

# The Golden Hoard

By Edwin Balmer  
and Philip Wylie

## SYNOPSIS

With a fortune in gold loaded in a plane, Horace Denslow, panic-stricken financier, flies south to board his treasure. He lands to meet a greater adventure, death, which awaits in his Georgia hunting lodge skirting the Telair plantation, just as a woman warned it would, a woman whose anonymous voice comes over the phone to Prescott, Denslow's attorney, in his New York office. Young Linda Telair, long distanced by Prescott, hurries to the lodge and finds Denslow slain. She picks up scraps of paper that form a letter incriminating possibly to Gregory Denslow, the financier's son, who must have been there the previous night, the time of the slaying. She recalls Gregg fondly . . . hides the bits of paper. Allan, pilot of the plane, remains undiscovered. When Linda encounters Gregg in a cabin near the plantation's edge, in a spot where Lucius, old family retainer, tells her he saw men digging by moonlight on the murder night, she tells him she has found the letter. He vows that, although he sided with his mother during her divorce from Denslow, that he will devote himself to running down his father's slayers. He says he came back when he heard the murder news over the radio. Prescott arrives. He hints to Linda Gregg had a motive to kill . . . wrongs to his mother. He reminds her of the Denslow temper. Linda, disturbed in mind wanders out on the plantation late that night and there sees, high in the crotch of a tree, a man sitting motionless . . . it is Allen, the pilot, dead!

## INSTALLMENT IV.

AS THE lights drew nearer the house Linda arose, trembling, and watched them. A dozen men at least were coming from the woods.

When the men came into the field of radiance around the porch she saw that Dr. Ames was in the lead but that he had an escort on either side. Sheriff's men, she was sure, though she did not definitely recognize either of them.

Dr. Ames ignored his escort; he approached Linda and said in his pleasant professional manner: "My dear child, you shouldn't be up; you mustn't stay up any longer. The strain of this affair will break you down unless you take care of yourself."

"I'm all right," Linda protested. "Where's Gregg?"

One of the electric torches was switched off and from where it had been Gregg stepped up before her. He also had an escort which he ignored—one of them Yerkes.

"What's happened, Gregg?" she said; for something very definite had happened since she had left him in the woods. She had seen his face then in the light of his lantern and it was not drawn and haggard as now.

"It's all right, Linda," he replied, trying to reassure her.

"What happened, Doctor?" she persisted, turning about to Dr. Ames.

"You'd better come in, Linda."

"Will you come in with me?"

"Yes," said Dr. Ames, looking at Yerkes significantly. "Gregg and I."

"Wait for the sheriff!" Yerkes objected.

"Why should we?" the doctor countered calmly. "We'll just step in; you can surround the house if you like."

"Wait for the sheriff!" Yerkes stuck to his point; and Hapgood's stupid hand pulled his pistol quite out of the holster.

"Where is the sheriff?" asked Linda.

"With Davy Allen, Linda," said the doctor. "They're taking him up to the lodge."

"O," said Linda, and realized why the compact group of light delayed. Their holders were carrying the body of Davy Allen. Clem Clay was with them.

THE cluster of flashlights, which had been left behind, had been slowly proceeding not toward the house but to the nearest curve of the road. Now they halted by the road; and one light separated itself and approached.

Clem Clay carried it and he promptly made his presence known.

"One or two questions, Miss," he addressed Linda.

She was silent.

"How come you were in the woods tonight?"

"I saw lights," Linda faced him. "They were probably your own."

"How come you found Davy Allen, too?"

"Because she shot him, too, of course, Sheriff, and hoisted him up in that tree. Look here, Clem, I've told you just how it was, and you know it was just that way. I wouldn't make too much of you leaving her to do your work for you if I were you."

"Me leaving her to do my work?"

The doctor nodded coolly. "Didn't you? You had all day—and a dozen men—to make the right sort of a search through those woods; and did you do it? You did not. I wouldn't make more of her part in it than I had to, Sheriff, if I were you."

He silenced Clem Clay completely; the man cleared his throat; shifted his feet noisily on the veranda floor, but he contrived to say nothing.

"In fact, Sheriff," the doctor continued calmly, "nobody here is going to give out any statement about the finding of Davy Allen, so I'd go on right up to the lodge with your men carrying him if I were you. Say anything you like about it. I'm going back home; you know where you can always find me. Miss Telair will be here, of course. I'll take Denslow along with me. You'll be my guest for the rest of the night?"

The young man looked at the doctor but did not answer; he looked then at Linda, clinging to the pillar and gazing at him.

"I wish you'd stay here, Gregg," she said.

He brushed back his hair with a slow, almost painful pressure. "I'd like to," he replied.

"All right," the doctor arranged promptly.

