A LUCKY FIND.

A True Story.

BY CARLOTTA PERRY.

CHAPTER I.

"If I find a purse on the street, this morning, with lots of money in it, I *won't* advertise it; not I. I'll bring it home and hide it under the bed, or in the well, or some such safe place, and then we'll draw down the blinds and play we're not at home till the danger of being found out has passed; and then"—Bessie Bently hesitated as to just what would come next.

"Well, what then?" said her mother, looking up from her sewing, "what would you do next?"

"I'd get myself a new pair of boots; just look at the shabby foot of me," said Bessie, showing a dainty foot in a rather worn boot; "and gloves and a new gown—blue nun's veiling—and a hat to match. What would I do with it, indeed! And you suffering, just *suffering*, for a new black silk!"

"So you think you'd enjoy wearing finery obtained in that way?" asked her mother.

"Enjoy it? Yes, of course I'd enjoy it. I'm a communist, I am. I just wish some of these rich women who spend small fortunes on their lap-dogs couldn't sleep a wink of good, sweet, refreshing sleep till they were obliged to give me half of what they waste; I do indeed."

"I'm surprised at you, Bessie Bently. I never heard you talk so."

"You never saw me feel so; my heart is broken over this ragged glove, and gloves do cost so much, and you brought me up to think that a lady should always wear neat gloves and be daintily shod; and behold the result of your teaching. Having imbibed these principles I am debarred from practicing them; hence these tears." Bessie looked smilingly at her mother as she spoke. "I speak metaphorically of course," she said; "the tears are in my heart."

"I've often told you," said Mrs. Bently calmly, "that the habit of receiving gifts was deteriorating to character, where, I mean, there is not the ability to make a return of gifts, and I thought you agreed with me."

"I do, in theory; but just now I'm perfectly willing to be deteriorated. I long to be deteriorated; nothing would make me so happy. You see it's very fine to hold these exalted views, but it spoils a good deal of fun. It's like slang; it's very improper and unladylike to use it, but one misses making a good point now and then by being too proper to use it. But there's no danger, my dear, precise mamma, of my lowering my—no, your standard. There's nobody meditating the giving of a fortune to us, and so I'll put a little more polish on these rusty toes, and take a stitch in these forlorn gloves and go down town and *find that pocket-book!* It shall have a fat roll of bills in it, and two or three gold pieces, and not a scrap of writing of any sort to tell to whom it belongs; and I'll bring it home, and after a little time has elapsed I'll spend it, the money, I mean, in riotous gloves and shoes and gowns, and all of the vanities whereon my vain and foolish heart is set. And I shall walk about a deteriorated damsel, but very fair to see."

"Externally," said her mother, "but the King's daughter was all beautiful within."

"Bother the King's daughter," said Bessie; "you see I'm beginning to deteriorate as fast as I can."

"I see," said Mrs. Bently, "it all goes together."

When Bessie was dressed for the street she admitted to herself that in spite of what she deplored so strongly, her appearance was very fair. "O, I know it," she said, when her mother remarked on the fact, "I know it; but the fact remains that this gown has seen its best days; that it's just all I can do to keep this feather in curl, and that I fished this bit of cardinal ribbon out of the rag-bag. I am conscious of a look of extreme elegance." And she made a little grimace as she spoke. "I resemble my mamma, I am told, but I have a sort of whited sepulchre feeling, for there's no good and satisfactory reason why I should look fit to be seen. I haven't a rag on that the old clo' man would buy."

Then, seeing the pained look on her mother's face, she stooped and kissed her tenderly, saying:

"Don't be fretted, mamma dear; I've got one of my little spells on. I dare say I shall come back in an angelic frame of mind, and quite reconciled to the state of my wardrobe."

There wasn't a prettier girl in all Brainerd than Bessie Bently, nor a sweeter tempered one. And in spite of limited means, there was not one who always looked more daintily elegant than she. The widow of a college professor, Mrs. Bently was left with a small but certain income, and had wisely lived within it. This had necessitated many small economies which she found no difficulty in practicing, but which Bessie at times rebelled against sorely. Every one with tastes at variance with their pocket-books knows how it is.

There was never actual want under the Bently roof. Nobody ever thought of such a thing as offering a service because it was needed. It would have been a daring person who would have approached the dignified lady or the proud daughter with an inquiry as to their larder or coal bin. Still there were some times when the income had to be stretched to the utmost, and then failed to cover the needs.

She did find the pocket-book! When she came into the house she threw it into her mother's lap, with a careless "Here it is," much as if finding pocket-books on the street were an every day occurrence.

