

## DEEPDALE'S OPERATOR.

IT was difficult for society to acknowledge that Guy Hazleton was a man whose mental calibre was far above the average and did ample justice to the educational advantages that had been lavished upon him.

He was a handsome man and heir to the Hazleton property—two facts quite sufficient for society to receive him with cordial welcome, and when Irene Curtis accepted his hand society smiled approval.

Miss Curtis was acknowledged to be the belle of her circle, and being the only child of one of our merchant princes, the engagement, when announced, caused quite a flutter.

Mrs. Hazleton, Guy's mother, was the first to call upon the fair fiancée after her son's offer had been accepted. She found Irene, her hands idle, her large eyes looking far into the future.

One word roused the young girl. "Darling."

Then followed long, close caresses, that told how warmly these women loved each other.

"So I am to have a daughter?" the old lady said lovingly.

"And I a mother. I see so little of father, that he is more like a friend than a near relation."

"You know Guy goes to New Orleans next week, and will not return until May. He thinks it will take him three months, at least, to settle his affairs there; and he will be ready for Europe again. I shall be getting your house ready Irene, and you must aid me in trying to keep Guy at home."

"He has been home now, how long?"

"Not quite a year," said the old lady abruptly; "do you know how lovely you are? I know Guy could never have married an ugly girl. He worships beauty. I think there is something in his sensitive nature that positively recoils from defect."

There were other calls of congratulation, and a week passed swiftly over Irene's head before Guy started upon his journey to New Orleans, with the understanding that the preparations for a wedding in June were to be pressed forward during his absence. Irene found herself so busy and so happy that over her day dreams of future content not one foreshadowing cloud warned her of the storms

that were to break upon her life.

She had been spending a day with Mrs. Hazleton, and together they had visited stores and selected dainty goods for the beautiful trousseau in active preparation. When they reached home, a gentleman to see Mrs. Hazleton was announced to be waiting her return, and Irene ran lightly up the stairs to remove her hat and cloak, while her hostess went to the drawing-room. Her visitor proved to be the confidential clerk of Mr. Curtis, with an appalling story. Irene's father had heard that day of the utter failure of a speculation in which his entire fortune was involved, and had committed suicide. In the hours of grief Irene learned more fully the value of a friend who loved her as a daughter. She was not allowed to return home; the funeral, the sale of her father's house and property, the weary details of business were all taken out of her hands, and she was allowed to nurse her grief in seclusion.

Just one week after her father's death, Irene received a letter, which she took at once to Mrs. Hazleton. It was from a relative of whom she heard for the first time, a brother of her mother's. He wrote to her, informing her that her mother had been a poor factory girl at the time of her marriage, and that her family had never intruded themselves into her luxurious home.

"I am a poor man," he wrote, "earning my living as a telegraph operator, but I have a home to offer you. You will miss the luxuries of your father's house, but I will give you comfort. Come to me now, or at any time when you need a home."

"Am I very poor," the young girl asked, realizing for the first time that her father's death involved also a loss of property.

"Are you not Guy's promised wife?" said the old lady reproachfully. "Your home is here, Irene, until you leave it as Guy's wife. Write to your uncle, my child, and tell him your mother claims you until your promised husband returns."

But the letter was never written. It was long past midnight, on the night following this conversation, when Irene was aroused from sleep by cries of pain from Mrs. Hazleton's room. She ran at once to meet a sight of horror. Her old friend had fallen asleep over the

fire, and slept until her book had fallen upon the hearth, caught fire from a coal, and communicated the flame to her dressing-gown. When Irene reached her she was in a blaze.

One moment of hesitation increased the frightful peril. In an instant the little figure was wrapped in thick blankets from the bed, pressed closely by Irene's strong arms, while she cried aloud for help. The flames were subdued, a physician summoned, and the sufferer's injuries dressed before Irene thought of herself. Not then, not until days later, did she fully realize that she had saved a life, and lost her beauty. The burns were not severe, but one side of her lovely face was drawn out of shape. Mrs. Hazleton's injuries were serious, but not mortal, and Guy was not summoned home.

May had arrived with its balmy air and fresh foliage, and Mrs. Hazleton was able to sit up the greater part of the day. She knew well that much of her rapid recovery was due to Irene's careful nursing. Now, Guy was coming, and the tender nurse would have her reward. The noon train would bring her son home.

"Now, Irene, dress yourself. See, it is almost 11 o'clock, and Guy will be here by 12. Put on your white collars and cuffs, dear, to relieve this heavy black. You will not wear it much longer."

Irene made no reply. She knelt down beside her friend and embraced her lovingly and then left her.

At length the welcome sound of carriage wheels greeted the mother's ear, and a moment after she was clasped in her son's arms. Even then his eyes wandered round the room.

"Irene, mother?"

"She went to change her dress. You will not let her see, Guy, that you feel any alteration in her face. It was to save your mother's life she gave her own beauty."

"A note for you, sir. I was to hand it to you as soon as you arrived," said a servant.

"From Irene," he said wonderingly, as he tore it open. "Mother! read that."

"Dear Guy," the note said, "you are coming now to take my place, and I can leave your mother to your care. The Irene you loved is gone; only a hideous mask. My poverty your heart overlooked, but your mother said to me, on that