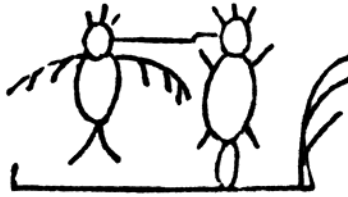


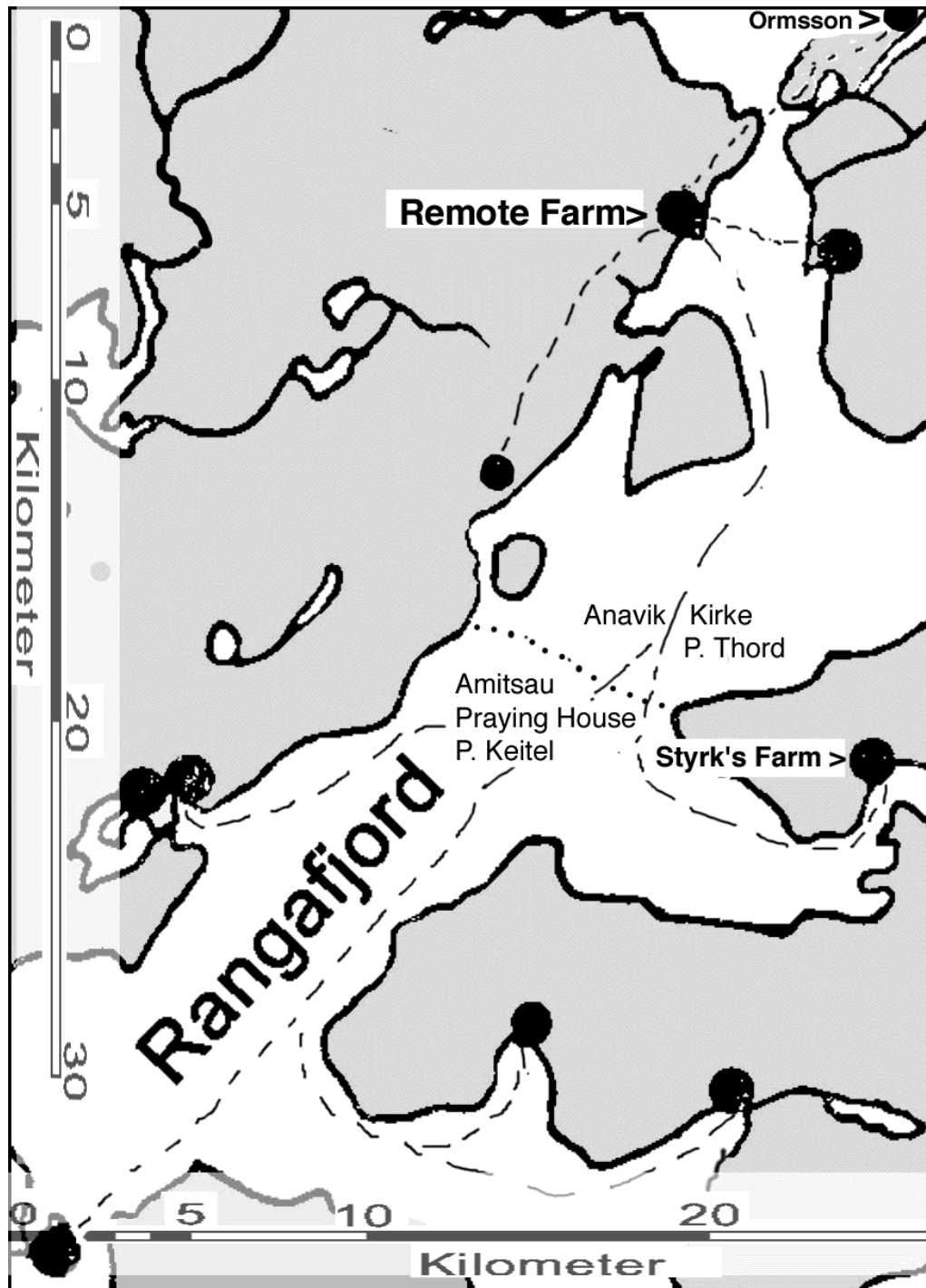
STORIES
of
MAALAN AARUM

WHERE SHOULD WE GO?



E. S. 3:14

TALERMAN'S *THING*



Talerman returns to Rangafjord in fall of 1344 and immediately invokes his power as *sakkyndig* to call the families in the nearest nine houses to an over night *Thing*. He knows the *Thing* will be the tipping point.

WHERE SHOULD WE GO?

At the remote farm around the peninsula on the northeast end of Ranga Fjord, omens for the future were not good. During the previous winter the livestock had consumed all the forage before they could be put on grass. Some of the animals, including the old bull, starved. In the spring they had borrowed a bull from the neighbors on their small peninsula. But only one of their three cows had settled. She would give birth later in the fall, not in summer when the milk would be better. The animals were now at pasture. Thjodhild, Ingjald, and their four children were camping in a hide tent in the pasture. Thjodhild liked the sense of freedom.

The haying had not gone well. There was about one moon's time less hay than the year before.

The seal harvest had also been small. The cold weather caused the seals to come onto the ice further south than expected. The delayed scramble to get to the seals resulted in a lower kill than normal. Caribou were not to be seen. The Arctic hares were also scarce, as were the ptarmigans. So the white foxes were not around in great numbers.

Fortunately Bjørn, a mere boy but good with a harpoon, had struck a walrus in the summer. The nine farms in the fjord divided the walrus flesh according to tradition. Bjørn received one tusk, in addition to his share of the meat, as the reward for his skill.

At least there was some meat to be made into pemmican. When the pounding was done and the fat poured over it, the pemmican would go into a natural refrigerator, a hole dug down to permafrost. Turf covered the pemmican in the hole.

The view was still majestic, but the remote farm was not, at the time, a great place to live. The climate of late summer was already chilly. The remote farm in the fall, when Bjarni was forty-four years old, was a poor place at a poor time to continue a story. But that is where Maalan Aarum's story resumed.

Arnora was swinging the rounded mallet with anger.

Thud! "Men!" thud, "All must be," thud, "like stupid," thud, "oxen!" thud.

She lay the mallet on the stone table. She retied the bowknot holding the sealskin covering her fur clothes. Then she skimmed a layer of fat from the simmering kettle and spread a thin layer on the beaten meat. She covered the fat with a scattering of dried berries. She was careful to put on the right amount. Too

few berries and teeth began to hurt. Too little fat caused belly pains and made people's feet swell.

The stone table was located outside, beside the food room door, so Arnora could see the glacier, the boat pull out, and the trail up to the house. She could also see much of the pasture including Thjodhild's tent where her own children Yngvild and Bjørn were visiting.