"Clem, you can leave him here. Leave a couple of your men, too, if you like; but they won't be needed. Any one of us will be on hand whenever you want us. You agree to that, don't you, Denslow?"

"Certainly," said Gregg.

Clem Clay, having somewhat recovered his assurance, exacted from Gregg a parole not to depart until he, himself, returned in the morning; the sheriff further did his duty by posting Yerkes and Hapgood, one at the front door, the other at the rear. Then the rest of them moved on.

Dr. Ames, too, drove away. Linda switched off the porch lights and led Gregg into the house.

Moonlight streamed in through the high old windows. Moonlight and silence. Linda closed the door. Upstairs her mother and brothers continued to sleep undisturbed.

"I wanted to stay here," Gregg said. "How did you know?"

"Because I wanted you to . . . Do you want a light?"

"Not now; do you?"

"No," said Linda. "Not more than the moon. It sort of moves you into another world, moonlight like this. You can sort of pretend for a while that morning—that day doesn't have to come."

"You don't want day to come?"

"Not right away; do you?"

"I wish it would never come!" he whispered almost fiercely. "What a rotten thing a day can be! At night you can deny it—and dream. Yet I've got to talk about things tomorrow with you."

"Tell me now, Gregg."

"No; you must sleep."

"I can't till I know what happened to you after I left. What was it, Gregg?"

"All right. We got Davy Allen down; he'd been—tortured."

"Tortured?"

"O, I don't mean anything actually savage or as if by a maniac. They'd tried on him something more scientific. Dr. Ames thought they'd given him what in the Philippines was called 'the water cure'; then they'd shot him."

"Why?"

"Why shoot him?"

"Yes, and why—the other?"

"And also," Gregg finished for her, "why was he way out there in a tree? They probably got hold of him at the lodge about the time they killed father. They took him out in the woods to try to make him show them where father and he had hidden the gold. Maybe he led them in that direction on a wild-goose chase; maybe he told them he was leading them to the gold in order to get them into the woods where he might have a chance to escape. At any rate, it's pretty clear that he didn't actually bring them to the cache. When he didn't produce they tried to make him tell. Something frightened them or they lost their nerve—or maybe somebody in the party wouldn't stand for torture; anyway, somebody shot him skilfully, just once. It wasn't like the killing of father. They seemed to have had to hide Davy quickly so they put him up the tree."

Linda's hand found Gregg's and held them, shaking.

"Gregg!" she cried. "Why, Gregg, you're crying!"

"I am, a little," he confessed. "For Davy. I can see him telling them all to go to hell and taking whatever they tried on him and telling them all to go to hell again! For they'd shot his father, too! Linda, Davy was—you see, Davy was my half brother!"

"Your half brother?"

"Yes. My father was his father, too. Remember, I told you yesterday—that I knew a reason why Davy Allen couldn't possibly be the one that killed father? I'll tell it all to you; it's bound to come out now. It was Davy Allen and his mother that was the trouble between father and my mother and me. You see, when father was young—it was long before he met mother—he'd been wild. He'd had one affair after another. He swore they were all over with; and mother, as one says, forgave him them all and married him. But one of the women came back into father's life; she had a son—his son—and she wanted him brought up as father's son."

"Father wouldn't do that; but he did keep him near him. He made him his pilot. That was Davy Allen, Linda, whom father cared for more than he cared for me. Davy was completely devoted and loyal to father; and Davy was the only man whom father, in the last years, completely trusted. He seems to have been flying about the country cacheing and hiding gold with Davy. That's the truth about Davy Allen; now you know it."

Gregg had released his hands from hers during the telling; he had moved away a little from her as he recounted his family scandal; but Linda followed him.

"Thank you for telling me, Gregg," she said so sweetly and sincerely that he seized her.

"What a dear you are, Linda! What a dear! . . . I won't mind the morning quite so much now! . . ."

When they went upstairs their parting was on small practicalities. "There's a room next to Dan's; third door from the right. It connects with his and you'll find pajamas in his bureau,

They'll be too small but they'll do. I'll get them for you."

"No, I'll find them, Linda. Good night . . . We say that, whatever's happened, don't we?"

"Yes. Good night!"

In her room with the moonlight she began to undress tremulously, utterly weary. Exhaustion had overcome her body yet left her mind intermittently alert.

Sheer exhaustion at last propelled her toward sleep. Somewhere in the distance a rooster crowed prematurely.

Gregory Denslow, in the room next to Daniel's fell into a troubled slumber. At the inn at Albemarle Prescott paced the floor, frowned, and finally slept before morning grayed the sky.

IN a small, steel-barred room behind the vast chamber where night lights glowed on the teller's windows of the New York Amalgamated Fidelity Trust company, three expert accountants who were among those who did not sleep on the night of the murder, closed heavy ledgers and locked up sheafs of bank statements. The oldest of them, who had been in charge of a grand accounting of data collected here from many sources during the last twelve hours, pursed his lips and spoke to his two assistants. In his eyes



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there was that curious light which comes into the face of one who has had to deal with results of human frailty and eccentricity.

