

THE GREEN RUST

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The Green Rust by Edgar Wallace

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BY
EDGAR WALLACE

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CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I	THE PASSING OF JOHN MILLINBORN . . .	7
II	THE DRUNKEN MR. BEALE . . .	14
III	PUNSONBY'S DISCHARGE AN EMPLOYEE . . .	24
IV	THE LETTERS THAT WERE NOT THERE . . .	35
V	THE MAN WITH THE BIG HEAD . . .	43
VI	MR. SCOBBS OF RED HORSE VALLEY . . .	50
VII	PLAIN WORDS FROM MR. BEALE . . .	58
VIII	THE CRIME OF THE GRAND ALLIANCE . . .	67
IX	A CRIME AGAINST THE WORLD . . .	74
X	A FRUITLESS SEARCH . . .	85
XI	THE HOUSE NEAR STAINES . . .	93
XII	INTRODUCING PARSON HOMO . . .	102
XIII	AT DEANS FOLLY . . .	109
XIV	MR. BEALE SUGGESTS MARRIAGE . . .	116
XV	THE GOOD HERR STARDT . . .	124
XVI	THE PAWN TICKET . . .	132
XVII	THE JEW OF CRACOW . . .	139

CHAP.	PAGE
XVIII BRIDGERS BREAKS LOOSE	148
XIX OLIVA IS WILLING	156
XX THE MARRIAGE	163
XXI BEALE SEES WHITE	169
XXII HILDA GLAUM LEADS THE WAY.	177
XXIII AT THE DOCTOR'S FLAT	185
XXIV THE GREEN RUST FACTORY	192
XXV THE LAST MAN AT THE BENCH	198
XXVI THE SECRET OF THE GREEN RUST	204
XXVII A SCHEME TO STARVE THE WORLD	212
XXVIII THE COMING OF DR. MILSOM	219
XXIX THE LOST CODE	227
XXX THE WATCH	233
XXXI A CORNCHANDLER'S BILL	240
XXXII THE END OF VAN HEERDEN	244

CHAPTER I

THE PASSING OF JOHN MILLINBORN

"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 Prédeaux. 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 Prédeaux—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,