



Drawn by Clifford W. Ashley

A WHALER AT ANCHOR IN A HARBOR OF THE CAPE VERD ISLANDS

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THE NEAREST RELATIVE

BY WATSON DYKE

WHEN Mrs. Thomas Wetherall of High Ings, Upper Enderdale, was nearly dying, she thought it time to send for the doctor. He came. It was Mudd, from the town of Simonscope.

Rosannah, the maid, seeing him walking up the flagged fields that led to the sheltered farm, ran to the front door and unbolted it. It unbolted slowly and stiffly, because it had never been opened since Mr. Thomas Wetherall's funeral day, when there was such a large gathering of relatives that the kitchen and the sitting-room did not hold them all, and they overflowed into the garden and sat on the garden walls. And yet Thomas and his wife had no sons and daughters! These were nieces and nephews, cousins, brothers, and sisters, second cousins, third cousins, relatives by marriage, and relatives unknown, who came out of distant dales and took a quarter of an hour to explain where they came in on the family tree; but they did come in, as they said themselves, or they would not have ventured to Thomas's funeral.

So Rosannah unbolted the door, with the tears trickling down her rosy cheeks, and faced Dr. Mudd.

"Don't cry, Rosie," said Dr. Mudd. "Is she gone?"

"Nay, sir; but she 's suffering, and I can do nowt to ease her."

"She 'll be nearly dying," said Dr. Mudd, "or she would not have sent for me. Has she had her lawyer?"

He asked this question as he was going up the creaking stairs, passing the staircase window, with its wealth of geranium and cactus and old-fashioned fuchsias.

"Nay, sir, she hes n't. She 's not decided to send for thee yet; I took it on mysel'."

"Oh—then I 'll expect a storm. Never mind, Rosie; you did right."

He stooped his head to enter a room the wooden beams of which had been whitewashed. There, sitting in the middle of a huge four-post oak bedstead, was Mrs. Thomas Wetherall. She was rubbing her withered hands together, and now and again pulling the quilt about her as though to gather warmth from it. The window was shut, though it was a July day, and a wasp was buzzing on the panes.

"Hello!" said the doctor. "What can I do for you?"

"Ease t' pain," said Mrs. Thomas. "Tha can't cure me."

The doctor came up to the bed, flung his riding-whip upon an oaken chest of drawers, and took her withered hand in his.

"Why did n't you send before?" he asked almost curiously.

"Thar 's nae gude to be done to the death-struck; and why waste t' brass that I 's saved?"

"You 've got no children," said the doctor, with an amused smile, and he sat down on a chair by the bed and began drawing letters in the dust which covered the little table in the window.

"That 's what I telled her," said Rosannah, staring at the doctor with her large, blue eyes. "She may as well spend it on hersel' as let some wastrels abuse 't. I oft telled t' maister t' same thing."

"Aye, she did; but he 'd niver listen," said Mrs. Thomas, sniffing at the thought. "Saving was his nature to his grave, and I was always a faithful wife that lived by her husband's side in ivery sense o' t' word. What 's that tha 's putting in my wrist, Doctor?"

"Something to ease the pain," said the doctor, fastening up the case again.

"Now, do you feel easier?"

"Aye, a bit," said the old woman, after