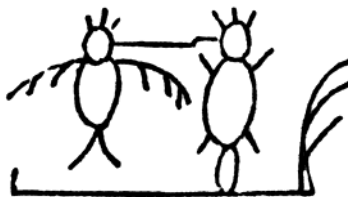
She had her back to the food room door and the corner of the house behind her. She felt secure because nobody would think of landing in the birch fjord and climbing over the ridge to the house. Normally she liked solitude. Today, because of her anger, she really enjoyed it. She rolled up the first batch of pemmican and pushed it aside. She lifted a seal-hide sack of dried meat and poured it evenly on the stone working table.

She picked up the mallet. Thud! "All men," thud, "Oxen!" thud, "Bjarni," thud, "is a..." She felt the bow knot slip. The sealskin slipped away.

Her left hand flew to the short lance leaning against the wall. She raised the mallet high. Her right foot hooked back. With an "Hunnah" she turned, intending to drive the lance in an arc toward the neck of the person behind her. As she swirled, she heard, "Is this the house of the hellion?"

"Bjarni!" The lance stopped. It fell to the earth with the mallet. Bjarni had deftly stepped back. He opened his arms. He was holding cloth in one hand and beads in the other. Her arms surrounded his head with an embrace. He clutched her body close.

Bjarni raised his eyes to locate the door to the great room. He lifted Arnora, took a step past the table. He headed toward the door. He squeezed her body tightly to him. He entered.



Once more Arnora enjoyed the old sensations. Naked under the bearskin, her body was snuggled close to Bjarni. She felt the blessed sense of togetherness. Her contentment was overwhelming her thoughts. Bjarni seemed to be asleep. She would drift back to sleep herself.

But no! She heard voices. Looking up, she saw the orange light from the other room flickering on the ceiling.

"I better get dressed," she said.

"Why?"

"There are men out there."

"They can take care of themselves. They always do. The men will not be pushy. They are good men. They were with me at the *Althing*."

"Oh, the *Althing*, the annual meeting in the south where everyone goes. Why did you not take me along?"

"I told you this spring. It was too far for you to go to the *Althing*. Besides, I was busy most of the time. Most of the wives from the North Settlement were not there."

"And many of those wives were angry!"

"I sensed your anger as you swung the mallet. I do not understand why you were so angry."

Arnora said:

"Bjarni, for more than three years you have been in Merica. At first I missed you terribly. Then, as if I grew numb, I learned to cope. I thought I might be a widow. Many women here are.

"Suddenly, this spring you show up just before the frozen trail breaks up. For two months my hopes were high. I thought we would have a full summer together. A full summer would be nearly half the time as we have been together in the past six years. Then, suddenly, you told me you had to go to the *Althing* because all the important men go there to make decisions about Greenland. You never cared about their decisions before.

"But you left me and one moon's time passes, two moon's time, and now three. Every moon's time I waited, the angrier I got. Our time together is so precious. I know you will have to walk to Merica as soon as the ice freezes. I am angry, really angry at you for wasting my best opportunity in six years to be with you."

Bjarni replied, "Arnora, I walked the frozen trail this spring because, as I told you, getting to the *Althing* this summer was vital to us being together for many years, not moons."

Arnora moved her head away from Bjarni's chest and looked at his face. She said:

I do not see the difference. You were never here during summers for three years when the weather was cold. You were not here at all during three years of warm weather. This time I thought it would be different. But you were not with me this summer even if you were in Greenland. I believe I am married to a snow ghost who only comes to me in the coldest moons.

Bjarni talked at the ceiling as he replied:

Arnora, forgive me. I desperately wanted to be near you also. But there were developments at the *Althing* that will make our future together possible. Events are happening faster than we beaver-heads expected they would. Sometimes the whole plan is scary. Especially when many people suddenly start to think it will work. The beaver-heads say we should not talk about it too much or the evil spirits will find ways to undo us.

She tightened her legs around his left thigh. She pushed her breasts until his chest hair tickled her left nipple. Her lips touched his skin on the neck below the ear.

“Am I an evil spirit?”

“No, but I am sure you are the hellion they talked about.”

“What! How dare you! I am not a hussy!”

Bjarni explained:

I did not say hussy. I said hellion. A hellion is a woman who fights like hell to avoid lying with just any man. After I have been away every day for three long years, I am pleased my wife has earned herself a widely known fame as a hellion.

Arnora tried to absorb the words, she said, “Well, I did not—When did you hear about the fame of the hellion?”

Bjarni continued to explain:

Two men talked to me when we traveled in the Eastern Settlement. Each man spoke to me privately at a different place. They both were ashamed. But they both wanted me to know how fortunate I was to have a very valuable woman. They said you were a strong woman with a well-known fame -- as a hellion. I had not heard about your fame before, but I agreed with their thoughts about you being a valuable woman.

Arnora pulled her knees up and swung them under her as she turned her body. She was half sitting on her legs and half lying on Bjarni's chest. She looked intently at his face. She asked, "Who were these men?"

"I promised each I would never tell. My promise is good to keep. We men may be in the same boat someday." Bjarni smiled at Arnora, "But I am sure you can guess their names."

"Would one of them be named Vifil?"

"Yes, Vifil had a reddish scar along the front shoulder to a red spot just under his jaw."

Arnora shuddered slightly. She looked at the hair on Bjarni's chest as she asked, "What did he say about the hellion?"

"He said he was strongly attracted to the hellion's body until her lance cut off his badge and caused him to bleed. The sight of his blood suddenly made him hungry."

"Just like men. If they cannot force a woman to lay, they always want to fill their belly."

As a playful gesture, Bjarni put his right index finger on Arnora's nose. "He also said he would go with us to Akoman. He told me that he has been to many places in this world. He knows that a man who can live with a hellion is a man to follow to the ends of the ice."

Arnora shook her head, grabbed Bjarni's arm and pinned it above his head. She said, "Ha! He was assuming you can live with the hellion."

Bjarni did not resist the pinning. Arnora's breasts above his face made the surrender endurable. Then Arnora drew back. She placed both hands on Bjarni's chest. She looked at her hands, took in a deep breath, and then looked into Bjarni's eyes saying quietly, "Would another man be named Gard?"

Bjarni's eyes flashed with surprise. Then came a look of puzzlement. He said, "Not at the *Althing*, but I do know a Gard. A Gard Asvaldson rowed in my canoe for three summers. He is a big man. His parents were Danes. The Eskimos

thought he descended from the Tunit. He was a reliable, resourceful companion. A few times he deflected men and weapons coming at me. Is it he?"

Bjarni felt Arnora's involuntary shudder under the robe. She sucked in a short breath. Then a smile spread across her face. She was trying to imagine two men, with one of them having something to hide, rowing in the same canoe. She asked, "Did you see his big bare chest?"

"No, he always wore a deerskin coverlet. The few times he washed he preferred to bath in the stream alone."

Arnora let her robe fall open. She placed one finger on Bjarni's chest and, drawing a slash, she inquired, "So, you never saw the red slash on his chest? What did he have to say about the hellion?"

