

Allaq's jealousy

Scholarly source:

Briggs, Jean L. (1970). *Never in anger: Portrait of an Eskimo family*.
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Meet Allaq

Allaq was a ten-year-old girl in 1964. She lived among the Utku people.



The Utku were Inuit living northwest of Hudson Bay on the Back River.



While Allaq's life was fulfilling in a hundred ways, she had a problem. She was dreadfully jealous of her adorable four-year-old sister Saaraq.

We'll come back to that in a minute, but first let's learn a little bit about the fulfilling parts of Allaq's world.



Allaq's world

The Utku people were nomadic. They'd move from place to place on dog sleds with the seasons.



In the warm months Allaq's family would set up a summer campsite near a supply of salmon trout with a number of related families.

They'd live in tents where the men would fish with nets, and the women would clean the fish, make meals, simmer tea in kettles atop a twig fire, and visit with their relatives.

Allaq had plenty of time to relax and have fun with her many cousins.



Allaq, like most of the Utku, enjoyed life on the move. When fall set in people would begin to get excited about moving to a winter camp where they could tuck themselves under warm quilts and listen to the whistling winds.



They would then seek out an ideal camp site. There Allaq's family might get the chance to meet new people. All those who settled together were considered relatives, even if they'd never met before.

Allaq always loved making new cousins.



The men in the winter camp would provide food for the family by hunting big game (usually walrus) and ice fishing.

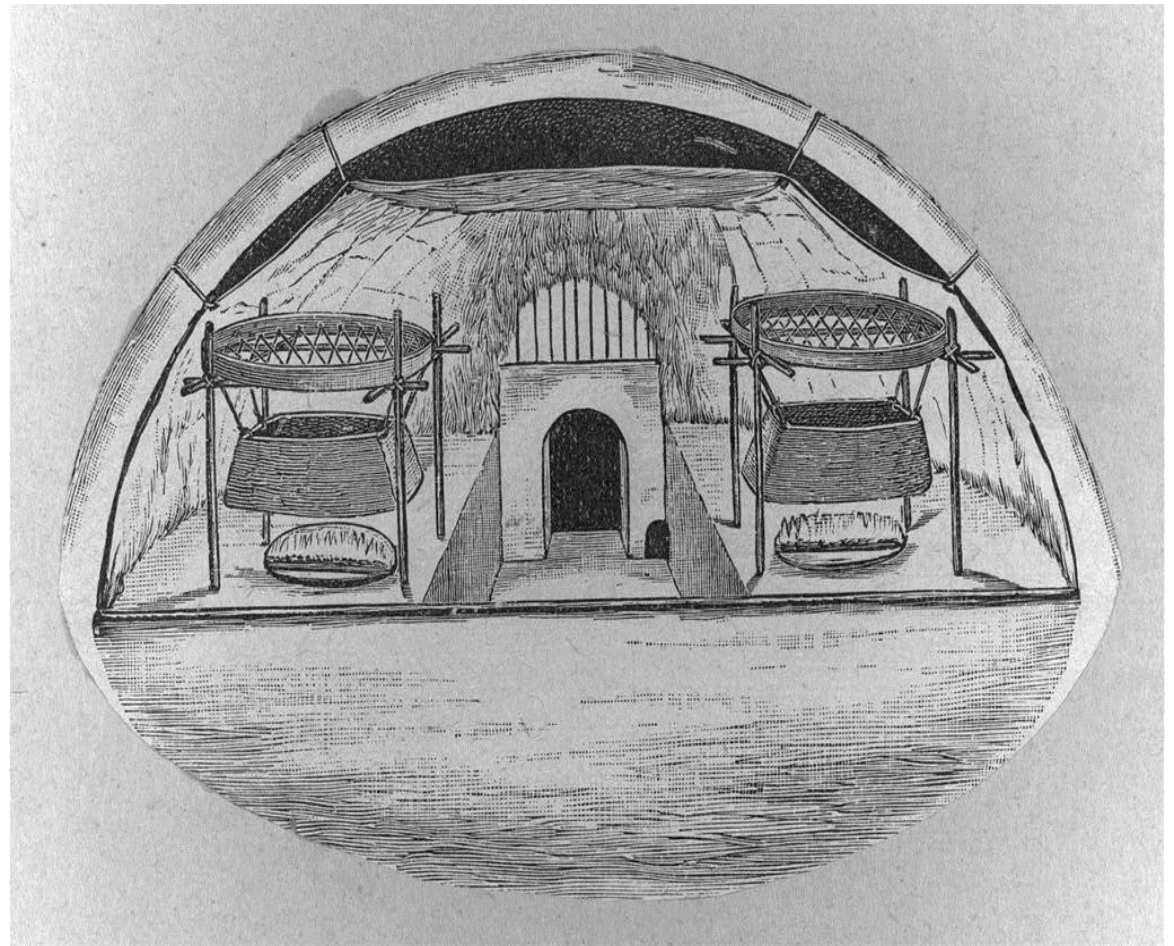


The entire family would start making their winter home, which was an iglu made out of cut cubes of ice, topped with snow.



