

a coat of shellac. Galvanised iron took the place of brass, but if the old schooner lacked the glitter of metal she certainly shone with spotless cleanliness.

One saw at the first glance that the *Shark* was less of a pleasure-craft than a floating home, and such a domicile she had truly been for fifteen years. Asthma and an insubordinate heart had retired her owner from the service of his country; the same affliction forbade his residence ashore and compelled him to seek a warm winter climate. Wherefore, he wisely bought the *Shark* for a mere song, and made of her a home for himself and his three little motherless daughters: Cécile, aged nine; Paula, aged seven, and Hermione, aged four.

That was fifteen years before the epoch of this saga, so that we find our three sirens at the dangerous ages of from nineteen to twenty-four. Little heed had their cantankerous parent ever given them, and little need had they of it, as from the very first day to the present, they had found a wise and kindly nurse, playmate, and duenna in that splendid old grizzled viking, Christian Heldstrom, Master Mariner.

Captain Heldstrom, sailing-master of the *Shark*, had previously served for ten years in the U. S.