Bjarni replied,

He never mentioned a hellion. He was always very quiet. When the other men told stories about women, he would just roll up to sleep. One time the men teased and teased him to say something about women. All he said was: 'A man who has a faithful wife is very, very lucky.' Then he rolled up to sleep.

Arnora leaned back crossing her arms and tilting her head. "Well, the hellion can tell you that he was a giant man, but he got hungry at the sight of blood too. Still, as you said, he was reliable. After the slashing, Gard did stay in our house for two moon's time. The first night he had come carrying caribou meat. He misunderstood my elation at having enough food for all to eat. By morning, after a night to nurse his wound, he sensed that we were desperate for food, so he stayed to hunt for us. You are right, he is a resourceful hunter. We were weak and sick then, so we relied on him to get the fires started, water in the pots, and other chores. He was also respectful. Maybe I had relaxed too much that first night. A powerful, respectful man, like you, is seductive. But when he started to ... What stories did you tell?"

"A few about the robe warmer I knew before we married."

Arnora shook her head violently. She said:

"Bjarni! I am a grown woman. You have traveled many years in a land where stories of willing robe warmers are legend. You could hardly avoid the offers. I do not like it. I hope there were few, but do not lie to me.

Bjarni's hands grasped Arnora's shoulders. He held her centered so they looked eye to eye. He said:

"If I have learned anything in my travels, it is that no person likes lies. Tjalve was the one who taught me how to refuse politely. I just said, 'It is against my religion.' I think I gained more respect for that action. People, around the campfire the next day, treated me as if they trusted me more.

"My other action came from your own advice, which I followed. I kept walking from village to village. After many sleeps in the same village, people expect even a man with strong religion to take a woman into his wigwam. As long as my group kept moving, the situation did not come up. So, Arnora, believe me. I am not lying to you."

Arnora used her forearms against his to knock Bjarni's hands from her shoulders. She still looked Bjarni directly in the eyes saying:

I would be a fool to argue against you, because I want to believe my actions have been rewarded by your loyalty. But I continue to doubt. What would happen, for instance, if you woke up some morning to find a willing woman in your robes?

Bjarni smiled. His eyes reflected the humor in his voice as he said, "Arnora, I wake up with a willing woman every time I am home. You know what happens."

Arnora tapped her right fist on Bjarni's chest saying, "No, I meant another willing woman."

Bjarni grabbed Arnora's fist. His eyes narrowed. He said:

I have worried about that too. Arnora, Big Raven Arne is the only saint I know. I am a man. We both know what might happen when a man finds a willing woman in his robes.

Arnora shook her head, and tapped Bjarni's chest with her left hand. She said:

I try to keep thoughts like that out of my mind. If, for some reason, it happens, I do not want to know. But beware Bjarni; here in Rangafjord hunger drives actions. While you were away, I heard of three cases where young single women had become with child by richer, married men.

Bjarni held both of Arnora's fists. He nodded once, saying, "That practice was happening before I left home. Rangafjord people expect the man to support the

woman and her child as well as his own family. When I was a youth, we boys dreamed to become rich enough for young women to trap us."

Arnora snatched her hands free. She planted them on Bjarni's chest nearer to his throat. Her face showed stress. She was hissing as she said, "Bjarni, in the same time period, I have heard about fourteen or fifteen of those 'trappings'. In the three cases I am talking about, the young girls, and their unborn babies, were dead within weeks of moving into the man's house."

Bjarni moved his hands to recover Arnora's hands. His face showed that he was truly puzzled. He asked simply, "How?"

Arnora said, "Bjarni, the polite talk is that one drowned, one froze, and the last one hit her head after falling. The gossip is that, really, the wives killed them."

Bjarni asked, "Were the wives that jealous?"

Arnora sat straight. She pulled her robes open, saying, "Look at me. Do I look like I am eating enough?" She raked her fingers along her clearly visible ribs. She continued:

We have lost one child to hunger. Even now our two children are hungry. Thjodhild's children need food more than ours. We cannot have two more mouths in this house. So, if you are a man with a willing woman, expect me to behave like a jealous, starving woman. Your willing woman, with child, may not live one moon's time after you bring her into this house. She may fall on my lance.

Bjarni saw that their talking had turned very serious. He wanted to change the subject. So he said, "In Akoman, when men talked about women, I, like Gard, rolled up to go to sleep. I would lay there thinking how unlucky I was." Bjarni rolled his head sideways. He tried to put on an unlucky face.

"Unlucky?"

"For being so far away from my Arnora, for so long." Bjarni glanced to see if the phrase had improved the mood. It had. Then he remembered, "There is another man?"

Arnora brought the robe closed again. She sucked in a short breath. She turned to look at the dark wall. Her voice trembled as she said, "Runolf is the only other man who would carry any scars."

"Ah yes, I met him. He had a brown scar low on the left side. He seemed so sad. His friends said he is now happier than he has been in years. His friends said he likes dogs better than women."

Arnora's voice still trembled as she asked, "Will he follow you to the ends of the ice?"

“No, he was embarrassed to tell me how y—the hellion was such an allure. He said closeness to the hellion could be fatal to him. He told me he has chosen to always go in the other direction as far as he can go. He wanted me to tell you there was no hatred in his choice. He wished us the best.”

Arnora gave a sigh of relief. Then she was breathing quietly. The talking had been more troubling than Bjarni thought it would be. But he also thought the issue should be finished. So he asked, “Are there other men without scars?”

Arnora said softly:

I . . . the hellion lived a long way from other houses. People, who usually lived in her house, were sometimes away. The hellion tried to be helpful to passing strangers in a barren land. She learned men’s fancies become queer in the cold dark. The point of a lance helps men refocus on more practical desires, like eating. Fortunately, many men chose not to test the lance. Only three, who carry scars, were foolish enough to try.

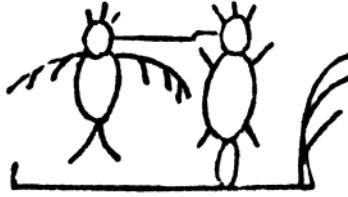
With a shake of her head, sending her hair flying, Arnora showed that the subject was closed. She aimed her right index finger at Bjarni’s nose saying, “But you have not told me anything about the *Althing*.”

Bjarni raised his hands over his head. He was smiling as he said:

All this talk about blood has made me hungry. Besides I sent some beaver-heads to invite the neighbors of Rangafjord over to parlay. Let us join them in the great room. Then after they are settled I can talk to everyone at the same time.

Arnora threw off the covers and slid out of bed. She said:

“What! You invited the neighbors without telling me? Now I must get my clothes on! My fame as a cook, instead of seals, may be going into the pot. If my cooking fame does not survive this mess, you personally will see the hellion increase her fame with a vengeance.”



