

# Grief



If you had been there, you would have seen the boat pull in. Every face was drawn and tight. So it must be true. Bad news.

Magnus' men they were, surely. You would recognize one or 2 under that bright April sky, with the cold wind whipping in from the east. Then 4 men jumping down into shallow water and then something large and sail-wrapped, man-handled but with gentleness over the boat's side, down into waiting arms. A body ! No words were spoken, but every last hope died. It is the Earl.

So on a broad plank the body was borne by 6 men. As villagers come running and a resting place is found, faces fall in shock. A woman weeps. Men fight back tears. From a child, the questions spill out : Is he dead? Is it Magnus? Who killed him? Did he fight them? Did he ... ? A hand shakes the boy's shoulder and his words are muffled and lost.

Yes, they all knew he was gone. That much had come through the grapevine. But still, hope in their hearts fought the facts – until now.

If you had been there, you would have felt that cloud of fear come in, like the sea har - clammy and dripping hopelessness. The shepherd was gone. The protector was dead. What safety now? What justice? Dread gripped every heart.

Once the coffin was made and prayers were said – and barest details shared of what was done over the water in Egilsay – then six village men lifted the silent Earl and began the trek. Magnus must be buried at Birsay. Twelve miles or so – over hills.

Was it the weight of the coffin that drained their souls of life? Or the east wind nipping the side of the face? Was it the rough tracks that so quickly tired fit, strong men? No, it was the pain of loss. It was the grief. It was a hero stolen, a loved protector gone. And every heart wavered between fear and despair