"Well," he said slowly and solemnly, "that's that."

One of his assistants nodded. "Fourteen million, nine hundred and sixty-two thousand, three hundred dollars."

"One million eight thousand dollars in bullion and assay bars. A million in gold coin."

Their chief walked wearily to the door and picked up his hat and coat from the rack. "I'll telegraph Prescott. It's funny that a man of Denslow's intelligence would have gone about such an undertaking; but, when he did go about it, I'll say he undertook it thoroughly."

"Good night." The chief accountant shook hands with his assistants. "We'll go tomorrow at noon. As long as we live, we'll never get a stranger assignment than this."

In Baltimore the city editor of a newspaper sat beneath the green-shaded lamp, scanning the lead of the latest news on the Denslow story.

The city editor was scanning the second column of the story when a young man, still wearing his hat, burst violently into the room. "I've got something on the Denslow story that'll get us somewhere."

Involuntarily the city editor glanced down at the copy on his desk. "Of course. Denslow's pilot. He was found dead at 11 o'clock, after you went out."

The color of triumph fled from the young man's face. "Allen dead? Where? How?"

"Here's the story."

The reporter seized it and his flush of triumph returned. "Boy! O, boy, this makes my story all the better."

"What is yours?"

"Davy Allen was Denslow's son—by a woman he wanted to marry but didn't."

It was the city editor's turn to jerk up. "Can you prove it?"

"The woman's living in this city. I got tipped off by an anonymous telephone call. I've been following it up."

"Who is she?"

The reporter told him. The editor whistled softly.

"If she confirms it—and can prove it—get it ready to break tomorrow morning. Work on every angle of it."

Linda began to dress furiously and yet, before she left her room she paused long enough to add painstakingly those minute touches which perhaps would make a difference to one certain harassed young man—if he were still in the house.

She went down the hall and saw the door, which had been Gregg's, standing open. Dan's room next also was empty. Linda went on to her mother's room. Mrs. Telair was talkative.

"Lucius just brought me my coffee. You look pale as a ghost. He told me about that airplane flyer. He said that young Mr. Denslow stayed here last night. I don't approve of that, Linda. You will find yourself unjustifiably involved in the Denslow's doings; and they are getting more serious every moment. Remember they and their friends act upon different principles from people like ourselves. They're northerners . . . I understand that Sheriff Clay has just taken young Denslow away. Your brother, Daniel, has gone to town to see what they are all doing."

Linda breathed with some relief. Plainly her mother was yet ignorant of the part she had played in the events of last night. The house Negroes, who knew, with their racial tact had refrained from telling her.

Mrs. Telair went on: "I am going to take Andrew over to the Thompsons' and stay there for lunch. I want to remove him from this disturbed atmosphere. I wish you would come with us."

"I can't," said Linda. "I've promised to stay here; but there is no possible need for you to stay, mother. You can't help me." And she realized that her mother had passed the stage of shock and that her governing impulse now was to evade, as much as she could, the realities of the situation.

Linda went down stairs to find the lower part of the house empty.

She went into the big, quiet, sunny dining room and Lucius brought grapefruit and hen toast and coffee.

"Find anything, Lucius?" Linda asked, for it was plain that the old man had something, or yet admitted, on his mind.

"No, Miss Lindy. Nothin'—nothin' but . . ."

"But what, Lucius?"

"Nothin' but the conjure stone, Miss Lindy."

"Conjure stone?"

"Conjure stone I ever did see, Miss Lindy. Layin' dare in de path. Lookin' jes' like a stone."

Linda, accustomed to old Lucius' conjures, paid only polite attention even after he went out and returned with the stone.

It was a whitish, rough boulder about the size and dimensions of a cantaloupe and Lucius conveyed it, carefully, in both his hands. He held it before Linda.

"Where'd you get this, Lucius?"

"On de path to Ollie's place."

"Where you were the night you saw men digging?"

"Yes'm. This side . . . What conjure a lil' rock be weighty like dat, Miss Lindy? Dat debil rock for shore . . ."

THEY were still discussing it when a car drove to the house and Linda recognized an Albemarle liveryman with one passenger—Mr. Prescott.

The New Yorker got out, glanced about and, after a moment's delay, proceeded to the door. Linda arose and then sat down again. The presence of Prescott had the power to frighten her far more than could Clem Clay.

Prescott peered in and Linda knew that he could see her at the table.

"Let him in, Lucius."

Prescott tossed aside his hat as he entered; he was shaven and freshened by a bath and clean linen and newly pressed clothes, yet it was discernible that he had not slept well, and, indeed, he immediately admitted it.

