

# THE PAGAN LUCKY BEAN.

**B**ATH, Swindon, Reading and Paddington!"

An energetic servant of the Great Western Railway Company announced this in a peculiarly raspy voice as he patrolled the platform of that dull and uninteresting station, Bristol.

Miss Montague bought a daily paper. Then she walked leisurely the length of the train and selected an empty first-class carriage. Into this, preceded by an obliging porter, she arranged her three bags artistically, she stepped, and aiding her golf cape to the porter's handwork, she gave him a shilling with a smile and proceeded to ensconce herself in a corner seat comfortably.

Miss Montague was just thirty. She didn't look it. A fortnight of balmy Somersetshire air coming as a break after the strenuous but regular routine of journalistic work in London, had flushed her cheeks with a becoming pink and brightened her earnest—some people called them sad—eyes. But she did look what she was—a woman with a purpose—a woman to whom life had been both kind and cruel.

The first was evident in the undoubted air of affluence about her. The second in the unaltered expression of her face in repose. It was obvious that the successful writing of short stories and articles had not entirely satisfied her. She opened one of her bags and proceeded to extract therefrom a pencil and notebook.

"Beg pardon, miss, there be a train at three-five-goes straight through without er stop. Thought p'raps you'd like to wait, miss?"

It was the porter, refreshed by his unusually inflated tip, and anxious to show it.

"I think not," she said. "I may as well be here as wait at the station, now I'm settled. I've plenty to do."

"Yes, miss?"

The porter was interrogatively agreeable. "I don't expect you'll get anyone in till Swin—"

"He was in the act of continuing when his words received the lie direct by the advent of an eminently respectable young person, leading a little girl by the hand.

The eminently respectable person, who looked agitated, paused outside Miss Montague's carriage, hesitated, requested the obliging porter somewhat curtly to move, and finally lifted the little girl in.

"Would you be so kind as to keep an eye upon her, miss," she said very deferentially to Miss Montague. "She's going to Swindon, and none of us can be spared to go with her. She won't be any trouble—she's a good little one. Aren't you, Miss Florence?"

"Yes," said Miss Florence.

Miss Florence might have been five—she might have been six. She clasped a goliwog of peculiarly hideous appearance, and her gaitered legs stuck stiffly out across the cushions of the carriage. That was Miss Montague's first impression.

Later on she became conscious that Miss Florence was a compound of brightly-tinted cheeks, enormous brown eyes, many capes and a coquetish Puritan bonnet tied beneath a very dignified chin.

While she was absorbing these details, a whistle shrieked. The porter outside—no doubt a little aggrieved—shouted sulkily that if the eminently respectable young person didn't intend to be carried on, she must "come out of it."

She made ready to "come out of it" accordingly with a little flurried shriek, dabbing a kiss meant for Miss Florence's face on to the bow of the Puritan bonnet. Final doors banged—the aggressive noise of escaping steam mingled with steady puff-puff of the engine.

The eminently respectable young person disappeared abruptly. She was lifted out backwards; but whether her frantic gestures signified thanks to herself or annoyance with the porter, Miss Montague never discovered. She was left alone with her charge.

"Now, dear, be a good child, adored them timidly, and with little vague thrills of rapturous longing. They were a part of her unfulfilledness. She looked across very kindly at the child who sat facing her, and decided that a more fascinating scene she had seldom seen.

"No, dear, it's a bad headache," she said. "I'm afraid not—at least not yet awhile."

Miss Montague twisted one of Florence's bronze curls round her finger, then she kissed the serious little face. The kiss was enthusiastically returned, and she felt vaguely comforted. An older woman would have jarred just then—this child didn't.

For some time they sat quite still, and then Florence wriggled to her feet. She had a mighty plan fermenting in her small but nimble brain. She loved this kind lady with a nice smile whose name was the same as her own, and who kissed goliwogs and provided buns with equal alacrity.

This kind lady was in trouble—a trouble worse than stomach-ache or tight elastic. Comforted by those who have done a good Channel "best."

"Now, I do not, for a moment, pretend to be an infallible authority on the peculiarities of the Channel; but, at the same time, as one who has tried to emulate Captain Webb's memorable feat of just over twenty-one years ago, I can, at least, speak from personal experience.

"In the first place, I should like to say that, really to appreciate the extraordinary difficulties of the Channel swim, it is necessary to have made an attempt to swim it.