The iglu would be divided into two parts. The back section was for sleeping and the front became a kitchen, larder, and storage area—mainly a place for the women to work.

It was a most inviting home for night sleeping. The temperature seemed always perfect and the air was so crisp.



At night Allaq's family would say their prayers. They'd been converted to Christianity by missionaries years ago. Allaq's mother would always pray to keep the family safe at night—especially as they listened to the howling wolves far in the distance.



Allaq would pray too. But ever since she was five or six, Allaq would pray for something else. That something else was called *ihuma*.

And *ihuma* was all entangled with Allaq's jealousy.



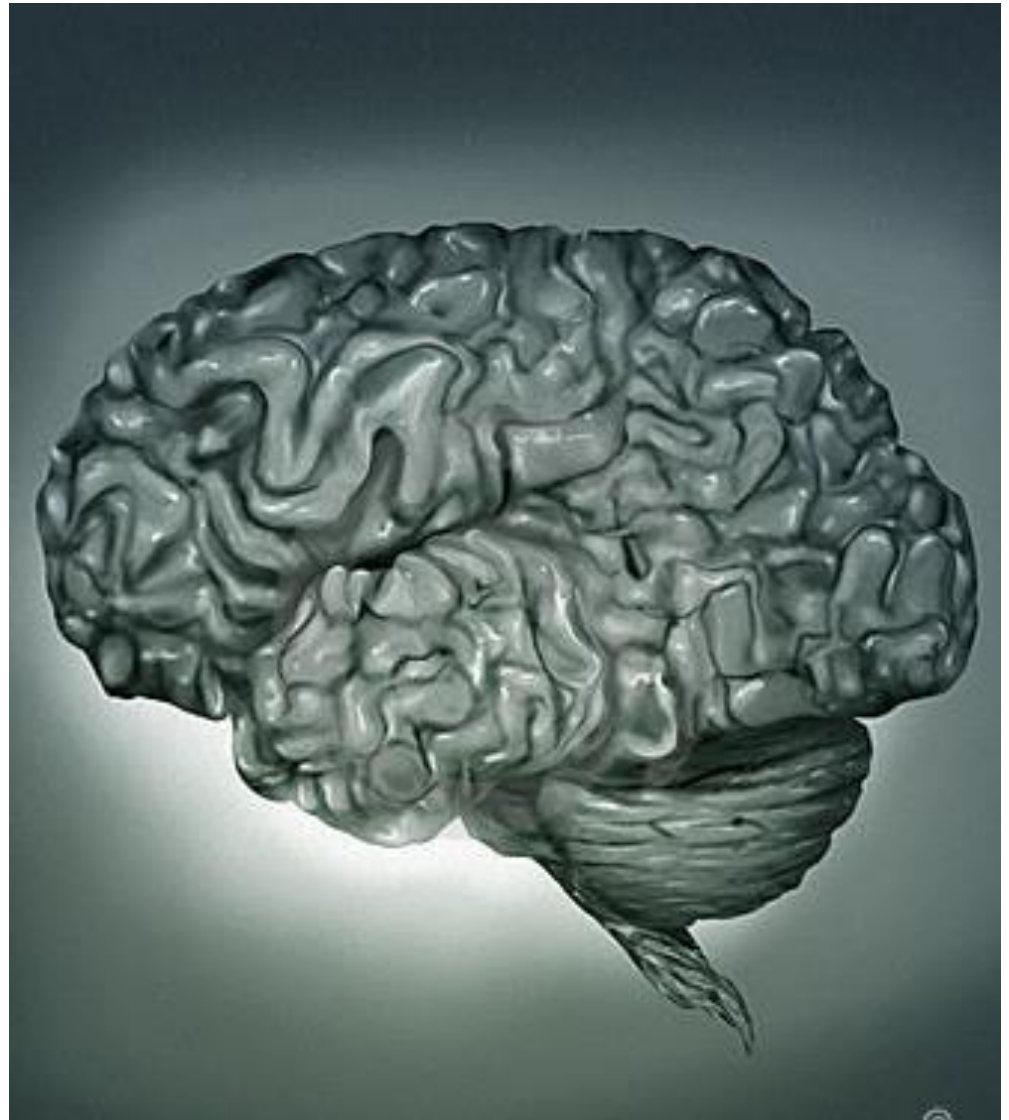
Allaq's jealousy

As long as Allaq could remember, her parents seemed enthralled with little Saaraq. No matter how naughty she might be—even when she tore through the iglu and tossed all the bedding all over the place—they just laughed at her.



