

I read about the Maelstrom in a book and I always wanted to see it. The Maelstrom appears in the sea near the coast of Norway.

In the northwest of that country there is a region called Nordland. And near the coast of Nordland, there is a group of islands called Lofoten. Two of the Lofoten Islands are called Moskoe and Vurrgh. Between Moskoe and Vurrgh, there is a narrow place where the sea turns and races in a great circle. This is the Maelstrom-a whirlpool.

In the Maelstrom, the sea rises up and then falls. As the sea falls, it turns in a circle. It turns faster and faster. It is the same as water going down into a huge pipe. The Maelstrom is very dangerous for boats and ships. It pulls them down into the sea. Many ships have sunk and many men have died in the dangerous water.

I wanted to see the great whirlpool, so I went to Norway. When I got to Nordland, I found a guide. I paid this man to show me the Maelstrom. He took me to the top of a cliff early one morning.

"This is the best time to see the whirlpool," he said.

We came to the edge of the cliff and looked down. The sea was more than a thousand feet below us.

I stepped back from the edge quickly. I felt ill and afraid. I wanted to sit down. The wind was blowing very strongly and the waves of the sea crashed against the rocks below us. I thought that I was going to fall over the edge of the cliff.

"We are on the side of a mountain called Helseggen

the Cloudy," said my guide. He reached out his hand and pointed across the sea toward a group of islands. "Look, those are the Lofoten. Can you see the two smallest islands? They are Moskoe and Vurrgh. No one lives there. Now listen and look at the sea between the islands."

I looked at the two smallest islands. They were black rocks. No one could live on them. I listened and heard the sound of the wind. But then I heard another sound. It was a low sound. It sounded like hundreds of huge animals were calling and running together. I could hear the sound and I could feel the sound. I could feel the low sound in my body.

"The tide is turning," said my guide. He pointed down to the sea below us. "The tide turns twice each day. Look at the sea! It is turning and moving in another direction!"

I looked to where the man was pointing. The dark water far below us was as black as oil. I watched it moving slowly. It started to rise and turn, as if it were a pot of hot water on a fire. But the seawater was not hot; it was as cold as ice. The wind blew the tops of the waves. It made many tiny bubbles of air in the water. The tiny bubbles became white foam. Soon, more and more white foam appeared on the black sea. My guide pointed toward the islands of Moskoe and Vurrgh again.

"Watch the sea between the islands!" he shouted.

Then there was another change in the sea. The water became smoother, but it did not become calmer. The dark water started to move in a huge circle. It moved very quickly. It spun around and around. The edge of the circle was white with foam. It was amazing.

"Is-is that the great whirlpool? The Maelstrom?" I asked.

"Yes," said my guide, "that is the terrible Maelstrom.

When fishermen sail toward this coast, they look for Moskoe. They do not come closer than a mile."

"Do fishermen sail near these islands?" I asked. I could not believe this.

"Yes, they do. I did. I was a fisherman once. There are a great many fish near Moskoe."

"But isn't it too dangerous to fish here?" I asked.

"Fishermen know when the tides rise and fall. There are two times in the day when it is safe. We go out when the sea is calm and smooth. Then we come back twelve hours later."

"And is fishing always safe at those times? Are boats and ships never lost?" I asked.

"Many boats and ships are lost in the Maelstrom," the man said. "Fishermen make mistakes and their boats are pulled down. Sometimes larger ships are lost in the Maelstrom when they come too close. The sea is calm one moment, and a storm can be blowing five minutes later."

I looked at the Maelstrom in amazement. I could not believe it! The whirlpool was moving faster and faster. As the whirlpool moved, the water in its center dropped down. There was now a hole, or pit, in the center of the whirlpool!

"Nothing can go into that hole and come out alive," I said. "It is a huge, round mouth in the sea. That mouth will

swallow everything that comes near it. It makes me afraid."

"That is true," said my guide. "The Maelstrom swallows ships and whales and men. But one man went into the Maelstrom and came out alive."

"Surely, that is impossible!" I said.

I looked at the round, black mouth in the sea. My body shook with fear. The white foam made me think of teeth.

Terrible teeth. And the noise of the wind and water! It was the noise of a monster eating rocks.

"How old do you think that I am?" asked my guide. He shouted these words. I shook my head. It was difficult to hear his voice. The noise of the Maelstrom was now very loud. We moved back from the edge of the cliff. We went and sat behind some rocks.

"How old do you think that I am?" the man asked again.

