

# **Avalon Study Guide**

## **Avalon by Anya Seton**

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# Plot Summary

This novel is an epic story that describes the fates of Merewyn of Uther and Romieux de Provence. Theirs is a journey that begins with a chance meeting on the way to Tre-Uther, and continues through England, Iceland, Greenland, and North America. Following the history of England's raids by the Vikings, Archbishop Dunstan's trials as he attempted to bring the masses to a Christian life, and Eric the Red's landing and colonization of Greenland, the story is one of love, devotion, and a basic struggle to survive that begins in the year of our Lord 973.

When Rumon meets Merewyn, he never imagines his life will become so entwined with hers. He is an Atheling after all, on a quest to England to offer his services to King Edgar. A descendant from King Alfred and Charlemagne, he is still unable to refuse the dying request of Merewyn's mother, Breaca - to deliver Merewyn to her aunt in England. Breaca also confesses that Merewyn is actually the prodigy of a Viking raid that had taken place fifteen years earlier. Breaca then swears him to secrecy. Suddenly, he finds that he is the guardian and travel companion to the young Merewyn, her serf Caw, and her dog Trig. Nothing can prepare him for the seesaw his emotions will take, and it seems that there is no bond as strong as the love he finally realizes he has for her. Merewyn, on the other hand, falls for Rumon almost immediately. Feelings unfamiliar assault her during the short ride to Tre-Uther, and that is just the beginning. Her feelings grow quickly, and without reservation. It takes Rumon many years to reach that conclusion himself, though. Before that happens, he takes Merewyn to England as promised, offers his services to King Edgar, and befriends Archbishop Dunstan. Fate will separate them for years, but they remain in each others thoughts. Merewyn learns firsthand the truth of her heritage, escaping death in a Viking raid only when it becomes known that she is the daughter of the Viking captain, Ketil Redbeard. Instead, he takes her captive to Iceland. After many years, and one child in that country, she genuinely loves her Nordic husband.

During all of this time, she has never been out of Rumon's thoughts. Finally understanding the depth of his love for her, he searches for her to confess his feelings, only to find she has been taken by the Vikings. He attempts to follow, intent on bringing Merewyn home, but the ship he hires is blown off course and never reaches Iceland. Instead, victims of bad weather, they find themselves miles off course, landing finally at Great Ireland.

Circumstances conspire to keep the surviving crew there for some time, and when Rumon finally reaches Iceland, he is surprised to find that Merewyn is not the reluctant captive he thought she was. In fact, she looks quite content; instead of being thrilled to see him she is almost hostile by his intrusion. Stunned, he leaves and returns to England without her. Merewyn's husband then decides to join a group of colonists in Greenland, led by Eric the Red. Eric had assured them that the land was plentiful and free, but he had neglected to share the truths of the hardships of living in such a place, and there are many. Merewyn has her second child in Greenland, but the country finally takes her husband. She makes the decision to return to England with her children.



Somewhere in the back of her mind she still believes that Rumon will help her. The surprises don't end there. In a twist of fate, Rumon has given himself to the church, and refuses even to see her, but Merewyn's life has a few turns of chance left.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

This novel is an epic story that describes the fates of Merewyn of Uther and Romieux de Provence. Theirs is a journey that begins with a chance meeting on the way to Tre-Uther, and continues through England, Iceland, Greenland and North America. Following the history of England's raids by the Vikings, Archbishop Dunstan's trials as he attempted to bring the masses to a Christian life, and Eric the Red's landing and colonization of Greenland, the story is one of love, devotion and a basic struggle to survive that begins in the year of our Lord 973.

Merewyn leaves home for an overnight trip for the first time with a serf named Caw and her dog, Trig. She is making a pilgrimage to St. Gundred's Well at Roche in the hopes that her prayers there will help her ailing mother, Breaca, too weak to make the journey herself. On her return she meets Romieux de Provence, known as Rumon, who is bound for England and King Edgar's Court. However, after being shipwrecked, Rumon is at this point hopelessly lost. Merewyn sends Caw down the river alone and shows Rumon the way to her village by land. Though he tells Merewyn little of his heritage, the ride allows him to reflect on both how he left his grandmother, Queen Edgive of Arles, for the last time, and his adventures thus far. They arrive at Tre Uther, (the house of Uther) to find no smoke rising from the chimney. Fearing her mother is dead, Merewyn convinces Rumon to accompany her inside.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

The two main characters are introduced here. The lineage discussed here should be paid attention to as it returns again and again in Merewyn's life and is a central issue. Merewyn is a young lady just entering her teenage years when she meets Rumon. He is the first to stir confusing emotions in her as they share his horse for part of the return trip to Merewyn's home. She comes from a simple town called Padstow, and has never ridden a horse before this day. Barefoot and simply dressed, Merewyn is a stark contrast to Rumon and his royal adornments, but she still has enough pride to assert her lineage to King Arthur, although Rumon reveals little of his own family tree.

Rumon is a self possessed nobleman, but doesn't fit in his home environment. Born just hours before the Lord Jesus, he is a gentle soul; one who preaches peace when asked to fight for his country, and advocates forgiveness of his enemies instead of battle. He is a loner as a result, and while his grandmother tries to play matchmaker, Rumon refuses to marry without love. Instead, he longs for the distant shores of a faraway land. Sensing these feelings will not pass, Queen Edgive decides to send him with a parchment of safe conduct to her nephew, King Edgar in England. Her rationale is that in a more peaceful country, her grandson will finally find some purpose to his royal birth.

Traveling from monastery to monastery, Rumon enjoys the hospitality and relative safety of the church as he goes.



# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary

Rumon meets Breaca of Uther, and notes her failing health. When Breaca finds out that Rumon is headed to the Monks, she is vehement they are useless. She relates the tale of the invasion of the Vikings, and how the Monks hid while she and her family were attacked and slaughtered. Rumon goes to the church anyway and finds several Monks, the fattest of which appears to be the Prior. At first the Prior thinks Rumon is a spy, but finally he is convinced, and when Rumon attempts to enlist some form of aid for the house of Uther, the Monks are unsympathetic. The Prior, Father Poldu, admits to hiding, and tells Rumon that Merewyn is of Viking descent and not the Royal blood she claims to be. Astounded, Rumon can't believe they are unwilling to lend aid. Disgusted, he can hardly wait to leave the town behind. Although he has promised Merewyn he will stop and say goodbye, he is now reluctant to, but she is standing on the road outside her home waiting for him. She tells him that Breaca is much better and hopes to speak with him, so Rumon goes inside.

Breaca is not getting better and instead sends Merewyn outside while she convinces Rumon that he should help her. Her dying wish is that Merewyn be taken to her aunt, Uther's sister, in Shaftsbury, but first Breaca makes Rumon promise that he will not tell her daughter that she is the child of a Viking. Once the promise is made, Rumon has a vision and is again convinced that he is on the path of his quest, so when Breaca dies he reluctantly keeps his bargain. He sees Breaca buried and takes Merewyn, Caw and Trig away with him after selling her remaining stock to the Prior. As they travel, Merewyn swallows her grief and takes English lessons from Rumon. She is a quick study.

They arrive at Launceston and discover that King Edgar is at Lydford across the river with most of his court and is to be crowned on Whitsunday at Bath, but was presently was visiting his Queen's old home at Lydford. Rumon also learns that the Queen has changed. Queen Aelfryth, or Alfrida as it was Latinized, is as beautiful as she is mean, and is rumored to have manipulated her way into the position of Queen. Rumon is undeterred and goes to the castle the following morning. He is met by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who, skeptical of Rumon's vellum of introduction, questions Rumon at length, asking about his journey, and then specific questions about his grandmother's past that only Rumon could know the answers to. When the Dunstan is satisfied that Rumon is indeed cousin to King Edgar and distant kin to himself, he is overcome with joy. He also tells Rumon that he knows Merewyn's aunt well, and that she is now the Abbess of Romsey. Rumon would like Merewyn sent to her immediately to be rid of his obligation to her, but the Archbishop has other ideas. He decides to see Merewyn properly received at the castle first.



## Chapter 2 Analysis

Rumon likes his solitude and freedom, and is reluctant to involve himself in the lives of the house of Uther, but his vision there helps to convince him that he should relent. He sees Merewyn as a child - an inconvenience at best, and is eager to get rid of her. The Archbishop reads a great deal into Rumon's lack of physical attraction to Merewyn. He believes that Rumon can be molded into perhaps a Bishop's position one day. The reader will notice that Rumon is accused of being a spy sent by Archbishop Dunstan to spy on Father Poldu and 'disturb' them. His leanings to the church were so evident even then, it is easy to see the path he would take. It is almost a foretelling of events to come.

The Archbishop Dunstan is also quite amused by Rumon's reaction to Merewyn, and his decision to bring her to be presented at court leaves no room for argument. It is already obvious to Dunstan that Rumon has feelings for Merewyn, but the only way he will know for sure if Rumon is right for a life of service to the church is to put them together and see what develops. It is also quite clear at this stage that Rumon is denying any feelings.





# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Rumon is presented to the King after some explanations by Archbishop Dunstan. Merewyn, temporarily forgotten about by all, stands off to a corner fearing that Rumon is ashamed of her and her simple garb. Rumon is well accepted by the King as family, and quickly relates the tale that brings him there, adding his greetings from Queen Edgiva of Arles. When he reveals the portion that includes being charged with Merewyn's care the King is most interested, having an avid interest in all tales of battle and adventure. King Edgar also thought fondly of King Arthur, believing they were much alike. Immediately he called Merewyn to him and summoned his Queen, telling Merewyn that she was welcome and would be treated in a manner befitting the last of King Arthur's line. Queen Alfrida appears at King Edgar's side and Rumon is struck by her beauty. Dunstan seems the only one unaffected by the Queen. Dunstan didn't trust the Queen, with good reason. Nine years earlier, the King had dispatched Earl Athelwald of East Anglia to visit the daughter of Earl Ordgar on his behalf and report back her looks and behavior. Athelwald claimed the girl was skinny, pock marked, ill mannered and altogether unsuitable for a King, so King Edgar married Eneida, the daughter of another Earl. Meanwhile, Athelwald disappears, and when the King decides to visit his old friend, he finds that Athelwald has married the daughter of Earl Ordgar himself, and that she is every bit as lovely as spoken about and more. The King bides his time, but finally kills Athelwald on a hunting expedition. The only other impediment to the King having Alfrida to himself is his own wife, Eneida. Getting rid of a wife is no problem for a King, and so he does just that.

Later, Alfrida becomes pregnant and a more lax Bishop of Ramsbury performs the rite of marriage between Alfrida and King Edgar, but Archbishop Dunstan refuses to perform this ceremony because of the King's crimes. A penance of sorts lasts for years, and as long as the former Queen Eneida is still alive, no marriage ceremony will be performed. Finally Eneida dies, and Alfrida can hardly contain her excitement. Finally, the Lord had seen fit to reward her with marriage and coronation as Queen also.

Merewyn is meanwhile installed in the Ladies' Bower. She is given the important job of keeping the Queen happy. She begins with menial tasks, but is soon in charge of brushing the Queen's hair, and massaging her with special oils. Merewyn does so with gratification, and when the Queen rewards her with a small kiss on the cheek, Merewyn's loyalty is assured. The Queen briefly shows her true colors when the King brings to her attention the bad behavior of one child upon the other. Alfrida takes the side of her son by blood, Ethelred, despite the evidence revealing his guilt, instead of supporting Edward. The King is insistent at first but when Alfrida lets a few tears fall, the King leaves punishing Ethelred up to her. Her agenda is revealed. When the coronation has taken place, the Queen uses her considerable influence over her husband to ensure that Merewyn will be appointed as one of her permanent Bower Ladies.



## Chapter 3 Analysis

Rumon is anxious to complete his obligations and deliver Merewyn to the Abbess of Romsey, but events conspire against him. Queen Alfrida has taken a liking to Merewyn, and also to Rumon. The Queen is reluctant to let either go. She has a history of doing whatever it takes to get what she wants, and is not afraid to employ any and all means. The Queen reveals her true character to Merewyn with her first tirade, but Rumon sees only what he wants to. Queen Alfrida's agenda is obviously to advance her son by blood if possible in order to ascend to the throne instead of Edward when the King is gone.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

For the next two years, Rumon stays at Glastonbury Abbey. Rumon has been sent to Glastonbury after Dunstan caught him locked in an embrace with Queen Alfrida. Two years later, Dunstan now suggests Rumon find someone to marry and have children with, and further suggests Rumon consider Merewyn as a candidate, but Rumon isn't interested. They are both summoned suddenly by the King, and after two days travel arrive to find the King gravely ill. Despite his youthful thirty-one years of age, he is at death's door. In a moment of pain-free lucidity near the end, King Edgar gives his kingdom to his first born son, Edward. Alfrida is more disturbed by this than she is by the King's death, but Edgar takes it as grief at their parting and with his last breath gives his blessing to Ethelred. Queen Alfrida is in shock. Ramon takes her back to her bower and gives her to Merewyn to be tended. This time the Queen isn't to be soothed. Merewyn is shocked by the Queen's attitude, and even more surprised to see Rumon with her.

The emergency Council of Wise Men convenes after Edgar's death, divided on who should be crowned as King in his place. Many don't want Edward to succeed as he stutters and is weak in temperament. Unfortunately, Dunstan has not convened all members of the Council, and finding himself outnumbered, he hangs his head and asks the Bishop of Winchester to help him. The Bishop immediately calls an end to the Council meeting until the Archbishop is feeling better and all of the Councils' members can be assembled.