But it was so different with Allaq. Allaq was expected to begin acquiring *ihuma* when she was five or six.

Ihuma would show up as children matured. If they were getting *ihuma* they would start being generous, helpful, honest, independent, and above all, in control of their emotions. According to Utku beliefs, *ihuma* controlled reason and thought in the brain.



Allaq's older brother Pala had *ihuma*. This their parents often noted. While he was only one year older than Allaq, he could already hunt seal. He was kind and generous to his relatives and took good care of the dogs. A boy like Pala did not need a showing of affection or praise to be a good little man.

This was not the case with Allaq.



Oh, Allaq could be generous and helpful and was even showing some of the skills needed to be independent. She could make clothing from hides, cook, and had even made the most ornate dolls of any in the camp.



But Allaq was not in control of her emotions. Her mother could see through her fake smile. She saw that she was overcome with jealousy for her sister. Allaq resented the attention that Saaraq got from her parents and wanted an equal amount for herself. But the parents felt she should be acquiring *ihuma* and would not need this attention.



From a very early age Allaq was expected to take her little sister with her when she played with friends.



There were times when Allaq would take Saaraq sledding on the hill, and then go join her friends and just leave Saaraq screaming at the top, all by herself.

People in the camp whispered about the way Allaq treated her sister.



The change

Then one day Allaq noticed that her mother was getting a very fat tummy. She mentioned this to her father. A few hours later, while her father was sitting outside the iglu, he summoned his children. He told Saaraq, Pala, and Allaq that they would be getting a new brother or sister very soon.



Not many weeks after that Allaq woke up one morning and saw her mother holding a new baby boy. The parents named him Mannik.

Allaq's mother let her hold the child for a few minutes. She then told Saaraq that she could no longer sleep with her in her bed, as the new baby would be taking her place.



Saaraq was livid. "No mama!" she cried. "My place is in the bed with you—not this little brother!"

The mother stroked Saaraq's head. "Little darling Saaraq," she began. "You are almost five. Soon you will be getting *ihuma* and won't have the need of all this attention. You will be the master of your own emotions."

Saaraq could only stare into space. She wanted to be the baby. Who needed *ihuma*?



For the first time in her life, Allaq actually felt sorry for Saaraq.

"Don't worry, little sister," she said. "I understand. I am still here with you."



Well, Allaq may have understood what Saaraq was feeling, but her parents did not. Her mother was very busy now with baby Mannik. After a few months, Saaraq was not allowed to run wild about the iglu messing up the bedding and such. Her mother no longer found it funny.

But little by little, big sister Allaq was making sense of her world. She actually began to enjoy baby Mannik very, very much.

She now needed to help Saaraq to figure it out too.



Saraq constantly complained to her sister. "They don't love me! They only love him! He is their favorite!"



"No, little sister," argued Allaq. "This is not true. See, I used to think this too before Mannik was born. But then I came to understand it."

Saaraq just pouted.

"Our parents don't have favorites."

Saaraq continued pouting.



"Please, Saaraq, you must hear me out," the big sister insisted. "Before the time that we are supposed to develop *ihuma*—when we are little—we are like those dogs out there. Our parents let us do silly things because we are not expected to do anything else. They pat our heads like they pat the heads of the dogs. They know the dogs will fight and run wild and do foolish things and can't control themselves.



"But now you are growing older. You will be getting a little *ihuma* now and more later. So our parents think this is the time to stop patting your head. *Ihuma* lets you control yourself. You will need this to help others, to live and work with other people—to be in a society."



And then that spring, just as the family had moved to their summer camp, Allaq's father approached her as she was making tea. He had something he wanted to tell her.

"My oldest daughter," he began. "Your mother and I see the full development of *ihuma* in you now and how successfully you have learned to use it. You no longer feel your old resentments. We want you to know that your family and all our relatives have the very highest respect for you."



Allaq tried not to cry. She was so happy. She was much happier now with this respect than she would have been if she was being pampered like her new baby brother.



The end

Let's talk!!!