

**HIDDEN
DEPTHS. VOL. II**

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Hidden Depths. Vol. II by Felicia Skene

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FELICIA SKENE

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CHAPTER I.

THE GAOL.

ERNESTINE COURTENAY stood that same afternoon at the gate of the gaol, waiting an answer to her summons. She looked up to the high massive walls which hid the building, and the ponderous door, with its ominous bolts and bars, and the grated loophole through which the turnkey inspected her before he opened it; and she smiled involuntarily as she thought of Lady Beaufort's horror and indignation could she have seen her niece in such a position. Her order at once gained her admission, and walking through an enclosure laid out as a garden, where a few sickly flowers strove to blossom in the perpetual shade of the high walls, she was ushered into the governor's room. He was seated writing at a table,—a tall rough-looking old man, with a keen eye, which had scanned her from head to foot before she had been two minutes in his presence. Her appearance seemed to propitiate him,

for he very graciously asked her to sit down, and proceeded to read her order. He looked up sharply at her when he had done so.

'This is not a common order,' he said. 'You don't want to see one of those gals in particular, and you can't be come just to look at the whole lot, as if they were wild beasts in a show; so if you'll just tell me what you're up to, ma'am, we shall get on a deal better and quicker.'

'I will, gladly. Mr. Thorold told me you would help me in a matter I am anxious about.'

'Mr. Thorold advised you to come here, did he? then it's all right. He is a trump, he is; not one of your stuck-up parsons, talking out of a book, as stiff as a poker. Would you like to know what Mr. Thorold did once?' he continued, veering round on his chair so as to face Ernestine. 'There was a thundering blackguard here committed for manslaughter; he had hit a publican such a knock on the head that he killed his man then and there. Well, he was just like a devil when we got him in here. He knocked down one of the turnkeys, and squared up at me; only I had the handcuffs on him before he knew where he was, and it took the lot on us to get him into the black-hole.'

'The black-hole?' said Ernestine inquiringly.