

Brenton
Kennedy's
Monument

Lucy Maud Montgomery
1903

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Brenton Kennedy's Monument

L. M. Montgomery

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“I must put up a monument to him,” said Josephine firmly. “I don’t know yet just how I’m going to manage it, but it must be done.”

Josephine’s sallow little face took on an expression of determination, and her thin, faded lips settled into a yet harder line. She looked out from her doorway, over the beds of striped ribbon grass and rich crimson peonies, over the lush clover fields and the pond in the pastures below them, to the burying ground on the sunrise slope of the hill beyond.

“All of my family are buried there, and there’s a real good, handsome white marble headstone to every one of them. Brenton isn’t there, but a monument he shall have just the same.”

Abner Dolman nodded, not knowing just what to say. Secretly he thought it a piece of folly on Josephine Kennedy’s part, but he knew it would not do to say so.

“What good is a monument going to do Brenton Kennedy, when he’s buried thousands of miles away? I don’t know where she’s going to get the money to put it up with,” he said to himself as he went away around the curve of the birch trees that hemmed the little brown house in.

Josephine did not know either. It was a problem, but a problem that must be solved. She had been thinking it over for weeks, ever since the news had come that Brenton had died in the Klondike.

Brenton had been Josephine’s brother, but she seemed more like his mother than his sister. She had been twenty years old when Brenton was born, and her mother died. Josephine had brought him up. Their father had died ten years later and Josephine and Brenton lived alone together. Josephine had a very little money coming in every year from a small investment of her father’s. It was enough to live on if she practiced the most pinching economy. Josephine did not mind that. She was used to it.

But when Brenton grew up she knew he must go away. There was nothing for him to do in Springvale. Brenton was a good boy, honest and steady. Josephine did not allow herself to worry when she had to let him go. She thought Brenton would come out all right. They had a few plans for the future, when Brenton should have made enough money to come home and buy a farm in Springvale—the Morrison farm if possible. Josephine had always thought the old Morrison homestead the most beautiful place on earth.

“And I shall go and keep house for you till you get married,” she told him. “Then I’ll just want a corner for myself and a bit of garden. Only, you must marry a nice girl, Brenton.”

Brenton went to the Klondike. Six months later Josephine got a brief letter from

a stranger telling her of his death from pneumonia. She grieved so over it that her neighbors thought she would fret herself to death. Abner Dolman declared that it was only the hope of putting up a monument to Brenton that kept her alive at all.

Josephine was very determined. It would take time, but she must earn the money somehow. She knew just the kind of monument she wanted. Nothing second rate would do. She must have the best. She had picked it out from Mr Purdy's designs already. It would cost ninety dollars, but Mr Purdy told her he would make it eighty for her.

She picked berries all that summer, as long as they lasted, and took them over to sell at the summer hotel on the mountain. She put her pride under her feet and did days' work for her neighbors. She took in washing for the men who were building the factories at Springvale Center. When the winter came, she knit socks and stockings and sold them. But as she was not strong, her hard work told on her, and sometimes she was afraid that she would not live long enough to put up Brenton's monument.

"And if I don't do it, it'll never be done," she moaned. "It about kills me to think of it."

It took Josephine two years to earn the eighty dollars. When she added the last one to the little hoard in her shell box, there were tears of thankfulness in her eyes.

"I'll go over to the Center to-morrow and order it from Mr Purdy," she said exultantly. "I shall have the verse mother liked so much on it.

'Asleep in Jesus—far from thee,
Thy kindred and their graves may be
But thine is still a blessed sleep
From which none ever wakes to weep.'

If he was with his own it wouldn't seem so hard. But at least he shall have his monument among them."

She went up to see Emma Chase that evening, and found her crying. This was not unusual, for Emma Chase often cried. She had had a good deal of trouble. Her only daughter Emmy had hip trouble. Emmy was twelve years old and had been a cripple for a long time. She was lying on the sofa looking wistfully at her mother.

"What is the matter?" asked Josephine.

"It's Emmy," sobbed Emma. "My nephew was here to see us yesterday. He's a medical student in the big hospital in Cherlotteville, you know. And he says he believes they have a new doctor there who can cure Emmy. There is a new way they've found out. If—if I could afford it. But it would take about a hundred dollars,

Jim says. I can't get it any more than a thousand. I haven't more than ten saved up. It seems awful hard if Emmy can't be cured just because we're so poor."

Emma Chase would not have complained to anybody who was well off. She was very proud and she would have been afraid that they would think that she was trying to get them to help her. But Josephine was poor like herself, and Emma did not mind confiding in her. She did not know about Josephine's monument hoard.

Josephine did not answer at once. Her little face grew pinched and gray in the sunset light. She bent down and broke off one of the day lilies that grew by the hall door. The fragrance reminded her of Brenton. He had always liked day lilies. She felt too miserable to speak and Emma thought her unsympathetic. She dried her eyes with a little dignity and began to speak of other things.