"Bessie Bently!" exclaimed her mother. "What under the sun is this?" holding up the leather article as though it were a natural curiosity.

"Pocket-book, of course. I don't wonder you fail to recognize such a plethoric one," said that calm young person.

"But where and how did you get it? Tell me this minute."

"Be calm," said Bessie. "Though I admit the occasion warrants some excitement, still I beg you be calm. I said I was going out to find a pocket-book, and I have kept my word. I am very careful always to keep my word. I've had excellent training, you know. I was going down Hammond Avenue, musing upon the mutability of human affairs, and also wondering if I could get a jacket out of my old plum-colored polonaise—No, that wasn't it, I was planning a polonaise out of the jacket, when my eagle eye spied this on the grass just at the edge of the sidewalk. Like the before mentioned eagle I swooped down upon it. I saw that it was the article my soul longed for, and I straightway, having first looked around to see that no possible owner was in sight, transferred it from its resting place upon the dewy sward to the more proper but less poetical shelter of my pocket. I went in Nell Gray's, on my way home, and under pretext of arranging my bangs, so surely does one piece of duplicity make place for another, I sought the privacy of Nell's room long enough to examine my treasure. It inventoried as follows: Five ten dollar bills, three twenties, a ten dollar gold piece, a cuff button marked 'R.,' a silver tooth-pick, a note signed 'Nora' inviting 'Dear Dick' to spend Xmas with them. The note had no address, and was without an envelope."

"And is there nothing to tell you anything more about the owner?"

"Nothing that I have been able to discover. There may be some secret passage, some sliding panel or hidden chamber that may disclose more to us, but I have not been able so far to find any such. There may be a spring which, if we can touch it, may reveal the name of the evidently comfortably-situated gentleman who had the misfortune to lose this charming book."

"You speak very lightly, daughter. What do you propose to do with it? It is the strangest thing that you should have found this after your careless speech of this morning."

"It is strange, passing strange. It is a direct confirmation of several old sayings, 'Many's the true word spoken in jest,' 'A bird in the hand's worth two in the bush,' 'All things come round to him who will but wait,' 'Procrastination'"—

"Bessie Bently, stop that foolishness. I ask again, what are you going to do with this thing?"

"Let me see: Five tens, that's fifty; three twenties, that's sixty; fifty and sixty make one hundred and ten; then the ten-dollar gold piece, that makes one hundred and twenty. So much in money, not to mention the smaller items. One hundred and twenty dollars would do several things."

"Bessie! Bessie!"

"It would buy you that silk gown. Well, perhaps we would compromise on a very nice cashmere. I could revel in new apparel that would do justice to my attractions. Wouldn't we look beautifully, mother mine?"

"You would not look well to me in garments so obtained. Perhaps this money belongs to some poor working woman or working man."

"No, the silver tooth-pick and sleeve button belong to no working man or woman. Is it possible that you do not discover an irresistible air of elegance and general high-tonedness in this receptacle of filthy lucre? The owner of these bank notes wears fine clothes, carries a cane, drives fast horses, and possibly owns a yacht. He will not miss this trifle, and will probably never take the trouble to advertise."

"Nevertheless," said her mother.

"Nevertheless," replied Bessie, "having been trained in so hopelessly correct a fashion, I suppose that I shall walk down to the printing office and have the 'ad' inserted, and, O! the tyranny of having high principles, I shall even send one to the city paper in my efforts to restore the money to its careless owner. I shall do it with the secret hope that the aforesaid owner may never see the notice. Of course I will do my best to prove that my training has been what it should be. I shall be honest, but I shall go without new shoes, and the man or woman who finds it in my possession will spend it on his cigars or her poodle and never know the pang that these ragged gloves give my soul, or how sharper than a serpent's tooth is the pain this shabby little Derby hat inflicts upon my sensitive heart. Alas, 'tis beautiful to be honest, but 'tis inconvenient."

"I am sure, Bessie, that you'd no more use that money without first trying to find its owner than I would," said her mother. "Would you, dear?"

"You have no idea," said Bessie, "of the dreadful depravity of my nature. I dare not confess to you the height and depth of the spirit of covetousness that possesses me. However, I will proceed to write the hateful words that shall bring my dream to an end. Let me see, what shall I write? 'Found, a pocket-book,' I suppose is the correct formula. I wonder how soon we may expect to hear from the owner. I presume the avaricious wretch is watching the papers to catch some sign. I'll make him pay for the advertisement, anyway, and I'll make him prove his property beyond question. Hope he'll never come though."

