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ASTHMA REMEDY

Lucia's Choice

By SAIDEE E. BALCOM

(Copyright, 1910 by the Western Newspaper Union.)

Robert Merton had made a million and was retiring from business. He had been a liberal and indulgent employer, and when the establishment he had founded was transferred to others he summoned four of his former department heads to his home.

"Boys," he said familiarly and affectionately, "you have helped me make my business successful and profitable, and I am going to make each of you a present of $10,000. I am going to do something else. You are all young, unmarried, have worked hard, need a rest, and I invite the four of you to join me in a trip around the world at my expense."

"That's just like your dear old generous self!" exclaimed Water Morse, always exuberant and talkative. "The idea is fine. It will give you a variation and will broaden us young ones."

"You have been a regular father to us and we will be a jolly party," added Clifton Adam. Just as responsive and as much pleased were Newton Lund and Randal Wickersham, who expressed their appreciation and acceptance of the invitation. In the room where they sat was a full-length portrait of a beautiful girl, the daughter of the house. Four pairs of eyes more than once strayed to this, and Mr. Merton secretly noted this and chuckled. From Morse, the aggressive and boisterous, down to Wickersham, quiet and undemonstrative, each one of the quartet was in love with Lucia Merton. If Mr. Merton had been fatherly, Lucia was sisterly, and her invalid mother as well looked upon "the boys," as she called them, with friendly interest. No one of the quartet was over twenty-five, their lives had been clear and clean, and father and mother believed that some one of the group would some day win the love of their only child.

As to Lucia, life was to her the golden dream of a petted, happy girl, kind to everybody and saddened only by the confirmed illness of her mother. Mrs. Merton had been under medical care for nearly five years. The greater part of the time she was so weak and nervous that she was confined to her room, and her physician was not only puzzled, but in despair over her case. She had taken a marked fancy to young Wickersham, and his sympathy and solicitude for her welfare had somehow drawn Lucia closer toward him than to the others.

There was a farewell dinner and Mr. Merton and his animated fellow travelers started out to circumnavigate the globe. "Each one of us is going to bring you back a famous memento of the wonderful trip we contemplate," announced the buoyant Morse. "We shall ransack both hemispheres for something worth having."

Seven months later, bronzed, travel worn, but pictures of radiant health, every one of the little group returned. There were entertaining stories to tell of what they had seen and exciting adventures to relate. Thus, Lund, who had visited an ostrich farm, had been chased a mile by one of the powerful birds, and Wickersham was lost in the mountains of India for a week while looking up a famous Hindu doctor said to have effected some remarkable cures of disease.

Morse had brought Lucia a string of exquisite pearls gathered in a far East fishery, Adams presented some seal fur trimmings from Alaska, Lund tendered some ostrich plumes, Wickersham had brought a dainty Florentine carved pin, simple but precious. Lucia welcomed these true and cherished friends with warmth and gladness. As soon as the first greetings were over Wickersham said to Lucia:

"I would like to see your mother. Is she better or worse?"

Lucia led the way to an upper apartment, saying that there was little change in the condition of Mrs. Merton. She left the two together. There was a pleased, excited expression on Wickersham's face when he returned downstairs, and Lucia looked curious. With the following day her mother was in improved condition, and this went on until by the end of the month she was able to be about all of the time, and a few weeks later all her ailments had disappeared.

"Oh, mother!" spoke Lucia one day, "what does this happy transformation mean?"

"It means Randal Wickersham," replied Mrs. Merton. "We have both held a secret I shall now disclose to you. While in India, Mr. Wickersham heard of a wonderful native doctor who had performed some incredible cures. He nearly lost his life in reaching the remote home of the man, to whom he described all my symptoms. The Hindu diagnosed my case as a poison of certain nerves, gave him a precious phial of medicine, and I am perfectly well again, thanks to the thoughtfulness and faith of Mr. Wickersham. We did not tell you or the others for fear of disappointment."

The day came when, within a few hours Lucia Merton knew that she must decide which one of her four lovers she would accept. She looked with pleasure at the beautiful ostrich plumes, the seal trimmings, the string of pearls, and then at her mother. The gift of quiet, unassuming Randal Wickersham had been life, health, happiness for her dear mother. Gratitude, devotion, love directed her girlish choice without hesitation, and her parents were content.

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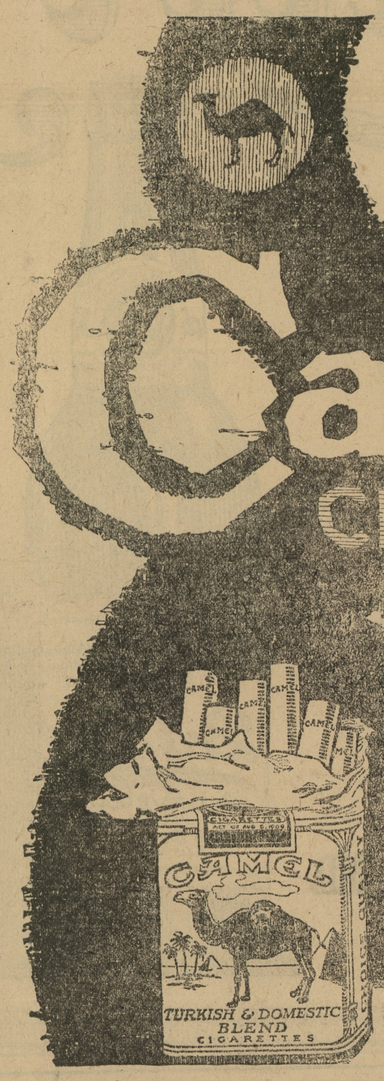

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