he hesitated and looked down at her wistfully.

"I was just going into the tea room to get a bite of lunch," he said. "I wonder if you wouldn't join me? It's lonely eating all by myself, especially in the midst of these gay Christmas crowds. It seems to emphasize one's loneliness."

"Why, I'd love to!" said Marjorie, with a sudden unreasoning feeling of having been crowned. She followed him through the Christmas throngs to a table in a corner where there was comparative quiet.

Marjorie, of course, had often been out to lunch with her young men friends, but somehow this seemed the rare experience of a lifetime. How silly she was! This man was an utter stranger. All she knew about him was that he could preach an interesting

sermon, and her brother adored him.

So she relaxed and enjoyed her lunch and the pleasant talk that went on with it.

"I have been wanting to ask you something," she said at last as the dessert was placed before them and the waitress hurried away again. "Perhaps this isn't the place to talk about such things, but I would so like to know something."

"I'll certainly be glad to help in any way I can," he said.

"Well, then would you tell me please, how can you tell whether you're saved or not? I'm a church member of course. But is there a way to be sure one is saved?"

"There surely is!" said Gideon, his eyes lighting eagerly.

She met his gaze earnestly.

"Sunday in your sermon you talked a lot about the new birth, and I don't understand it at all. I've always been taught that if I was good I would go to Heaven when I die."

"So was I," said Gideon smiling, "but that is not true."

Marjorie gave him a startled look.

"No, because the law must be kept perfectly to be a means of salvation, and no one but Christ ever has or ever could be perfectly good, so it would be hopeless for us if that were the only way to Heaven. But thank God it isn't. We have His own word for it! Do you believe the Bible?"

"Oh, yes, of course. I don't know so very much about it I suppose, but, yes, I believe it."

"Do you believe its gospel: that Jesus was nailed to a cross for you, taking all the penalty of your sins by enduring God's righteous judgment upon them?"

"Yes, of course, I believe that."

"Well, do you believe that because He did that God raised Him from the dead and exalted Him in the highest heavens?"

"Yes, indeed, I believe that, although I never heard it stated in just that way before."

"You believe, then, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?"

"Why, certainly."

"Well, then listen to what this says."

He took a small testament out of his pocket and opened to I John 5:1.

"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God."

The astonishment on her face changed into illumination as she took in the wonderful truth:

"Then I am saved!" she exclaimed, her eyes softening with the wonder of it.

"Yes, it is as simple as that," said Gideon, his eyes drinking in her eagerness.

Marjorie looked up, her eyes filled with wonder.

Suddenly Gideon glanced at his watch, and looked startled.

"Excuse me," he said. "I have a wedding in half an hour and I've barely time to make it. I didn't realize how the time was going. May I talk with you again sometime about this?"

"Oh, I should love to have you," said Marjorie, "I know almost nothing about the Bible!"

"You'll have to begin to study it now." He smiled as he turned to the waitress to get the check. "I'd love to help if I may. I have a little book that may help at the start. I'll send it over to you. Goodbye, I wish I didn't have to rush away. You've given me a wonderfully pleasant hour."

"Oh, and you've shown me an inheritance I didn't dream before that I had!" said Marjorie with shining eyes.

As she took her way home an hour later she reflected how utterly changed was her life in just a short week's time.

The doctor was there when she reached the house. He was standing in the living room talking to Betty, telling her about a certain Christmas in his childhood when he had been alone among strangers, desolate and forlorn.

Betty stood in the doorway listening sympathetically to the story, and Marjorie thought she saw a wistful look in the young doctor's eyes. She wondered if he had a home and family now to make Christmas merry for him, or was he lonely yet? If he was how nice it would be if they were only in Brentwood and could invite him to Christmas dinner. Nice to have Gideon Reaver too. But, of course, they couldn't do anything like that in this little house.

Evan Bower was in a state of mind when at last the message got to him late in the afternoon with Marjorie's address. He immediately went to work trying to get her on the telephone.

At last he went out and sent a large box of wonderful orchids to her by telegraph with his Christmas greetings.

He made his plans to slip away from his mother's annual family Christmas gathering immediately after the old-fashioned midday dinner and take a plane to the city where Marjorie was staying. He would arrive in plenty of time to take her out for a late dinner and the evening somewhere. He did not let her know of his coming. It was better to take her by surprise.

The Gays, meanwhile, had been having a wonderful time getting ready for Christmas.

It was the next morning about ten o'clock while they were just in the most interesting part of opening the presents that the doorbell rang and an enormous box arrived from one of the big city florists.

"Miss Marjorie Wetherill," the driver announced. "Sign on the top line!"

Marjorie looked up and smiled. For me? How ridiculous! How in the world did anybody find out where I was?

So Marjorie, laughing, opened the box and disclosed the wonderful orchids.

The card which lay on the top fell to the floor and Bud picked

it up and read it aloud before anybody noticed to stop him.

"Christmas Greetings for Marjorie from Evan Bower."

Somehow, Marjorie felt the eyes of the family upon her in question, though they hadn't meant she should, and the color crept up into her fair cheeks. But she laughed.

"Oh, he's just an old friend of the Wetherill family," she said casually.

"They're orchids, aren't they?" said Ted, almost accusingly, Marjorie thought. "They're about the most expensive flower there is, aren't they?"

"Why, I don't know about the expensive part. Yes, I guess they are considered rather rare. We'll give them to Mother, shall we? I'd like to have her have them. Now, let's forget them and go back to our stockings."

It is safe to say that Marjorie had never had such a happy Christmas in her life. The thrill of giving had never been hers before.

The last present was a long envelope done up in a fascinating box with a great seal and long red ribbons hanging from the package.

"To Mr. George Gay with many wishes for a Happy Christmas that shall last all the year," read Ted as he handed it out

with a flourish. Ted was as much in the dark about it as any of them, for Marjorie had decided not to tell anyone her secret.

But they had to wait some time before the legal document finally came to light, and then there was a note within that had to be read. The astounded father studied the paper and then the note, and read them both slowly, as it dawned upon him little by little that the document he held was a deed to his beloved lost house in Brentwood. But still he didn't quite understand. So he turned to the note and read it aloud:

"Dear Father, This isn't exactly a Christmas gift. It's only an old possession come back to you, and this time entirely free from any obligation. Hoping it may bring you joy and comfort for many Christmases to come.

Your loving 'Nother Betty!" When it finally dawned upon them all that the dear lost home was theirs again, there was first an awful stillness, followed by the biggest tumult of shouting and hurrahing the Gay household had ever known. Father noticed that Mother was crying softly. Smiling and crying like April rain in sunshine.

"Look here, this won't do, Mother! You're going to get all used up. You ought to lie right

down and rest and have everybody keep still!" he said anxiously.

"Oh, no," said Mother smiling through her tears. "Don't you

know that joy never kills?"

(Continued Next Week)

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