A month later, when the full Council assembles in Winchester, they witness an apparent miracle as the crucifix appears to endorse Edward as successor. When the vote takes place shortly thereafter, Edward is crowned. Rumon realizes that the "miracle" is a trick and loses his faith in the church. He feels as though the Queen has been betrayed and goes to her to confess his love. She plays him perfectly, pouting about Ethelred's loss, and hers of course. Rumon proposes marriage to her, and she considers the option, quickly.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

Rumon is blinded by the Queen's beauty, so much so that he is unable to see her counterfeit side. Her lust for power spurs her on to have her son, Ethelred, crowned as King. When that doesn't happen, the Queen is distraught. Without her son as King, she is nothing but the woman who used to be the Queen, and she knows it. For her it is all about status and power, and she feels it all slipping away.

That she would even consider a marriage proposal from Rumon when she has no love for him is a testament to her desire to advance herself socially. Rumon's status as an Atheling would give her some standing.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

After the Archbishop manages to manipulate the Council by way of the "miracle" that occurs during the second Council's meeting, there is no time wasted in crowning Edward. Since Queen Alfrida is no blood relation to Edward, she loses her status and is then referred to as "Old Lady". The newly crowned King Edward immediately sends his body Thane, Gunner, to inform her that this would be a good time to consider retirement from the court. He asks which property she would prefer to have as her Dower House.

Earl Alfhre overrules Alfrida's insistence that Ethelred not attend the coronation since she has been snubbed. Alfhre insists, and in a moment of rage Alfrida lashes out, hitting Alfhre in the face with all of her strength. He deals with her behavior swiftly by brutally raping her. Then he suggests that Alfrida go to the witch, Gytha, and get a potion that can be used to remove Edward. Alfhre's wife, Godleva, is ill with lung rot, and he is sure she won't last much longer. Alfhre then tells Alfrida that they can wed and rule England through Ethelred. Alfhre still wants Alfrida to court Rumon in the meantime, just in case his alliance with Dunstan and the church can be put to use. After the coronation of Edward, Earl Alfhre returns to Mercia and ousts all of the monks, replacing them with canons that have little or no morals, but who quickly repay his kindness by filling his coffers with gold. The wickedness quickly spreads to other Earls.

That autumn, a comet appears and is seen throughout England. Dunstan insists it is a sign, and interprets it as God's wrath. By the following spring there is famine, bitter cold, and even snow that continues into June. The young king recognizes the severity of the problem as he returns from a hunting trip with the stag they have caught. Seeing a mother who's baby has died, the king orders the stag roasted for the people. It is the first of many small things that will endear the new king to his countrymen.

Slowly, the famine and sickness ebb, and King Edward finds love the following autumn. His heart goes to Gunner's sister, Elgifu, daughter to the Earl of Yorkshire. She is young and pretty, and after some consideration, Dunstan consents to their wedding. King Edward is overjoyed. At Yuletide, King Edward pays a surprise visit to Corfe castle. Alfhre of Mercia also arrives, and Merewyn is sent to Rumon to extend the invitation that he join them for the feast, and to ask for board for some of the many thanes that travel with the King. King Edward and Ethelred share the same bed as space is limited, but Ethelred is flattered by the King's attentions and is no longer as jealous of him as he was in the beginning. Alfrida is impatient though, and wants Edward out of the way so that her son Ethelred will rule, with her help of course. They agree to continue charming Edward into a false sense of complacency, then kill him. Alfhre proposes marriage as he is of the Cedric line, kin to Edgar himself, telling Alfrida she may be Queen again.



## Chapter 5 Analysis

While King Edward has won the love of his people, and of his new bride-to-be, he now has more to fear from his own extended family. Thinking that they are supportive of him, he is unaware that they plot his death behind his back. Alfrida is as power-hungry as ever, and willing to string along any avenue that has a reasonable chance of getting her the control she desires. She sleeps with Alfhre, and with Rumon, the latter with Alfhre's knowledge and encouragement. Beauty and the beast definitely live together in her.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

Yuletide passes joyfully, and Edward is surprised at the attitude of his stepmother, Alfrida, who even happily accepts the invitation to their upcoming wedding. Her deceptions continue as she also makes time for Rumon over the holidays, showing him an affection and tenderness that he was sure had long gone. Alfrida finally agrees to marry Rumon, and further agrees to announce their engagement at dinner that evening. Rumon is overcome with his blind love for her, and tells her of the plans he has made to remove her from her dreary Castle and take her to Ireland, perhaps. At noon Rumon returns to his own lodgings to don his best clothes in anticipation of his betrothal announcement to the King. On his way back to the Castle, he runs into Merewyn, who is leaving for Romsey. He tells her of his betrothal, and Merewyn responds by telling him he is either mad or bewitched - or both. Rumon doesn't understand her attitude, and after arguing with her he tells her that she is mad. In one last desperate attempt to make Rumon see reason, she tells him that Alfrida has Alfhere for a lover as well. Rumon accuses her of lying, and walks away. When Rumon and Alfrida kneel before the King and ask for his consent and blessing, Edward is overjoyed. He gives his consent happily, and by midnight, everyone is drunk. Even Rumon finally falls asleep on Alfrida's lap. She looks over at Alfhere and signals him to meet her. She tells the sleeping Rumon that she is going to the latrine, and lays his head on the wooden bench. He doesn't move. Alfrida and Alfhere confer for some time, making plans, and the next day Alfhere departs with King and company.

Nightshade is mixed into a draught, and given to Rumon when he arrives under the guise that it will ward off spring fevers. When Rumon tastes it though, it has a musty tang, and he quietly pours it out onto the floor rather than drink it. When Alfrida realizes Rumon is not falling asleep as he should, Cild helps her to drug him a second time. This time he drinks in response to toasts. Realizing he has been poisoned, he tries desperately to induce vomiting but is unsuccessful. Rumon sees Edward sitting astride his horse, taking a cup from Alfrida. Rumon shouts to Edward not to drink, just as Cild Aelfric and Wulfgar spring at him. Rumon sees the glint of the blade that Cild wields and races down the remaining steps. By the time he reaches the gate, Edward's horse has bolted with Edward's leg carefully entangled in one stirrup. Edward bumps along face down over the rocks as the panicked horse races onward. Rumon looks at Alfrida through blurred mind and vision and sees her composure, understanding immediately that she set the whole thing up.

The King is dead, and Rumon collapses and is taken to his home. Ethelred is told of Edward's death and his impending rise to the throne; however, he balks, insisting he doesn't want to be King. More important to him though is his misery at learning that Edward is gone, and he asks his mother what she did to him. Alfrida snaps. She grabs the huge candle clock and rushes Ethelred, beating him about the head and face with



the huge flaming candle. She likely would have killed Ethelred then, but for a reminder from Cild that if she did, Ethelred would not be king of England.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

Treachery is a common theme as Alfrida finally gets her way. King Edward is dead, and Ethelred will be king. Alfrida is once again in control, despite the fact that Dunstan now realizes her involvement in Edward's death. Dunstan understands that more killing is not the answer, and is more inclined to let vengeance be God's. Without proof, there is little that can be done to reverse the fact that Ethelred has been crowned King.





# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

Merewyn enters her twenties living with her aunt, the Abbess Merwinna at Romsey. She receives a letter from Rumon that apologizes profusely for his behavior and for doubting her. He asks that Merewyn remember him in her prayers, and claims responsibility for King Edward's death. Merewyn keeps the letter in the bottom of her chest, taking it out on feast days to reread it. Dunstan and Bishop Ethelwold celebrate requiem mass and Alfhere kneels throughout the ceremony in black homespun robes. He shudders at times and is genuinely repentant. Bishop Ethelwold donates three hairs of the Blessed Virgin's that are part of a lock given to Dunstan in Canterbury by Pope Benedict VII. The relic inspires such awe that pilgrims come almost every day to worship.

One day Sister Herluva comes running to find Merewyn. The Abbess has had a fainting spell and is asking for her. Merewyn hurries to her side, and is amazed to see Gunnar Thoredsson. He has a beard which ages him slightly, but the devotion he had once shown her is not evident now in his eyes. He tells her that he has changed sides, and is now a Norseman. He is disgusted by the fact that his sister Elgifu, who was originally to marry King Edward, is now being given to Ethelred. He bears the news that seven shiploads of Vikings with four hundred and twenty men are in Southampton and coming toward Romsey looking for plunder. Gunner regrets coming to Romsey and vows to himself never to be that weak again. Then he leaves, but not before telling them that the Abbey and all the convent will be burned after Sweyn has removed the treasure. The Abbess makes sure the news is spread so that those who want can flee to the bush to survive. The Abbess, Herluva, Elfled, and Merewyn remain in the Abbey in prayer. The Abbess prays with a fervency that excludes all other surroundings to her. Such depth of devotion and confidence in God is a rare thing, and those who remain with her witness firsthand the strength of her conviction. As sure as if God had summoned the solution, the sky rumbles and growls with thunder. The Vikings take it as a sign that Thor is angry. If that alone wasn't enough to convince them, a bolt of lightning strikes the leaders boat, rendering it useless. The remaining boats waste no time in lashing their leader's boat to theirs and sail for home. When Herluva breaks the news to the Abbess, she seems not to hear. Elfled notes that there is a light around her, and they watch in wonder. Herluva speaks to her again, and this time the Abbess hears her, collapsing to the floor in exhaustion. They take her to her own cell and put her to bed, but despite chafing her hands and using foxglove tincture, it is still a slow recovery for the Abbess Merwinna.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

Superstition and belief in God play a large factor in the events as they unfold. The interpretation of signs as messages from God enable those with strong ties to the church to maintain control over others. It is a debate that reaches back through the

ages, and evidence of the belief in God was never more prevalent than in those days and times. The strength that the church gains as a result of "miracles" and acts of random occurrences in life is amazing. Claiming a storm as evidence of God's almighty will is little different from the claim that Thor was displeased and ruined a ship as a warning. It shows that people around the world need to believe in a higher power. The name of the power changes from place to place, but the basic tenets are very similar from one to another. When events unfold that support the prayer or action, the Deity or Superstition is rewarded with the power to have done so, and if the "prayers" are not answered, the same power is credited with being displeased and showing anger. It takes all of the pressure off of us humans to just take responsibility, doesn't it?



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

During her lengthy recovery, the Abbess holds interviews with each of her nuns. She imposes no sanctions for their lack of courage, but merely speaks to them of devotion and faith. Bishop Ethelwold returns in October and hears final vows from Elfled and four others. Merewyn asks the Abbess permission to enter the nunnery herself and is refused. Instead, the Abbess Merwinna entrusts Merwyn with a pilgrimage on her behalf. She requests that upon her passing, which she is sure is soon approaching, Merewyn take her heart back to Padstow. The Abbess also assures Merewyn that she would have no objection to her stopping in Glastonbury to see Rumon. Merwinna suggests Merewyn and Rumon be wed and have children, citing their compatibility and lineage. It is the last private conversation the Merewyn has with her aunt.

She takes her aunt's heart to the grave of King Arthur, and prays for the dead. She can almost feel them beside her, and in that state of reverence she emerges to encounter Rumon. Taken aback by her beauty, he suddenly realizes that she has never been far from his thoughts. The idea unbalances him, and he is abrupt to the point of discourteous with Merewyn as a result. He offers to guide her up the Tor that evening and she consents. Merewyn prays in the church, and at twilight she and Rumon set off. When they reach the top of the Tor, Rumon and Merewyn sit down, and finally Rumon's feelings get the best of him. He tells Merewyn that he wants her, and kisses her with some abandon, even though on some level a part of him still rebels against the idea. Merewyn is torn between responding and drawing back. Sensing this, Rumon asks her what is wrong. Merewyn tries to explain herself, but they quarrel. For a moment, Rumon is tempted to tell Merewyn the truth about her heritage, bursting her opinion that they are equal in rank and status, but Merewyn is hurt, and recognizing that, Rumon apologizes. She accuses him of always being hot and cold. With heart pounding, he offers to take her into the tower where they'll be sheltered. Horrified that he would think her good enough to bed but not to wed, she runs most of the way back down the Tor, leaving Rumon at the top. He is there for a long time thinking, before he sadly comes down. Merewyn is so devastated that she rouses her servants at three in the morning, thus missing Rumon completely.