Were it possible to make an attempt to reach the Continent in a bathing suit, in perfectly calm weather, with smooth seas all the way over,

"I seeps wiv it on," she said, triumphantly. "I seeps grandpa, and he said, 'Bless my soul, the child's a pagan!' Is a pagan a nice thing to be, Miss—Miss Big Florence?"

"That depends," said Miss Big Florence, guardedly. "Some pagans were very nice, but grandpa was only joking. You're not a pagan—you're a very dear, little, modern girl. Won't you have a bun, childie?"

An inspiring recollection of a bag of buns she had brought with a view to her own tea had struck her suddenly. She reached for them.

"Thank you," said the child. She took a bun with the utmost gravity, and pulling off her gloves, rolled them into a ball and settled herself in a corner and made a painstaking pretense of sharing her refreshment with the goliwog.

Miss Montague had put away her pencil and notebook. This was obviously not the time to jot down ideas on "Vigorous Philanthropy."

She must hold herself in readiness to continue the conversation when the roscobud mouth opposite should be less clogged with bun than at present. She picked up the paper, and glanced down the columns on the first sheet of news.

Quite suddenly a name caught her eye—a name in that sinister list which follows the marriages that serves to remind all who read that joy and sorrow walk hand-in-hand.

Surely it stood out in letters some size larger than any of the others, or was it only her smarting eyes which magnified it?

"Maddock!" It beat an agonized tattoo in Florence Montague's brain. For several seconds she stared, look no further. And when she did—oh, Heaven!—when she saw the smiling railway carriage, the childish face in its Puritan bonnet, everything receded for an instant—everything but the appalling utter desolation of the knowledge that the man she had loved—did love—should have never, had left this bright, sweet world without a word of farewell from her.

True, he had gone out of her existence—gone out of it ten years before, when an overbearing father, who had married late in life and was not accustomed to being thwarted, had threatened to disown him if he made a foolish love-match—she herself had broken off the engagement, but the love nothing could break. It was not that she had ever expected to see him again, but the awful finality of it!

"Oh the little instant, at the Chantry, Redland, Bristol, very suddenly, Caspar Maddock, aged thirty-eight."

There was a mistake—of course there was a mistake. He was so vigorous, so strong—he couldn't go like that. She read it again. No, the name, the age, the place of residence, all were exact. There was no mistake. Then realization came, and with it the only relief that was possible as yet—warm, blinding tears.

How long Florence Montague sat with the paper clutched in her hand and unseeing eyes on the flying landscape she never knew.

"Oh, Caspar!" she said to herself, over and over again. Oh, Caspar!

A touch on her knee roused her. She started and looked down.

The child—she had forgotten all about the child.

Small Florence and the goliwog, both a mass of curls and sympathy, were gazing earnestly into her face.

"Don't kye!" said the little girl, pulling at her coat. "Oh, poor sing, don't cry! Take me up—daddy always takes me up when he feels bad."

Scarcely understanding what she did, Miss Montague lifted the child onto her knee.

She sat very still, but she reached up a hand and continually stroked her companion's face.

"Poor sing!" she repeated at intervals, and, at last, as if unable to suppress her curiosity, "Why does you cry?" she asked.

"I'm in trouble, dear," Miss Montague made a great effort to control her shaking voice and say this gently.

"Yes, Florence, terribly hurted."

"Why does you cry?" the child asked, anxiously.

"No."

Florence scrambled into a kneeling posture in her new friend's lap and whispered "sumnick sobe!" in immense concern.

