Edgar Wallace

The Green Rust

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I. — THE PASSING OF JOHN MILLINBORN

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"I DON'T know whether there's a law that stops my doing this, Jim; but if there is, you've got to get round it. You're a lawyer and you know the game. You're my pal and the best pal I've had, Jim, and you'll do it for me."

The dying man looked up into the old eyes that were watching him with such compassion and read their acquiescence.

No greater difference could be imagined than existed between the man on the bed and the slim neat figure who sat by his side. John Millinborn, broad-shouldered, big-featured, a veritable giant in frame and even in his last days suggesting the enormous strength which had been his in his prime, had been an outdoor man, a man of large voice and large capable hands; James Kitson had been a student from his youth up and had spent his manhood in musty offices, stuffy courts, surrounded by crackling briefs and calf-bound law-books.

Yet, between these two men, the millionaire ship-builder and the successful solicitor, utterly different in their tastes and their modes of life, was a friendship deep and true. Strange that death should take the strong and leave the weak; so thought James Kitson as he watched his friend.

"I'll do what can be done, John. You leave a great responsibility upon the girl—a million and a half of money."

The sick man nodded. "I get rid of a greater one, Jim. When my father died he left a hundred thousand between us, my sister and I. I've turned my share into a million, but that is by the way. Because she was a fairly rich girl and a wilful girl, Jim, she broke her heart. Because they knew she had the money the worst men were attracted to her—and she chose the worst of the worst!" He stopped speaking to get his breath. "She married a plausible villain who ruined her—spent every sou and left her with a mountain of debt and a month-old baby. Poor Grace died and he married again. I tried to get the baby, but he held it as a hostage. I could never trace the child after it was two years old. It was only a month ago I learnt the reason. The man was an international swindler and was wanted by the police. He was arrested in Paris and charged in his true name—the name he had married in was false. When he came out of prison he took his own name—and of course the child's name changed, too."

The lawyer nodded. "You want me to—?

"Get the will proved and begin your search for Oliva Predeaux. There is no such person. The girl's name you know, and I have told you where she is living. You'll find nobody who knows Oliva Predeaux—her father disappeared when she was six—he's probably dead, and her stepmother brought her up without knowing her relationship to me—then she died and the girl has been working ever since she was fifteen."

"She is not to be found?"

"Until she is married. Watch her, Jim, spend all the money you wish—don't influence her unless you see she is getting

the wrong kind of man..."

His voice, which had grown to something of the old strength, suddenly dropped and the great head rolled sideways on the pillow.

Kitson rose and crossed to the door. It opened upon a spacious sitting-room, through the big open windows of which could be seen the broad acres of the Sussex Weald. A man was sitting in the window-seat, chin in hand, looking across to the chequered fields on the slope of the downs. He was a man of thirty, with a pointed beard, and he rose as the lawyer stepped quickly into the room.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"I think he has fainted—will you go to him, doctor?"

The young man passed swiftly and noiselessly to the bedside and made a brief examination. From a shelf near the head of the bed he took a hypodermic syringe and filled it from a small bottle. Baring the patient's side he slowly injected the drug. He stood for a moment looking down at the unconscious man, then came back to the big hall where James Kitson was waiting.

"Well?"

The doctor shook his head.

"It is difficult to form a judgment," he said quietly, "his heart is all gone to pieces. Has he a family doctor?"

"Not so far as I know—he hated doctors, and has never been ill in his life. I wonder he tolerated you."

Dr. van Heerden smiled.

"He couldn't help himself. He was taken ill in the train on the way to this place and I happened to be a fellow-passenger. He asked me to bring him here and I have been

here ever since. It is strange," he added, "that so rich a man as Mr. Millinborn had no servant travelling with him and should live practically alone in this—well, it is little better than a cottage."

Despite his anxiety, James Kitson smiled.

"He is the type of man who hates ostentation. I doubt if he has ever spent a thousand a year on himself all his life—do you think it is wise to leave him?"

The doctor spread out his hands.

"I can do nothing. He refused to allow me to send for a specialist and I think he was right. Nothing can be done for him. Still—"

He walked back to the bedside, and the lawyer came behind him. John Millinborn seemed to be in an uneasy sleep, and after an examination by the doctor the two men walked back to the sitting-room.