"Dear Bessie," said her mother, "I wonder if you do really want that money as much as you pretend. I am sorry we are not rich if you feel so bad about it."

"Mamma, be at rest in your mind," said that young lady. "My mercenary spasm is wearing off; the spirit of my ancestors is in the ascendant; better a calico frock and ragged gloves and independence therewith than cloth of gold bought with your neighbor's money. O! my principles are cast-iron, mamma, only there are moments when they have the appearance of being wood, and rotten wood at that."

No answers came to the advertisement. After a week passed Bessie tried again. "This time," she said, "I am going to depart from the accustomed order. See here, mamma," and she read: 'If Dear Dick will send to, or call at Dr. Dale's office, in Nortonville, he will find the mate to his sleeve-button and something else to his advantage—after paying for this advertisement.' There, I'll tell Dr. Dale what I have done, and if anyone comes to inquire, the dear old doctor will attend to it. If this does not bring a response I hardly know what I will do next."

CHAPTER II.

But it brought a response. Three days later a very stylish turn-out halted in front of Mrs. Bently's residence. Two gentlemen, one tall and dignified and gray-bearded, the other tall, elegant, blue-eyed and blonde, alighted. Bessie looking uncommonly pretty in a pink polka-dot Mother Hubbard gown, sat on the little front porch as they came up the walk. She had time to be very grateful that she had on a becoming color, as she also questioned rapidly in her own mind which one was "Dear Dick." Of course she decided that it must be the younger one. The novelty of the situation brought a brighter color into her cheeks. She was almost ashamed of the absurdly-worded advertisement. While this was passing in her mind, the two gentlemen were thinking what an uncommonly pretty girl she was, what soft, sweet eyes, and what entrancingly pretty hair that the wind had tossed just enough to "fluff" into a distractingly beautiful disorder.

Bessie's calm exterior gave no evidence however, of the little tempest that was choking her impulsive little heart, and the two gentlemen looked as though recovering lost pocket-books was the one aim and purpose of their lives.

"Yes," said Bessie, in reply to their inquiry, "I caused the advertisement you refer to to be inserted in the *Herald*. I had previously advertised more explicitly, but without obtaining a reply. I therefore adopted a manner more striking, if less—less—less elegant."

They were looking at her so intently that she knew they thought her notice very ill-bred and unladylike.

"I lost it," said the elder gentleman, "on my way to the train. Such a thing never happened to me before, and I cannot see how it did this time. I—"

"If you will describe the article," said Bessie, "I shall take great pleasure in restoring it to you."

She was just a little disappointed that he was "Dear Dick." She mentally decided that it was perfectly absurd to call a man of his years by such a boyish name. "If you will describe it," she continued.

"It was a brown pocket-book, and contained a pair of sleeve buttons, and a tooth-pick—a gold one, and several bill—ah—ah—I don't know just how much."

The gentleman was a little embarrassed, and turned in a helpless sort of fashion to the younger one, who looked smiling and serene, and was not in the least touched by his companion's distress.

"You seem to be mistaken," said Bessie, coldly, "the pocket-book does not contain a pair of sleeve-buttons, a gold tooth-pick, nor is it of the color you mention. It contains quite a sum of money, but I think if it was yours, as you say, you would be able to describe it more accurately."

"It is not my property, Miss Bently, though—"

"Not your property! What are you here for, then?" Little Bessie was indignant. She had read and read of the city villains. She had known of gross impostures practiced upon unsophisticated people by the smooth tongued and designing; she imagined that these two elegant looking men had laid a plot whereby to possess themselves of the "something to advantage" she had advertised. She thought she saw the evil under their outward fine bearing, and she was sure that she saw a look pass between them that she could not understand. There was some complicity in wickedness here.

Suddenly the elder gentleman turned to the other, saying: "Dick, I am afraid you'll have to come to the rescue. You needn't sit there so smiling, while I am convicted by this young lady of being a hypocrite and a base fraud.