Rumon, who paces most of the night, goes to see Merewyn early the next morning to try to explain. He is told that the group had left two hours previously. After some prodding by Rumon, the porter tells him that the group has gone west. Rumon returns to find out Dunstan is to arrive that evening, and without a word he dons his lay-brothers habit and goes to work in the garden. Dunstan, though happy to see Rumon, knows right away that something is wrong. He prods and insists that Rumon discuss what is troubling him. Dunstan already knows that the Lady Merewyn has been to see Rumon, and when confronted, Rumon finally confesses he loves her. When Dunstan fails to understand his distress, Rumon tells him that Merwinna is not Merewyn's true aunt. Although he swore on the cross not to, he now confides the secret to Dunstan. Dunstan suggests he



follow her and intercept her before she can reach Padstow and find out the truth for herself. Rumon's face lights up at the thought, and he and Brother Finian leave the next dawn. On the way, Finian tells Rumon of the Culdees who fled from the Norse heathen and had gone westward to wonderful lands. Though they hurry, they seem unable to catch up with Merewyn and her servants.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

A true example of what love can put you through, this story touches on so many of the ups and downs that can come with real love. He was her prince, and she was his princess, and despite the love they both felt, they raced around the country one step behind each other all the way. When Rumon returns to Tavistock after looking for Merewyn in Lydford and not finding her, his first impression is one of Merewyn kneeling at the south transept, looking up at the high altar. Rumon has a vivid impression of the church then, and has a feeling of belonging, but he still is overwhelmed by the need for Merewyn.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

Rumon and Brother Finian continue their journey to find Merewyn. As they reach the Camel river, Finian observes that it smells like smoke, but Rumon is unconcerned until they get closer and come across a young Cornish child. She tells Rumon there is trouble, and he races ahead thinking only of Merewyn. Tre-Uther is burned. Suddenly the horses argue against proceeding and they soon see Caw and Godo lying on the side of the road. Caw's head is split down to his chin, and Godo has a chest wound. Rumon recognizes the badge from the Bishop of Winchester on Godo's sleeve and is stunned at what became of him. Brother Finian and Rumon go to the church find only the prior. He tells Rumon that Merewyn was alive when they took her, and she is the reason he survived. The Vikings had come and the chief was about to rape Merewyn when Poldu spoke up, asking the chief if he was such a beast that he would rape his own daughter. Ketil Redbeard understood just enough of the conversation to stop him in his tracks. His men gather around him, and Poldu watches as their faces go from lust and jeering laughter to grave consideration and thoughtfulness. They confer, pointing to Tre-Uther, and Ketil orders Merewyn taken aboard his ship. After giving a mocking salute, they sail away leaving Poldu alive. Rumon is devastated by this story, unable to imagine it from Merewyn's side. The decision to follow the Viking ship and bring Merewyn home is made almost immediately, and the next morning Finian is waving goodbye to Rumon as he leaves on a fishing vessel he hires to take him to find the Viking ship. Finian takes charge of the burial of the bodies left behind, and afterward tells Brother Poldu to ready himself to leave. He is to return to Glastonbury.

Rumon and the fishermen make good time, arriving at the mouth of the River Shannon on day six. The Irish fishing folk there all hate the Vikings, and are happy to freely dispense food, water, and information. They reach the Shannon and then dock, and make their way into Limerick to look for a man named Rafn who is likely to know where Merewyn is. Rumon can see that the crew is behaving less than enthusiastically and reminds them that he is a man of his word and they will be paid whether he finds Merewyn or not. They find Rafn and Rumon explains that he is looking for Ketil Redbeard. Rafn tells them that the ship is the Bylgja and it has already passed through on its way to Iceland. With coaxing, he discloses that Merewyn is mute. She said nothing the entire time, and Rumon's heart aches at the thought of what she is enduring. He realizes now that Merewyn knows what he meant when he insulted her on the Tor. Rumon confides that he still wishes to pursue her, and Rafn tells him that Ari Marson is headed to Iceland. For fair recompense, Ari would certainly take him along. The next morning, Rumon pays off the crew of the fishing vessel that got him this far, and hires the Thorgerd and her crew to take him the rest of the way. They sail out of the Shannon and soon encounter a storm that is relentless. The Thorgerd is swamped and icebergs are seen off the bow. For days, the ship flounders until the crew is almost convinced to throw Rumon over as a sacrifice to the Gods, but after Rumon prays for intervention, they finally find land. To Rumon's surprise, the people they meet first are



Culdee! After much gesturing and repeating of phrases, Rumon learns they are in Great Ireland, and after explaining that they had been blown across the sea for weeks, they are led away to be baptized - forcibly if necessary. The Council Ring decides that the ship is a wonderful turn of fortune, and promptly takes it over. The one deck hand that has been left behind resists and is killed.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

Having denied his feelings for Merewyn for so long, Rumon has now opened the floodgates and has little control over the depths of his emotions. Willing to risk his life, he follows her first to Padstow and then onward as he searches for the Viking ship that took her away. He gives little thought to what he will do when he finds her - if he finds her - and for someone who has lived a very ordered life, this is a large step out of character for him.

It is also interesting that despite a previous Viking raid on Padstow, Rumon can not conceive of the possibility that it has happened again. He is shocked when he realizes the truth of the new raid, and the death that it left in its wake. It is surprising that he doesn't give up at this point and continues to put his life in peril to find Merewyn. After all these years, he finally realizes he loves her, and perhaps is just beginning to understand that it might be too late now. It shows again what is evident throughout history. We are our own worst enemy.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

By the year 984, Merewyn is part of her Icelandic community. She is married to Sigurd, and has a fifteen-month-old son Orm. Their home is in Western Iceland, near the Bogarfjord, and has a view of the Hafnarfell mountains. She learns to read the wildlife signs around her, and understands the land. Merewyn and Sigurd raise sheep and horses, and even have a cow and a pig. Sigurd is a good farmer, and Merewyn reflects often on the time that she asked Sigurd and Ketil not to go a-viking anymore.

Ketil is slightly over fifty now, but still a powerful man. He loves his grandson, and respectfully calls Merewyn "Dottir". Merewyn and Sigurd lease their land from Thorstein Egilson, who is the chief of the Borg district, and Ketil resents it mightily. When Ketil goes down to the naust for his daily walk to the Bylgja, Merewyn takes Orm inside and finds that her thrall Brigid is ill. It is obvious after a question or two from Merewyn that she is pregnant and about to give birth. Asgerd is brought and the baby is stillborn. Sigurd tells Ketil that he went to Reykjavik to sell the fleeces, but a trader from Norway with live sheep was the star attraction. Asgerd stays several days and Brigid recovers under her expert care. On June fifth, Asgerd leaves, and Merewyn is relieved. She waves goodbye and sees two men on horseback coming up the road. She doesn't recognize them, and still doubts her eyes even as Rumon comes over to greet her. She invites them in, and Rumon tells her he has been looking for her since Glastonbury, but she refuses to believe it. She offers hospitality, telling them that she is sure that Sigurd will be glad for the company. It is Rumon's turn to be shocked as Merewyn explains that this is her husband. This provokes a confrontation, angering Merewyn, but Ketil arrives and she does not pursue the matter.

Ketil has Jorund, Rumon's companion, tell the story of their voyage, and how they came to be in Iceland. Jorund explains how Ari and his ship the Thorgerd were blown off course, and tells him of their time with the savages. Ketil asks about Ari, and Jorund is embarrassed to admit that the captain and two others did not want to leave. After three years of captivity, much like Merewyn, they had come to love where they were. Ari had married the chief's daughter, Norumbega, despite leaving a wife behind in Iceland. Ketil is astounded, and when the tale is complete, sees Ari as having disgraced himself. Finally, realizing the two men do not know Sigurd, Ketil asks exactly what they are doing there. Rumon explains that he has come for Merewyn, and when Ketil asks why, Rumon confesses that he has searched for her since the day Ketil took her from Padstow.

Ketil misunderstands at first, thinking that his "Dottir" might not have been a virgin when she was given to Sigurd, but she quickly corrects him, and tells him there is no reason to duel for her honor. Finally Sigurd returns and meets Rumon and Jorund. When he discovers the reason for their visit, he asks Rumon if he intends to fight him for Merewyn. Rumon declines, and Sigurd calls Merewyn to him. He asks if Merewyn loved Rumon and she tells him that she had once, a long time ago. When he further presses



her about whether or not she loves Rumon still, she says no, and tells Sigurd that she loves only him, and that she believes Rumon will always be wanting what he cannot have.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

Rumon fully expected that even after three years Merewyn would be overjoyed to see him. At the very least, he expected that his love would be reciprocated, and he is stunned to find that is not the case. He never considered that his behavior on the Tor might have shut the door to her heart for a time where Rumon was concerned. Sigurd is confident of Merewyn's feelings for him. As it was when they were married, Sigurd does not press. This is love freely given from Merewyn, and Sigurd is certain that she will not leave with Rumon. Sigurd is right.

Ketil, on the other hand, is bored and eager for any confrontation to occur. It's interesting that he sees Ari as having disgraced himself by staying where he was first held as captive, but the same circumstances surround his own "Dottir", and he doesn't see her as a disgrace. Ketil is actually proud of the fact that she is becoming a true Icelander. Ketil is so restless that any excuse to use Bloodletter is a good excuse. He is not settled into home life, going down to the naust on a daily basis is evidence enough. Ketil would be happier on his ship.





# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

After Rumon has been gone a fortnight, Ketil and his group arrived at Thingvellir. Here, on the eastern plain of Reykjavik, is where the Althing is held each year. Merewyn is glad for the distraction. She can't understand why she is filled with such anguish since Rumon and Jorund left. While there, Merewyn had spoken very little, and had been overly affectionate with Sigurd, much to his amusement, but the fact that Sigurd has never been baptized bothers her. She hears about an Irish missionary priest in Reykjavik, and wants to go there on the way to the Althing, but Sigurd, who is patient at first, finally gets angry with Merewyn. He tells her that he stopped a-viking for her, but that even he has limits. He believes in the Gods of his fathers, and has no interest in a god who would turn men into weak women, referring of course to Rumon. Merewyn is so angry that she slaps him, hard. Sigurd retaliates, striking Merewyn so hard that she sees lights.

They walk down the lava trail until they reach "Logberg". They find a spot near the river, only because many have not yet arrived. Orm races from booth to booth in excitement, and Ketil rides around greeting old friends and searching for Erik the Red. It is evening before Ketil finds him, and Erik tells Ketil that he sailed west to a land where grasslands bordered a central ice cap. He is so enthusiastic as he describes this place that Ketil is already dreaming of a new home called Ketilsfjord, with miles of free land. By spring, twenty-five ships are set to sail from the western fjords. Erik tells them it is a matter of only four or five days sailing. Merewyn hates to leave Langarfoss. At first, all ships sailed within sight of each other, but fog descends and soon they are blowing their horns to make sure they don't sail into each other. When they round the cape, they see grassland, but no trees are in sight. Sigurd shares Merewyn and Orm's disappointment, but not Ketil.

Erik offers Ketil the fjord they have just sailed into, and tells him that he will take the next one up, calling it Brattalid, where he had built a shelter the previous year. Only fourteen ships have completed the journey, the others are missing or have turned back. Sigurd is concerned that there is no wood, but Ketil is undeterred. Merewyn, Orm, and Brigid sleep on the ship while the men are busily creating a new home. With eight men building, it isn't long before they are settled in the new home they called Ketilvik. Merewyn is four months pregnant, and Ketil's idea of having a feast as soon as possible doesn't thrill her. When Ketil tells her they will slaughter a sheep or two and how he plans to invite most of the colony, Merewyn finally loses her temper, and yells at Ketil. She doesn't understand what possessed him to leave Iceland and come to this barren place, and when she shares these feelings, Ketil calls Sigurd as he has no idea how to calm Merewyn down. Sigurd holds her, kisses her, and tells her that the love they share will keep them strong and insists that she now quiet down. She obeys, much to Ketil's relief. In August they hold their housewarming feast.



When Merewyn's labor begins, she panics. She wants Sigurd to stay with her, but also wants Astrid, her friend from the next homestead over. Ketil finally agrees to go and get her, although he makes it known that he believes it is all for naught and the baby will probably be born before he returns. Sigurd doesn't understand her fear, but he instructs Brigid to gather snow and melt it, keep the fire up, and get linen cloths. He has no idea why these things must be done, but remembers that it was done when Orm was born. Astrid finally arrives and two hours later, a daughter is born. Sigurd formally recognizes her and introduces her to his family as Thora. The baby is water sprinkled, but Merewyn still worries and asks that the baby also have the name, Mary. It is finally settled that the child will be called Thora Mary Sigurdsdottir. At nearly exactly that moment in Glastonbury, Rumon is being ordained as a monk in the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. His thoughts wander during the vows, and he wonders if now finally he will find the love he seeks. First it was Alfrida, and then Merewyn, and now Rumon is a Benedictine monk. He walks out of the church and looks up at the Tor. It brings tears to his eyes.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

Erik the Red convinces Ketil that Greenland is paradise, and the resulting relocation of his entire family forced many a hardship on them, but still they followed him as the Patriarch of the household. It was accepted that the elders ruled, and the family unit remained intact. While they survived, the family was never as content in Greenland as they had been in Iceland. Ketil wanted a better life for his family, but he also yearned for adventure. The latter is likely what tipped the scales in that direction. Ketil never felt as much as home as he did on his ship.

That Rumon is thinking of Alfrida and Merewyn at the moment that he is being vested as a Benedictine monk speaks to the decision he is making. At a crossroads now, he is lost, and since Merewyn sent him back alone, he is convinced that he has no luck with women. His decision to enter the church is largely because of this self image. Had he waited, the future might have been quite different for both of them. His reaction to the Tor makes that obvious.



# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

Erik the Red's son, Leif, sails into Greenland in June of 1000. It is a highlight to even just welcome Leif's messenger. The news is very good, as Leif has been treated extremely well by the king of Norway, Olaf Tryggvason. Greenland now does regular trade with Norway, and the foreign market includes products like Greenland woollens, and seal skins, as well as walrus tusks.

Ketil dies after a prolonged illness that causes terrible stomach pain. He spends months in and out of his mind, and at times is so bad that only Sigurd can manage him. At one point, Sigurd sends for a seeress from Brattalid. Thorbjorg is highly respected for her abilities, and well rewarded for her consultations. After seeing Ketil, she confirms that Ketil is not mad, he is dying. Toward the end of his illness, Ketil wanders the Bylgja, which is still wintered in the naust, shouts orders at a crew that only he sees, and vomits blood in between. He dies on his ship, where he is happiest, and they bury him behind the homestead with Blood Letter and his favorite knife at his side. Thorbjorg tells Sigurd that he will prosper for some years yet (how many she is unsure of), and she sees big changes again for Merewyn. She is quite sure that Merewyn will not die in Greenland.