"I've been up three-fourths of the night—as, I hear, were you," he said, greeting Linda. "You must have had a terrible experience."

"We did," said Linda. How much, really, did this New Yorker know?

"You should have been spared it."

"Why?" asked Linda.

"I feel myself to blame, Miss Telair, precipitating you into this. I had no idea when I telephoned you yesterday morning—"

"Of course not," said Linda. "But I'm glad you did. Where has Clem Clay taken Gregg, do you know?"

"To headquarters at Albemarle, I suppose."

"What do you mean by headquarters?"

"The courthouse, presumably."

"What for?"

"Formalities, I suppose."

"What sort of formalities?"

"Probably just questioning, first."

"And then?"

"That would depend on how he came through the questioning. You've heard the news of Davy Allen?"

"That he was found?" said Linda.

"No; I know you found him. I mean—have you heard that he was Horace Denslow's son?"

LINDA started, in spite of herself. So that was out already! "Who says so?" she asked.

"The Baltimore papers are saying so this morning, and the Associated Press is carrying it. I got it in wires from New York. That's a surprise, isn't it?"

"Not to me," said Linda, sure now that there was no trick in this. "Gregg told me last night he was."

"He was what?"

"Davy Allen's half brother."

"So he knew it all along. I thought so!"

Had she now harmed Gregg? Linda wondered. "Didn't you know?" she demanded of the lawyer.

"I didn't, for I didn't handle Mr. Denslow's divorce. That was done by an entirely different firm. I handled his business affairs—all that he put into any one else's hands. He kept every different side of his life in absolutely separate compartments, and never said a syllable more than was necessary about his private affairs."

"Sit down, won't you, please?" asked Linda.

"Can Lucius bring you breakfast?"

"Had it, thanks." But he sat down. "The real trouble—for Davy Allen and his mother must have been the real trouble—never came out at the divorce."

Prescott let the subject drop. "What have you there?" he asked, staring at the stone on the table.

"A funny rock Lucius found in the woods."

"How funny?"

"Pick it up," bid Linda, and he did so, almost letting it drop, as Linda had done.

"Hello!" he ejaculated. "Hello!" And he held it very carefully, slowly turning it over.

He held it so seriously and so long without speaking again that Linda wished, vaguely, that he hadn't shown it to him. Very plainly it meant something to him that she did not know and she said at last to make him say something:

"It's a stone, but it's heavy as lead," said Prescott.

"What's heavier than lead?" asked Linda.

"Is that servant of yours about?"

"No, I hear him in the kitchen. What's heavier than lead?"

"Well, for one thing, gold."

"Gold?"

"Gold. It's almost twice as heavy as lead—as the interior of this object seems to be."

"How would gold get in a stone here?"

"That is not a natural stone."

"What is it?"

Prescott delayed again before answering. At last he said, "Have you a hammer? Or I can get one, perhaps, from the car."

"Dan has one somewhere." She left him with the stone and ran to Dan's room. He awaited her in the dining room, but when she returned he asked: "Where can we go and close a door?"

SHE led him into the little room called the den. Besides a door, which Prescott closed, it supplied him a substantial hearth of stone. He laid Lucius' conjure rock upon the hearth and hit it with the hammer. A chip flew off. He struck again and again, cracking it at last.

He lifted it, with sudden impatience, and with both hands hurled it down upon the hearth. It shattered like a shell. Indeed, it proved to be a shell, that stone; for the white and gray fragments strewn themselves over the hearth and between them lay yellow bars of gold.

Gold! Though Linda never in her life had seen gold like this, immediately she knew it. Gold! How plainly it declared itself, gold!

Prescott, who had smashed open the stone, stood staring down at it without bending, his eyes accounting the yellow bars. Linda knelt, in curious fascination, and picked up one of the small, yellow slabs. How heavy it was, this gold! Strange stuff to feel in one's fingers—the stuff for which men sold their souls.

This little slab was stamped, she saw, with the seal of the United States, and little figures were cut in it, too. Linda fingered it and vaguely—very vaguely—understood it.

Five other little slabs of gold, just alike, lay on the hearth. Mr. Prescott kicked a segment of the shattered shell and two more little slabs tumbled out.

He looked about at the door, saw that it stayed shut and he stooped and gathered up the seven yellow slabs and straightened again. He held them in one hand and Linda, holding her bar of gold, stood up, also.

"There's more of this, of course, Linda," he was saying "Very much more. But finding this, we've—stumbled on something."

She could see that he would have given much to have stumbled upon it himself, alone; she could feel that only perforce had he shared this revelation with her.

"It is absolutely necessary, you surely see, Linda," he proceeded, "to keep this to ourselves. Look at me! This must not get out! This is part—but only a very small part—of Denslow's hoarded gold."

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(To be continued)