

THE CAPTAIN'S WISHES

By H. M. Egbert

"O, don't mind father. He's partly deaf, you know, Elise, and he doesn't take much notice of things. Give us that recitation again."

Cap't Paul's daughters were having an afternoon party in the house on the hillside overlooking the sea. The captain had retired with a competence ten years before, but it had been heartbreaking work and half a dozen times he had lost all in shipwrecks and had started life again. And his wife had not lived to see the prosperity which at last came to him as the result of a successful whaling adventure.

The captain sat dreaming on his porch most of the time, staring out at the sea. He did not bear the young people in general, but he had heard Myra's words.

"I guess I'm old and done for," he said to himself, a little bitterly. "Well I'm glad they won't have to struggle along as Mary and I struggled for years."

He thought of their life in the little seaport cottage, of his months-long absences at sea, of the lonely woman who cared for the home and babies when he was gone, of those home-comings, sometimes with fair prosperity, often with nothing.

The bitterness of life had eaten into his soul when he was a young man. Now, in old age, he had nothing to enjoy in life.

"I wish—" he muttered to himself.

And it seemed to him that the smoke from his pipe curled in a curious, hazy wreath that filled the air and obscured the vision.

And out of the wreath emerged a woman's form—a beautiful woman, with something in her eyes that at once soothed and awed him.

"Cap't Paul," he fancied he heard her say.

"Aye, aye, madam!"

"Keep your seat, please. I am no

human woman. I am the Smoke Goddess who comes to old men sometimes. You shall have any wish you desire. More, you shall have three wishes. Choose!"

It seemed so real to the captain at the time that he at once began wishing.

"Well, ma'am," he said. "I wish I could be a young man again, 30 years back, and—"

Cap't Paul rubbed his eyes. To his amazement he found himself seated



Out of the Wreath Emerged a Woman's Form

upon the porch of a very different house. A first he did not recognize it; then he remembered that it was his cottage on the Rhode Island shore. Something black on his breast attracted his attention. It was his beard, which he had worn long in those days, and it was jet-black in hue.