

The Golden Hoard

By Edwin Balmer
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SYNOPSIS

Horace Denslow, New York financier, is slain in a Georgia hunting lodge, where he has flown with Pilot Davy Allen to cache some of the precious metal. Prescott, Denslow's manager, warned by a mysterious woman's voice over the phone, phones Linda Telfair by long distance to hurry to the lodge, which adjoins her plantation. There she finds Denslow's body and bits of paper which form a note incriminating to Gregory Denslow, the murdered man's son. She hides the scraps. Mrs. Denslow has divorced the financier because of another woman in his life and that woman's son, who was Davy Allen, the pilot. Linda spies the lifeless body of Allen perched in a tree. Old Lucius, family retainer, discovers a "conjure stone," which Prescott cracks open, revealing to Linda bars of gold. At the inquest the "other woman" in Denslow's life, Mrs. Berseau, makes a scene. Davy Allen's widow murmurs words which Linda recognizes as those on the page before Denslow when she found him dead. Words from the Psalms: "For, lo, the wicked bend their bow." Gregg receives through the mail a letter containing a cipher. Linda finds the key in the Psalms. "Bow, lo, the wicked . . . etc." Kate Kelly, aviatrix, flies Linda to New York, where authorities open Denslow's safety deposit boxes. Linda learns that Davy Allen's widow has found another cipher containing a Bible quotation and the word "Chicago." In Denslow's safety deposit boxes is found a white envelope containing more ciphers.

INSTALLMENT XI

GREGG attacked his copy of the second page of figures found in his father's safety deposit box. The result was the same.

For a long time he struggled with his decoding, checking his count of the letters, repeating with utmost care each operation, but with no better result.

He had decoded a senseless string of letters that could not possibly be arranged in words. It became apparent to him as he sat at the table, frowning and running his hands through his hair, that the first message and its solution must have been unrelated to the rest. He had felt sure that, as soon as he applied to these figures the same "key" which had made sense of the first message, he would learn the secret of his father's disposal of his fortune, but now he felt as far away from disclosing the contents of those tantalizing figures as any one could be.

It unquestionably was true that the papers in the vault, which he had copied, had been themselves copies. Who had the originals and what were they doing with them?

Gregg jumped up and for a few moments paced the room in the relief of physical motion.

His mother was not in her room and he was glad of it. He would prefer to report to her after he had accomplished more.

He attacked the third page of figures and was making no more sense of them when the room phone rang, and when he mechanically answered, Linda's voice came to his ears.

"Hello, Gregory. How are you?"

He boomed back a loud, astonished, "Sweetheart! Sweetheart! It's wonderful to hear your voice! It's grand of you to telephone me all the way up here!"

"It's the fourth time I've phoned you this morning," Linda said and laughed with an excitement which he somewhat vainly attributed to the fact she was talking to him.

"That makes me feel pretty shabby, not calling you," Gregg exclaimed in response. "After this I'll keep the long distance operator so busy she'll think she's playing a zither."

"You won't have to," Linda said.

"Won't have to what, dearest," Gregg said, for the first time suspecting "something."

"Have to bother long distance," explained Linda.

"What do you mean? Where are you?"

"Will you have lunch with me today?" Linda tried to tease him a little longer.

"Lunch with you—where are you? O, dearest, where are you?"

"I'm in New York! Gregg! Gregg! I'm in New York!" Linda could contain her secret no longer. "Kitty Kelly brought me in her plane!"

There was such a long silence that her next words were agitated. "What's the matter? Did I do wrong to come here? Because, if it's bothering you at all I'll go right back. I wanted to be near you, but I certainly don't mean to get in your way—"

Gregg had recovered during the interval of her apology. He had recovered completely and the next words she heard were in a voice that carried huge delight. "I'm coming there, honey! . . . Just tell me where you are; and—O, wait for me there!"

"I'll wait, Gregg! I'm . . ."