"The excitement has been rather much for him. I suppose he has been making his will?"

"Yes," said Kitson shortly.

"I gathered as much when I saw you bring the gardener and the cook in to witness a document," said Dr. van Heerden.

He tapped his teeth with the tip of his fingers—a nervous trick of his.

"I wish I had some strychnine," he said suddenly. "I ought to have some by me—in case."

"Can't you send a servant—or I'll go," said Kitson. "Is it procurable in the village?"

The doctor nodded.

"I don't want you to go," he demurred. "I have sent the car to Eastbourne to get a few things I cannot buy here. It's a stiff walk to the village and yet I doubt whether the chemist would supply the quantity I require to a servant, even with my prescription—you see," he smiled, "I am a stranger here."

"I'll go with pleasure—the walk will do me good," said the lawyer energetically. "If there is anything we can do to prolong my poor friend's life—"

The doctor sat at the table and wrote his prescription and handed it to the other with an apology.

Hill Lodge, John Millinborn's big cottage, stood on the crest of a hill, and the way to the village was steep and long, for Alfronston lay nearly a mile away. Halfway down the slope the path ran through a plantation of young ash. Here John Millinborn had preserved a few pheasants in the early days of his occupancy of the Lodge on the hill. As Kitson entered one side of the plantation he heard a rustling noise, as though somebody were moving through the undergrowth. It was too heavy a noise for a bolting rabbit or a startled bird to make, and he peered into the thick foliage. He was a little nearsighted, and at first he did not see the cause of the commotion. Then:

"I suppose I'm trespassing," said a husky voice, and a man stepped out toward him.

The stranger carried himself with a certain jauntiness, and he had need of what assistance artifice could lend him, for he was singularly unprepossessing. He was a man who might as well have been sixty as fifty. His clothes soiled, torn and greasy, were of good cut. The shirt was filthy, but it

was attached to a frayed collar, and the crumpled cravat was ornamented with a cameo pin.

But it was the face which attracted Kitson's attention. There was something inherently evil in that puffed face, in the dull eyes that blinked under the thick black eyebrows. The lips, full and loose, parted in a smile as the lawyer stepped back to avoid contact with the unsavoury visitor.

"I suppose I'm trespassing—good gad! Me trespassing—funny, very funny!" He indulged in a hoarse wheezy laugh and broke suddenly into a torrent of the foulest language that this hardened lawyer had ever heard.

"Pardon, pardon," he said, stopping as suddenly. "Man of the world, eh? You'll understand that when a gentleman has grievances..." He fumbled in his waistcoat-pocket and found a black-rimmed monocle and inserted it in his eye. There was an obscenity in the appearance of this foul wreck of a man which made the lawyer feel physically sick.

"Trespassing, by gad!" He went back to his first conceit and his voice rasped with malignity. "Gad! If I had my way with people! I'd slit their throats, I would, sir. I'd stick pins in their eyes—red-hot pins. I'd boil them alive—"

Hitherto the lawyer had not spoken, but now his repulsion got the better of his usually equable temper.

"What are you doing here?" he asked sternly. "You're on private property—take your beastliness elsewhere."

The man glared at him and laughed.

"Trespassing!" he sneered. "Trespassing! Very good—your servant, sir!"

He swept his derby hat from his head (the lawyer saw that he was bald), and turning, strutted back through the

plantation the way he had come. It was not the way out and Kitson was half-inclined to follow and see the man off the estate. Then he remembered the urgency of his errand and continued his journey to the village. On his way back he looked about, but there was no trace of the unpleasant intruder. Who was he? he wondered. Some broken derelict with nothing but the memory of former vain splendours and the rags of old fineries, nursing a dear hatred for some more fortunate fellow.

Nearly an hour had passed before he again panted up to the levelled shelf on which the cottage stood.

The doctor was sitting at the window as Kitson passed.

"How is he?"

"About the same. He had one paroxysm. Is that the strychnine? I can't tell you how much obliged I am to you."

He took the small packet and placed it on the window-ledge and Mr. Kitson passed into the house.

"Honestly, doctor, what do you think of his chance?" he asked.

Dr. van Heerden shrugged his shoulders.

"Honestly, I do not think he will recover consciousness."

"Heavens!"

The lawyer was shocked. The tragic suddenness of it all stunned him. He had thought vaguely that days, even weeks, might pass before the end came.

