What happens?

An apparently prepared community confronts a storm it cannot fully control.

The main idea

Preparation offers limited protection when an invisible force makes human confidence collapse.

1. “prepared”

Method: Declarative opening

The initial confidence becomes a position the poem tests.

2. “tame cat”

Method: Simile

Familiarity offers a false expectation of safety.

3. “savage”

Method: Tonal reversal

One adjective turns domestic comfort into danger.

4. “huge nothing”

Method: Paradox

The unseen force feels enormous despite its intangibility.

Form and structure

One 19-line stanza, predominantly blank verse; conversational address gives way to military imagery.

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Development, voice and tone

Opening houses — Confident. The collective speaker lists practical measures that seem to establish security.

Sea and wind — Unsettled. An apparently familiar environment turns threatening and attacks the home.

Last lines — Fearful and questioning. The threat cannot be grasped; the ending makes fear itself part of the problem.

Context

Heaney’s island setting invites a literal reading of extreme weather. Political resonance is possible, but should be argued from details.

Comparison links

Exposure: nature as an adversary. The Prelude: confidence overturned.

Recall question

What changes between the opening confidence and final uncertainty?