In truth Bjarni, as sakkyndig, had sent a summons instead of an invitation to the neighbors of Rangafjord. His beaver-head messengers told all the adults and children above fifteen years that they were expected to come and stay the night. A major group decision was going to be made. As Arnora dressed, all those neighbors were rowing toward the remote house.

Arnora came out of the master bedroom while tying an apron over her best fur dress. She was muttering to herself, "Sixty people. Sixty people is more than our household by, by..."

"A factor of six," said Hallgrim, whom she nearly ran into. "How much seal do you eat every day?"

Arnora answered, "If there are no limits, we eat a seal a day. We plan for that."

"Then we will need at least six seals," said Hallgrim. "We were able to bring two. We found the walrus meat you were turning to pemmican. We can use that."

Arnora said, "There is a seal under the stones on the north side. It has been there five sleeps. The meat should be turned by now."

"Good, that is equal to four," replied Hallgrim. "I asked Tjalve and Styrk to beg for two seals each. If the people have them, we will get more than we need. Do you have anything else?"

"The bundles of caribou bones I save for hunters that drop in," replied Arnora.

"How many?"

Arnora held her fingers to her temple, trying to remember, "I tie them in bundles for four men and put them in the cold hole. I think there are thirteen bundles left."

Hallgrim said:

Not quite enough, but close. I know Halldis is bringing the rear legs of a sheep. You can start with that, then bring out the bones after the mutton is nearly gone from the pot.

Arnora added:

I have enough butter, and dried fish. I think I should serve that in the morning. For good things tonight I have the guts with fat stuffed into them. I know I have guts from eight seals. I also have the roots we get down in the birch thicket. I bundle them for four people. I have more than twenty bundles. I suppose we could get out a sealskin with fermented birds. Some people, especially the youth, are starting to like them.

“Good,” said a smiling Hallgrim. “I think you have enough food. We asked others to bring something if they could.”

Arnora smiled back, saying, “Now I know why Bjarni calls you his numbers man. But numbers will not get us more cooking pots. We will need at least, at least...”

“Six,” replied Hallgrim:

We have four getting warm now. I brought one of ours along. We found your two and the old one in the food room. The crack leaks a little but we smeared heavy grease on the inside and can keep doing that through the night.

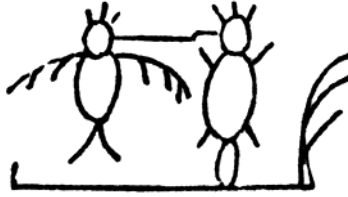
Arnora said, “Thjodhild has one out in the tent. The only other one that is close is across the little bay. The sun will be down by the time somebody gets it.”

Hallgrim nodded and said:

When Styrk and his sons arrive, we will send the boys to the pasture to bring Thjodhild and her family home. You will need her boiling pot and her help. Then the boys can row across the bay to go after another boiling pot from the neighbors.

“That is what Bjarni says he likes about you: numbers and quick ideas,” said Arnora.

Hallgrim smiled as he turned to adjust a sputtering wick. “Did he tell you that on the trail I can cook almost as good as you?”



Styrk with his wife Halldis and their sons were the first to come into the great hall. They were from the Amitsau praying house nearby, but they lived just as close to Bjarni's great hall. Three other men of Rangafjord left their wives at home with the younger children, but they brought five older boys and two older girls. Paafa Ketil from Styrk's praying house slipped in to stand against the wall. Then Arnora saw Sigrid enter the room. Of the six wives from the far houses, Sigrid was the decision-maker. Arnora thought, "I am pleased Sigrid is here, we will not have twelve undecided people at least."

A few moments later Paafa Thord, who served Talerman's kirke, entered and went to visit with Paafa Ketil. In time, there were fifty-eight people clustered around the boiling pots eating, sitting cross-legged on the floor, sitting on the benches, or leaning against the wall.

All of the people in the great room were visiting in small groups. They all expected an important meeting. Some of the adults were aware that many of the beaver-heads and the priests had just returned from a prolonged journey through the Eastern Settlement. They had heard from other men, who came back earlier in the summer, that the decision at the *Althing* had been very close. They were anxiously waiting for Talerman to tell of the meetings at the other kirkes.

Because Talerman was in his homeland, he had wanted to open the migration discussions in the Northern Settlement with a good start. The desire for a friendly crowd was the reason he summoned his closest neighbors to the great room.

After entering the great room, Talerman visited with many of the guests as he worked his way around the boiling pots. When he neared his bench in the center of the wall opposite the door, the loud jabbering lowered to a hushed murmur. Several eyes watched the Talerman's every move. When he sat down, the room went quiet.

Talerman looked around. Then he said in a loud voice for all to hear:

"I have been surprised to hear many of you, especially the women, ask, 'Where is Akoman?' As you know, all of us call the lands to the west 'Merica'. We get to Merica by sailing or by walking over the frozen ice.

“When we get to Merica we hunters, going to Akoman, walk across the land to the west. On the other side of that land is another salty sea. Hunters walk to the shore of that salty sea. From there they go south on the ice. The walk, on the ice, takes about a moon’s time. At the end of the walk is a land called ‘Akoman.’

“When we beaver-heads were in Merica and Akoman we often talked around the campfires about the possibility of moving our families to Akoman. We talked about how to make a safe migration for our families. Everyone thought first of sailing. But the people in Einarsfjord and Lysefjord have few big boats. So a migration by water would be much too long. Also the unsure season for safe sailing would make water migration much too risky. Then we realized that nearly every one of us men had walked the frozen trail more than once. Some hunters make two roundtrips every year.

“So, over many campfires, we schemed. We thought, maybe, we could convince our families to walk the frozen trail to Akoman with us. If you families walked the frozen trail, life would be so much better for all. We hunters would not have to be away from our families most of the year. If we pulled you to Merica, we would not have to pull pemmican home year after year. Slowly, the migration began to seem possible to us.

"As many of you know, most of us hunters, wear beaver hats. The beaver hats help the people in Akoman know which men are familiar with Akoman customs. The Akoman people know that blond, blue eyed men without beaver hats need watching.

"We, hunters in Merica, selected experienced beaver-heads who came from each of the kirkes in the fjords of Greenland. Those beaver-heads returned with me. Each beaver-head planned to talk about the migration to the people of their own kirkes.

“This spring we beaver-heads walked from Merica to the Northern Settlement just before the frozen trail melted. We went to the Eastern Settlement as soon as we could sail. At the *Althing* in the Eastern Settlement, we talked about the migration. We talked with as many people in the Eastern Settlement as possible. Now we are here to talk to you.

“I know most of you have discussed the idea of migrating at home. Many of the women in this room have made the sled run to Merica. You women know that crossing the ice is hard, but it is possible. The distance from Merica to Akoman is shorter than the distance from Rangafjord to Merica, but some of the walking must be over land. The land is better traveled in the winter when both water and land are frozen. The walk over

the land through snow is harder than the walk on the ice, but walking across the soggy ground in the summer, with the many flies biting is sheer torture. We beaver-heads prefer to walk to Akoman in winter. We believe that all of you can make the entire walk in three moon's time.