"Miss Bently," said the other, "the property in your hands I think, beyond a doubt, is mine. This gentleman and myself were in this beautiful little village for one day, not very long ago. In taking an early train I carelessly left my pocket-book on the bureau in my room—a strange thing for a man to do; men, you know are so rarely careless in such matters. Had I been a woman, now, it would not have been strange at all. But—well, I left it there, and once seated in the car discovered my loss, and immediately telegraphed to this gentleman, my uncle, to find it and bring with him. His reply came 'all right.' But alas, Miss B., for my faith in his carefulness, he dropped the thing on his way to the train. We were about starting on an important business trip to the West. The business admitted of no delay. We went at once, first leaving an advertisement describing the lost property and offering a large reward. This did not reach your eye, and your notice, owing to our being away, failed to be seen by us. The day we returned, however, I took up the paper containing your notice to 'Dear Dick',"—he did not seem to see the bright color come to Bessie's face—"and remembered the note in the pocket-book, and also that the notice hailed from the town where it was lost. We decided to drive down and see, and as my uncle really lost the book, I coaxed him to play the part he did. He is, however, I am bound to say, a failure, for though I had instructed him again and again as to the contents of the purse, he failed at the last moment. We did it simply for a little amusement, and again, because, being a strictly truthful young man, I could not say that I lost the article you found. You see, Miss Bently, it really took us both to tell the truth in the matter."

"I see," said Bessie, "your explanation is entirely satisfactory. Now we will hear your description of the contents of the much-talked-of purse."

Here followed a close description, including the note signed Nora. Bessie noticed that he volunteered no information in regard to that lady, and instantly made up her mind that she was a sweetheart.

"I think," she said "beyond a doubt you have proven your right to this article," and she took it out of her desk as she spoke.

That moment her mother, who had been out for a walk, came into the room. Explanations were in progress, when the elder gentleman said: "Surely I am right. You used to be Helen Lacy. And you ought to remember me, Richard Winlaken."

"I do remember you," said the lady, simply. "I do remember you well, and I am glad to see you after so many years." There was just the least trouble in the lovely widow's voice, as she said this, and the faintest pink stole to her delicate cheek.

"This is delightful," said Bessie; "I shall be quite reconciled to giving up this money, which I have had so many struggle over, since it has brought you back an old friend. There is but one thing more," she said, with perfect gravity, "before I place this in your hands," this addressed to the young gentleman, "and that is to pay for the advertisement."

"Bessie," said her mother, "it seems to me you are very business-like."

"So I am. I should otherwise be the only one in this transaction unbenefited. Mr. Winlaken has found an old friend in you, and you have found an old friend. This gentleman"—"also Mr. Winlaken" he interposed—"has found his money. I seem to be the only one who hasn't gained anything by it, and I don't intend to lose the price of my advertisements."

"Your business talent is to be commended, Miss Bently, and I shall reimburse you immediately."

This little bit of badinage brought a genuine laugh that made amusing what might otherwise have been awakened. A laugh will sometimes go further toward making people acquainted than any amount of wise conversation; and they found it so.

The gentlemen spent the evening. Mr. Winlaken, the elder, and Mrs. Bently discussed old times and old friends, and told each other much of what the years had done for each since they met.

But the younger people, not having old times to discuss listened, or talked of the new as inclination dictated.

And when they drove home, the two, in the still summer night, each one in his heart was hopeful that he had found something to his advantage. But they said not a word of all that was deepest in their hearts.

Bessie, as she sat with her mother for her usual good night visit, declared that she gave up the hope of her new gloves and gown with a great pang, "but I am sustained," she said, "by the thought that I have lived up to my principles, and that the elegant young gentleman will never know how thoroughly I coveted his shekels." Then she wondered a little about Nora, declaring with unnecessary emphasis, that she cared nothing about her anyway.

The delicate, tender-hearted widow called to mind a summer evening long past, when a hasty word, repented soon, sent away from her the man she loved—the man who loved her. She had had a loving husband and a happy married life, but she knew that her heart was not buried in the grave that she could see from her chamber window.

How did it all end? Just as it ought. It grew to be a common thing for the two to drive out from the city to spend a day or two in the pretty country town; and when, one glorious evening, Bessie and the younger Mr. Winlaken returned from a walk together, they saw, in the quiet, moon-lit parlor which they entered without warning, the elderly lovers in each other's arms.

"Bless you, my children! bless you!" cried the nephew, "and," he added more seriously, "bless us too!" drawing Bessie to his side.

"Well, I declare!" said his uncle, "I never saw anything like it; curious, and perfectly proper too, that since we both had a hand in losing that pocket book, that we should both gain the 'something to advantage.'"

"And," retorted Bessie, "equally strange and just, since, I never, never should have returned it to you except for my mother's counsel and training, being like Bella Wilfer, 'so mercenary,' that she, as well as I, should reap the 'large reward,' which I believe you say you offered. Truly this is a strange world, and honesty is the best policy."

"And I am 'Dear Dick' to some one beside my sister Nora," said that young man, in an exultant tone. "'Dear Dick' before ever you saw my face."

"What could have been luckier," said the happy elder lover, "than my losing that pocket-book."

"Nothing," said Bessie, softly, "except my finding it."