A great feast is held by Erik the Red for his son's return, and is attended by many of the families, but there are some that are not well enough to attend. A sickness is working its way through the western settlement. The illness takes many; first with fevers and chills, and then with painful stomachs that erupt with red spots. A few have already died. Thorbjorg is sent for, and after incantations, she tells them that the sickness is a result of one crew member from a fishing boat that has put into Gothaab. The seaman, Arne, is well liked by all, and as he isn't sick people begin to wonder if Thorbjorg is losing her touch. When pressed, she tells them that Arne is only an unwitting carrier of this illness. She further says that the sickness will spread to Brattalid if anyone goes to the feast, and that she herself will not attend. Again, people are skeptical, and no one really wants to miss a feast of this grandeur, so some attend even though they aren't feeling well. Some of the women are in such discomfort that they don't even sit down to eat.

Leif arrives and immediately begins to present commands from King Olaf Tryggvason. The King wants everyone baptized right away, and despite reluctance, everyone knows that trade is directly tied to their obedience in matters such as these. Erik is stunned. His son quotes the Bible and tells him that the Gods they have always worshiped are bad. Erik is so angry by this news that he strikes Leif, giving him a nosebleed. Merewyn is curious about what may have occurred, and Erik's wife Thiodild is quick to draw Merewyn into the issue by bringing up her Christianity. She asks Merewyn about her faith and explains that her husband is upset, but she believes the Christian gods are stronger. Merewyn tells her about the Blessed Virgin Mary, and Thiodild is even more convinced that baptism is the thing to do. Leif makes several speeches extolling the advantages of becoming a Christian, emphasizing that if you repent even at the very



end, all your sins will be forgiven. Erik speaks out against the Christian god he calls a milksop, and Sigurd vocalizes his agreement, citing his lack of respect for any god who could turn a man into a woman, thinking about how emotional Rumon was when he came to their home to get Merewyn. There is no point arguing Merewyn knows.

Merewyn notices that Sigurd's face is drawn and he looks tired. He tells her that he has a headache and wants to lie down for a while. Merewyn isn't afraid at first, but as the days wear on Sigurd does not improve. He shakes with chills and fever, and she notices rosy red spots on his belly. Orm comes home and tells Merewyn that he has been given a job by Leif. He is to be the youngest member of the seven, and he is very excited. Merewyn tells him that Sigurd has the illness that is sweeping through the western settlement, and when Orm sees his father in bed, he is brought crashing back to earth. Sigurd tells him he is dying, and makes him promise to take his mother and sister away from Greenland. On his deathbed, he now sees that Greenland was never the place for them. He makes the promise sadly, and Sigurd makes him swear on it, both to his god and to Jesus Christ - just in case. He makes the sign of Thors hammer to seal the deal, and notices how much it is like the sign of the cross that Christians make. He concludes that Thor and Christ must understand each other. Sigurd dies the next day. Merewyn is numb. Finally, with help from Astrid, Merewyn goes to Sigurd's burial behind the homestead, and counts out Orm's inheritance assets. Orm takes his place on the high seat now, and confesses the promise he made his father to take them away from Greenland. Orm asks his mother where she wants to go, and she decides it is time to take her children back to England.

It is September before the Bylgja reaches England after two months at sea. When they arrive in the port at Bristol, the locals are terrified. Remembering Viking raids, they see the ship and presume imminent danger. Merewyn tells Orm to lower the sail and remove the dragons from the prow and stern. He does as he's asked while Merewyn removes a white linen coif and waves it frantically. She tells Thora to wave her nightshirt also, and she does while John calls out to shore. He tells them they are fellow countrymen, and expected a better welcome. When Merewyn recognizes the dress of an Earl or Thane, she calls out to him, telling him they have no weapons. She adds that she is the Lady Merewyn, descendant from King Arthur, born in Cornwall, and served for many years as a lady in waiting to Queen Alfrida. The young Thane who's name is Odo is impressed, but he doesn't like the looks of Orm until Merewyn explains that he is her son. Orm is quietly impressed by the control his mother commands, but at the same time he is confused by her claim to be of King Arthur's line. He argues that she is of Ketil's blood, but she silences him.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

When illness takes Sigurd from Merewyn, all reason to stay in Greenland is gone. On his deathbed, Sigurd recognizes the similarity in the two belief structures. Thor's hammer is much like the cross that Christians make and Sigurd thinks that Thor and God must understand each other. He also takes signs from the land that they are not meant to be there, but it is only on his deathbed that it all becomes clear. Making Orm



swear that he will take the family out of Greenland on the Bylgja, he knows that his son will also not return with Leif. Merewyn has always hated it there, missing the trees and roses. She tells her children about England, and without reservation they sail for her shores. In so many ways it is a leap of faith. Her son has only just inherited this ship, and yet she has no doubts about going.

Parting with the ship after they have arrived is her way of finally saying goodbye to Sigurd. She finds strength in the thought of going home, and has no difficulty remembering that she is the Lady Merewyn. Orm is less than thrilled that she is so willing to forgo her heritage and lineage. He is a proud Viking, and now has to present himself as Lady Merewyn's son. It is a thorn in his side. Merewyn wastes no time becoming English again, even insisting that they become baptized now, but there Orm draws the line, reminding her that his father had forbidden it. Merewyn's largest concern is to return to court life as soon as possible.



# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary

Once Odo purchases the Bylgja and a Narwhal horn that Merewyn and family had brought with them, he gives them two horses to take on their journey. Odo doesn't know where the court is at present, but he wants Merewyn to have good things to say about him when she finally catches up with King Ethelred. They walk over the Mendips, and Orm asks about the Tor and St. Michael's tower. She is excited that they've reached Glastonbury, and can hardly wait to find Rumon, but first she settles her children into the hostel. The monk in charge is no more difficult to convince of her lineage than Odo was, and shortly thereafter they set out for an interview with the new Abbot of Glastonbury. She instructs Orm as to the proper protocol, and tells him that it is proper for him to kiss the Abbot's ring. Orm sulks at the idea, and is shocked when he hears her describe his homeland as her capture by the dreadful Danes. In Greenland, he was taught the importance of heritage, and spent hours learning the history of his ancestors.

The Abbot Beorhted receives them, but is certain that they are seeking charity. Merewyn quickly corrects him, explaining that all she wants is information. It is hard to know who is more surprised, the Abbot or Orm when Merewyn asks the location of Rumon, The Abbot suggests that she talk to Brother Finian who lives in one of the cells halfway up the Tor. She goes there, unaware that Brother Finian is the one who was with Rumon looking for her so many years ago. Understandably, he is startled when she introduces herself. He invites her to sit, and asks her why she wants Rumon when she didn't want him in Iceland. Brother Finian also knows the truth about her heritage, and asks her why she is passing herself off as a British Lady. She explains that the fear most have of Norsemen would make it impossible for her children to have a normal life in England if she didn't. Finian understands and tells her no one in England really knows who she is but himself, Rumon, and Dunstan, who had died on May 19th, 988. She learns of Rumon's missionary life at the Lizard which was at the tip of Cornwall. Rumon converted and baptized sixty people, and started a church. In his three years there, Rumon truly found God, Finian is sure as his smile had become sweet and at peace. There were now four parishes named for him, Finian tells her. Rumon was in charge at Tavistock when the Vikings came and went wild, protecting the altar and the beautiful gold crucifix with the silver dove emblem. He killed two Vikings in the process. Finian suggests she go back to the Abbey at Romsey. He tells her that Elfled is the Abbess there now, and Finian tells Merewyn that it would be best not to reveal the truth about her heritage.

Three days later, Merewyn and her children arrive at Romsey Abbey in Hampshire. At Romsey, Thora becomes quite attached to Sister Herluva, and Orm amuses himself by going riding. One day he came across a King's Thane name Wulfric. Orm is invited back to Wilric's manor for dinner and is quite taken back by the size of the Manor, the amount of house staff, and the variety of food that is offered. Orm is explaining himself as half descended from a royal British line, and the accent coming from a time spent in Iceland.



Orm finally begins to understand what a grim life they led in Greenland, and he later consents to becoming one of Wulfric's men on condition that his mother will get a place at court. Wulfric sees no problem, and easily agrees. The next day, Wulfric shows up with an invitation for both Orm and Merewyn to join him at his manor until a place at court can be arranged, and is stunned at Merewyn's beauty. They leave Thora behind with Sister Herluva, more for her own safety than any other reason. Wulfric, Merewyn, and Orm return Wulfric's manor. Merewyn is just as amazed by all of it as Orm was in the beginning. She is given a capable maid-servant and a bower of her own, but Orm is quickly disenchanted. King Sweyn of Denmark was in England with quite an entourage and Orm mentions he'd like to meet him, but Merewyn is appalled. She reminds Orm that he is English now and that is who he should be fighting for. He is quick to counter that she is of Viking blood, and Merewyn threatens again to baptize him.

Next, Merewyn goes to Wherwell to see Alfrida and is shocked by the change in her. Her hair has been cut short, and has turned to the color of mud, and her once fine boned face now more resembles the full moon. Her eyelids are puffed over and she begins to whine almost the minute she sees Merewyn. She is particularly disturbed that no one comes to see her, and demands her hair be brushed. Merewyn complies, and feels pity where once she felt awe and love.

## Chapter 13 Analysis

Looking for Rumon, Merewyn goes up the Tor and speaks with Brother Finian. For the first time, she is asked to explain why she is passing herself off as Lady Merewyn when it is not the truth, although he knew she once believed it was. This represents another foretelling of things to come.

Here Orm sees an entirely new side of his mother. Until now she has been quiet, reliable, and compliant in all ways. Nothing prepares him for the woman she becomes simply by arriving in England again. She is no longer the wife of Sigurd and mother of Thora and Orm. Now she is suddenly Lady Merewyn, descendant from King Arthur. She commands respect, and locals have even heard of her before. Orm is mystified. He doesn't entirely understand how she can abandon her lineage. This was something he was taught to remember and be proud of, and now his mother was instructing him to say he is descendant from King Arthur instead of Sigurdsson.

Merewyn also gets her eyes opened when she goes to see Alfrida, who has aged much and changed little. By comparison, Merewyn has aged less but changed more. There is a quiet confidence about her as she tells Alfrida calmly that humility and trust in God are all there are to guide us. Merewyn leaves this visit with a sense of sadness.



# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary

By the year 1002, Merewyn is officially a lady-in-waiting to Queen Elgifu, who by then requires constant nursing. The Queen delivers a still born baby, and afterward simply deteriorates. She simpers and moans, and at times even shrieks with pain as the end nears, and though Merewyn feels pity, she never really warms to the Queen. The intense attachment she found with Queen Alfrida never materializes, nor do the land grants, or the position of Thane that she wants so badly for Orm. Ethelred waffles daily. One day it is Yes, and the next it is Maybe. Time passes, and he would simply forget, at which point Merewyn is forced to begin her campaign anew. Ethelred is an ineffective ruler. He is most often drunk, and becomes either angry or desolate afterward. His constant companions are the son of Alfhere, Cild Aelfric who is the one who conspired and arranged the death of King Edward, and Edric Streona, who is loud and repulsive to Merewyn as well. While Ethelred wallows in self pity and drunkenness, England is under attack. Vikings led by King Sweyn and his son Canute sail from Denmark, and then moor in either the Isle of Wight or Normandy. Messengers continue to bring news of raids, including ones on Essex, Devon, and even Somerset. London is also attacked, but somehow manages to defend itself against the invaders. Ethelred, who cowers in Winchester while all this takes place, finally decides that the safest thing to do would be to buy off the King. To further ensure their safety, King Sweyn agrees to leave his sister and husband and their son as hostages. He wants twenty-four thousand pounds, and the deal is struck.

At the same time, unknown to Merewyn, Orm approaches King Sweyn and asks to join him. Orm tries out as a steersman on one of the long ships, and is accepted. Merewyn reminds him of how generous Wulfric is, but Orm is determined to leave. Merewyn asks what will become of her as the Queen has finally succumbed to her long illness. Orm hasn't given that much thought. He figures that his mother is safe with Wulfric and court life, and Thora is happy at Romsey, so his promise to his father is fulfilled, and he feels his responsibility to them is done.

King Ethelred requests the hand of Emma, who is the Duke of Normandy's sister. It is Ethelred's way of ensuring that the fighting will stop. If paying off the invaders didn't work, surely marriage and alliance to the Vikings will. After careful consideration, Merewyn decides that she will marry Wulfric. She even hopes a child will be in the offing, but Orm is appalled, and cites her age as prime reason she shouldn't even consider such thoughts. She quietly corrects that notion, and her dignity silences Orm. He says goodbye to her, and Merewyn prays that Ethelred will never discover the truth of where he is going. Merewyn needs the King's permission to marry, and is sure that Ethelred will refuse if he knows the whereabouts of her son.

Merewyn sends word to Tavistock Abbey soon after she is reinstated in court life. She asks if a visit with Rumon will be appropriate. In only four days, the messenger brings





her answer. Rumon addresses the letter to the Lady Merewyn at King Ethelred's Court, and tells her that his life has changed much since they last met. He feels that they should not meet again, but he adds that he will remember her in his prayers. For weeks Merewyn is beside herself with unhappiness that alternates with anger, but all of this dissolves under Wulfric's constant attentions. He makes her feel loved and secure, which is exactly what she needs. Slowly, she comes to appreciate him more and more, and finally consents to marry him. His ancestry is high bred enough, she decides. Wulfric is the grandson of the Earl of Mercia, and grandson to a Bishop on his mother's side.