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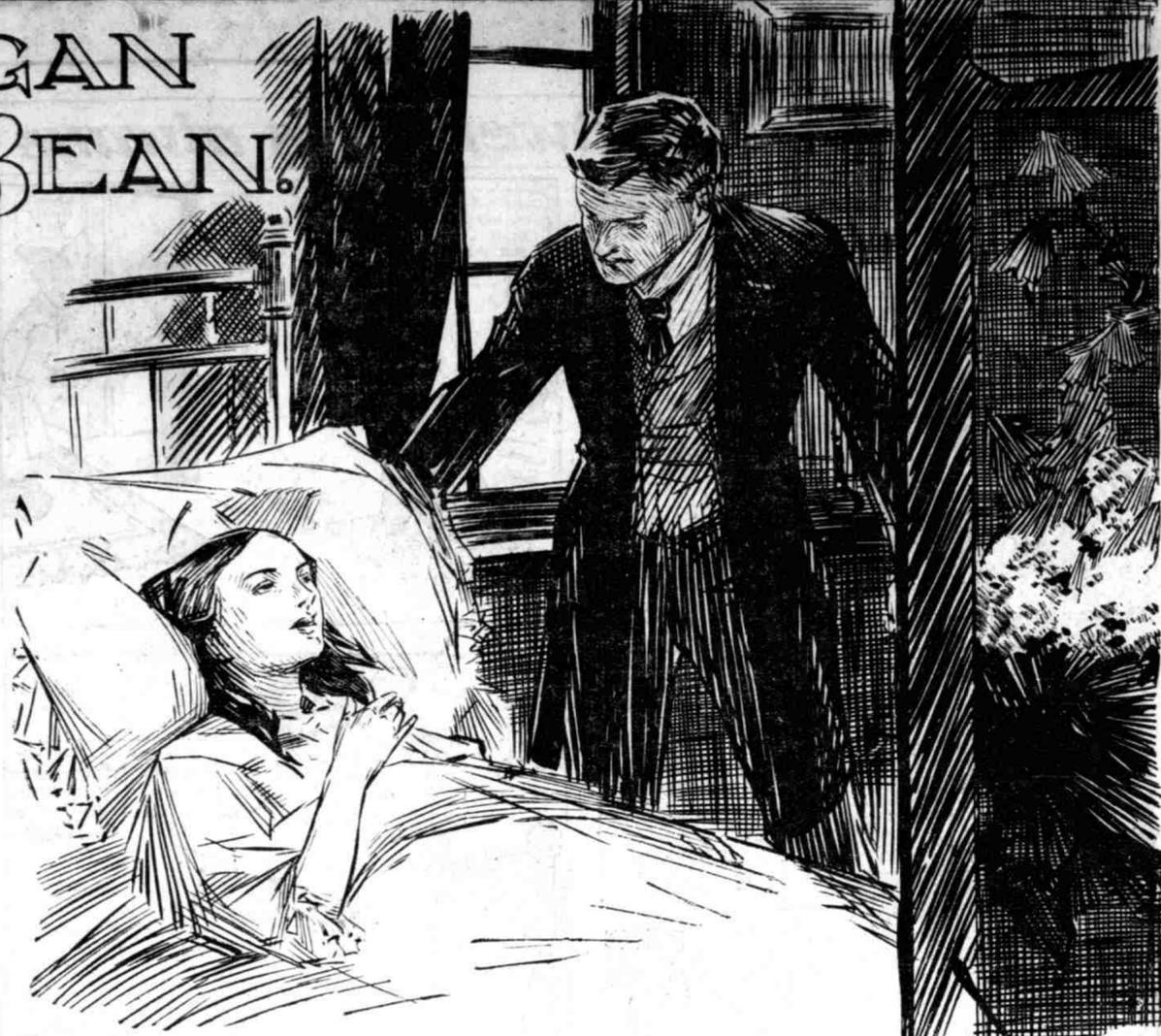
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The man who stood at the head of her bed where she could not see him came round into sight. "It is Caspar, dear love," he said. "Florence, it is Caspar!"

explained that it was something which prevented people from having misfortunes and gave them exactly what they wanted.

The train shot suddenly into a tunnel and Florence junior felt that the hour was ripe. She would not hand the bean over to her companion, for she had a wide experience—being a generous child—the difficulty in inducing grown-ups to accept anything.

"Very sweet of you, darling!" They were apt to say with a large smile and perhaps a kiss. "And thank you so much, but you may want it some day, you know," and so on.

She would want her bean one day most probably—she would not dwell on that. Somebody wanted it most frightfully now—the future must take care of itself.

She glanced across at Miss Montague. She was leaning back against the brown leather of the carriage with her eyes closed.

Her face was so white and wan, and the noise of the tunnel was so nerve-shaking, that had she not had an absorbing idea to distract her, Florence would have been terrified.

As it was, she was so breathlessly engaged in dislodging the bean from its chain and fumbling in her mite of a pocket for a paper to wrap it in, that she was callous to all external impressions.

The only paper she possessed was a letter from daddy written a month ago when he had run over to Paris and she was left at home. The letter had been very carefully treasured, for daddy, being a busy man, was generally addicted to picture postcards only. She could not part with this, she decided, but the envelope—why not the envelope?

She dropped the bean into the envelope, and, folding it carefully, looked again at her vis-a-vis.

