

He stood on the threshold suddenly petrified. There was a solemnity and there was a curious smell, too, for which he was not prepared. The room looked, too, frightfully white, in the reflected light from outside. Then he saw a face on the pillows, with the white cap over it; and the face did not appear to him to be Cousin Nevill's at all.

"Jim," said a very odd voice, very low.

Ah! that was Cousin Nevill all right then. He had really not been quite sure till he heard that; but it was a whisper which he had heard before, in games. He went forward, with the nurse's hand on his shoulder.

"Good morning, old man? I hope you're quite well. That's you, isn't it?"

"Good-morning, Cousin Nevill. . . . Er. . . . may I kiss you?"

"Kiss him very gently," said Nurse Deacon's voice.

Jim approached the bed resolutely, and put one knee upon the edge. The nurse's hands held him, that he should not slip. Then Jim administered a careful kiss to Cousin Nevill's left cheek. It felt "funny" to his lips.

"That's all right," said Cousin Nevill. "Now sit down, old man; and don't shake the bed." The big eyes turned to Nurse Deacon and seemed to give some sort of signal. The nurse said nothing, and passed round the foot of the bed. Jim's eyes followed her a little anxiously, as she went through the door into the bathroom on the further side. But she did not absolutely shut the door, as he had feared she might.

"Jim, old man. . . . You're not frightened?"

Jim brought his eyes back again to that rather grim face; and determined that he must not be frightened. He cleared his throat which appeared to him rather dry.

"No, Cousin Nevill. Not at all, thank you."

"Jim; there are just three things I want to say. Listen, won't you; and tell me if you don't understand."

"All right," said Jim.

"The first is this. . . . Do you remember about the Grail?"