No one questions Orm's disappearance and the wedding is held without incident. Herluva brings Thora, and after watching the looks from Wulfric's house-carls lusting after her, Merewyn decides it will be best to leave Thora at the Abbey where she is safe. Her first night with Wulfric, after the Bride-Ale party, is nothing like her first night with Sigurd was, nor has she expected it will be. With more maternal feelings, she helps Wulfric along, and then reflects on her current status with some satisfaction. The only thing missing is Orm.

Servants are sent from Ashley manor to Winchester for supplies regularly, and Merewyn has no trouble keeping up with the gossip of Court life. She knows when the new Queen arrives in Southampton and that the King had gone to meet her with a thousand carls and thanes. It was said that the Queen was petite, beautiful, and dark. She spoke in whispers and only to the large group of Normans who came with her. Merewyn hears that the wedding day is to be on Easter day, which is April the fifth, and when a messenger arrives with an invitation for them she is pleased to no end. Wulfric presents her with a gold coronet meant to be worn over her veil, and although Merewyn is reluctant, she wears it, and they attend the wedding. The ceremony is swift, despite the two Archbishops presiding, and then all settle in for the bridal feast after the Nuptial Mass. Merewyn sees that the Queen is miserable; at barely eighteen years old she certainly has been wed against her will. She hardly speaks a word to Ethelred, and when he tells her he is ready to take her to bed, she pretends not to understand him. Ethelred looks to Cild Aelfric for help, who is amused by the situation, but since he has largely orchestrated and then profited handsomely from both sides as a result of this union, he rises to make a speech that silences the entire hall. He announces that it is time for the royal couple to go to bed, but first they will greet their guests in a tour around the hall. Ethelred puts out his hand and the new Queen has no choice but to take it and reluctantly follow from guest to guest. Her resentment plain, she winces each time a guest refers to her by her new Christian name "Aelgifu" or "Lady Aelgifu". She smiles only once when she passes two of the hostages, Gunhild, King Sweyn's sister, and her young son. When their tour around the room brings them to Merewyn and Wulfric, the Queen stops the procession and inquires as to the coronet that Merewyn wears. It is explained to the Queen that Merewyn is a royal lady who served the previous two Queens, and Lady Aelfric is quick to notice that Merewyn is of Nordic descent. The new Queen is intrigued, and Wulfric believes it won't be long before the Queen requests that Merewyn become part of her bower as well. Wulfric adds that he doesn't want her to go because he wants her to stay with him, and Merewyn



immediately assures him she has no intentions of returning to court service, especially not for as unhappy a Queen as this one will surely be.

As the months slip by, Merewyn spends the warm days walking the dog she asked Wulfric for. She names him Foss, which means waterfall, but she doesn't explain the name to Wulfric. Once she has organized her household, and walked the dog, she has little to do. She visits Thora at the Abbey now and then, but it always takes a while before Thora remembers who she is. Merewyn sees little of Elfled, and their old friendship seems not to have existed at all. The only break from tedium is an unexpected visit from the Queen. While Merewyn proudly summons a bevy of serfs and house carls to attend to the Queen, it turns out that she wants nothing save Merewyn's presence at Court again as an English tutor. Merewyn thanks the Queen, and hesitates before responding. At one time she would have refused the offer outright, but her current state of boredom, and her lack of pregnancy makes her consider more carefully. While doing so, she lamely murmurs about not really wanting to leave her husband. The new Queen listens to the translation and offers that the Manor is so close to Winchester that she could go back and forth any time. Besides, the translating Count continues, she says you remind her of her Norse grandmother. Merewyn picks up Foss who is barking at her feet and inquires as to whether the dog can come and the Queen, sensing victory, laughs and agrees. On St. Michael's Day, Merewyn starts service for her third Queen of England. Wulfric is distressed at first, but when he hears she is able to come back and forth, he relents. The Palace has changed dramatically. Tapestries hang on the walls, and French armchairs replace the stools. Rugs even cover the stone floors in places, and the Queen ordered a spectacular fireplace for her main Bower room, sending for a Mason from France to build it. The fireplace is the first Merewyn has ever seen with an outside chimney, and she finds it very comfortable compared to the usual small central fire that would vent out through the roof wherever it could.

November twelfth is the day that Merewyn expects to ride home, but the weather turns. Sleet and rain falls and since Merewyn already has a cold, she decides to ask the Queen if she can stay. Looking out the window, she notices that there are many horsemen assembling in the courtyard. She climbs to the Bower. The Queen, anticipating her, asks if she is staying. Merewyn says she will if that is acceptable, and asks about the horsemen in the courtyard. The Queen looks out of the same window as Merewyn did, and is white when she returns. She says she was warned that it will happen. By the time Merewyn understands what the Queen is telling her, there is a cavalcade of armed horsemen with torches headed for Winchester town. She learns that the Queen overheard a conversation a few days previous where the King had shouted, "We'll kill all the Danes. Get rid of them forever". Another voice agreed, and later a dish-thane also overhears the King and Cild Aelfric speaking of Danish treachery. The King has already taken to eating and drinking nothing unless the dish-thane has eaten a mouthful several minutes ahead of him. Merewyn is confused though, knowing that King Sweyn has been paid off, but already the men have reached the house of the royal hostages, Gunhild, her son, and her husband Pallig. Within minutes the house is burning, and when the Queen opens the window they can hear the distant screams. It isn't until the next day, St. Brice's Day, that anyone thinks to bring bread and ale to the ladies. Every Dane in the entire kingdom has been killed. The Queen orders the door



barred in case the King decides that the Normans should be the next to go. Merewyn knows Ethelred's madness will pass, and he will be sorry, but though she has seen many rages from him over the years, Merewyn has never seen anything like this before. The smell of roasting flesh is inescapable.

Finally, Wulfric appears, having first seen the King. He has been hunting, and they had been unable to find him or he would have been expected to join the rest of the men on their murdering rampage. Merewyn has never seen his face so desolate. He says the King blames everything on the Earl of Mercia, and is sobbing. Merewyn tries to translate this for the Queen with gestures and sounds. Hundreds have likely died, Wulfric tells her, and adds that despite his fealty to the King, he finds his behavior completely dishonorable. Merewyn leaves with Wulfric, but not before telling the Queen that she has known Ethelred for many years, and claims that he isn't all bad. He just has many demons, and many fears, but that she, Lady Emma, is strong, and is certainly able to rule her husband if she desires it and can force herself not to draw away from him or leave him to the likes of Cild Aelfric. Merewyn is silenced by Wulfric then, but the Queen recognizes the wisdom of her speech. Merewyn tells her God will punish him, and the Queen adds that she is sure that God will punish England.

## Chapter 14 Analysis

Merewyn life is inexorably drawn to Court life again, and her influence fills a vital role. For the third time Merewyn serves a Queen of England, this time teaching her English, but also teaching her to be strong and to take charge of the position she is in. Merewyn is largely the reason that the Queen rises to the challenge instead of the alternatives which would have certainly brought England down. On one hand, Merewyn is much like Queen Alfrida, pursuing position and title to ensure comfort in her future, but on the other hand, her conviction that Ethelred can be controlled by his Queen probably saved the country. Her quiet contribution affects so many on both sides of the conflict.

King Ethelred acts in paranoid misjudgment when he makes the decision to slaughter the Danes. It is this mad action that is the beginning of the end for England.



# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary

By Yuletide, most of the horror of the massacre has subsided. A few hundred Danes have been slaughtered, but many justify it by countering that the Viking raids have done their share of killing as well and killing the Danish royal hostages is considered acceptable also. Even Wulfric echoes the sentiments of the general population on this, and Merewyn wisely keeps her thoughts to herself. While she is not summoned to the Castle again, Merewyn thinks often of the petite Queen, and listens to the gossip eagerly. The King and Queen are seldom at the castle, and it appears the Queen has taken charge. In March there is news that the Queen has had a son they name Edward. Unfortunately, Merewyn has still been unable to bear a child and it nags at her. Life simply isn't worthwhile. Depression sets in, nothing matters. Even Foss can't reach her. In April there are rumors that King Sweyn has returned and is laying waste to Devonshire. Wulfric thinks it is a mistake, but Merewyn corrects him, reminding him that his sister has been killed. Still, Wulfric denies the possibility that it might be true.

One evening a stir is created by the arrival of Orm, and Merewyn is overcome with joy to see him. He's come with Sweyn, and they've already taken over the western shire. At twenty-two, Orm is a self-assured young man now, and he laughs at his mother's suggestion that he leave his sword, helmet, and chain mail in her Bower so that he will be safe. Predictably, Wulfric welcomes Orm into the Manor without issue. He tells Orm that his mother missed him, and then they feast and are entertained. Finally, Wulfric is at his limit, and a house carl helps him make it to bed, leaving Orm and Merewyn alone to talk. Orm tells her that Exeter was taken with hardly a sword drawn, and Merewyn is relieved to find out that Tavistock Abbey is not hit again. Finally, Orm gets around to the real reason for his visit. As a former crewman of Leif Erikson, Einar has been part of Leif's crew when they sailed from Brattalid to find Vinland. Orm describes the new land with such enthusiasm that it is easy to see Sigurd in him. Orm tells her he would like to help colonize this new world with a girl he has met in Dublin who claims to be willing to go with him, but wisely he doesn't suggest his mother come along.

Wulfric is too interested in his newest hobby as falconer to pay attention to much else, but something about the chained birds bothers Merewyn. She puts it aside when Wulfric asks her to come and see his newest acquisition, and as they are on their way, they come across two Benedictine monks. Wulfric goes forward to offer assistance if needed, and the taller monk introduces himself as Brother Laurence and his companion as Brother Gwyn. They say that they are seeking the Lady Merewyn. Wulfric is quite astonished but introduces his wife to them. Brother Laurence tells her that he has come on a request from a holy Monk named Rumon who has lost the use of his legs. He is ill and fears death is close, and asks that Merewyn come see him. She struggles to keep herself neutral, but inside she is glowing. Wulfric, knowing that his wife had been feeling low of late, suggests that a trip to see an old friend might be a good idea and that Merewyn should go.



It is an early August morning when Merewyn arrives at Tavistock Abbey. On the way she is told of the injury and how during a conflict with the Vikings he had suffered this now fatal blow. Rumon's legs are numb and cold, but he never complains, and Brother Laurence tells her how comforted they all are when coming to him for confession. Rumon tells her that the real reason he sent for her is because he once cared for her deeply and worries about her soul. He wants her to confess her deception, pointing out that she shouldn't even be wearing the Athelings circlet. He tells her that she should confess the truth first to the King and Queen, and then to Wulfric. Merewyn is horrified. She is certain that if she confesses the truth to Wulfric, he will repudiate her. He suggests that if Wulfric will no longer have her, she can always return to Romsey Abbey, but Merewyn knows that isn't an option. He tells her that this is a dying request and reluctantly she agrees. Merewyn begins immediately, confessing she has no royal blood of any kind to Brother Laurence as they prepare to leave. Wulfric greets her before she has a chance to speak to the King, and reminds her that this is the day of the special feast for the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin. Merewyn has forgotten and tells Wulfric so before walking past him and straight to the King and Queen. The Queen greets Merewyn's curtsy with an invitation to return to Winchester as her Bower Lady. Merewyn is sure that the Queen will not want anything to do with her after she confesses her lineage, and says as much before raising her voice to almost a shouting level and announcing that she is not the Lady Merewyn, and she is not descended from King Arthur - although she once believed so in good faith.

The reaction to her announcement is mixed. The King immediately springs to his feet with dagger in hand and threatens to kill her for collaborating behind his back, but both the Queen and Cild Aelfric hold him back while Merewyn states the facts of her service in her defense. She also tells him that how he got to the throne sickens her, but that Edward's murder is not Ethelred's fault and that she knows he has suffered for it. The Queen confesses that the King has had nightmares in this regard. The Queen is sympathetic, having been a bastard herself until her parents married, and is prepared to do anything Merewyn now wants. This includes a marriage annulment from Wulfric who is stunned by this information, and an endowment to Romsey Abbey so that Merewyn is not looked down upon if that where she is going. Wulfric finally finds his voice and tells the King and Queen that he doesn't care. He is a bit shocked naturally, but he doesn't want the jewelry back that Merewyn offered him, and Merewyn at once knew that was where she wanted to be. She feels cleansed, and for the first time in a long time feels like she can turn her spirit to God again.

The King by now is asleep on Cild's shoulder, and the Queen quietly tells Merewyn that someday soon, when things have quieted down a little, she would still like Merewyn to come to court, and Merewyn happily agrees. They leave to the sound of the harps playing softly and Merewyn is reminded of Rumon. The thought of him brings joy and a feeling of approval. Merewyn tells her husband that she thinks he is a fine man, and that they'll be home soon, and their lives go on together.



## Chapter 15 Analysis

Confession shall set you free. Merewyn is floundering, lost and unable to find peace in herself. After her meeting with Rumon, she begins to clear the air immediately. To confess the truth of her heritage gives her freedom, and once everyone knows there is no more hiding and no more fearing that the truth will slip out in some embarrassing or dangerous way. Finally accepted for herself without the lineage is what Merewyn has wanted all of her life, and feared the loss of.

