

## A STRANGE CATCH.

By Garrett J. O'Connor.

When Gerald Dillon, the mail clerk with the dreamy Irish eyes, first saw the maiden standing near the railway crossing to watch him "catch" the mail bag which the old courier from Lorraine hung daily on the "catching post," he looked back from the door of his mail car on the Bridgeport and Brantport run until an envious turn in the road hid from his sight the beautiful figure of the girl with the white face, ruby lips, and great mass of bronze hair coiled upon her shapely head.

He who said that a ship in full sail was the most entrancing sight in the world had not been favoured with a glance at Irene Dunn.

"Aha, young man," cried the veteran conductor as he turned from the open door, "you need not look for a smile there, for, though farmer Dunn's girl has the sweetest smiles in the world, they are very hard to win."

"Well, Mr. Sheridan," replied Gerald, "they must be trebly valuable to the man who may be blessed with one on that account; I would give much for one."

But, you may ask, what is a "catching post"? It is a device by which mails from small communities are received without stopping or delaying mail trains. A tall post is sunk four feet into the earth, seven feet and one inch from the railway track, in front of which stands a platform with a couple of steps. The post has two iron arms, adjustable, from which the courier hangs his mail bag, secured at top and bottom by simple springs. The arms stretch towards the track for four feet two inches.

What next? If you are not tired of such dry details I will ask you to imagine the mail bag hanging and the mail train coming nearer and nearer down the track. If we peep into the mail car we will see our friend Gerald open the door of his mail car, grasp the handle of a strange iron device, with a thick butt stuck into an iron socket screwed on the door post and having two great prongs, the longest, when the device is raised, standing out from the side of the car for a distance of two feet. Quick! back now to the side of adorable Irene Dunn, standing near the aged courier, and watch! Look! There is Gerald at the car door, his "catcher" turned out.

Longingly he gazes at the girl on the road below him, for, as weeks rolled past, his soul began to hunger for a smile from that gentle face. Listen to the air-brakes hiss as the train slows up. Bang! The mail bag is caught in the crotch of the "catcher," the arms on the post fall. Gerald pulls the bag into the car, still looking back with the Irish eyes full of yearning.

On speeds the train.

Irene Dunn walks down the green lane to her home with the courier, and bids him good-bye at her father's gate.

Is there a new look in her eyes?

Oh! if the lonely man in the mail car saw the figure in the clinging green dress rest her chin on the gate and gaze dreamily after the train, now out of sight, it would be as a peep into Heaven for him.

If Gerald could see her now!

One day a strange thing happened. Gerald had shaken out the meagre contents of the bag from Lorraine on his sorting table, when a small package fell apart disclosing a photograph—hers!

But, "che, sara sara!"

Then came days when Gerald, to his alarm, noticed Irene's frequent absence from the crossing and that, when she did come, as of old, to see the train pass, her glance avoided him.

This maddened him, and his powerlessness was a torture. He framed a score of plans all aiming to place himself and his great love before her. He had almost concluded to fall out of his car door some day when the train slowed up in the hope that he could speak to her, feel the touch of her hands, or look into her eyes.

One day he was actually preparing to take this desperate chance when the kind Providence that sometimes helps true lovers worked a miracle.

But are not the days of miracles past? Oh, no; the most wonderful mysteries are forever being unravelled by good spirits around us.

This is the explanation:—

One day when old George Hamilton, the courier, started up the steps of his platform to hang the bag for the coming train, he tripped, fell, struck his poor, old head on the edge of the platform, and lay, for a moment, almost unconscious, on the ground. Irene, trembling with sympathy, ran to help him, but he cried, in faint voice: "Hang the bag, Miss; hang the bag; I will soon be all right."

Hang the bag! But how?

Hark! A long whistle from the coming train, now in sight, and rapidly drawing near.

Irene raised the bag, tried to hold up the arms on the post, almost succeeded, but it fell away from her. Quickly she tried again to adjust the mechanism of the post, but too late.

Gerald Dillon, as was his daily habit, when near the "catching post," opened his car door, turned out his "catcher" and began to strain his big, grey eyes in an effort to see the adorable form which he now loved so well. But where was she—absent again?

The engineer slowed up, looked back to see that all was well, saw the slim figure on the platform look up with a cry as the "catcher" threatened to dash her from the