"Tonight each of you must make a decision affecting all of us. We beaver-heads have been a long time bringing our proposal to you in the Northern Settlement. We waited until we knew the decisions of the *Althing* and the Eastern Settlement before talking to you. We waited because if the Eastern Settlements were opposed to migrating, then we in the Northern Settlement would have had difficult choices to make. Many of the beaver-heads believe the Northern Settlement does not have enough men to make the migration survive in the face of possible enemies. We now know that if the Northern Settlement decides to walk to Akoman, most of the people near Einarsfjord will follow. Their numbers will increase our strength.

"I am hoping you can make a decision here tonight. If we can decide tonight, we beaver-heads will have just enough time to get ready for the migration to Merica next winter. A decision not to decide will be the same as a 'no' decision. By the time you leave tomorrow, everybody will know if we will migrate or not.

"If we are to migrate to Akoman or if we stay here, we need everyone to decide as a group. As we talk tonight think, 'Will you move your families to Akoman as members of your Kirke or praying house group?' When we know your answer we may change the history of Lysefjord and Einarsfjord."

Hallgrim and Tjalve, seated in a corner, watched the movements of the crowd. Then they put their heads together, talking quietly. They were close in their estimates. The ten youth were a toss up. About twice as many men were in favor than opposed. But eight men did not reveal their position. Ten women did not either. Tjalve and Hallgrim were surprised that four women gave clear nods they would go to Akoman. The crowd seemed to be slightly in favor, but there were about twenty uncommitted people. Hallgrim held his hands flat in front of his chest, crossing them back and forth. Talerman caught the signal. He knew the outcome of a summer's effort was still in balance.

Arnora brought slices of seal meat to add to the stews near the center of the room. When she turned toward the food room, Talerman continued, "We beaver-heads did not go straight to the *Althing*. We went to Big Raven Arne's house first."

Paafa Thord stepped forward from his position near the entrance. He raised his right hand. He pointed over the boiling pots to Bjarni. Paafa Thord said loudly, "I told you before, his title is Bishop Arne and you know it!"

Bjarni put his hands on his hips, glaring at Paafa Thord. He answered, "And you know everyone in Akoman calls him Big Raven Arne. He prefers for most us in the Northern Settlement to do the same."

Then Tjalve stood, shaking his head. Talerman saw Tjalve's move and remembered the purpose for the meeting. They needed the help of the priests to convince the people to migrate. So Talerman extended his hands, palms up, and spoke, "Paafa Thord, I ask your forgiveness. I have been calling Bishop Arne "Big Raven" most of my life. Allow me to finish what I have to say, then you and Paafa Ketil can talk to us without interruption."

Paafa Thord had put his arms on his own hips. He was swayed more by the tone of respect than the words. He dropped his arms, gave a slight nod to Talerman, and stepped back to the wall.

Talerman continued:

We knew the Greenland people would never leave their homes unless the priests in their kirkes bless the venture. We also knew Big— Bishop Arne was once in favor of going to Akoman, but we were not sure if he was still in favor. Some of the beaver-heads had heard him talking about sailing directly to Akonsee. We thought it necessary to know if Bishop Arne was in favor of our plan.

Styrk rose from his seat next to Talerman. He shifted from foot to foot, obviously wanting to talk. Talerman nodded. Styrk spoke:

How do these priests get so much influence? Halldis says she will walk the frozen trail only if Paafa Ketil is in favor. Why should she listen to him? He has not walked the ice.

Paafa Ketil stepped forward, raised his right hand, palm up, and spoke quietly:

"Styrk, I apologize for not meeting you at the *Althing*. I stayed here, in the Northern Settlement, because many families needed comforting.

"Bishop Arne appoints priests to serve in the local kirkes and praying houses. I have baptized all your family. Also I have comforted Halldis and the rest of your family many times, especially when Halldis' parents died. I believe I provided needed support."

Styrk waved his right hand across his face than responded:

Paafa Ketil, I have known you since we were kids. I could always whip you. I have difficulty believing you gave support that I could not. What have you done to gain so much influence over Halldis?

Paafa Ketil continued in his quiet manner:

I visited Halldis shortly after each of your children was born. I have been with your family more times than you have. During the first ten years of your oldest son's life you were home only three years. Most of the other seven years, you came home only for a moon's time at Christmas.

"Instead of running off like you did, I have stayed here with the people in distress. I have suffered with them. I have starved with them. I have prayed with them.

"Because I am one of five people in the Northern Settlement who can write, I was, several times, able to request food and robes from Bishop Arne."

"Paafa Ketil," Styrk exploded:

I pulled many sleds full of pemmican to feed my family. I starved myself to save pemmican for families here. When I arrived here from Merica, the families were starving. They needed all the pemmican we brought. Yet, you dare tell me you were responsible for saving them?"

Paafa Ketil, still speaking softly, replied:

"I was partly responsible. Four years ago, I wrote Bishop Arne about our lack of food even as summer approached. The hunters did not get across the ice in early spring that year.

"Bishop Arne was able to use his influence to get ships to go to Merica. Those ships brought back enough pemmican to give us food until the next winter when the hunters brought more pemmican."

Styrk was visibly agitated. “But Paafa Ketil, the men in Merica were the people who loaded the boats. We were able to send two shipments of pemmican by boat. By our efforts, we saved many people, including my family.”

Paafa Ketil responded, “Styrk, you did save the people, including me, but Bishop Arne was responsible for sending the boats. I was responsible for sending the timely message to Bishop Arne.”

Styrk, waving his hand again in disgust, said, “I see we have a standoff right now. I will not follow you even if you pray for me. I believe in the Great Spirit of Akoman instead of your God.”

Most people in the great room had never heard an exchange where the words of a priest were questioned. All nineteen women and half of the men sucked in their breath when they heard their God denounced.

Paafa Ketil said quietly:

Bishop Arne told us they are the same spirit, Styrk. The first Big Raven who walked to Eastman Land over two centuries ago taught the Original Ones about God. Because those people were used to thinking of animal spirits, the first Big Raven was more effective when he talked about a Great Spirit than when he tried to tell them about a powerful God. There are many paths to the top of the mountain. At the top, the Great Spirit and God are the same.

There were sighs of audible relief. Several women nodded their heads in agreement. Styrk sensed that the mood of the group was turning toward Paafa Ketil. Halldis moved out of the food room to stand in the doorway. Styrk noticed her movement. He changed the subject slightly: “If your God is so great, why did his most powerful man on earth, the Popa, assign Big— Bishop Arne to serve a country having less than two hundred and eighty farms?”