THEY were together in the living room of Kate Kelly's little apartment—Gregg and Linda, side by side, in the dazzling sunlight over the window studded wall of the opposite skyscraper.

Linda could scarcely believe it—that she was with Gregg in New York. It was like a dream. It was even more like a dream when, in spite of the bright, hard daylight and the myriad windows overlooking them, he kissed her.

"I didn't believe this morning that it would be possible for me to be so happy ever again," he said.

She took both his hands. "I never thought in all my life that I'd be as happy as I've been since the afternoon we met. It seems a long time ago, doesn't it?"

He grinned and kissed her again. "It won't be anything to the time that lies ahead of us."

There was a long pause. Then she drew away from him slightly. "We got in yesterday, but I waited to call you until today. I didn't want to."

"Why did you, then?"

"Could I be sure you'd want me—here?"

"O, my dear, never in my life have I wanted anything or anybody so much . . . When you phoned, I was longing for you."

"Then? At that minute?"

"I'll tell you. Do you know what I've been about, Linda? This morning we opened father's safety deposit boxes. It was very strange—and queer."

"Tell me, Gregg."

"I will. It was . . ." He told it all.

She clung to his hand, but her face became grayer as she felt that, from their brief moment of rapture they were being pressed by a score of external compulsions into the deadly seriousness of life as it surrounded them and out of the romantic ecstasy of life as it could never be for either of them until all this was finished.

"Did you bring those copies with you, Gregg?" she asked.

"I did. I didn't dare leave them anywhere. I meant to bring you with me right back to the hotel, but maybe mother hasn't returned, and there was no reason I shouldn't stay here."

"No reason. Kate won't be back soon. Let me see those copies, Gregg."

She cleared Kate Kelly's flat, ultra modern writing desk and he spread the copies out.

"Who do you think wrote the figures in the originals?" Linda asked.

"Father, I'm sure. They all looked like the paper Niles Evans sent in the mail, but they're not in the same cipher."

"Which are the three you tried?"

He showed her and she took up the fourth, bending over her pencil, counting letters and decoding, using the now familiar verse as the key:

"For, lo, the wicked . . ."

She got only a jumble of letters as he had from the three sheets of figures he had attacked. She tried the fifth sheet, and it was the same. She began on the sixth.

Gregg was idle, watching her.

"O," he said, when her motion of looking up had surprised him, "—there's a curl on the top of your head that is particularly entrancing. I was wondering where we would find the best wind to blow it in the most comely manner. On the Mediterranean, or Biscayne bay—or perhaps for such a ravishing lock, we would be best off in a more exotic climate . . . The precise breeze for that curl might be found, for example, a mile or so off Tahiti . . ."

LINDA smiled and then stared down at the slip of paper. Her cheeks were a little more red than they had been. "At least this sheet makes a start," she said.

"What?"

"See!"

The sixth sheet of paper, which was Gregg's copy of the sixth page from the vault, was dated in the corner Nov. 2. The numbers on this slip were:

82	4	14	9	32	77	4	51	81
57	95	41	50	1	87	10	93	66
54	79	6	11	78	99	101	16	55
97	97	2	91	19	28	54	73	97
8	51	18	55	64	25	97	13	79

Linda had substituted for the first seven figures the corresponding letters in the "key" verse before she had looked up. These letters were old wall.

"Old wall!" cried Gregg. "What's next?"



"The highest cypress near the swamp is—that one," Dan said, his light on it.

They were both working at the code now. The pencil was in Linda's fingers and she was writing as Gregg called off the letters, in the verse, which corresponded to the figures on the paper.

OLD WALL NORTH OF HIGHEST CYPRESS, they obtained, and clasped each other in their excitement. The message ran on without an error or a meaningless letter: NORTHERN END STONES.

Gregg took the pencil from her to put a comma after "cypress" and another after "end," so the message read:

"Old wall north of highest cypress, northern end, stones."