There are only two times in Merewyn's life where she admits to feeling completely at peace. The first time was with Sigurd in Langarfoss and it was also the first time that she was living the truth of her heritage. The second time was after she had confessed all to the King, the Queen and Wulfric. Again, the truth is what set her free and gave her peace in her life. Wulfric, truly loving her, doesn't care. Her heritage isn't as important to him as it once might have been and their marriage still makes a Lady of Merewyn.

The Queen's response is no surprise. Her past makes it impossible to be anything but sympathetic to Merewyn's confession. Her generosity is the little bit extra that makes it possible for Merewyn to have options even if Wulfric won't have her. That she again repeats her invitation for Merewyn to return to court is further example of her good spirit, and wisdom that transcends class and status.



# Characters

## Merewyn of Uther

Merewyn is a young girl of fourteen years as this story begins. She has been raised by her mother, and for the first half of her life she believes she is a direct descendant of King Arthur. Her lineage makes her a proud young woman despite her simple life, and she is confident enough to leave her home for as long as even overnight at this age. Merewyn dresses like most young Cornish women. Her feet are always bare, and her clothing is a drab homespun kirtle and dirty red mantle. That is where the similarities end, though. She has long chestnut colored hair that is in stark contrast to the black hair of most Cornish women. Her eyes are also lighter than theirs, a blue with green flecks instead of the usual brown of most Cornish women. Merewyn is just entering the awkward age where too much scrutiny can be embarrassing, but she is earnest and has an intelligent look about her.

Merewyn begins a journey in life that takes her from her home in pursuit of help for her sick and emotionally wounded mother. On her return, she meets a man quite by accident who will be part of her life in one way or another for the rest of her days. Romieux de Provence is how he introduces himself, and little does Merewyn know that he would turn her life upside down. He begins by taking Merewyn to England at the behest of her dying mother. Before they leave, Merewyn hardly has time to catch her breath after her mother's death. Devastated at first, Merewyn quickly learns to stifle her sadness and concentrates instead on learning English. Before long she realizes that she loves this Atheling called Rumon despite his behavior, which tells her that he can hardly wait to be rid of the responsibility of her. She hardly has time to process all of this before she finds herself being presented at King Edgar's court as the Lady Merewyn of Uther. Rumon has another agenda, and for a while she hardly sees him, but her life is busy now as well. She is a lady in waiting for Queen Alfrida. Each time she see Rumon she is thrown into emotional chaos that only increases when she realizes that he is obsessed with the Queen. At one point, Merewyn actually considers giving her life to God and entering the nunnery. Thankfully, her Aunt Merwinna, the Abbess of Romsey, recognizes that Merewyn needs so much more from life. Merewyn lives with her aunt for some time before she becomes ill; when near death, her Aunt Merwinna sends her on an errand. As this is a deathbed request, Merewyn can hardly refuse, and she finds herself returning to Padstow once more. This pilgrimage will send her life on another turn of fate that will test her strength and courage again. It is on this trip that she learns of her Viking ancestry. Horrified, she thinks of all of the times she proudly asserted her royal heritage falsely.

Merewyn is the product of a Viking raid that took place in the year of our Lord 958. Her father, the Viking captain Ketil Redbeard, returns many years later to Merewyn's home of Tre-Uther and then realizes that Merewyn is his daughter. Instead of raping and then killing her as was his original intention, he takes her back with him to Iceland. Merewyn is devastated at first. So taken back by the news of who her father is, the addition of



being kidnapped and taken to Iceland puts Merewyn over the edge for a time. She is mute and unresponsive, but still she is treated in accordance with her father's wishes from the moment he claims her as family. Out of respect for his wishes, Merewyn is cared for until she slowly snaps out of it. She begins to understand the language and even comes to love Ketil-Redbeard as her father. Time passes and she takes Sigurd, a Norseman, as her husband. In Langarfoss she has her first child, Orm. She is a strong woman, who grows into her role as wife and then mother. It is in this home in Iceland that she one day realizes that she is happy and content with her life.

While most would say Merewyn had already lived a full life, her strength of character is tested again when Rumon shows up in her life claiming his love and devotion for her. Merewyn won't be swayed from her current life however, and sends Rumon back to England alone. Soon after, her husband announces his intention to join the colonists headed for Greenland. She joins his enthusiasm, but it turns out to be a difficult life. More than just the usual challenges face these colonists as they struggle with building homes from land that have little timber. They also have to cope with bitter cold and months of isolation from each other as the worst of the winter rages. The only time Merewyn even displays doubt is when her daughter is due. Merewyn is frightened and wanting Sigurd by her side, insisting that Ketil be sent to bring back her neighbor and friend, Astrid. Ketil does as he's asked and Astrid helps Merewyn to deliver her second child. This child is a girl, and Sigurd proudly claimed her as his "Dottir", naming her Thora, and Merewyn adds Mary to the name as well. The girl is then known as Thora Mary Sigurdsdottir.

Merewyn spends many years in the harsh climate of Greenland, but when Sigurd becomes ill he makes his son, now eighteen, vow to take his mother and sister away from there. It takes Merewyn no time to make up her mind where she wants to go. When Sigurd is gone, Merewyn wants to go home to England. With help from an able seaman named John, Orm captains his father's ship, the Bylgja, and takes them all to England. Merewyn intends to find Rumon and enlist his aid in returning to court life, but there are still more surprises in store for her. Feeling great regret for the way they parted the last time, Merewyn is determined to find Rumon, but when she does, he sends greetings, but refuses to see her. He is now fully entrenched in the church, and Merewyn takes the blow with typical dignity. She has returned to the Abbey at Romsey, hoping to find a friendly face, and discovers that her old friend Elfled is now the Abbess, but she is not as warm and unreserved as she once was. When Merewyn asks for help, Elfled suggests she pray. So Merewyn and Orm stay at the hostel while Thora stays on at the Abbey. It is a safe place for a simple minded girl trapped in the body of a beautiful young woman. Orm meets one of the King's thanes when he is out riding, and Wulfric, who had lost the stag he was hunting anyway, invites Orm to dinner that evening. The rest is as much fate as providence. In time, Wulfric and Merewyn marry, and Merewyn again finds herself working for Ethelred's Queen Emma as a lady in waiting. Merewyn teaches Queen Emma English, and with words of wisdom in difficult times, convinces the Queen that she can make a difference in her position, despite the fact that her husband is sometimes a cruel and mean King.





## Romieux de Provence

Romieux de Provence, or Rumon as he was more commonly known by those who could not pronounce his full name, was born just hours before the Lord Jesus. Able to write and draw, Rumon is descended from the great King Alfred and also from Louis L'Aveugle's line from Charlemagne - a prince twice over. Rumon is of dark complexion, fairly tall, with glossy black hair cut above the ears. He is lean and clean shaven, and is clad in a soft blue mantle with squirrel stitched in at the hem and held by a brooch at the shoulder. His long leather shoes are designed and his blue trousers are "cross gartered to the knee with linen strips". He is always dressed as a prince should be, and keeps himself extremely clean, insisting on daily baths that set him apart from most of his countrymen. He has brown eyes that are confident and intelligent, and his demeanor is one of peace and harmony. Rumon had a vision at the age of fifteen that urged him on a Holy Quest. He heard a voice that spoke of brotherhood and peace between all men. The voice inspired in him such awe and joy that he leaped at the chance to follow his quest when the chance presented itself. He seeks "a blessed island suffused with golden light floating somewhere in the west". His vision is repeated, convincing him to take charge of and deliver Merewyn to her family after Breaca of Uther dies.

It is Merewyn's good fortune that her life is put in Rumon's hands. As a high born Atheling, there are no doors that won't open for Rumon in his travels. He is an honorable man who is not the type to take advantage of her, and true to his word, he will take Merewyn all the way to the Abbey at Romsey where her Aunt Merwinna is Abbess.

Rumon is a conflicted man. He falls for a woman who is Queen, and almost loses himself when she casts him aside, but with his belief in God and the strength of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dunstan, he is helped back to his feet. Rumon is sent to Glastonbury after Dunstan catches him in the arms of the Queen. He goes into seclusion, prays, and climbs the Tor, but still can't shake his desire for the Queen. Rumon doesn't see her clearly until King Edward is murdered and he himself has been drugged to be kept out of the way. It is then that he sees in her face that she has had a hand in the murder of the king and he is devastated.

Again, Dunstan senses his need for more challenge, and he sends Rumon on a mission to Lizard to bring religion to the heathens. Rumon is gone for three years, during which he baptizes over sixty people and starts a church. He finds his calling in that place, and when he returns it is with a peace and contentment that he has not known before.

After his return from Maneage, or Lizard as it is also known, Rumon goes to Canterbury where Dunstan gives him one last instruction. Dunstan believes that Rumon's soul needs more challenge, so he sends Rumon to Tavistock Abbey to do translations and make illuminations. He would also be able to use his skills as a harpist to set the pitch for the chants and perhaps even to accompany the carols on more festive occasions. Rumon agrees, and in no time finds himself in charge of the Tavistock Abbey. The next challenge comes when Vikings came to the Abbey. Finding something in himself he hadn't previously known, Rumon fights back. He kills two Vikings in the Abbey Church



and survives to tell the story, but suffers an injury to his back that, while not evident immediately, will certainly be the end of him. He finds a state of grace, and even convinces Merewyn to find hers and peace before he dies.

## Archbishop of Canterbury, Dunstan

Archbishop Dunstan is a man in his sixties with ruddy cheeks and a stubby nose that is slightly off straight. Bushy grey eyebrows and a benign look disguise piercing eyes and a good judge of character. Clad in the black Benedictine habit, with a jeweled cross at his neck holding a gold embroidered cope and sporting a pearl studded skull-cap, Archbishop Dunstan is an imposing sight that commands attention. Dunstan lives his life in service of the church. He takes a special interest in the souls of those he knows, and works hard to keep challenging the souls of those in his Church. He is a strong influence in both church and government, manipulating if necessary the events to the church's and England's best advantage.

Recognizing the potential in Rumon, he takes special interest in him, hopeful that he will be a strong addition one day. At the same time, he sees that Rumon is not happy, so he continues to find new challenges for him. While he is not beyond manipulating situations to his advantage when necessary, Dunstan's intentions are usually honorable. He acts in good faith not only for his country, but for God as well. He is committed to helping Rumon find himself - regardless of whether or not he remains in the church, again showing that his motives are entirely altruistic. Right up until the end of his life, the Archbishop of Canterbury is a pious and confident believer in the greater good of God and England.

Dunstan's connection to the court ends when King Edward is murdered. King Ethelred has no religious aspirations whatsoever, and instead turns Corfe castle into something bordering on sleazy. Despite this, Dunstan continues to affect change, bringing Christianity to any and all he hears of. His life ends much as he lived it, in prayer.

## Breaca of Uther

Mother to Merewyn, Breaca is a widow, marked by illness and a disordered mind. She was attacked when their home was raided in the year of our Lord 958 by the "bearded and helmeted raiders", the Vikings, and was left with a sword wound in her thigh, and an arm ripped from its socket. The arm still hangs limply at her side now. Her state of mind is largely due to the invasion of the Vikings who killed all but one Serf on her property, and left her pregnant and without husband or support of the Church as a result. Shunned, she is angry and disillusioned, but still raises her daughter to believe that she is the child of her husband, Uther, and that her lineage is descendant from royalty. She vows not to tell Merewyn the truth about her beginnings. Breaca of Uther's role is brief but poignant as she orchestrates Merewyn's journey with Romieux of Provence to England and makes him vow not to reveal her secret to Merewyn or anyone else. She



dies shortly after extracting this promise, leaving her daughter, Merewyn and her serf, Caw, to the fate and mercy of Rumon.

## King Edgar

While he may have been known as a peaceable King, and his reign over England certainly reflects that, King Edgar is also capable of violence. Having killed Earl Athelwal for deceiving him about Alfrida from Lydford, he then repudiates his current Queen so she is removed and the way is clear for him to marry Alfrida himself. While she certainly manipulated him to some extent, the King has his own demons. His love for Alfrida would cost him much. King Edgar is not lacking intelligence however. He gives his crown to his first born son, Edward, instead of his son by Alfrida, Ethelred. He knows that his wife wants her son by blood in the seat of power, but Edgar realizes that it is not in England's best interest. Little does he know that by naming his son Edward as successor, he also sealed his fate. Despite his earlier transgressions, Dunstan was sure that King Edgar had long ago paid for his transgressions, and after his death Edgar would be remembered as a mediator and a merciful King.

## Alfrida Ordgar and later Queen Alfrida

Alfrida was lovely, and knew it. She was only nineteen when King Edgar first sent his loyal and trustworthy friend, the Earl Athelwal of East Anglia, on a trip to Lydford to report back on her behavior and looks, but the Earl is doomed from the start. When he meets the Devonshire girl he falls for her and asks Earl Ordgar for her hand. He then tells the King that she is gangly and pock marked, and that she has no manners at all. He then leaves the immediately realm of the King in the hopes that the King will never know. Instead, the King marries another Earl's daughter, and Alfrida would have been unaware had the King not suspected something. He comes to pay the Earl a visit and when he sees Alfrida, he knows the truth. Alfrida is conniving, and uses all of her wiles to lure the King in. When she is successful, the King even goes as far as to murder Earl Athelwal in order to make Alfrida his queen. Of course there is also the small matter of the current queen, but she is also dealt with and Alfrida becomes Queen. She rules with a vicious hand, often unfair and unyielding, especially when it comes to her own aspirations. She would often take the side of her son by blood over his older brother and stepson to Alfrida from Edgar's previous queen, even if the evidence supported the contrary.

