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MAELSTROM

a romantic mystery drama series for television
in six or eight episodes

by

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OUTLINE

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maelstrom (male-strom) noun

a) a great or violent whirlpool. b)
a violent force or whirl of events.

STORY OUTLINE

CATHERINE DURRELL, working as a Senior Account Executive with advertising agents Whitly and Scott, is made redundant.

With a fairly handsome cheque as compensation, CATHERINE, although she misses the excitement, glamour and challenge of the Agency, is not unduly concerned by her dismissal and she feels well able to weather the economic storm for a while.

She starts looking round for other work in advertising and when she finds that it's hard to come by she begins to seriously consider setting up a small and highly specialised agency of her own so as to have it well established when recession turns to boom once more.

Then, out of the blue, she receives a letter from a firm of solicitors asking her to call and see them.

When she visits the offices of Longworthy, Stoddard and Price she is told that an extremely wealthy Norwegian businessman, HJALMAR JORDAHL, has recently died and has left her a substantial bequest in his will.

This comes as a considerable surprise to CATHERINE because, although she knows that her mother was born and brought up a Norwegian, she was unaware that she had any close relatives still living there and the name JORDAHL means nothing to her.

What's more she is unable to check on her benefactor with her parents because her father, Richard Durrell, was killed in a road accident when CATHERINE was only three years old and her mother, Kirsten, died of leukaemia in 1980.

CATHERINE is informed that, under the terms of JORDAHL's will, she has inherited a house and a tract of land on the Storefjord and the ownership of a timber business in the town of Alesund.

She asks the solicitor if she is obliged to keep the property and the business and he tells her that there is no such stipulation attached to the bequest and that she is free to sell them if she wishes to.

Soon after her visit to Longworthy, Stoddard and Price, CATHERINE gets a letter, postmarked Alesund, from a woman named ANNA-MARIE JORDAHL who identifies herself as HJALMAR JORDAHL's daughter. ANNA-MARIE says how delighted she

was to hear of CATHERINE's good fortune and then goes on to say how much she and the rest of the Jordahl family are looking forward to meeting her. And she asks when CATHERINE is planning on visiting Alesund.

CATHERINE replies thanking her for her friendly letter and telling her that she is making arrangements to travel to Norway on the coming Wednesday.

On her arrival in Bergen CATHERINE is advised to take the coastal steamer service up to Alesund and she books on the boat leaving the following night. Later she is called to the telephone in the hotel foyer but as soon as she answers the call the line goes dead.

That night, as she is walking back to hotel along the quayside, she has a very narrow escape when she is nearly run down by what she assumes to be the drunken driver of a Volvo.

During the twenty-six hour voyage up the coast to Alesund CATHERINE meets ARNE ALBRIGTSEN who is a doctor in the small town and from him she learns more about her benefactor.

He tells her that JORDAHL, who was a leading and influential figure in Alesund, was in his early sixties when he was found drowned in the fjord following a sailing mishap a month or so earlier. A very rich man he owned much of the land and several businesses in the area and elsewhere in Norway and, his wife having committed suicide some years ago, the bulk of his estate had been divided among his four children, ANNA-MARIE JORDAHL being the eldest of them.

When CATHERINE asks DR ALBRIGTSEN if he knows of any possible link between HJALMAR JORDAHL and her mother or father he is at a loss to think of one. "But then Hjalmar was a very private man, in fact something of a mystery in many ways," he tells her.

CATHERINE takes to the worldly and somewhat cynical ALBRIGTSEN and she finds the middle-aged doctor a very pleasant and knowledgeable companion as the ship proceeds up the coast. And luckily for her he is close at hand when, while strolling on the deck, she has another close shave as some oil drums, stowed as deck cargo, break free from their lashings and cascade down a companionway toward her.

When the ship docks at Alesund INGRID NILSEN, Jordahl's second eldest daughter, and her husband LARS are waiting on the quay to greet CATHERINE. INGRID explains that ANNA-MARIE had told them when to expect her.

The couple welcome the Englishwoman warmly and drive her to their home, insisting that she stay with them at least for the time being.

Later, at the Nilsen's house, CATHERINE meets the rest of the Jordahl family, the last to arrive being ANNA-MARIE who has driven up from Oslo where she is a successful fashion designer.

ANNA-MARIE is a highly attractive, chic and sophisticated woman with a devil-may-care attitude toward life and a great, if somewhat acid, sense of humour and CATHERINE likes her enormously finding the other members of the clan, although friendly enough toward her, somewhat secretive, stiff and formal and very provincial.

It is from ANNA-MARIE that CATHERINE learns that the suspicion among the rest of the family is that she has to be an illegitimate child of HJALMAR JORDAHL and that that is why, in a fit of conscience, he included her in his will. CATHERINE dismisses this as nonsense and ANNA-MARIE agrees but at the same time, she cannot come up with any satisfactory explanation as to why her father left CATHERINE a share in his estate. And a visit which the two women make to Jordahl's house where they examine his private papers in no way helps to explain the mystery.

