

VAL OF PARADISE

by Virginia S. Roe



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Synopsis

John Hannon, wealthy ranch owner, his wife, Belle, and their beautiful daughter, Val, live happily together in Hannon's wonderful ranch home, Paradise. Hannon, the greatest power in the mesa country, loved by his family and hated by his neighbors, is the richest land owner in that section. His wondrous Red Brood of horses is the envy of all cattlemen. In Hunnewell's store in Santa Leandra, nearest town to Paradise ranch, a strange man of mystery, wins steadily until a stranger, accompanied by a band of horsemen, appears. The stacks of gold at Brideman's and pass gradually to the stranger's side. Lola Sanchez, rose of Santa Leandra, watching the game, proposes that Brideman stake her to the stranger.

Brideman stared for a moment in dull amazement. Then his great laugh boomed in the room and more, the sparkle came swiftly back to his blue eyes. "Home," he cried, "come on, youngun, if you're a stayer! I stake Lolo, the rose of Santa Leandra, against your whole pile." And he waved a staid hand grandly toward the stacks of gold and silver. For the first time the stranger raised his eyes and looked at the girl, but he did not meet his gaze. Lola Sanchez forced forward and caught the stranger roughly by the shoulder, but she put her hands on her slim hips and shook him off disdainfully. "In nineteen," she said, "go on, Brideman."

Sanchez flung up his hand, snapped his fingers. His brown face was ashen gray. For a second or so the stranger hesitated, scanned the faces of the principals in the little play. Then he smiled, picked up the cards, deftly took them together and shoved them over. "All right," he said, "and you may have the deal in the bargain. One hand to draw." Brideman, steady as a rock, dealt, and down the pack and picked up his hand. He discarded two, picked up the pack again and looked at the other. The young man threw down four cards and smiled.

The girl by the table flushed like a sunset. A slight chance he took to win her, in all truth. In silence Brideman dealt him four cards, took his own two, and in silence they both spread down their hands. "The devil's luck," he said, "but you're sold, Lolo, body an' soul!" With which words and a mocking laugh he reached to the bar. And Lolo, looking up with her wide black eyes and her pomegranate lips parted like moist rosebuds, smiled at her master like a siren. The man looked down at her and the smile died on his own face. For a long moment he regarded her, gravely. Then he stepped to her side and took her hand.

"Little, bold, pretty thing," he said, "don't do these tricks any more. Here, and your sass!" And he caught the broad end of the spread vanity by the end of her knee, spread it, gathered its end tight, closed her hands about the knot, and, turning to the table, swept into the sack thus formed the load of gold and silver thereupon. Then he stooped and kissed her lightly upon the rosybud of her mouth. "Go home with your dad," he said, "and be a good girl."

Then he gathered his men with his quick glance, walked to the door and out into the afternoon sunshine. In ten seconds the whole bunch, after among the horses, had mounted and turned and were making out of town toward the south with the great red horse five jumps ahead, his satin blue shining, his huge neck bowed, the cloud of his black mane like smoke above him and his long tail a fan behind. Every man at Hunnewell's but one crowded out upon the porch to watch their going. "Boys," said Hunnewell, solemnly, "do you know who that was?" "No," came the answer promptly, from several, "but we got a good guess."

"Right, I take it," said Hunnewell. "That's Velantrie from th' Border, and his band o' bandits—Don Keota, Velantrie, they call him, south, though they say that name, I don't know, an' he's th' smoothest lad in th' world, they say. I saw him once before, in a little town over th' line, an' he remembered me. They say he knows a lot that some folks don't—your name, too, Brideman."

But Brideman lay across the table wide, dead asleep. CHAPTER III The Friends of Paradise The summer was glorious upon the mesa. The sun was high in a cloudless sky and a little wind came eternally in from the bunch-grass levels. Under the light the wide alfalfa fields, of which John Hannon was immensely proud and which the ranchmen hated, lay like broad emerald toward the south, scattered against this field and the Red Brood grazed in contented plenty. Reddons, the big savage stallion, stout, old but built like a racer and with the look of a colt; Dawson, the devil one; Firebrand and The Flame, they were a sight for gods and men in their perfection. They ate of the sweet orange with daintiness, raised their heads from time to time to look over their world, and called their shrill challenges to all and sundry beyond the high blue sky. Redstar crossed the fence in a wobbly field grazed in quietness, untroubled of the ramping creatures that came and nickered along the fence with lifted tails and snoring nostrils. He had no need of bluster, of wildness. Little he cared for the Red Brood's challenge. He was the king and his behavior was fitting his royalty. The hatred of one stallion of another was in Redcloud's scream of anger when he passed, but he had never been known to answer it. It was as if he felt a mighty contempt for the wild red horse, a bit smaller than him-

self, not so dark in color, heavier and of less tone, arched his high neck and "Redcloud hates th' king," said John Hannon, smiling. "But Redstar don't know he's on earth. It's the heart of th' thoroughbred in him, th' instinctive knowledge that they ain't rivals—can't be nohow."