Alfrida is as interested in power as she is beautiful, and promotes all avenues that are available to her through her incredible looks and any connections she can create. When being a Queen isn't enough, she starts to push her son Ethelred as successor to the throne, even though Edward, the King's eldest son, is next in line. It is never enough. When her husband the King named Edward as his heir, Alfrida almost has a complete emotional collapse, but evil is resilient. She is soon made to see that there can be an easier way. It is helpful that Alfrida had nurtured some nasty connections in her reign, and she soon plots her stepson's murder so that her son can rule in his place. It is



pathetic, but all she thinks about is her return to court life. Nothing else matters to her. She conspires, killing the young king, and moves back into a position of power.

## Edward

Edward is the first son of King Edgar, and heir to the throne of England. He is a quiet and unassuming young man with an unfortunate nervous stutter. When Alfrida replaces Eneida in the castle, the situation only gets worse. He constantly has to fight for his position as the first son of King Edgar. When the coronation ceremony takes place, he behaves much as his father did, nervously praying in the church and fasting. His first decision as King is to remove the women from Corfe Castle. He sends word to Alfrida that she could retire as the Old Lady to any of her properties she chose. It is the first bold move he made, even though it had been made with much influence from Dunstan.

Edward would earn the love of many during the great famine, ordering the stag they caught roasted and given to the starving people he saw. He didn't punish poachers during that period and did not enforce royal preserves. Soon his countrymen loved him, and in 977 he found love himself. Elgifu was Gunner's sister, and daughter to the Earl of Yorkshire and Lady Hilde.

Sadly, Edward is deceived by his wicked stepmother and believes her seeming happiness for him. He begins to believe that she isn't so bad after all, and even spends time with Alfrida and Ethelred. They look forward to spending holidays together, and the Yuletide is a very merry time at Corfe. Alfrida seems interested when he talks of Elgifu and how he misses her. The last day of March is the date set for his wedding, and it is a date Edward would not keep. Told of a wild boar that was causing problems, he rode out with his men on a hunt and is manipulated in stopping in to see his stepmother and Ethelred. It was an invitation he wouldn't refuse. On March 18th, he would ride alone to see Alfrida and Ethelred, and would be welcomed with a cup of nightshade and a silver hilted dagger in a spot near the left shoulder blade. Too late to save him, Rumon sees the truth and calls out, but events are already in motion, and Edward dies from injuries as a result of being caught with one leg in a stirrup of his horse as it bolts.

## Ethelred the Unready

The second son of King Edgar, Ethelred is a disappointment from the beginning. Alfrida's hope for the throne over her stepson Edward, Ethelred just doesn't have any ambition or spine. He is a whiner as a youngster and even his bowels are weak when he gets nervous. Alfrida's treatment of him doesn't help. She is so consumed with getting him into a seat of power that when it finally happens and Ethelred responds with his characteristic whining and sniveling, Alfrida beats him half senseless with a clock candle. This begins a fear of candles in Ethelred that will last the remainder of his life. As a child, Ethelred is nasty and spoiled, pulling pranks that include painting his brother Edwards' horse green just before a coronation ceremony, and stealing Edwards' sword -



the Sword of Athelstan. As an Atheling, he is a disappointment - stealing and lying, and cringing and whining when he is caught.

As a king he is irrational and easily led. He still cringes and whines, and still lies and cheats. His companions of choice are vile, drunken animals, and Corfe castle turns into a cesspool. Out of control drinking and paranoia lead him to a decision that has all the Danes in his area slaughtered, including the Royal hostages left behind by King Sweyn as assurance along with his payoff that he wouldn't return to England again. By killing all of the Danes, the King puts in motion the turning wheel that will be responsible for the Norman Conquest in 1066.

His only saving grace was a self-serving marriage to Emma of Normandy. While his reasons were strictly to avoid more conflicts with the Viking raids, it turned out to be good decision for England. Emma of Normandy would install her countrymen in positions of importance and when the Danes came, they were met without fight. Called Ethelred the Unready, England went to pieces under his rule and he finally died in London on April 23rd, 1016. No one is sure if the cause was natural or not.

## Earl Alfhere

Lord of all Mercia, the Earl Alfhere is a handsome man who is adept at any game of wits. Earl Alfhere owns enough land to make the Archbishop Dunstan nervous about the amount of power he wields, so he encourages the King to take land from him to build new Monasteries and Nunneries. Alfhere regards the church with annoyance and suspicion. Alfhere also resents the amount of control that Dunstan has over the young King, and does his best to have the young King Edward ousted. He tells Dunstan that Edward is unfit to be King, and wants Ethelred crowned instead. This would be no surprise to anyone who knows of his ongoing relationship with Alfrida, and putting it all together, Alfhere had aspirations to rule England with her. His scheme doesn't work, but he continues to plot against Edward. His machinations are at work with Alfrida too as he convinces her to continue leading Rumon along as though there was some hope of a future for them. He bets that as Rumon has contacts with the church and is close to Dunstan, he might be of some use to them in the future.

Once King Edgar dies, Alfhere takes issue with Dunstan over his introduction of Benedictine rule in the church. He tells Dunstan he is sick of it, and promptly ousts the monks and replaces them with the original canons and their wenches. Other Earls follow his lead, and the wicked sedition spreads.

Meanwhile, he conspires with his son, Cild and Alfrida to kill Edward. Even on the night of Alfrida's betrothal to Rumon, Alfhere is in a back room with Alfrida making plans. When the time finally comes to put the plan in motion, it is Alfhere who arranges the delay in following the King to Corfe so that he winds up there alone. The Earl is also the one seeding the idea in Alfrida that she should acquire a potion to put Rumon to sleep so that he will be out of the way.



## Elfled

Once Bower Lady to Queen Alfrida, who despises her, Elfled is sent to Romsey Abbey. She works and becomes a novice, very devout and much happier than she was when she first arrived from Corfe seeking asylum. In the peaceful and ordered convent life, Elfled thrives. Though thinner, she constantly disciplines herself. She bathes in the freezing cold of the carp pond, and on fast days, she eats only a small piece of fish or chicken. Her knees are stiff and filled with callouses from the amount of time she spends on them praying. Despite the passing years, she retains the elfin smile that somehow suits her name. In time, her devotion leads her to the the Abbess of Romsey, eventually helping Merewyn who had once helped her.

## Sigurd

Ketil Ketilson's foster son, Sigurd is one of Ketil's crewmen when they attack Padstow a second time and capture Merewyn. He is a brawny lad who takes an immediate liking to Merewyn, visiting her regularly, and even brings her a gilded brooch. With golden hair and beard, he has serious blue eyes. He patiently waits until Merewyn recovers and then when she is willing, he marries her. He does well as a farmer after Merewyn asks him to stop going a-viking, and he is mostly happy. He has one son named Orm while they live in Iceland and a daughter named Thora Mary while they live in Greenland. In his life he was a viking who became a farmer, and then a father. He didn't stop there. He helped to settle Greenland, and was a religious man. He loved his family, and was a calm and good natured man until his limits were reached. Then he was capable of lashing out if necessary to make a point. Despite that, he is a proud man who believes that they are not barbarians, Viking behavior aside.

## Orm Sigurdsson

Orm looks much like his father Sigurd. He is blond and has very curly hair when he is young. He has his father's blue eyes as well, and even has many of his mannerisms. Fearless from childhood, Orm is as at home at sea as he is at home. He learns early from his father, and the Bylgja is very familiar to him by the time his father passes away and leaves it to him. He assumes responsibility for his mother and sister, and sails to England at his mother's request. Once there, he is saddened by the sale of the ship, but respects his mother's decision. Merewyn is like a new person to Orm when they reach England. He is amazed by his mother's duality of identity. Once he sees her safely to England and living comfortably, Orm decides to join King Sweyn. He tries out for a position on his ship and gets it, following in his father's footsteps as he goes a-viking.

He returns to Ashley Manor to warn his mother, but also to tell her that he found a girl in Dublin that he loves and he wants to take her to Vinland, which is the new land waiting to be colonized. It turns out that the country he is talking about is the same one that Ari's ship had been blown off course to. It is the last of Orm that Merewyn sees.



## Ketil Firebeard Ketilson

Ketil Firebeard Ketilson is a viking at heart. His ship, the Bylgja, is his pride and joy, and he is almost lost without it. He raids Padstow twice, the first time fathering Merewyn when he rapes her mother Breaca, and the second time taking Merewyn captive after realizing she is his daughter, stopping him just before he rapes her.

All Ketil wants is to get back on his ship, and it probably plays a big part in his decision to pack up his family and sail to Greenland. His death is a painful one, an illness in his stomach driving him mad in the end. He spends his last moments raging at unseen crewmen on the deck of the Bylgja.

## Erik (the Red) Thorvaldson

Erik is an outcast, exiled for murders; he spent years exploring uninhabited land to the west and then returns with stories of a place he named Greenland. He offered acres of land free to those willing to colonize, and leads several ships back. He does manage to colonize Greenland, and stays there until his death. He holds lavish feasts for all who will come. He and his wife Thiodild have a bastard daughter named Freydis, who is a source of much trouble for Merewyn. He names his place in Greenland, Brattalid. It is located up Eriksfjord, and he is the chief and leader of both sides of this colony. He has a son named Leif, a son named Thorwald, and another named Thorstein.

## Queen Emma

Queen Emma of Normandy is the final Queen of King Ethelred. Her marriage to him was arranged, and she bitterly opposes it at first; but, after time passes, she realizes that she could play a more active role in what is going on. Her strength of character would take her far if she could manage her new situation. She is witness to horrors her husband orders, and decides to become proactive from then forward. When Merewyn confesses her heritage, the Queen calms the King from his outburst, and even invites Merewyn back to court once things have settled down.

## Wulfric

Wulfric is King Ethelred's Thane. He is a good man, stout and middle aged, with a red nose and a kindly soul. He lives in a home he calls Ashley Manor, and his favorite pastimes are drinking and hunting until later in life when he develops a real liking for falconry. He is Merewyn's second husband, and her only husband that the church recognized. He is a good husband to Merewyn, loving her for herself, and unconcerned with her lineage. He owns land in at least a dozen counties, all left to him by his father when he died, and loves his wife so much that the fact that she is without a dowry or anything else of value is unimportant to him. He makes this case to the Queen and King and wins Merewyn's heart without reservation or false pretense.



## Cild Aelfric

"Cild" or Childe of Aelfric is a beardless, rather slim built young man who has a high, almost girlish voice that betrays his capability for violence. He has mouse colored hair that hangs down around his ears, and eyelashes so light that they are hardly noticeable in front of his shrewd hazel eyes. He is unencumbered by conscience, or fears of any kind, and is religious but only when it suits him. At the youthful age of nineteen, he earns the honorary title of knight by being responsible for the plot that kills four of his father's enemies.

He grows up with Ethelred, and later when Ethelred ascends to the throne, Cild is there as his friend and confidante. In a state of constant drunkenness, he is part of the plot to kill King Edward, and is part of Ethelred's slimy court thereafter.





## Objects/Places

### Tre Uther (The Homeplace of Uther)

Merewyn's birthplace, and home until her mother dies, Tre Uther is a property in Cornwall that at one time was quite prosperous. Surrounded by a wall of stones, the house was quite large, built with granite slabs and topped with a thatched roof. The home is built above an estuary, and the view is of the headlands toward the Western Sea. Until the Viking raid in 958, there were many serfs, sheep, and cattle, and the family was well respected and known to be descended from the King Arthur line. After the raid, Tre Uther lost its patriarch, and its spirit.

### Les Beux Castle

The fortress where the Lord of Les Baux consented to raise Rumon, it is built on a weird, rocky spur that was the top of the great hill. Inhabited by a Baron and his knight, it was called the Nest of Eagles by most of Provence and looked over the surrounding valleys. Impregnable, the fortress was Rumon's home for many years. Rumon was born in Avignon, located not far from the castle.

### Atheling

Of high born ancestry.

### Wherwell Forest

Site where King Edgar speared Earl Athelwald for deceiving him about Alfrida and her beauty.

### Rumon's Quest

A dream or vision that Rumon had as a fifteen-year-old child, soon after the death of Vincent, the harpist. A thing of great beauty, this vision was of an island suffused with a golden light that floated somewhere in the west. A ruby red cup, transparent and shimmering is beneath the wings of a white dove. Beams of light shoot down and touch Rumon's face gently. There is music in the air and a voice that urges Rumon on a holy quest of brotherhood for all men, and peace. The voice speaks of love and induces awe, joy, and a sense of dedication in Rumon.



## Devonshire

Home of Alfrida, daughter to Earl Ordgar.

## Isle of Avalon/Glastonbury

Shrine second only to Rome, although some would say not even that, the Glastonbury church had been visited by the Blessed Lord himself, and dedicated to his Holy Mother. Glastonbury was also home to the Holy Grail.

## Brittany

Brittany is a coastal land of dark forests and stone temples that were left from the days before the Romans came.

## St. Brieuc Monastery

The St. Brieuc Monastery is in Brittany, and in the snowy month of December, Rumon arrives on his twentieth birthday - Christmas Eve. It is also the first Monastery to refuse Rumon shelter or comforts of any kind. Rumon returns the next morning and convinces the Abbot to shelter him until he is able to board a ship across the Channel to England. The next one doesn't leave until Spring, so Rumon stays at St. Brieuc, learning Celtic and listening to legends of Saints.