Josephine said she had come up to get a slip of Emma's white pelargonium and Emma cut it for her. She went away as soon as she could and when she got home she sat down on her sagging doorstep in the sweet, windless summer dusk and cried.

"I don't know how I can do it," she sobbed, "but I must. It would be sinful not to. The living ought to come before the dead. I s'pose Brenton will understand all about it. It's some comfort to think that, but I feel as if my heart would break."

The next day Josephine took the money out of the inlaid shell box and went with it to Emma Chase.

"It's for Emmy," she said, "with your ten it will make ninety and I guess you can manage ten more some way."

"But—but you can't afford it, I'm sure," faltered Emma. "And I don't know when I could ever pay you back."

"I can spare it as well as not," said Josephine, firmly. "And I don't expect you to pay me back. It's my gift to Emmy."

After she had prevailed on Emma to take the money, Josephine went to the Springvale commons and picked blueberries all day. She cried bitterly while she picked them.

"I'll have to begin all over again," she said drearily, "and I don't feel able, someway. But I'm glad I gave it to Emmy. I ain't a bit sorry for that, even if Brenton never gets his monument."

When Emmy Chase came home from the hospital she was cured. To be sure, she had to lie on the sofa most of her time still, and was not to be allowed to walk much for a long time. But the doctors said that with care she would eventually become quite well and strong. When Josephine went up to see her, Emma Chase cried again with joy and gratitude.

“I don’t know how I can ever thank you, Josephine,” she said.

Josephine’s careworn face looked brighter. “After all,” she thought, “I guess a living flesh-and-blood girl, saved from helpless suffering, is a good deal better monument than one of white marble.”

A week later, when Josephine reached home one evening, after she had been to the hotel with her berries, she saw an express wagon under the birches. A couple of big trunks were in it. Josephine recognised Hosea Atkinson’s rig. Hosea usually hauled the luggage of the hotel guests to and fro from the station. Josephine thought he was likely on his way to the station now to catch the night express. She wondered what he had called for.

As she opened her sagging little gate and hurried up the path, Hosea came through the hall to the front door.

“Here she is,” he shouted to somebody behind him. The next minute Hosea was pushed out of sight and another man stepped out. He was tall and bronzed, with a soft, brown beard and a pleasant face. Josephine did not think she had ever seen him before, yet there was something about him that seemed curiously familiar. He held out his arms to her.

“Josie!”

Then Josephine knew him. “Brenton!” she gasped, and her face became as white as the day lilies. She would have fallen if he had not caught her.

“I’ve scared you,” he said penitently. “Hosea told me you thought I was dead. I’d ought to been more careful. There, there, it’s all right, Josie.”

Josephine was crying and laughing together. Her first audible words were: “Oh, Brenton, you won’t need a monument now.”

Brenton threw back his head and laughed heartily. “Not much, I don’t. Never felt less in need of one! But I must pay off Hosea and get my trunks in before I begin to talk.”

While he was out Josephine found her way into the house. As yet she was dazed. She heard Brenton’s shouts of laughter out in the lane as he and Hosea dragged the trunks in.

“Just fancy if I’d had that monument up!” she said hysterically.

When they were alone Brenton sketched his experiences briefly. “When I got to Dawson City I had hard luck at first, Josie. I was too late. There were hundreds there next door to starvation. After a pretty tough time, I fell in with a party that were going prospecting away up north, clear of even the fringes of civilization. They were all desperate like myself. I went, too. I wrote you before I started, but the letter must have gone astray. All the adventures I went through would fill a book. There wasn’t

no way of writing to you. We had hard times. But we struck luck at last, and just as soon as I could I started for home. I haven't made a fortune, Josie, but I've got enough to buy the Morrison farm. It's for sale, too, Hosea tells me."

"To think I didn't know you at first!" said Josephine breathlessly. "It's that big beard of yours! But how did that story of your death come?"

"Well, I can't be sure because I never knew it had come until I got home, but I guess it was this way. When I left Dawson there was a man named Burton Kennedy there sick with pneumonia. He didn't seem to have any friends to speak of. I left Dawson pretty quiet and sudden, and he must have died and they mixed him up with me. Jerusalem! You should have seen the folks at the station stare at me! They thought I was a ghost sure. But here I am alive and well, and we are going to have a good time, Josie."

"Emmy Chase is cured and you're home," cried Josephine with a long breath. "I'm the happiest woman in the world. And I am so thankful that I was prevented from putting up that monument. It would have been a dreadful bad omen!"

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Part of a sentence *Emmy was twelve years old*, was duplicated, it has been fixed so the sentences make sense.

[The end of *Brenton Kennedy's Monument* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]