"Not recover consciousness?" he repeated in a whisper.

Instinctively he was drawn to the room where his friend lay and the doctor followed him.

John Millinborn lay on his back, his eyes closed, his face a ghastly grey. His big hands were clutching at his throat, his

shirt was torn open at the breast. The two windows, one at each end of the room, were wide, and a gentle breeze blew the casement curtains. The lawyer stooped, his eyes moist, and laid his hand upon the burning forehead.

"John, John," he murmured, and turned away, blinded with tears.

He wiped his face with a pocket-handkerchief and walked to the window, staring out at the serene loveliness of the scene. Over the weald a great aeroplane droned to the sea. The green downs were dappled white with grazing flocks, and beneath the windows the ordered beds blazed and flamed with flowers, crimson and gold and white.

As he stood there the man he had met in the plantation came to his mind and he was half-inclined to speak to the doctor of the incident. But he was in no mood for the description and the speculation which would follow. Restlessly he paced into the bedroom. The sick man had not moved and again the lawyer returned. He thought of the girl, that girl whose name and relationship with John Millinborn he alone knew. What use would she make of the millions which, all unknown to her, she would soon inherit? What...

"Jim, Jim!"

He turned swiftly.

It was John Millinborn's voice.

"Quick—come..."

The doctor had leapt into the room and made his way to the bed.

Millinborn was sitting up, and as the lawyer moved swiftly in the doctor's tracks he saw his wide eyes staring.

"Jim, he has..."

His head dropped forward on his breast and the doctor lowered him slowly to the pillow.

"What is it, John? Speak to me, old man..."

"I'm afraid there is nothing to be done," said the doctor as he drew up the bedclothes.

"Is he dead?" whispered the lawyer fearfully.

"No—but—"

He beckoned the other into the big room and, after a glance at the motionless figure, Kitson followed.

"There's something very strange—who is that?"

He pointed through the open window at the clumsy figure of a man who was blundering wildly down the slope which led to the plantation.

Kitson recognized the man immediately. It was the uninvited visitor whom he had met in the plantation. But there was something in the haste of the shabby man, a hint of terror in the wide-thrown arms, that made the lawyer forget his tragic environment.

"Where has he been?" he asked. "Who is he?"

The doctor's face was white and drawn as though he, too, sensed some horror in that frantic flight.

Kitson walked back to the room where the dying man lay, but was frozen stiff upon the threshold.

"Doctor—doctor!"

The doctor followed the eyes of the other. Something was dripping from the bed to the floor—something red and horrible. Kitson set his teeth and, stepping to the bedside, pulled down the covers.

He stepped back with a cry, for from the side of John Millinborn protruded the ivory handle of a knife.

II. — THE DRUNKEN MR. BEALE

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DR. VAN HEERDEN'S surgery occupied one of the four shops which formed the ground floor of the Krooman Chambers. This edifice had been erected by a wealthy philanthropist to provide small model flats for the professional classes who needed limited accommodation and a good address (they were in the vicinity of Oxford Street) at a moderate rental. Like many philanthropists, the owner had wearied of his hobby and had sold the block to a syndicate, whose management on more occasions than one had been the subject of police inquiry.

They had then fallen into the hands of an intelligent woman, who had turned out the undesirable tenants, furnished the flats plainly, but comfortably, and had let them to tenants who might be described as solvent, but honest. Krooman Chambers had gradually rehabilitated itself in the eyes of the neighbourhood.

Dr. van Heerden had had his surgery in the building for six years. During the war he was temporarily under suspicion for sympathies with the enemy, but no proof was adduced of his enmity and, though he had undoubtedly been born on the wrong side of the Border at Cranenburg, which is the Prussian frontier station on the Rotterdam-Cologne line, his name was undoubtedly van Heerden, which was Dutch. Change the "van" to "von", said the carping critics, and he was a Hun, and undoubtedly Germany was full of von Heerens and von Heerdens.

The doctor lived down criticism, lived down suspicion, and got together a remunerative practice. He had the largest flat in the building, one room of which was fitted up as a laboratory, for he had a passion for research. The mysterious murder of John Millinborn had given him a certain advertisement which had not been without its advantages. The fact that he had been in attendance on the millionaire had brought him a larger fame.