But Lightning, the beautiful gelding, slim, graceful, tall and swift, gentler than all the rest, was of a nearer mettle. If there was one horse on the ranch that could hold a candle to Redstar, it was this dark bay beauty with his mane like a lady's tresses and his gentle eyes. But Redstar's eyes were gentler, his soft coat daker with a faint black shadow through it along shoulder and hip where the dim black dapples shone, his regal head higher, his nostrils smaller, more delicate, his slim legs longer, his massive withers higher. When Val Hannon looked at Redstar a mist of tears sometimes dimmed her eyes, a lump rose in her throat. "It doesn't seem possible that a horse could be so grand, so—so human," she said once, "he's more than a horse in all truth. There's a spirit in him that's like a soul."

And she was right, for when she came to the upper bars and cupping her hands to her scarlet mouth sent out the double whistle that was between them only, it was more than a horse who raised his splendid head—alert enough now—lifted his flowing tail and arched his high neck and sailed away across the fields toward her—it was a friend. Nay, more—it was a lover. A lover who smelled of her hair with long inhalations, as if he drew the beloved scent of her into his lungs who rested his great muzzle on her shoulder, rubbed his cheek on her red satin on tony velvet—who nibbled her hands with his soft lips and searched her garments for tidbits.

When Redstar swept out from the wide ranch yard and sailed away down across the levels with Val in the saddle, her father sometimes stood and watched them with such a look of pride as a king might wear beholding his domain from the mountain tops. And Val, loose in the saddle as an Indian, shot through the soft blue atmosphere like a bolt, her dark eyes half closed, her lips apart, a smile dimpling in her cheeks, drunk to the head on the glorious speed, the keen singing of the wind in her ears, the humming thunder of Redstar's shining hoofs.

Redstar himself was no less drunken with his own perfection. He had run always—always, since those dim days which he had nearly forgotten—and the open sage was to him an amphitheatre. There was nothing in all the blue distance to stop him. There was nothing in the land to catch him had never been. He had run with Redcloud, and with the slim young racers Firebrand and The Flame, and with Lightning, but always he had run away from them. Dawnlight had screamed and fought her bit, and raged like a fury because she fell behind, had stopped and plunged and acted like a maniac, and John Hannon had never let her run again.

Only Lightning, of all the speedy crew, had hung on Redstar's flank for any length of time, and the master had looked at him with new interest. "There's somethin' by-ordinary in this Lightning horse, Tom," he had said, "for th' Redstar's a high gauge to judge by—a damn high gauge!" On that soft warm day when Lolo Sanchez carried her rolls down from the gaping street of Santa Leandra and did not see the gazers for her dreaming, Val Hannon drifted down across the bunch-grass levels on the great red king and smiled in the joy of freedom, the splendor of her youth and the glory of the open space.

Presently they swung far and away toward the north and west, to skirt the foot of the Mesa Grande that lifted its flat top high above the surrounding levels, to find the narrow river thwarped up its south side in steep and dangerous slants, and to climb to its high tableland where the ancient Indian huts stood, hollow and deserted, whipped by the winds and eaten by their sands. But the silent places held a lure for Val Hannon, had always drawn her from the time when, a little child, her father had first brought her here to scan the world below. Val sat straight in her saddle, her hands folded on the pommel. And as they rested so in the hush of the eternal silence alone on the mesa with its ghosts of a vanished people, something moved on the plain below, far off to the west, and caught their searching gazes. A rod of light, swiftly, sweeping out of the north where lay the town of Santa Leandra, and one shot out ahead, a leader. The girl showed her eyes with her hand and watched this rider and his horse whose mane lifted above him like a cloud, whose beautiful body lay stretched along the earth in skinning flight, whose whole make and seeming were oddly familiar.