And CATHERINE, despite having been so scornful of the family's theory, is left wondering.

A party given in CATHERINE's honour and attended by DR ALBRIGTSEN is violently interrupted by the arrival of ANDERS BJORNSON.

BJORNSON is a good looking, powerfully built, man in his early thirties and he is very drunk. Angrily, and somewhat incoherently, he abuses the name of HJALMAR JORDAHL and demands what he claims is owed to him by the dead man.

The Jordahls appear to be terrified of BJORNSON but he is finally persuaded to leave and, when he has gone, DR ALBRIGTSEN explains to CATHERINE that the man, who has a reputation as a hellraiser, owns a fishing boat which he operates out of Alesund and which, according to local gossip, he uses mainly for the highly lucrative business of smuggling cigarettes and alcohol into the country from Scotland. The customs authorities are equally convinced that BJORNSON is a smuggler but so far, because of his cunning, his great skill as a seaman and his intimate knowledge of the coastline, they have been unable to catch him at it.

ALBRIGTSEN goes on to say that he cannot believe that JORDAHL was in BJORNSON's debt in any way particularly since it was well known that there was bad blood between them.

In conversation with INGRID NILSEN, CATHERINE discovers that the family are taking it for granted that she will wish to sell the land and the timber works and she agrees that this is what she had in mind. She says, however, that she is in no great rush and that she would first like to see exactly what it is that she now owns.

ANNA-MARIE takes her on a tour of inspection and CATHERINE is enchanted by the town and the surrounding countryside.

At the busy timberworks she meets OLAV ENGER, the Manager, who is polite but distant towards her. It is clear that he resents the fact that it is a stranger and, worse even, a foreigner, who has inherited the business. But his attitude softens a little when he learns that CATHERINE is considering selling it and he asks her to give him sufficient time to negotiate a loan from the bank in order to put in a bid himself.

CATHERINE agrees.

The land and property on the fjord was once a small farm and there is a meadow behind the attractive old house, at first rising gently and then more steeply to become summer pastureland amid outcrops of bare rock on the mountainside.

The farmhouse itself stands almost at the waters edge and in the midst of a broad expanse of garden.

ANNA-MARIE tells CATHERINE that HJALMAR JORDAHL originally bought the land with the intention of building a small hotel on it but had then abandoned the idea and that, in his later years he had taken to using the house as a place to retreat to from the ever increasing demands of his many business interests.

She also reveals that it was in this house that her mother committed suicide and when CATHERINE unlocks the front door, ANNA-MARIE, clearly distressed, excuses herself claiming that she has to pick up some lace from a village a few kilometres away and adding that she will return and drive CATHERINE back to Alesund in a couple of hours time. "That should give you time enough to look around and get a feel of the place," she says.

When she is alone CATHERINE explores the house and she is captivated by its charm and its warm and welcoming atmosphere.

She is a little surprised however to find that one of the bedrooms, the door of which is locked and which only opens with difficulty, is almost filled with baby dolls of all shapes and sizes, many of them antique but the majority of them relatively modern.

Leaving the house, CATHERINE walks up into the mountain pasture where she finds a small log cabin which at one time was presumably used by the herdsman but which has been converted into a pleasant summerhouse with a magnificent view out over the fjord.

It is simply but comfortably furnished and, lying in the hearth of the open fireplace, is a large pile of burned photographs only a few fragments of which are still identifiable.

Returning to the farmhouse CATHERINE sees a young man entering the private boathouse down on the fjord.

When she investigates she discovers PER HOLBERG closely examining a sailing dinghy, one of two boats moored inside.

Challenged by the Englishwoman, HOLBERG identifies himself as a journalist working for the local newspaper.

As the couple move out onto the landing stage they are unaware that they are being observed through binoculars.

From the bridge of his fishing boat which is anchored in the fjord, ANDERS BJORNSON is watching them with considerable interest.

Asked what he is doing on the property HOLBERG tells CATHERINE that he is following up a theory of his.

"And what's that?" enquires CATHERINE.

"I am certain that HJALMAR JORDAHL'S death was not an accident," says HOLBERG. I believe that he was murdered. And I'm going to prove it."

AND WHAT HAPPENS THEN?

In the following episodes, against a background of contemporary Norwegian life but paralleled by myth and legend, CATHERINE DURRELL becomes deeply involved in the affairs of the Jordahl family and, more and more, her parentage is called into question as she probes the mysterious life and background of HJALMAR JORDAHL.

She embarks on a passionate, stormy and potentially tragic, relationship with ANDERS BJORNSON which places her life in even greater danger.

And when PER HOLBERG, now close to proving that HJALMAR JORDAHL was murdered, is found dead at the foot of a waterfall, CATHERINE pursues his investigations until, finally, on Midsummer's Eve and with the pagan Nordic celebrations at their height, the last piece of the jigsaw falls into place and she comes face to face with a double murderer and her own would-be killer.

And the MAELSTROM into which she has been inexorably drawn threatens to engulf her.