Paafa Ketil responded quickly:

“Bishop Arne says the reason is because someone in Norway wrote the Popa about the great number of people in Merica and Akoman. There are a hundred souls to be saved in Akoman and Merica for every soul in Greenland. The few thousand souls in all of Greenland are like a misty rain over a wide river in Akoman. One of the first bishops to come to Lysefjord went on to Merica as soon as he could. Some say he never returned.

Styrk, in a reflective voice, answered:

I have spent more of my time in Merica and Akoman than I have in Rangafjord. I have heard tales about the Big Raven in Akoman. The Original Ones and the K'nistenaux have beliefs similar to the ones my family is learning from you. The people even have altars in most tepees. Except over there the pavows do not serve in kirkes. There are no kirkes.

Paafa Ketil, respecting the change in Styrk's tone, smiled and said:

"The kirkes in Greenland were built by the leading farm families. Because the farmhouses are permanent, the kirkes are also. We priests have been appointed by Bishop Arne to serve the people who come to the kirkes. Bishop Arne told me the hunters in Eastman Land move their camps three to four times a year, so a permanent kirke is not useful there.

"Bishop Arne also said each village has their own praying man called a 'pavow.' Their word 'pavow' sounds similar to our 'paafa.' From what Bishop Arne could learn, the comforting roles are similar. Bishop Arne said most people visit the pavow's hut for spiritual support, but not at a set time or all at once. He said they have a word for "cross" that sounds like ours and many people wear one. He said they also had a word similar to our word for prayer. Do you know what it is?"

Styrk replied, "You must mean the word 'attaboan.' I guessed, correctly, that they were talking about 'altergang' when I first heard them say 'attaboan.' As a little boy I used the word 'altergang' to mean, 'prayer.'"¹ ~

Paafa Ketil, with a truly friendly smile, replied, "So, even if the people of Akomen have no kirkes, their belief in the Great Spirit may be as strong our belief in God because the faith is inside each hut and every man. When we get to the top of the mountain, we all will see only one God, even if you, and they, call him the Great Spirit."

The women and youth in the great room were learning about things rarely discussed in the kirke or at home. After the first confrontation, they were relieved to sense the two opponents were engaged in serious, but respectful discussion.

Halldis stepped further into the room. Styrk could see her better in the glow of the lamp. Halldis was holding a cloth by both hands. She was listening with a pensive look on her face.

¹ Altergang

Styrk said to Paafa Ketil, “I ask you to tell Halldis; her health depends on being with a man who can supply food. If my family walks the frozen trail, I can supply food and be with my family all the time.”

Paafa Ketil exclaimed, “I can think of nothing more frightening than for your family to be caught on the ice in a blizzard.”

Styrk replied:

Actually, the weather is not that bad. During the first three moon’s time after the ice freezes there are only about two short snowstorms for each moon’s time. When we walk toward Merica, the slight wind is often at our backs. The temperatures are really the same as in Lysefjord. Most men make the walk in a moon’s time.

Paafa Ketil replied, “I cannot in truth tell Halldis to go with you if I believe my God is not in favor. She has lived two decades without you being around eleven moons of the year. She may live longer here than over in Akoman near you.”

Styrk was looking toward Halldis. Paafa Ketil turned to see where he was looking. Both men saw Halldis raise a single index finger to her lips. Paafa Ketil responded to the signal:

These people have come to listen to Talerman, not us. We all will be staying here to night. We will have time to discuss this matter later. Let us think on it and talk again.

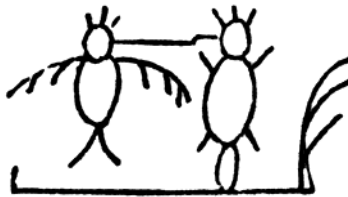
Styrk smiled and replied, “Talk again? With a boy I could always whip?”

The tension was broken. The crowd laughed. But Styrk felt that he lost the debate. He glanced at Halldis, who had her hands on her hips. Then he knew it was even worse. He was losing her respect, rapidly. He had to stop the loss and, if possible, recover some of her respect. Styrk continued, “But Halldis does want your blessing and I want a willing wife. Without your blessing my wife will not be willing. So I promise you, we will talk later this evening.”

There were audible murmurs of approval. Styrk now felt like he was back in the debate. But a glance at Halldis’ slight nod told him he was still walking on thin ice.

Paafa Ketil nodded and stepped back toward the wall. Styrk turned to Talerman, lowered his head and said, “I apologize, Talerman.”

Talerman nodded to accept the apology. He said, “Styrk, you know, I like men who ask good questions and listen well. All of us have learned more about the pavows, the priests, the Great Spirit, and God.”



There was a flurry of movement as people readjusted their positions. A few people came forward to the stew pots with their bowls and spoons. They fished slices of meat out of the boiling pot and spooned the broth into their bowls. Arnora, seeing the liquid going down, carried more water from the food room to the boiling pots.

Talerman surveyed the crowd. He was pleased. He had asked his men to summon the leading women, as well as the men, from the nine farms on Rangafjord. He was able to count nineteen of the women and twenty-three men from those nine farms. There were a few elder sons. The young men and several young women were grouped at the end of the room near the food room door.

Less than half of the families of the Anavik Kirke lived in Rangafjord. He, Paafa Thord, and the other beaver-heads would meet with the rest of the Anavik kirke later. Most of the Rangafjord men were beaver-heads, but many of them were not the migration leaders. Most of the people had known Talerman longer than they had known Paafa Thord.

Talerman waited until the rustle subsided. When he had their attention again, he continued:

“I was saying that we beaver-heads went to Bishop Arne's house. Not all beaver-heads stayed overnight. Bishop Arne's house was close to the *Althing* grounds, so many of the beaver-heads went to visit family or friends in the booths.

“Bishop Arne knew we were coming because the beaver-heads from the Eastern Settlement had told him to expect us. So he had instructed all the priests to come to his house. Most priests were already in the area because they had come to the *Althing*.

“As usual when old friends meet, there was chaos at first. Most of the beaver-heads and priests visited about mutual friends. I was not able to talk very long with Bishop Arne. The priests wanted to talk personally

with him. So they, by twos or threes all night long, slipped away from the general visiting for their private talks with Bishop Arne.

“They were concerned about the new official from the Popa. This new official, a man named Ivar Bardarsson, has the power to collect the church's ten- percent tithe and also the power to collect taxes for the King in Norway. Also Bardarsson appears to be using Norway values for the property, which will result in taxes much too high. So, Bishop Arne and the priests were trying to figure out what to do.

“Because Bishop Arne knew we were coming, he had suggested to Ivar Bardarsson that he should visit the court farm at Foss and survey all of the farms there. Bishop Arne was surprised but relieved that Bardarsson took his suggestion and went to Foss.

“As most of you know, we beaver-heads were selected for a purpose. Each one of us beaver-heads grew up in different kirke. We had a beaver-head from all the kirkes in Greenland. At Bishop Arne's great room, our beaver-heads purposely sought out the priest of their childhood kirke. We knew the decision for the people to leave Greenland would be easier if beaver-heads and priests could work as comrades.