His theories as to how the murder had been committed by some one who had got through the open window whilst the two men were out of the room had been generally accepted, for the police had found footmarks on the flowerbeds, over which the murderer must have passed. They had not, however, traced the seedy-looking personage whom Mr. Kitson had seen. This person had disappeared as mysteriously as he had arrived.

Three months after the murder the doctor stood on the steps of the broad entrance-hall which led to the flats, watching the stream of pedestrians passing. It was six o'clock in the evening and the streets were alive with shopgirls and workers on their way home from business.

He smoked a cigarette and his interest was, perhaps, more apparent than real. He had attended his last surgery case and the door of the "shop," with its sage-green windows, had been locked for the night.

His eyes wandered idly to the Oxford Street end of the thoroughfare, and suddenly he started. A girl was walking toward him. At this hour there was very little wheeled traffic, for Lattice Street is almost a cul-de-sac, and she had taken the middle of the road. She was dressed with that effective

neatness which brings the wealthy and the work-girl to a baffling level, in a blue serge costume of severe cut; a plain white linen coat-collar and a small hat, which covered, but did not hide, a mass of hair which, against the slanting sunlight at her back, lent the illusion of a golden nimbus about her head.

The eyes were deep-set and wise with the wisdom which is found alike in those who have suffered and those who have watched suffering. The nose was straight, the lips scarlet and full. You might catalogue every feature of Oliva Cresswell and yet arrive at no satisfactory explanation for her charm.

Not in the clear ivory pallor of complexion did her charm lie. Nor in the trim figure with its promising lines, nor in the poise of head nor pride of carriage, nor in the ready laughter that came to those quiet eyes. In no one particular quality of attraction did she excel. Rather was her charm the charm of the perfect agglomeration of all those characteristics which men find alluring and challenging.

She raised her hand with a free unaffected gesture, and greeted the doctor with a flashing smile.

"Well, Miss Cresswell, I haven't seen you for quite a long time."

"Two days," she said solemnly, "but I suppose doctors who know all the secrets of nature have some very special drug to sustain them in trials like that."

"Don't be unkind to the profession," he laughed, "and don't be sarcastic, to one so young. By the way, I have never asked you-did you get your flat changed?"

She shook her head and frowned.

"Miss Millit says she cannot move me."

"Abominable," he said, and was annoyed. "Did you tell her about Beale?"

She nodded vigorously.

"I said to her, says I," she had a trick of mimicry and dropped easily into the southern English accent, "'Miss Millit, are you aware that the gentleman who lives opposite to me has been, to my knowledge, consistently drunk for two months—ever since he came to live at Kroomans?' 'Does he annoy you?' says she. 'Drunken people always annoy me,' says I. 'Mr. Beale arrives home every evening in a condition which I can only describe as deplorable.'"

"What did she say?"

The girl made a little grimace and became serious.

"She said if he did not speak to me or interfere with me or frighten me it was none of my business, or something to that effect." She laughed helplessly. "Really, the flat is so wonderful and so cheap that one cannot afford to get out—you don't know how grateful I am to you, doctor, for having got diggings here at all—Miss Millit isn't keen on single young ladies."

She sniffed and laughed.

"Why do you laugh?" he asked.

"I was thinking how queerly you and I met."

The circumstances of their meeting had indeed been curious. She was employed as a cashier at one of the great West End stores. He had made some sort of purchase and made payment in a five-pound note which had proved to be counterfeit. It was a sad moment for the girl when the

forgery was discovered, for she had to make up the loss from her own pocket and that was no small matter.

Then the miracle had happened. The doctor had arrived full of apologies, had presented his card and explained. The note was one which he had been keeping as a curiosity. It has been passed on him and was such an excellent specimen that he intended having it framed but it had got mixed up with his other money.

"You started by being the villain of the piece and ended by being my good fairy," she said. "I should never have known there was a vacancy here but for you. I should not have been admitted by the proper Miss Millit but for the terror of your name."

She dropped her little hand lightly on his shoulder. It was a gesture of good-comradeship.

She half-turned to go when an angry exclamation held her.

"What is it? Oh, I see—No. 4!"

She drew a little closer to the doctor's side and watched with narrowing lids the approaching figure.

"Why does he do it—oh, why does he do it?" she demanded impatiently. "How can a man be so weak, so wretchedly weak? There's nothing justifies that!"