"It's the companion message to the one we had!" Gregg exclaimed. "See, it describes the cypress. The highest cypress, it says, at the northern end where the stones are. The gold is in the stones, and the stones are in the wall. That's what it's telling us!"

"I saw the old wall," Linda said, staring at

him, "from the air when we were starting up. From the air it was closer to the place where Lucius found his 'stone' than it seemed from the ground."

Gregg pushed back from the desk and rose and strode the length of the little room nervously.

"Why the devil won't the other messages decode?" he repeated. "Anyway, we've got two . . . The question is, who's also got them? . . . 'The northern end of the old stone wall; and in the swamp in a line north of the cypress . . . Who knows that, too?' . . . Linda, we ought to go back there. Or one of us ought to go back. The other of us ought to stay here, I suppose."

Linda's heart leaped at the way he said this, binding her with him so closely, so acceptedly in his impulsive plans.

"I'll go; or I'll stay, Gregg!" she cried. "Whatever you say."

He stopped and stared at her, suddenly aware of how he had spoken. He fumbled for a word for his feeling but, instead of uttering it, he stepped to her and kissed her.

"I don't know that either of us has to stay," he said then, "except that we're not through here. Something else will come up in New York, it's bound to. We've only started. But one of us surely ought to be back—to look after that wall."

He clasped her hand tightly before releasing her and turned away from her for a moment.

"Linda, come along with me. We've got to get started at doing something about these. Come along, first, to the hotel. Mother'll be back by now . . ."

MRS. DENSWLOW had, indeed, returned; and she was awaiting Gregg's reappearance or word from him with the utmost concern. She had phoned to Prescott's office and inquired whether the lawyer knew where Gregg had gone. Prescott did not, but he had supplied her with an account of the opening of the safety-deposit boxes and of the very disappointing findings.

She was lying down in her bedroom when Gregg and Linda together entered the drawing room of her suite.

She heard their voices and started up. Who was with him?

Gregg knocked on her door and called: "Mother! Mother, Linda Telfair is here!"

"Linda Telfair! From Albemarle?"

"Yes, mother. She flew up with Kate Kelly . . ."

It was several minutes before Mrs. Denslow joined them; and when she did, she had not succeeded in attaining the composure characteristic of her. Gregg noticed it at once.

"Mother, what's happened? . . . Or, aren't you glad that Linda is here?"

"Very glad," his mother assured him; and kissed Linda. "Is your mother with you, dear?"

Gregg gave, somewhat breathlessly, an account of Linda's arrival; then he reported the results of the visit to the vaults.

"I came back here as soon as we left the bank," Gregg went on. "You'd gone out."

"Yes," his mother said. "When I returned, I found that you had been here and gone. I phoned Mr. Prescott. He told me what you had done at the bank; but he did not know where you had gone."

"Chicago, especially," Mrs. Denslow said.

"Why, especially Chicago, mother?"

"I had a warning about the house in Chicago when you were out."

"Warning, mother? How? From whom?"

"It came to me here by telephone when you were at the bank. That's why I went out."

"Who talked to you? Or don't you know?"

"Yes, I know. It was Niles Evans."

"Niles?" said Gregg. "Here in New York?"

"I think so. He did not tell me. Again it was only his voice over the telephone."

"What did he want?"

"He wanted," Mrs. Denslow replied, "nothing."

"I'd say, mother," Gregg objected, "at least he wanted to talk to you."

"Perhaps he did."

"Well, what did he say?"

"He said some one ought to go back at once to Georgia and look after our stone walls," Mrs. Denslow related. "I can comprehend that strange expression better now than when he talked to me. He was very emphatic; he was very excited about it. He said over and over that I ought to send you back at once to Albemarle to look after our stone walls."

"He wouldn't explain. I had the impression that he couldn't. I mean, that he was phoning to me under difficulties or under danger to himself, perhaps. He probably could not talk more plainly. At the time I feared he was incoherent. I see now that there was more meaning in what he said."

