



Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize 2022
Written entries

Barrow

In a tongue we can barely imagine her people voice familiar grief.
Perhaps they sing to this mother, lover, sister, wife?
A daughter surely. A life.

Women tend her, braid her hair, choose bangles, vessels, flints -
daily goods less for use or ornament than to keep
her company there.

Men gouge a cyst with antler bones, curl her into her earth womb;
cairn stones, raise a tomb proud as a breast,
still standing firm on this hillcrest

where I share her green view across the vale. Huts that hugged
spring lines are villages now; dirt tracks, concrete threads
through the field quilt. Insect vehicles whine.

But for all that, little has changed since that bronze-age day in spring,
let's say, when distracted by blackbird and blackthorn
drifting favours along the slow way,

her people might have paused, questioning why
when bud and leaf return
should we die?

Vicci Bentley
