

Skara Brae*

(a villanelle)

Beneath a wintry wind, a village lay
in sand, in secret till an arctic storm
blew back the slender shroud of Skara Brae.

The burrowed houses kept the children warm
and safe beneath the sod, the dung, debris,
in sand, in secret, till an arctic storm

disturbed their dreaming. Deep within the lee
of midden-mound, walls of stacking stone,
safe beneath the sod, the dung, debris,

they huddled in furs by a fire, heard the moan
of the icy island gale. From heather bed
in midden-mound, by walls of stacking stone,

they bore the blustery winter overhead,
entombed, until the final chilly gust –
the icy island gale. From heather bed

they vanished. Homes deserted to the dust
beneath a wintry wind, the village lay
entombed, until the final chilly gust
blew back the slender shroud of Skara Brae.

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*A neolithic village in the Orkney Islands north of Scotland, occupied 3200-2200 BC, exposed by a storm in 1850: eight houses built with stone slabs, inside mounds of earth and rubbish for insulation.

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