"That" was apparently trying to walk the opposite kerb as though it were a tight-rope. Save for a certain disorder of attire, a protruding necktie and a muddy hat, he was respectable enough. He was young and, under other conditions, passably good looking. But with his fair hair streaming over his forehead and his hat at the back of his head he lacked fascination. His attempt, aided by a walking-

stick used as a balancing-pole, to keep his equilibrium on six inches of kerbing, might have been funny to a less sensitive soul than Oliva's.

He slipped, recovered himself with a little whoop, slipped again, and finally gave up the attempt, crossing the road to his home.

He recognized the doctor with a flourish of his hat.

"Glorious weather, my Escu-escu-lapius," he said, with a little slur in his voice but a merry smile in his eye; "simply wonderful weather for bacteria trypanosomes (got it) an' all the jolly little microbes."

He smiled at the doctor blandly, ignoring the other's significant glance at the girl, who had drawn back so that she might not find herself included in the conversation.

"I'm goin' to leave you, doctor," he went on, "goin' top floor, away from the evil smells of science an' fatal lure of beauty. Top floor jolly stiff climb when a fellow's all lit up like the Hotel Doodledum—per arduis ad astra—through labour to the stars—fine motto. Flying Corps' motto—my motto. Goo' night!"

Oft came his hat again and he staggered up the broad stone stairs and disappeared round a turn. Later they heard his door slam.

"Awful—and yet—"

"And yet?" echoed the doctor.

"I thought he was funny. I nearly laughed. But how terrible! He's so young and he has had a decent education."

She shook her head sadly.

Presently she took leave of the doctor and made her way upstairs. Three doors opened from the landing. Numbers 4,

6 and 8.

She glanced a little apprehensively at No. 4 as she passed, but there was no sound or sign of the reveller, and she passed into No. 6 and closed the door.

The accommodation consisted of two rooms, a bed- and a sitting-room, a bath-room and a tiny kitchen. The rent was remarkably low, less than a quarter of her weekly earnings, and she managed to live comfortably.

She lit the gas-stove and put on the kettle and began to lay the table. There was a "tin of something" in the diminutive pantry, a small loaf and a jug of milk, a tomato or two and a bottle of dressing—the high tea to which she sat down (a little flushed of the face and quite happy) was seasoned with content. She thought of the doctor and accounted herself lucky to have so good a friend. He was so sensible, there was no "nonsense" about him. He never tried to hold her hand as the stupid buyers did, nor make clumsy attempts to kiss her as one of the partners had done.

The doctor was different from them all. She could not imagine him sitting by the side of a girl in a bus pressing her foot with his, or accosting her in the street with a "Haven't we met before?"

She ate her meal slowly, reading the evening newspaper and dreaming at intervals. It was dusk when she had finished and she switched on the electric light. There was a shilling-in-the-slot meter in the bath-room that acted eccentrically. Sometimes one shilling would supply light for a week, at other times after two days the lights would flicker spasmodically and expire.

She remembered that it was a perilous long time since she had bribed the meter and searched her purse for a shilling. She found that she had half-crowns, florins and sixpences, but she had no shillings. This, of course, is the chronic condition of all users of the slot-meters, and she accepted the discovery with the calm of the fatalist. She considered. Should she go out and get change from the obliging tobacconist at the corner or should she take a chance?

"If I don't go out you will," she said addressing the light, and it winked ominously.

She opened the door and stepped into the passage, and as she did so the lights behind her went out. There was one small lamp on the landing, a plutocratic affair independent of shilling meters. She closed the door behind her and walked to the head of the stairs. As she passed No. 4, she noted the door was ajar and she stopped. She did not wish to risk meeting the drunkard, and she turned back.

Then she remembered the doctor, he lived in No. 8. Usually when he was at home there was a light in his hall which showed through the fanlight. Now, however, the place was in darkness. She saw a card on the door and walking closer she read it in the dim light.

BACK AT 12. WAIT.

He was out and was evidently expecting a caller. So there was nothing for it but to risk meeting the exuberant Mr. Beale. She flew down the stairs and gained the street with a feeling of relief.

The obliging tobacconist, who was loquacious on the subject of Germans and Germany, detained her until her

stock of patience was exhausted; but at last she made her escape. Half-way across the street she saw the figure of a man standing in the dark hallway of the chambers, and her heart sank.