Miss Montague still remained very quiet, her white face turned slightly away from the child, her eyes closed.

Now or never.

At the side of Florence reposed the golf cape. She turned it carefully over till she came to a pocket, and into the pocket she thrust the envelope with its precious contents, destined—she was certain—to accomplish such cheering results.

Then she sat perfectly still for three moments, and felt so guilty that she had to say over and over again, "It can't be naughty—it can't be naughty."

They drove into daylight, and Miss Montague sat up and tried to smile. She went over to Florence and brushed the crumbs from her coat, retied the bonnet which she had undone in her hasty search and generally, and all unsuspecting, tidied her.

"We shan't be long now, dear, before we get to Swindon," she said. "Are you tired?"

Florence shook her head. She sat stiffly in her place, her legs sticking out in front, and resumed the goliwog; but the desire to converse had departed, and Miss Montague was too utterly miserable—too anxious to get back to the shelter of home to notice. When they were slowing down at Swindon Station the child suddenly reached out two arms and kissed her friend warmly on the cheek.

"You'll be a right now," she said, consolingly. "I'll be a right!"

She said it with such emphasis and conviction that the words penetrated the shell of sick depression which held Miss Montague and made her wonder. And in a few minutes another eminently respectable person—somehow older than the last—had claimed Florence junior with deferential thanks to her traveling companion, and Miss Montague was being whirled on, alone—horribly alone.

### CHAPTER III.

If Florence Montague had been a Hindu or a Mohammedan she would have known the day to be unpropitious for traveling and remained at Clevedon awaiting a good omen.

As she was neither, she was apt in after years to put the startling events of it down to a far-seeing Providence.

That the identical train in which she had with straining, unbelieving eyes read of Caspar Maddock's sudden death, should be a vehicle of almost like destruction to herself, was surely something more than mere coincidence. But coincidence or not, so it was. They had not run two miles beyond Swindon when it seemed to her all at once that the world—the world out of which Caspar Maddock had gone forever—stopped quite suddenly. A sharp whirr, a jerk, the feeling of intolerable weight on her forehead, and then darkness—that was all.

It—whatever it was—had happened before she had realized its possibility. The cause of it she heard much later. Only two empty carriages intervened between her and the engine, and the engine had narrowly escaped telescoping an empty excursion train in front of it. It was thought

amazing afterwards that the damage to passengers was so slight. Later the guard found Miss Montague prone on the floor of her compartment. He called for assistance, and as assistance was on its way he looked at her luggage labels. They had been written hurriedly. "F. M. Paddington," that was all.

"There was no help from them. Her friends must be communicated with—that was certain upon the scene went systematically through Miss Montague's handbag and the pockets of her coat.

He picked up the golf cape, found the pocket and the pucker in his anxious brow straightened as he examined the envelope.

"New we've got it," he said, and read aloud: "Miss Florence Maddock, Ivy House, Swindon."

"Why, the lady's a relation of Dr. Maddock's," he said to the waiting room woman. "His sister, likely as not. I thought I saw the nurse and the little girl on the platform just now—they've been seeing her off, I'll warrant."

A young doctor who arrived at this point in a motor made a hasty examination.

"Only stunned," said he. "I'll take her round in my car to Dr. Maddock's. Get some of your men to lift her carefully, station master. I didn't know Maddock had a sister—she'll be herself in an hour or two." And in a few minutes Florence was rushing smoothly—to her fate.

"Where am I?" asked Miss Montague, raising an aching head from a very white pillow with a cramped frown.

"You're getting better, Florence—you're with me—everything's all right," she said, wearily. "Little Florence said it would be."

Then the familiarity of the voice which had answered her struck her returning senses and affected them strangely. The voice shook, but she knew it now.

"Caspar," she said, very softly, but without any surprise.

She was quite convinced that this was heaven, and that a merciful Providence was going to al-

low her what it had denied for so long. With a sigh of perfect contentment she stretched out her hand, and a warm, strong, essentially unspiritual hand immediately closed over it. She opened her lips. She wanted to ask Caspar how he died—if he had been happy in the ten years since they parted—thousands of things; but her wits were not yet absolutely under her control, so what she did say was: "I didn't think they made filled pillow cases in Paradise." She said it very wearily. Then she opened her eyes very wide and said, "How stupid I am—I was dreaming—I thought it was Caspar's voice. Oh, God!"