I did not understand the reason for his question. His hair was white and he had many lines on his face. He moved slowly. He must be an old man.

"Are you more than sixty years old?" I asked.

"No. I am forty," said my guide. "The Maelstrom made me old. I'll tell you my story. It happened three years ago."

This is my guide's story. I am writing his words.

One day in the summer, my brothers and I went out in our fishing boat. It was seven o'clock in the morning of July 10th. The sea was calm and smooth. We sailed past Moskoe Island to look for fish.

There were many fish in the sea that day. We caught a large number of them and loaded them into our boat. We were very busy and we forgot how many hours had passed.

In summer, we have nearly twenty hours of daylight in Norway. The nights are short. There are only four hours of darkness. When I looked at my watch, I saw that it was six o'clock in the evening.

We had to pass Moskoe Island at seven o'clock. That was the time when the tide turned. It was safe at seven o'clock that day. We were about an hour away from Moskoe. We started to return home immediately.

A storm came suddenly. Dark clouds covered the sky and the wind started to blow. Our boat raced before the storm. Faster and faster, we sailed toward home and safety.

When I looked to the northeast, I saw Moskoe Island. The sea was moving very quickly, but it was almost the safe time of the day. It was almost seven o'clock. I was sure of this. I took my watch out of my pocket again and looked at it. Then I had a terrible shock. My watch still showed six o'clock. It had stopped!

My brothers were in the front of the boat. I called to them.

"The Maelstrom!" I shouted. "My watch was wrong! We are too late!"

It was not the safe time of day. It was the time when the great whirlpool opened like a mouth in the sea. We were going to die!

Our boat shook. It shook as if it were a dog throwing

water off its body. Then the boat suddenly became still.

A few seconds later, the tide picked up our boat and started turning it. It pulled us into the circle of white water around the edge of the whirlpool.

Our boat moved slowly and steadily around the edge of the whirlpool. It circled many times. Each time that our boat circled, it moved a little closer to the great mouth in the sea. From the edge of the circle, the wall of the pit was as steep as a cliff. I had to look down at it. I could not turn my head away.

Around and around we went. My brothers held onto the mast in the center of the boat. We could not speak. The noise of the wind and water was too loud.

I could not hold onto the mast. I held onto a wooden barrel. It was our barrel of drinking water. The barrel was almost empty.

Our boat moved faster and faster. Now, the clouds had disappeared from the sky and we saw the moon.

I thought that we had been in the whirlpool for many hours. The hours of darkness are between two and seven o'clock in the morning. Could we live a little longer? The safe time of the day was seven o'clock. Could we live for three, or maybe four hours more?

The answer was no. The moon showed us the black mouth in the sea. We were going to fall into that mouth.

But we did not fall. The boat did not fall suddenly from the wall of water. We moved down smoothly and steadily.

I had time to think about death-my death. I thought about the water going into my mouth and lungs. I was going to drown. Was the sea going to take our bodies and keep them? Or was it going to throw our bodies back onto the land?

I looked down into the black pit. Our boat was on the side of the wall of water. The wall of water was turning faster and faster. I looked straight down the pipe of water but I did not fall. We were moving so quickly in a circle, that we did not fall. I was amazed.

The air raced past me. I was on the edge of death, but I was alive. It was strange. I was excited.

But the fear of death fell on my brothers. They took a rope and tied themselves to the mast in the center of the boat. I also took a piece of rope. I tied the rope around my body and onto the barrel.

Where was the bottom of the sea? It could not be far. And I knew that there were sharp rocks at the bottom of the sea. We were going to be cut and broken on the rocks!

Our boat moved lower and lower down the black pipe-Then the boat moved to the left and the right. It shook. I was thrown into the black water of the pit. But I did not sink beneath the water because I was tied to the barrel. The barrel stayed on the top of the water.

I saw the boat and my brothers fall down into the pit. We were turning around in the whirlpool. Then the boat disappeared and I started to rise. The barrel moved up slowly. And it took me with it.

Then, suddenly, I was no longer in danger. One moment, I was on the wall of water. The next moment, I was on the top of flat, smooth water. The sea had changed. It was calm. The whirlpool had disappeared. I was no longer looking down. I was looking up. I was looking up at the sky.

It was dawn and the sun was shining. Sunlight shone from behind the mountain, Helseggen the Cloudy. Fishermen were sailing their boats toward me. They pulled me from the water.

No one believed my story. My brothers never returned. Our boat never returned. And my friends and family did not know me. I now looked twenty years older. My black hair had become white. Fear had made lines on my face.