"Matilda, you're a fool," she said to herself.

Her name was not Matilda, but in moments of self-depreciation she was wont to address herself as such.

She walked boldly up to the entrance and passed through. The man she saw out of the corner of her eye but did not recognize. He seemed as little desirous of attracting attention as she. She thought he was rather stout and short, but as to this she was not sure. She raced up the stairs and turned on the landing to her room. The door of No. 4 was still ajar—but what was much more important, so was her door. There was no doubt about it, between the edge of the door and the jamb there was a good two inches of space, and she distinctly remembered not only closing it, but also pushing it to make sure that it was fast. What should she do? To her annoyance she felt a cold little feeling inside her and her hands were trembling.

"If the lights were only on I'd take the risk," she thought; but the lights were not on and it was necessary to pass into the dark interior and into a darker bath-room—a room which is notoriously adaptable for murder—before she could reach the meter.

"Rubbish, Matilda!" she scoffed quaveringly, "go in, you frightened little rabbit—you forgot to shut the door, that's all."

She pushed the door open and with a shiver stepped inside.

Then a sound made her stop dead. It was a shuffle and a creak such as a dog might make if he brushed against the chair.

"Who's there?" she demanded.

There was no reply.

"Who's there?"

She took one step forward and then something reached out at her. A big hand gripped her by the sleeve of her blouse and she heard a deep breathing.

She bit her lips to stop the scream that arose, and with a wrench tore herself free, leaving a portion of a sleeve in the hands of the unknown.

She darted backward, slamming the door behind her. In two flying strides she was at the door of No. 4, hammering with both her fists.

"Drunk or sober he is a man! Drunk or sober he is a man!" she muttered incoherently.

Only twice she beat upon the door when it opened suddenly and Mr. Beale stood in the doorway.

"What is it?"

She hardly noticed his tone.

"A man—a man, in my flat," she gasped, and showed her torn sleeve, "a man...!"

He pushed her aside and made for the door.

"The key?" he said quickly.

With trembling fingers she extracted it from her pocket.

"One moment."

He disappeared into his own flat and presently came out holding an electric torch. He snapped back the lock, put the

key in his pocket and then, to her amazement, he slipped a short-barrelled revolver from his hip-pocket.

With his foot he pushed open the door and she watched him vanish into the gloomy interior.

Presently came his voice, sharp and menacing:

"Hands up!"

A voice jabbered something excitedly and then she heard Mr. Beale speak.

"Is your light working?—you can come in. I have him in the dining-room."

She stepped into the bath-room, the shilling dropped through the aperture, the screw grated as she turned it and the lights sprang to life.

In one corner of the room was a man, a white-faced, sickly looking man with a head too big for his body. His hands were above his bead, his lower lip trembled in terror.

Mr. Beale was searching him with thoroughness and rapidity.

"No gun, all right, put your hands down. Now turn out your pockets."

The man said something in a language which the girl could not understand, and Mr. Beale replied in the same tongue. He put the contents, first of one pocket then of the other, upon the table, and the girl watched the proceedings with open eyes.

"Hello, what's this?"

Beale picked up a card. Thereon was scribbled a figure which might have been 6 or 4.

"I see," said Beale, "now the other pocket—you understand English, my friend?"

Stupidly the man obeyed. A leather pocket-case came from an inside pocket and this Beale opened.

Therein was a small packet which resembled the familiar wrapper of a seidlitz powder. Beale spoke sharply in a language which the girl realized was German, and the man shook his head. He said something which sounded like "No good," several times.

"I'm going to leave you here alone for awhile," said Beale, "my friend and I are going downstairs together—I shall not be long."

They went out of the flat together, the little man with the big head protesting, and she heard their footsteps descending the stairs. Presently Beale came up alone and walked into the sitting-room. And then the strange unaccountable fact dawned on her—he was perfectly sober.

His eyes were clear, his lips firm, and the fair hair whose tendencies to bedragglement had emphasized his disgrace was brushed back over his head. He looked at her so earnestly that she grew embarrassed.

"Miss Cresswell," he said quietly. "I am going to ask you to do me a great favour."

"If it is one that I can grant, you may be sure that I will," she smiled, and he nodded.

