

Feeling the desirableness of this, they complied; and Mr. Steptoe, when, after a painful experience of the superior strength of Jim, he got his head out of Chancery, felt ill, and was conducted to bed by his wife. Of whom Lizarann afterwards reported that, when she heard Uncle Bob get louder, Aunt Stingy, she said, "You do, and I'll call Jim back again," and then Uncle Bob he shut up.

This little girl's father had been in the Merchant Service and had lost his eyesight through an explosion of petroleum in the harbour at Cape Town. Current belief held that it was his own fault, saying that Jim Coupland hadn't any call to drop a lighted match into a hole in an oil-cask that was standing in the January sun; still less was it necessary that he should look after it through the hole, and receive the full blast of the inevitable explosion in his face. He admitted these facts, but maintained that a hundred oil-casks might have exploded in his face, and no harm done if he had not, a few days before, seen the Flying Dutchman. This belief could not be shaken by argument, not even by the fact that the other men on his watch, all of whom had seen the Phantom Ship, had retained their eyesight intact. Didn't old Sam Nuttall—and nobody could pretend he hadn't been forty years in the Navy—say the very first thing of all, when he told him he'd seen the Dutchman: "Look you here, my son," he said, "you've got to look sharp and get yourself hanged or shot or drowned, if you want to die with eyes in your head"? And warn't he right? Anyhow, the coincidence of the accident a few days later had created a firm faith in the mind of Jim Coupland, and very few had the heart to try to shake it.

Whatever the cause, Jim Coupland came back eyeless from that voyage, and found his wife lately delivered of a female infant that did well, and became Lizarann. But her mother did ill, presumably, and the doctor that attended her did certainly, if the verdict of Tallack Street was warranted. She had no call to die, said Tallack Street. Perhaps its many matrons did not allow enough for the hideous shock of poor eyeless Jim's reappearance. She *did* die, and poor Jim, the happy bridegroom of a year ago, was left a widower at eight-and-twenty, hopelessly blind, with a baby he could never see.