"Is that all he said, mother?"

"No, he said some one else ought to go at once to Chicago. I asked him why? He said, 'Because you have a chance to be in time there. I'm afraid you're too late already in Georgia; but some one ought to go there. But whatever you do, get somebody on the job in Chicago—at the house in Chicago and at the old Lake Forest place.' That is what he said. I was talking to him when he was cut-off or rang off. I couldn't tell which."

Gregg turned on his heel and strode away deep in thought.

"He's right, mother," he said, facing about.

"Certainly he's right about our walls; and probably he's right about Chicago."

"HE said one more thing," Henriette Denslow added. "He said, whatever we did, keep it entirely to ourselves. He said, trust no one; no one."

"He's right on that, too. We can do this ourselves. I can go to Chicago; I can start in an hour. Can you go back home, Linda?"

"Of course."

"You'll have to take some one in, trust some one, Linda," Gregg was speaking as he thought.

"Dr. Ames is the one. Go to him or send for him as soon as you get home and tell him what we've learned about the wall—and the swamp north of the big cypress . . . I'll go to Chicago . . . It's plain what Niles Evans thinks. They have the originals of the messages or some sort of copies; they've also caught on to the code. They're ahead of us at home in Georgia and they're on their way to Chicago; but I'll try to beat them there . . . I think the thing to do, after all, is to phone Dr. Ames now, right away, and put him on the job, now, of watching our stone walls."

Gregg picked up the telephone.

Linda, less than an hour later, was alone again in Kate Kelly's apartment. Gregg already had set out for Chicago. He was at the Newark airport, Linda figured, or perhaps already in the air.

Mrs. Denslow was to remain at the hotel in New York, at least for the present.

Gregg had taken with him his copies of the messages found in his father's box; but Linda now had copies of his which she kept in her handbag. Gregg's mother also had copies. How many copies had been made, Linda wondered, of the transcripts which Mr. Prescott had made and who, among those whom he trusted, carried them?

Why had Gregg and she been able to decode one page from the safety-deposit box and not the other six which accompanied it? Why did the "key" which unlocked one message fail before the other six?

Now, alone and waiting, Linda was able to think more clearly and she recollected the verse which Kate Kelly had brought back from her last visit with Mabel Allen. Where was it?

Linda, at the time, had written it down. Here she had it. "The heathen have sunk down in the pit that they made; in the net which they hid is their own foot taken."

Her blood leaped as she looked at it. How had she not guessed before what this must be? It was another key, of course! Another key!

She was copying it now, in wide, separated letters which she could number above:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14
T h e h e a t h e n h a v e

Swiftly, excitedly her fingers flew, yet she checked over her count carefully, to be sure it was accurate.

She had it all spaced out now, with each letter numbered; and she attacked the first of the six cryptic sheets of figures before which the other "key" had failed.

61 22 68 46 53 7 84 58

So she wrote down first the letter "j" and then "n" and then "i" again and then "h" and then "t."

She had: i n h i t

This was at first encouraging and then disappointing, for it had started out with a word—in—and it was the kind of a word which should begin such a message; but the next four letters meant nothing; and after them she was stopped, for there was no eighty-fourth letter.

But she did not give up; indeed, she was still so intent on the figures that the opening of the door surprised her.

There stood Kate.

Instinctively Linda snatched up some of the sheets, but some escaped her. And then, facing Kate, she felt the unfairness of hiding what she had been doing. So she told Kate—told her all about the ciphers and the two messages they had read.

"You'd better go back south," Kate fully agreed. "You'd better get back home as quick as you can. How about my flying you?"

"You want to, Kate?"

"Want to? . . . Well, however I've come to feel in regard to you, maybe you'll remember I started out in this affair as something of a friend of Davy Allen . . . If you don't want to go with me I'll fly down myself anyhow, just on a chance of arriving slightly ahead of certain parties . . ."