"I shall not ask you to do anything that is impossible in spite of the humorist's view of women," he said. "I merely want you to tell nobody about what has happened to-night."

"Nobody?" she looked at him in astonishment. "But the doctor—"

"Not even the doctor," he said with a twinkle in his eye. "I ask you this as a special favour—word of honour?"

She thought a moment.

"I promise," she said. "I'm to tell nobody about that horrid man from whom you so kindly saved me—"

He lifted his head.

"Understand this. Miss Cresswell, please," he said: "I don't want you to be under any misapprehension about that 'horrid man'—he was just as scared as you, and he would not have harmed you. I have been waiting for him all the evening."

"Waiting for him?"

He nodded again,

"Where?"

"In the doctor's flat," he said calmly, "you see, the doctor and I are deadly rivals. We are rival scientists, and I was waiting for the hairy man to steal a march on him."

"But, but—how did you get in."

"I had this key," he said holding up a small key, "remember, word of honour! The man whom I have just left came up and wasn't certain whether he had to go in No. 8, that's the doctor's, or No. 6—and the one key fits both doors."

He inserted the key which was in the lock of her door and it turned easily.

"And this is what I was waiting for—it was the best the poor devil could do."

He lifted the paper package and broke the seals. Unfolding the paper carefully he laid it on the table, revealing a teaspoonful of what looked like fine green sawdust.

"What is it?" she whispered fearfully.

Somehow she knew that she was in the presence of a big elementary danger—something gross and terrible in its primitive force.

"That," said Mr. Beale, choosing his words nicely, "that is a passable imitation of the Green Rust, or, as it is to me, the Green Terror."

"The Green Rust? What is the Green Rust—what can it do?" she asked in bewilderment.

"I hope we shall never know," he said, and in his clear eyes was a hint of terror.

III. — PUNSONBY'S DISCHARGE AN EMPLOYEE

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OLIVA CRESSWELL rose with the final despairing buzz of her alarm clock and conquered the almost irresistible temptation to close her eyes, just to see what it felt like. Her first impression was that she had had no sleep all night. She remembered going to bed at one and turning from side to side until three. She remembered deciding that the best thing to do was to get up, make some tea and watch the sun rise, and that whilst she was deciding whether such a step was romantic or just silly, she must have gone to sleep.

Still, four hours of slumber is practically no slumber to a healthy girl and she swung her pyjamaed legs over the side of the bed and spent quite five minutes in a fatuous admiration of her little white feet. With an effort she dragged herself to the bath-room and let the tap run. Then she put on the kettle. Half an hour later she was feeling well but unenthusiastic.

When she became fully conscious, which was on her way to business, she realized she was worried. She had been made a party to a secret without her wish—and the drunken Mr. Beale, that youthful profligate, had really forced this confidence upon her. Only, and this she recalled with a start which sent her chin jerking upward (she was in the bus at the time and the conductor, thinking she was signalling him to stop, pulled the bell), only Mr. Beale was surprisingly sober and masterful for one so weak of character.

Ought she to tell the doctor—Dr. van Heerden, who had been so good a friend of hers? It seemed disloyal, it was disloyal, horribly disloyal to him, to hide the fact that Mr. Beale had actually been in the doctor's room at night.

But was it a coincidence that the same key opened her door and the doctor's? If it were so, it was an embarrassing coincidence. She must change the locks without delay.

The bus set her down at the corner of Punsonby's great block. Punsonby's is one of the most successful and at the same time one of the most exclusive dress-houses in London, and Oliva had indeed been fortunate in securing her present position, for employment at Punsonby's was almost equal to Government employment in its permanency, as it was certainly more lucrative in its pay.

As she stepped on to the pavement she glanced up at the big ornate clock. She was in good time, she said to herself, and was pushing open the big glass door through which employees pass to the various departments when a hand touched her gently on the arm.

She turned in surprise to face Mr. Beale, looking particularly smart in a well-fitting grey suit, a grey felt hat and a large bunch of violets in his buttonhole.

"Excuse me. Miss Cresswell," he said pleasantly, "may I have one word with you?"

She looked at him doubtfully.

"I rather wish you had chosen another time and another place, Mr. Beale," she said frankly.

He nodded.

"I realize it is rather embarrassing," he said, "but unfortunately my business cannot wait. I am a business