## Witanegemot

The Council of Wise Men who helped rule England.

## St. Gundred's Well

Known for its famous cures, St. Gundred's Well is located at Roche. It was named after St. Gundred who lived beside the well and was said to be "close to the angels". She had a way with those who were ill in mind or flesh, and the cool, dark water of the well was said to have the ability to heal both. A granite cross is set above it, and people travel for miles to bathe in the healing water, seeking a cure.

## The Althing

A meeting of Icelanders that occurs once a year where disputes are settled and information is passed on. It is a celebration of feasting and storytelling that lasts for days.



## **Langarfoss**

Merewyn and Sigurd's home in Iceland, named because it is at the base of a waterfall that feeds the Langa River.

## **Thrall**

This word simply means "slave".

## **Dottir**

This is a way of saying "daughter".

## **Ashley Manor**

Wulfric's home, and later Merewyn and Orm's for a short time as well.

## **Bylgja**

Ketil Redbeard's ship until his death at which time it became Orm's ship. It is the ship that first took Merewyn from England, and then from Iceland to Greenland, and lastly, it will take her back to England once again.

## **Elsknan Min**

This phrase means "My Beloved".

## **Foss**

Icelandic name for waterfall, and the name Merewyn gives her dog at Ashley Manor.



# Themes

## Church versus State/The Struggle for Power

In the beginning, government and church are close. Archbishop Dunstan is a constant confidante and adviser to King Edgar, and then later to his son as he became King, Edward. Both men ruled with relative dignity and honor. That the church was deeply involved in the government showed in that land was expropriated for the purposes of building monasteries and nunneries, and without the King's power, that would not be possible. The Archbishop would do anything to maintain the integrity of the church and in turn the state.

It is interesting to note that when the church loses favor with the government, the honor and dignity that were a large part of these positions before are no longer there. There is a division of good and evil, both in government, and in the church, and this is England's undoing. Had the Archbishop been a little closer to King Edward, he might have recognized the falseness that his stepmother oozed, and been able to advise the young king to be more wary. As it was, the King was duped by those who were supposed to be acting in his best interest. The church may have taken more land than they should have for monasteries and alienated too many in the process.

Reflecting on the kind of king that Ethelred the Unready was, it is a wonder that the church didn't arrange to have him replaced. If they had taken that extraordinary measure, would England have survived King Sweyn?

## Norse Respect and Self Image versus Christianity

The Vikings sailed for days on end, then upon finding land they rape, burn, and pillage everything in sight. They have no qualms about killing people to get what they want, and see most of humanity as being something less than they are. They steal what they want, and burn what remains. No thought whatsoever is given to the people they displace, or the captives they force to go with them. It is considered a great honor to be a good Viking, and battle stories are highly regarded as entertainment and a way of passing on history from one generation to another.

At the same time, these Vikings would describe themselves as honorable men, and they have great respect for history and the land. They are a religious group, although Christianity is slow in coming to the area. They worship gods, and pray for everything from good weather to good health. It is the disparity between the two that is interesting. Later, when Christianity is being forced on Greenlanders in order to maintain trade routes to Norway, a whole scale change begins. A Viking who truly accepts Christ won't be a Viking any more as their self image changes.



## Class and Lineage versus Democratic Rule

Social class and lineage are largely what decided who ruled for many years. Democracy was a long time in coming. The rule by class style of government has many drawbacks. It relies on and presumes an intelligence of the upper class. It was by manipulation of less than brilliant men that England finally fell. In earlier days, an Atheling wouldn't marry beneath his class, or sully the family genes. As Earls were appointed by the kings of the day, to become part of the upper class was simply a matter of getting in good with the upper crust. Of course, as Merewyn discovers, that is much easier if you are part of the upper crust yourself.

Democratic rule would have kept Edward in the seat of power, and would have ensured that Ethelred never ascend the throne. A democracy therefore is the only way to ensure that the murder of a ruler will not guarantee the succession of the heir apparent. England still operates with a government that has a King and Queen as opposed to an elected official. While they also have a prime minister, England still sees it's Kings rise in succession by class and status.

## Religious Primacy by Any Means Necessary

The use of trickery to ensure that a vote goes the right way, or to push devout members to one side or another, has been part of our history since the beginning. The question is, how deep does the trickery go? If the church is willing to convince, 'by any means necessary', one has to wonder where that behavior started. Was it all a hoax?

As there has never been any indisputable proof that God exists, knowing that the church is not opposed to trickery to convince the masses, where is the beginning of the deception? It is possible that the entire story is just an elaborate exaggeration told in order to control or manipulate the masses. While there is absolutely no indisputable proof of the existence of God, there could certainly be a case for the existence of evil. Perhaps the real division is as simple as that. There is no God and there is no Devil. There is only Good and Evil. Someone long ago just removed a letter from one and added a letter to the other to create mysterious deities that would enable control of the masses.

Proof of trickery by way of religious miracles was shown twice in this small slice of England's history. Taken on a larger scale, where would we be now if religion hadn't entered into it at all?

## Thor's Hammer versus God's Cross

Religion seems to be different from one country to another, and sometimes even from one district to another. At the end of his life, Sigurd realizes that there are some similarities between Christianity and their Gods. He sees that the mark of Thor that they make is pretty much the same as the sign of the cross that the Christians make. While



he fights the idea of Christianity his entire life, on his deathbed, he sees the truth of most religions. In his conversation with Orm, Sigurd makes him swear by both Thor's hammer and Jesus Christ. He tells Orm of the similarities he sees and concludes that Thor and Jesus Christ must understand each other.

Religions all have the same basic tenets. The similarities exist between all religions. The message must be that our lives should be lived in a religious manner, not in a religion's manner. If one subscribed to the idea of being religious without falling for the trapping of organized religion, would unification be the outcome?



# Style

## Point of View

Avalon is told from the perspective of the two main characters. It's a story of their lives, and the love they had for each other. The adventure begins almost immediately as Rumon is made responsible for Merewyn. He resents the burden, but honors the deathbed promise he made to her mother, and takes Merewyn to England. Throughout their journey, Merewyn will fall for her companion and grow to deeply love him. He finally returns that love one day, but by then it is too late. Merewyn is a strong and determined woman. She is proud and dedicated to family. Rumon is torn. He confuses love with beauty and gives himself completely, but is soon disappointed as the real personality reveals itself. They soon separated, but Rumon is left devastated by the experience. Before he can recover, much will happen.

The story follows the history of these two people closely, and it is easy to bring the time period to mind with the descriptive narrative. England is young, and the country is ruled by church-sanctioned rulers until the murder of young King Edward. The church is gaining in strength and popularity during this time, and much of this is a direct result of the Archbishop Dunstan, but when Edward is killed and his younger brother Ethelred takes the throne in his place, the church loses its strength in the castle and in the government. As a result, England falls to the Danes.

## Setting

Set in 973, the story begins in Padstow, and continues to England, Iceland, Great Ireland, and even Greenland, and then finally back to England again. After being taken from England to Iceland, Merewyn finds happiness for a time, but her peace at Langarfoss is not to last. Following her husband to Greenland, Merewyn is disenchanted with colonization. She misses flowers and trees, and while there is greenery, there are no forests. It is a cold and barren life, and when Sigurd dies, she takes the opportunity to return to England.

The story follows the church, the royal families, and Merewyn and Rumon. Set in a time when class and status dictate the quality of life one could hope for, Merewyn struggles with honesty versus simplicity and safety. As she serves three different queens, a glimpse into several ruling styles is observed, and the corruption that always finds its way into rule. Merewyn uses the Uther link to King Arthur to gain entry to the high born set. She is determined to find her way back into court life. Having finally managed to do so, she witnesses treachery and deception by the Queen that she finds she is unable to live with. She goes to live at Romsey Abbey, but after King Edward's death she finds herself in court service again.



Having served three queens over her lifetime, Merewyn observes the many sides of power and the corruption of those who wield it.

## Language and Meaning

Anya Seton uses many of the original words and phrases consistent with the time period Avalon is set in. There is a smooth transition between English and Norse sayings and traditions. Beginning in Merewyn's home town, where Viking raids are described, and continuing with secular life, this story moves along well. Descriptions of the varied countrysides ranging from England to Greenland bring the reader not only into the story but into the time period as well.

Much is made of the religious and cultural differences, and Merewyn and Rumon both discover how varied and yet similar they are. The reader is taken on a tour of England in it's infancy, rife with conflict, greed, and ambition. Following the main characters, the reader is taken on a voyage through England and the Church's influence, and on to Iceland, Greenland, and even Finland as colonization of new lands continue.

The reader will notice the use of surnames and how they vary from country to country. Icelandic surnames follow a birth order, making it possible for surnames to be different even in the same families. For example, a daughter of Ketil Ketilson would be called Ketilsdottir by surname, whereas a son would be referred to as Ketilsson, giving a better idea of how some names evolved.

## Structure

Avalon follows two main character throughout their lifespans. Each chapter is a new adventure as the character's lives entwine, fate bringing them together again and again. While the story concentrates on Merewyn and Rumon, there is good insight into the church, the royal family, and customs of the time period. There is strong religious influence over the characters and government of the era, and Avalon smoothly tells the story of the church's connection to the court. Broken into fifteen chapters, this book is as much an adventure as it is a history lesson. It is a glimpse into the lives of church and state, where corruption rules and yet still a saint or two survive. The main characters live a love story in its purest form, never managing to bridge the gap between themselves. Set during a savage time, religion is feared and hierarchy is of prime importance. Avalon places one in an environment of conflict, exploration, of deceit and great nobility, and in the end, good mostly triumphs over evil. The moral clearly told is that the truth shall set you free.





## Quotes

"I salute you, Princess" Chap. 1 p. 36

"An Atheling may engage in brave fights, he may show anger, he may even play pranks, but he may not steal and lie, and cringe when he's caught." Chap. 3 p. 101

"The Norse pirates have come and gone for a century, like bleeding comets, like crop failures, like the plague - but all of these pass." Chap. 9 p. 318

"...I, for one am chucking out the monks and putting back the old time canons on my lands. With their wives and wenches too. Let a priest enjoy himself like a man." Chap. 5 p. 153

"...England was a rotting plum. Squeeze it her, it squirts there. Soon it will all collapse into mushiness." Chap. 10

"She's evil. She means evil. I know it. I swear it. Escape whilst you can." Chap. 6 p. 200

"I'm afraid.... I see darkness ahead - darkness..." Chap. 6 p. 212

"What did you do to him, my lady - you've hurt Edward, I know you did" Chap. 6 p. 222

"If you act like this, Ethelred will not be King of England. He'll end up in a tomb, like the other." Chap. 6 p. 223

"Tis April 23rd, the Feast of Saint George; we must pray to him that he save England from it's dragons of iniquity- o woeful, woeful plight wherein Satan has plunged us!" Chap. 7 p. 226

"You can die but once. And if this happens at prayer in a sanctuary, your road to Heaven will be that much shorter." Chap. 7 p. 262

"I've noticed that it is very like the sign the Christians make (Thor's hammer). Thor and Christ must understand each other". Chap. 12 pp. 469-70

"It matters not, we'll reach the Isle of Avalon in God's own time." Chap. 12 p. 282

"Ah, I can live here like a cabbage, sink myself into the chants, the devotions. I can illuminate manuscripts, and play the harp, I can talk to Brother Finian, I can do penance for my part in - in Edward's murder. But I do not find peace." Chap. 13 p. 294

"'Tis like the floating City of God. 'Tis like no Abbey I've ever seen." Chap. 13 p. 311



## Topics for Discussion

Greed has been the cornerstone of power for many governments, dating back as far as recorded time. What are some other examples of government that have been overthrown or altered by illegal means? Discuss the alternate outcomes for the history of England had Edward continued to rule throughout his natural lifetime.

Colonization and exploration of other lands are prominent throughout this story. What were the most obvious affects of the Norsemen on the places they discovered? Why is Eric the Red determined to colonize Greenland, despite the obvious increase in hardship and harsher climate? Would the colonists have joined him had they been aware of the true nature of their destination?

Speculate as to the course history might have taken had Rumon and Merewyn wed. Would the plot to have Ethelred succeed the throne have worked, or been necessary at all? If Rumon had taken a political instead of religious role in his life, would the church have been more involved in government today?

What role did Dunstan play in Rumon's life? Would Rumon have become a Benedictine Monk if Dunstan had not been so involved in his life? What might his alternate choices in life have been?

Rumon keeps his promise to Breaca and tells no one of Merewyn's lineage until he confesses to Dunstan. Had he been honest with Merewyn about her heritage from the start, what might her future have been? Should he have broken his promise so that Merewyn not live a lie, or was it appropriate to keep this secret? When did Rumon change his mind about his feelings for Merewyn, deciding that her status and class no longer mattered?

How many times did Alfrida directly affect the history of England, and by what means?

Merewyn finally found happiness in two places in her life. Describe the circumstances and speculate as to the reason she was content at those times.

Explain the effects of the three different queens that Merewyn served in her life. How might things have been different if Merewyn had stayed on with Alfrida instead of going to Romsey Abbey?

How did King Ethelred earn the nickname Ethelred the Unready? In what way did his reign directly affect England, and what was the outcome?

What changes did King Edward make to the castle directly after his coronation and why? How did King Edward earn the respect and loyalty of his subjects?

What was the catalyst that decided King Edward's fate? What two events were making Edward's death a necessity and why?

Vikings rape, burn, kill, and steal. They make no distinction between homes and churches, plundering each equally. How is it that they can still consider themselves not to be barbaric?