“So the first night at Bishop Arne's passed away with small groups of men talking. As you have just learned by listening to Paafa Ketil and Styk, not every pair became bosom friends. There were a few priests disturbed with our heathen ways. There were a few beaver-heads who were uneasy with priests who wanted to save their souls overnight.

“Bishop Arne's hall is the biggest in Einarsfjord. Even so, the nearly forty men milling around looked like a melee. We were lucky not to have any fights other than playful shoving. The talking, and some shoving, lasted until the sky began to pale again. Then slowly, one by one, we found a spot to sleep.

“When the sun was about two fingers high, I slipped out of the hall for necessary things. Bishop Arne was standing outside. He pointed to the kirke and asked me to visit with him when I returned.

“When I entered the kirke, I told Bishop Arne how pleased I was to talk to him alone. It had been a long time since we last visited together as friends.

“Bishop Arne asked me to just call him 'Big Raven'. Then Bishop Arne told me that our trip to Akoman, twenty-five years ago, was the best event in his life since his baptism.

“But Bishop Arne said he was, now, very sad. He did not know why God was testing the Greenland people so much. He said you people are

good people. You work hard. You love your families. Yet you can barely get enough forage to feed the livestock through the winter. The seafood harvest is unpredictable except at the open water marvels which are so far away. He said Greenland must have food from both the sea and Merica to survive. Despite valiant efforts during the recent warm years very little food has been stored up.

“Bishop Arne talked about other bad trends occurring in Einarsfjord. Such as the permafrost raising so the grave can only go down knee deep. He told me that the graveyards look as if there are no men in Einarsfjord. The men die either at sea or over in Merica.

“I told Bishop Arne that we have visited with many of the Einarsfjord families who came to Akoman in previous years. They live in safety in villages where the climate is warmer than ours. The spring and the fall are like our summers. In winter they hunt in the forests where there are many animals to eat and where the trees protect them from the wind. Their men are with their families all year around. We have not yet met an Einarsfjord family in Akoman that wants to come back to Einarsfjord.

“Then Bishop Arne lamented about the troubles people had in Einarsfjord. Men were able to come home from Merica for only one moon a year. But that was time enough for women to get with child. Having only a few men and many women with babies makes survival difficult for all even if people had enough food which they do not.

“The Norway ships did not get here last summer. When they last arrived, two years ago, the crews were arrogant. With few of our men around, they had an opportunity to take advantage of the many eager women. The priests tried to shelter the women in remote kirkes until the ship left. But there were some nasty happenings.

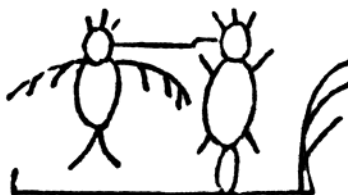
“The ships' crews placed high values on goods. The crews said they could get even more value from the people of 'another land.' The crews were referring to Norumbege and Akonsee.

“Finally, Bishop Arne told me about his anger with Ivar Bardarsson, the church ombudsman.

“Bishop Arne wanted me to tell you that we cannot depend on Norway or the Church to the east to help us survive. He thinks the missing Norwegian supplies and a greedy Church are signs of human failure in our world.

“Since he came back to Einarsfjord from his trip to Akoman, Bishop Arne has lived through three very cold periods with a total of ten very, very cold years. He thinks that the numbing cold today is a sign from

God. Bishop Arne thinks God, for the past twenty-five summers, has been shaping our people to go to a land prepared for them. This very cold temperature, right now, is God's sign for us to go."



Talerman stood silently, looking at the crowd. Then he continued:

"When Bishop Arne said the cold is God's sign for us to go, I asked 'Where should we go?'

"Bishop Arne said without hesitation, 'To Eastman Land in Akomen.'

"I said, 'Some of our men said your were thinking about Akonsee. Have you changed your mind?'

"Bishop Arne said, 'No, I have always been in favor of the Eastman Land.'

"But he said that a wise servant of God must consider options. Akonsee, with its regional kirke, more priests and warmer temperatures seemed to be a good migration option.

"Once he had Hallgrim figure the number of ships it would take to sail to Akonsee. Hallgrim figured moving four thousand people would take, at least, one hundred and thirty voyages. That is a lot of sailing for ships that should be hunting whale, seals, and other sea animals. But the voyages were not impossible if done over several years.

"So about ten summers ago, Bishop Arne asked two priests who had been to Eastman Land before him to take a look at migrating to Akonsee

"The priests sailed to Akonsee in a warm summer. Their trip took four moon's time. One priest barely returned to Einarsfjord before the sea froze. The other priest died in Akonsee of a disease which turned him yellow.²

"The returning priest said the food was adequate in Akonsee, but not plentiful. The hunting territories were small. The people of Akonsee would not like four thousand newcomers at all. The people were friendly

² Yellow death

but were suspicious of people with an accent. The yellow sickness might return as it had in the past

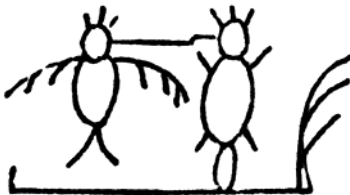
“The priest advised Bishop Arne that the people of Greenland should go to Eastman Land. The recommendation matched Bishop Arne's belief. So he definitely decided he wants the people of Greenland to walk over the ice to Akoman.

“Bishop Arne asked me how the people of Merica and Akoman would react to many people coming to their land.

“I told Bishop Arne that the people of Akoman would help us rather than block us. In Merica the Norse hunters are eager to pull their families west instead of pulling pemmican east.

“I also told Bishop Arne that during the last three years when I was in Akoman, the beaver-heads picked me as the person to speak for all of them. They call me Head-Beaver.

"So I, as the Head Beaver, and Bishop Arne, the Big Raven, looked deep into each other's eyes and we agreed. “Let us go to Akoman.”



Vignette sixteen

HEAD BEAVER AND BIG BIRD

Azon was again seated on his left leg at the bottom of the steps. He wanted to hurry. He said, "Ah, Pitolo, you are so late."

Pitolo grumbled: "I finally gave up. I know how to draw a large group of people in a meeting. But I could not think of how to draw them trying to decide if they should go to another land. Let me see your carving."

"Here you are. It was a difficult concept to show."



Pitolo studied the engraved stick and said:

Ah, you stacked three heads on the left of the hut, which must be the meetinghouse. The heads must mean the house is full. They cannot get in. Then you have three wisps of smoke coming from the house toward the right. The wisps might mean talking about the decision.

Azon nodded with a smile, saying:

Something like that. People left out, meeting house full, and talking shown by smoke on the right. I hope grandfather approves. I could not get a simple set of words for the beaver-head and the Big Raven. I did not know what to say about the hellion.

Pitolo replied, "The hellion is only to make the story interesting and, maybe, to teach some values, similar to most tales. I ignored her."