"The man who stood at the head of her bed where she could not see him, came round into sight. "It is Caspar, dear love," he said. "Florence, it is Caspar!"

"Florence, it is Caspar!" They thought you belonged here, dear, and I told them they were right. Oh, Florence, to think you should come back to me like this!"

Miss Montague came very near to losing consciousness again. And Dr. Maddock cursed himself for a fool for disclosing his identity so soon.

But joy seldom injures and in a few moments she was half-sitting up in his arms, saying, eagerly, "But the notice—the death notice in the 'Times'—it was your name—your age—everything."

Caspar Maddock held her closer.

"It was my father, dear," he said, "the old man who parted with ten years ago, when I was a child. His death has really been the means of bringing you to me!"

"What do you mean?" asked Miss Montague slowly.

"My little girl Florence was put into your charge today at Bristol. She was staying there when he died."

"Oh, my little girl!" she asked, painfully.

His face flushed. "My father married me to the woman he had always had in his eye. Oh, yes, I was a weak fool, child, but I had lost you and nothing seemed to matter. She was a good wife to me—far better than I deserved, for I told her the truth from the first."

"Was Caspar?" she interrupted him.

"Yes, she died when little Florence was born; the small child you traveled with, you know. The little thing came home quite full of you just now. The nice crying lady whose name was the same as her own, to whom she gave her lucky bean."

"Dear little soul—did she give it to me?"

"It was in an envelope—an envelope she had received from me. She had put it in the pocket of your cloak. The station master found it and handed it to me. That is why they brought you here, Florence. They thought you were Miss Maddock, do you see?"

"How very strange!" Miss Montague said. "I never saw her hide the bean there—but I was too wretched to see anything. Caspar, the little Florence was right—it has been a mass of, hasn't it?"

The doctor bent down and kissed her very reverently.

"It has indeed," he said. "And now I'm going to send my housekeeper to sit with you while you get some sleep. She's an old lady who has seen better days, and has very aristocratic notions. You'll find her a bit depressing, but she's good to little Florence, and I'm only keeping her still."

"Fill what?" she asked, and her face flushed brightly. For she knew

"Fill I can get the only bouquet I ever wanted," he said and left her.

## A Woman's Attempt to Swim the Channel

**A**NNETTE KELLERMAN, the champion woman swimmer, wrote the following after an unsuccessful effort to swim across the English Channel.

I have a notion that the elusive straits would long since have been conquered by swimmers of all sorts and conditions.

But experience has proved, beyond all manner of doubt, that this state of things is too much to be hoped for, as the Channel always seems to be doing just the last thing in the world that one would like it to do, for the tides have invariably baffled the most expert "sea-lubbers," and it is this hopeless uncertainty as to how they are going to behave that makes the swim doubly hard.

For the Channel tides—as is, perhaps, not generally known—are somewhat perverse, and the currents, especially when the tide is, what, I believe, the longshoreman calls "flowing," are particularly strong. So, if a swimmer's time of starting has not been judiciously chosen, he will, doubtless, be met by the "turn of the tide," against which it is practically a hopeless task to attempt to make any headway.

Unless, therefore, a swimmer be lucky enough to fall in with the changing currents, the task before him would prove, I think, too great, even for the strongest and most proficient swimmer in the world.

Swimmers have ever been divided in their opinion as to whether it is better to start to swim at night or in the morning. Thus, some have

decided to risk the "choppy" water which is practically always encountered during the daytime; while others, who wish to have a smooth surface, at all costs, have set hopefully out under cover of darkness; but, still, in spite of both these tests, the question remains perfectly open for neither one nor the other has proved itself of any marked benefit.

For my own part, I have a wholesome horror of the strong midday breeze and consequent rough sea, because then it is quite impossible, whenever any specially big wave comes along, to avoid swallowing nasty mouthfuls of seawater; and I can truthfully say that I consider this "shipping" of water one of the chief causes for the many failures that have been made in cross-Channel swimming. For, needless to say, the inevitable result of drinking pints and pints of seawater, apart altogether from the unpleasant motion of dipping up and down over the "white horses," is a bad attack of sickness, and consequent loss of interest in everything and anything.

Another difficulty, which only those who have attempted the "passage" can quite understand, is the terrible monotony of swimming, hour after hour, in the dead of night, on what has every appearance of being an endless journey.

Were it possible to make an attempt to reach the Continent in a bathing suit, in perfectly calm weather, with smooth seas all the way over,