THE flight southward was different, particularly after they encountered a fog. It was spotty at first; they edged inland and flew about it, but at last it spread everywhere before them and they were down in a field near Reidsville. There they caught a train, but it was nearly midnight before they reached Albemarle.

They sat in the Telfair living room. Linda, her mother, Dan and Dr. Ames—and Kate Kelly. Outside, the heavy rain, which had followed the fog, boomed on the roof. Intermittently the lead-wheeled chariots of thunder were dragged across the sky after sporadic flashes of lightning.

Mrs. Telfair hugged herself in a delicately knitted shawl. "I can't let you go out on any errand tonight, Linda. I can't! Why, the things you've been through and the things you've done have almost killed me. I don't see how you've stood it. When I got your telegram from New York saying that you'd arrived, and I hadn't even known you'd left, I thought I'd have a breakdown! Now you say you've got to go out again and you won't tell me where you're going, and all you will tell me is that I must say nothing to anybody about it. Don't you know that something dreadful is going to come of all this?"

Daniel looked bright-eyed at his sister. Linda's return had meant a further heightening of the tense excitement which her departure had diminished. He winked at Linda, rose and patted his mother's head. "I'll take care of her. We'll be on the bright side of all this blackness before long now, mother."

Yet they waited a few minutes while the thunder rolled into the distance and the rain-squall blew out. Linda, Kate Kelly, Dr. Ames and Danny went out to the doctor's wety glistening sedan and climbed inside. On the floor Dan deposited a pair of flashlights and a pair of revolvers.

The doctor drove with Linda seated beside him. Half an hour ago, when she arrived at the house and he had his first moment with her alone, he had told her that the old stone wall between the swamp and the cypress was gone. Now, as he drove through the rainy darkness, he merely repeated his warning to her as to what they would find.

"I know it's no use coming out, Linda," he said. "But I know you'll have to see it for yourself before you sleep."

"Yes, I have to," she said, and stared ahead as the car shot smoothly along the state road. Its headlight caught a cavern through the trees to the left and the doctor swung into an old dirt road deeply scored and rutted by recent heavy wheels.

"The tracks of the truck!" the doctor said. "It went in and out this way. Both times before the rain."

A FEW rods more over the oozing ground and a gray and ghostly old wall appeared in the light of the torches.

"The highest cypress near the swamp is—that one," Danny said, his light on it. "I checked up on that this afternoon . . . Here's where they were working, you see."

"When," asked Linda, her eyes large in the light, "when do you reckon they were here, doctor?"

"This morning," Dr. Ames repeated what he had told her before. "I ran right out just after I talked with Gregg. The men and the truck were gone then, but they'd just been here."

"I couldn't get any trace of them. Hundreds of trucks pass both ways on the state road. Any one could have turned in here with nobody noticing . . . They were ahead of us, Linda, a couple of hours . . . I went to your house and picked up Dan to find if he'd heard or learned anything. I brought him back here. We looked over the stones that were left. We had good daylight . . . Just stones were left here and nothing in the swamp. Everything different or even suspicious they'd loaded into the truck and taken off . . ."

"They," thought Linda. "They" who had shot down Gregg's father and murdered Davy Allen and thrust him in the tree. "They"—one of whom had waited at the lodge and overpowered her and locked her up and then searched Mr. Denslow's body. "They" who, probably, had the originals of the ciphers and who could read them and who—Niles Evans said—were on the way to Chicago next, where Gregg might, if he hurried, be ahead of them.

But if he met them, encountered "them," what would they do to Gregg?

"What?" she said to the doctor, who was speaking to her. "What did you say?"

"Do you want to see any more here, Linda?" the doctor patiently repeated.

"No. There's no sense my staying here, doctor. I guess we better go back—to the house—as quick as we can."

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(To be continued)