For a few moments she watched, while her eyes grew round with wonder and her lips fell apart. Then she dropped her hand and laid it on Redstar's neck as if she made sure of his living presence. "Sweetheart," she said at last, incredulously, "if you weren't here here, I'd swear you ran yonder, as sure as death!" And far off there where he rode like the wind itself toward the border of the all-attending Border, the little Antelope trickled sluggishly between its low banks, to nurse the straggling growth of trees that lined it, the heat was somewhat tempered, Cottonwoods grew here, tall and slim, their lacy shadow trees to spread over desert flowers planted in stone-edged beds among the sand, while the sword-like spikes of the maguery plant reached out to catch the unwary. This was a desert garden, rugged, grassless, inured to heat and drought, yet pleasant to the eye and mind as many a more, favored spot was not. To the west of the garden and beyond the trees, standing out against the sun and the desert winds like a spear and shielded warrior, the long blank walls of the Mission took the light on their pale expanse in a way to be seen for many miles across the plains. Peons, walls on the changing tides of fortune, refugees from the turbulent land across the Border, those broken and dispossessed by the warring factions that destroyed their own and got nowhere, the sick in mind and soul and body—these came to the doors of Refugio and none was turned away. For at those doors stood Father Hillaire, who for forty years had watched the stretching plains. He had seen some piteous things, and some that were tragic and some that were bright with faith and courage and everlasting fidelity—such as John Hannon's love for his blind wife—and he was gentle with understanding. But those who came to the Mission must work, for Father Hillaire was poor in worldly goods and the scant fare that was so free on the long board in the great bare living room behind the church must be taken from the soil with unceasing labor. Frijoles grew on the level stretches across the stream and a few bands of cattle ran on the open range, while sturdy grapes purpled on the wall that clasped the garden. Brown bread and milk and simple home-made wine, and the frioles always, these waited the corner at the Mission steps, he it dawn or dark or in the dead of night. But sometimes the slices of the dark bread were thin, the tea strongly flavored with sage, for gold came scarcely to the padre's coffers in these days. The sun went down toward the west and the long blue shadows started out across the level floor from the lone shafts of stone and the table-lands of the means, and the little wind began to whisper from the south, while the wondrous colors came shifting through the light. These colors had been to Father Hillaire one of the priceless possessions of his life, a gift of God in all truth, a wonderful healing and inspiration. Never was the day so dark, the future so uncertain, but that his burdened heart found peace and hope in their beholding. Today, as they flushed the high vault above the garden, Father Hillaire shut his beloved books and rose to greet them. In that instant there came the sound of the long-roll of a running horse upon the distant plain. He hurried to the opening in the high wall where the great gates turned back upon it and looked eagerly out. For a moment a pucker of concentration drew in between his brows, then smoothed away as the charming smile came upon his features. "Ah!" he said aloud, delightedly, "Velantrie!" It could be no other. There was not in the land another pair like the two who came skimming forward like a swallow, the man and the horse—there could not be. They seemed not two but one, so perfectly did they blend together in motion and appearance. The rider carried his broad black hat in his hand and the wind of their coming blew the black hair from the white forehead, and his face was bright with laughter to greet the old priest in the gate. "Father!" he cried as the great red horse thundered up to slide in the dust and stop with his haunches to the earth, his fiery eyes as mine in his broad bay face, "Padre! Ave!" He flung himself from the saddle and caught the padre's hands in both his own, pumping them up and down, by fashion. "My son!" said Father Hillaire, gladly, searching the sparkling face. "Son—son! It has been long, long since Refugio has seen you. Come in. Have you eaten?" "Not since yesterday, but what matters?" He laid his arm affectionately about the old man's shoulders and turned toward the garden, carefully gathering the bride rein he had not loosed. So they entered the garden, drawing the great red stallion after, and the father stopped and securely closed the gates. "Bonifacio," he called into the depths where the shadows were already falling, "come and take The Comet. Give him," he continued as a slim youth came briskly up through the watchtower trees, "a little water—not much—and rub him down well. Then a feed from the bins in the north stable. Keep watch upon him thyself until I call. Dusky women, their faces meek with the sweetness of that house, wait noiselessly about the setting of the evening meal, and old Josephina, for many years the chatelaine, greeted the stranger with a warmth of recognition in her wrinkled features. And so, presently, Velantrie of the Border sat at the long table with the padre of Refugio and ate as one furnished, though with grace and manners. He bowed his black head through the short blessing and withheld his hand with a slow repression, though hunger was with him keenly. When the meal was finished the two men went outside again to the starlight and the dry garden, drew together the worn chairs by the little table where lay the ancient books, and talked in that deep communion which comes with liking and understanding. Twilight deepened and the tip of Velantrie's cigaret glowed in the dusk, sign-manual of comfort. They talked swiftly and nearly, and the padre leaned forward and laid his worn hand on Velantrie's knee. "Oh, my son," he said softly, "I have grieved over this waste for all the months I have known you! Loss—loss! It is not right, a crime against humanity for a man like you—a man who can control himself—cast his high chance to the four winds. Velantrie smiled in the gathering darkness. "You know, father," he said, "that I'd take that from none but you. 'I know,' said the priest firmly, "and I dare, I have dared much in my time. The keen knife is the kindest. I dare because I love you." "And I take it and come back—for the same reason. See," he laid aside the cigaret in his fingers and reached in a pocket on his hip. (Continued Next Sunday.)

