

**IN A HOLLOW
OF THE HILLS**

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In a hollow of the hills by Bret Harte

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BRET HARTE

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IN A HOLLOW OF THE HILLS

CHAPTER I.

It was very dark and the wind was increasing. The last gust had been preceded by an ominous roaring down the whole mountain side, which continued for some time after the trees in the little valley had lapsed into silence. The air was filled with a faint, cool, sodden odour—as of stirred forest depths. In those intervals of silence the darkness seemed to increase in proportion and grow almost palpable. Yet out of this sightless and soundless void now came the tinkle of a spur's rowels, the dry crackling of saddle leathers, and the muffled plunge of a hoof

"There's nothing but a rocky outcrop here, where a house couldn't stand, and we're off the trail again," said the first speaker impatiently.

"Stop!—there it is again!"

The same square of light appeared once more, but the horsemen had evidently diverged in the darkness, for it seemed to be in a different direction. But it was more distinct, and as they gazed a shadow appeared upon its radiant surface—the outlined profile of a human face. Then the light suddenly went out, and the face vanished with it.

"It is a window, and there was some one behind it," said the second speaker, emphatically.

"It was a woman's face," said the pleasant voice.

"Whoever it is, just hail them, so that we can get our bearings. Sing out! All together!"

The three voices rose in a prolonged shout, in which, however, the distinguishing quality of the pleasant voice was sustained. But there was no response from the darkness