"What did you say?" Azon asked.

Pitolo paused for a brief while. Then he said:

"Head Beaver and Big Bird said:

'Let us go to Akomen.'"

Azon said, "Easy to remember. But so many details are left out."

Pitolo inclined his head and pulled his right hand past his ear, as if he were pulling down thoughts from the night before. He said:

When our grandson's grandsons tell this story, who is going to care how mad the hellion was? Akomen, this land, will still be here. My uncle went south and east to the salt sea when he was on his quest. He is always jabbering about the stone tower in Akonsee and the many places nearby named Ako-something or other.³~

Azon replied, "My uncles, four of them, and grandfather made their quests to learn about Eastman Land. I think the words should say something about those places."

Pitolo shook his head, saying, "I do not. Akomen will be here. Eastman Land or Akonsee may not be known anymore than last year's village."

Azon persisted, asking, "What about the stories Head Beaver was telling? Surely there should be more words to guide our grandsons."

Pitolo shook his head and said, "No, the important thing to say is that Head Beaver and Blackbird decided to go to Akomen. That was the beginning of the events that brought our ancestors here. Whoever tells that story can make up his own details to hold his audience's attention."

Azon frowned. He said:

I do not think grandfather will approve. But, let us hurry. There was a light covering of snow this morning. My father says we will be leaving as soon as the Big House ceremony ends. Grandfather did not accept food this morning, only water. Grandfather seems to be ready to die."

When they reached the top of the steps, Pitolo swung his leg in a rapid gait as he skipped along the path to the stockade. He said, "I am ready to hear about the *Althing*."

Azon's grandfather had been at the Big House celebration until late in the night. They found him still asleep. He was lying on his side with his knees pulled up.

³ Stone Tower

Pitolo got a bowl of stew from the ever-present pot hung over the fire. Azon found grandfather's cup and took up water. He touched grandfather on the shoulder. Grandfather stretched and then rolled on his back before sitting up.

They waited patiently while grandfather set the soup aside, but took slow sips of water. Then grandfather extended his hands as a signal to look at the engravings. Only Azon handed him one. Grandfather asked, "What? Only one?"

Pitolo said, "I tried many engravings. The idea sounds simple. The doing is not. I could not finish a good one. Mine were all worse than Azon's."

Grandfather frowned as he looked at Azon's engraving. He shook his head. Then he said, "Let me hear the verses from the last story."

Azon said, "Grandfather, I tried many times. I also knew the engraving must be finished, so I worked on it. I have no verse, but Pitolo's verse is better than any of mine."

Maalan Aarum turned to Pitolo and motioned for him to say the verse. Pitolo said, "Head Beaver and Big Bird said: 'Let us go to Akomen.'"

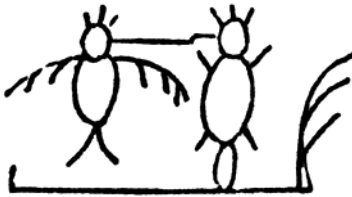
Grandfather lowered his head into his hands. He stayed there for a time. Azon and Pitolo thought it was a long time. When grandfather raised his head he said:

Boys, you are getting wiser and your judgement has been good before. But I have only a little time left. Now, I do not know if I am forced to accept the worst or if I am truly getting the best. Please, tomorrow each of you bring an engraving and a verse. You need experience in making both. I will have the satisfaction of choosing the best."

Grandfather added the engraving to his collection. Then he leaned back into the storytelling position. He said, "The story for today is about a meeting at a place called an *Althing*. The meeting was similar to our Big House celebration. The setting was not. Our people will recognize the engraving you made as a meeting, but the *Althing* was held outside in the summertime. The meeting was for the men. They usually stood in a circle. The only women there were servants.

"In that land to the east, the *Althing* controlled human action. If the men of the country agreed to an action, other men who wanted the action could go ahead. If the men of the country were opposed to an action, then men who wanted the action could do nothing.

"Head Beaver and Big Blackbird wanted all the people to go to Akomen. To do that action, they needed the approval of the *Althing*



Engraved Stick 3:14

"Head Beaver and Big Bird said:
'Let us go to Akomen,'"

FACTUAL FICTION

ALTERGANG

Today, in Norway, Altergang means, "communion." The story assumes that, in earlier times in primitive locations, "Altergang" meant what it says, "going to the altar (to pray)."

The Algonquins had: 1) a Great Spirit, 2) a name that sounds like "Jesus" for the light of the world, 3) Priests called "Pavow" similar to "Paafa", 4) cross tokens, both regular and tau, 5) a word "Quest" for "cross", 6) altars in their tepees and 7) a word "Attaboan", to mean prayer, that could have derived from "Altergang."

The cluster of evidence implies that the Algonquins were originally Christians. The "Attaboan" word implies that the Norse Christians also became part of the Algonquin culture sometime after 1000 when the Norse converted to the Christian religion. **(Return to Altergang place.)**

STONE TOWER

Verrazano (1524) reported that the people near the lavabo said they lived in "Agonsy." (Stromsted, 1973) The "other places" included, in colonial times, "Akomac," an early name for Plymouth, "Akomenack" meaning, "Haakon's people's country" but recorded as "of which Massassoit was sachem", the rivers "Akhushnut," "Akoont," "Akoakest," and "Akquissent." There were also tracts of land. hills and necks of land with names like "Akawmack," "Akashewah," "Akomonticus," "Akoakset," "Alockus," "Akoughcouss," "Akquiatt," "Akushnet," and "Akushena."

The stone tower, a lavabo and keep of a medieval church, still stands in Newark, Rhode Island. (Holand, 1958) **(Return to Stone Tower place.)**

YELLOW DEATH

Warren Rasmussen discussed the yellow death in a public forum in 2001. The yellow plague episodes are believed to be recurring events. A very bad episode occurred just before the Pilgrims landed in 1620. Rasmussen believed tainted shellfish during a very warm climate caused the yellow plague. The story has the Greenland priest dying in 1335, the warmest year in the previous twelve years. **(Return to Yellow Death place.)**

WORD MEANING

NOTE:

[Words can be viewed via the BOOKMARKS Click on the triangle in front of WORD MEANING. If the definition of a word is too long, point at the word and hold . A definition should appear. Other comments related to the word can be viewed in the list below. Click on the word in bookmarks to see the full comments. You can return to the bookmarks section by clicking on BOOKMARKS, but you cannot return directly to a place in text.. To return to a place in the text, enter the word in the EDIT(FIND) function.]

" Asvaldson" is the son of a very powerful man. "Ás" means, "god," and "vald" means, "ruler."

"Gard" means, "fence of protection."

"Runolf:" "Run" means, "hidden knowledge, secret" and "olf" means, "wolf."

"Sigrid:" "Sig" is from "siger" meaning, "victory" and "rid" means, "beautiful."

"Vifill" means, "We will." Usually the name of a priest.