CHAPTER IV The Cross in the Wilderness The summer drowsed upon the land. The winds had died this day and the brazen sun was monarch. Where the little Antelope trickled sluggishly between its low banks, to nurse the straggling growth of trees that lined it, the heat was somewhat tempered, Cottonwoods grew here, tall and slim, their lacy shadow trees to spread over desert flowers planted in stone-edged beds among the sand, while the sword-like spikes of the maguery plant reached out to catch the unwary. This was a desert garden, rugged, grassless, inured to heat and drought, yet pleasant to the eye and mind as many a more, favored spot was not. To the west of the garden and beyond the trees, standing out against the sun and the desert winds like a spear and shielded warrior, the long blank walls of the Mission took the light on their pale expanse in a way to be seen for many miles across the plains. 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See," he laid aside the cigaret in his fingers and reached in a pocket on his hip. (Continued Next Sunday.)

CHAPTER V BRITISH BOARD COMMENTS STOPPING FOR TEA LONDON, Feb. 3.—The afternoon cup of tea, to which pleasant habit many Americans fall victim after a short sojourn in England, has been catalogued in a report issued by the industrial fatigue research board. Investigation showed that where a long afternoon of five hours was interrupted by a tea interval, even if for 10 minutes only, the regularity of the work was particularly noticeable. The report quotes workers as declaring: "We can face with equanimity, and even enthusiasm, a period of two hours' work with the prospect of a rest, but to look forward to four or five hours' unbroken work during the day is a task of even an ardent worker."

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Silks	Silks	Silks	Silks	Silks	Silks
SILK SHIRTING	BUTY CHYNE	BROCADED SATIN	SATIN MESSALINE	PONGEE SILK	CREPE DE CHINE
36 inches wide, in all the new and fancy stripes. Per yard 98c	36 inches wide, in extra fancy stripes. Used for underwear linings and draperies. Per yard 79c	40 inches wide, in the new and wanted colors. Per yard \$3.75	36 inches wide, in a limited amount and colors. Efird's price, per yard 98c	32 inches wide, all silk, on sale Monday, per yard 98c and \$1.18	40 inches wide, in all the new and wanted colors. Per yard \$1.69
METALLIC CLOTH	SATIN	SIERRA CREPE	PUSSYWILLOW TAFFETA	RADIUM SILK	SATIN FOULARD
36 inches wide, for evening dresses and trimmings. Colors, gold and silver. Per yard \$6.95	36 inches wide, a very heavy satin which we have just received. Black only. Per yard \$1.98	40 inches wide, used for sleeves and trimmings. Per yard \$2.48	40 inches wide, in the new and wanted shades. This is noted for its service. Per yard \$2.98	40 inches wide. A soft silk for underwear. Leading colors. Per yard \$1.79	40 inches wide. A soft silk in all the wanted colors. Per yard \$1.98
Mallinson's Silks of the Finest Weaves	PAISLEY CREPE	MOLLY-O	CREPE SATIN	CORKSCREW CREPE	METALLIC CLOTH
	40 inches wide, used for sleeves and trimmings. Per yard \$2.48	40 inches wide. A heavy crepe-like silk and the newest silk on the market. Black only. Per yard \$4.98	40 inches wide. This is satin on one side and crepe on the other. In new and wanted colors. Per yard \$3.50	40 inches wide. A very heavy crepe-like silk. One of the best silks on the market. Per yard \$3.48	36 inches wide, a two-tone silk, in the new shades. Per yard \$2.75
	CANTON CREPE				
	40 inches wide, heavy quality in the leading colors: navy, brown, black, sandalwood. Per yard \$2.95				

Efird's Department Store