

## **The Blind Woman from Barvas**

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**This is a story told to me on a coastguard watch by John D Smith, from  
Barvas, Isle of Lewis. To my knowledge it has not been recorded.**

### **The Blind Woman from Barvas**

There was a blind woman in the village of Barvas. That's right at the edge of the West Side, Isle of Lewis. It's a real surf beach and it's wild a lot of the time. The blind widow, she had sons. One of her boys was the skipper of the village boat. The Barvas people never went to the sea until they heard that the fish were running. The risks were that bit too high because the surf comes in strong on a steep beach. There's nowhere to run for many miles, north or south. It's still the same.

The *Siarachs* - the westsiders, went for the *biroch*, the piked dogfish. That's fish most other folk thought were a menace, tearing herring nets. But, on the west sides of North Lewis, yes and off North Uist too, they went out with longlines to take the *biroch*. They dried and salted them. Some were smoked. Some were built into the frame of a coil of hay so when the wind blew through the haystack, the grey sharkskin wrinkled and dried too, preserving the fish.

And the word came from Bragar and from Ballantrushall that the biroch were running. So the Barvas boat was out with the rest of them. But they were all caught in a sudden squall. They didn't make it home in daylight. So the whole village was out there on the beach. Lanterns held to help the boys find their home shore. And everyone was scanning the white line of the surf for a scrap of red sail above it.

But of course the mother of the skipper was searching with her hearing. She was listening to every wave fall back, the stones rolling away. She was hearing it all above the wind. Great round boulders being shifted and running back down the slope. She heard a sound that was different from the rest. She knew right away what it was. Gave out a shout that was near a scream. So she was the first to perceive that her son had come back. The shock brought her sight back to her. So she saw him. She saw her son for the first time when his body was returned to her by the seas that drowned him.

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