

HERE IS MY HAND

Here is my hand. Take it.

Let me guide you through the rooms of my life. Tempt you to touch the decay of crumbling plaster, peeling paint, then, recoiling, flick the flakes of my world from your fingers. Can I coax you to wonder about my past? Tales abound in treasured possessions, perfectly placed on dust-covered shelves. I'm under your skin now. It's not that simple to shiver me off, is it?

You're right about being abandoned but not in the way that you think. This is where a brief moment of existence surfaced in the sea of eternity. Close your eyes and go back, floating in fading images that lap in and out on a failing tide; drifting memories – flotsam and jetsam of a voyage interrupted.

Have you worked it out? Can you solve the puzzle? It's not empty because? This is no parlour. Look again. It's the untranslatable *aelwyd*, the transcender of place and time. It's the wealth not counted in coins, home to unspoken words shared in the dark; it's the hearth we all yearn to belong to.

Here is my hand. See how it cradles the generations that formed me.

The cells of my skin map their journeys: the men who walked, in depression, valley to valley, drowning in dust, not poor but hungry; the women cheated to death, claimed by grim slums and rich blankets; epitaphs left in workhouse scratchings.

Priceless heirlooms passed down the ages: the hardworking lines that crisscross my palm like intricate lace, with infinite grace – these are their legacy. The *etifeddiaeth* that makes me.

Here is my hand. I hold it open before your algorithmic gaze.

What do you see? A begging bowl? An admission of failure? A gesture of submission? I do not mean it as an invitation for you to patronise, stigmatise, betray. It is not offered as a kind of supplication or plea for alms. You assume that it extends in expectation; that my simple act is a measure of poverty, a symbol of defeat. You are wrong. This hand is to remind you of a promise long made, a trust believed in, a covenant sworn. It's here to remind you of honour.

Here is my hand. Do not treat it as empty.

In a field of battle, not of my choosing, I am neither a casualty nor a victim; I am a hero. I am here to help you in your Sisyphean task. I am your purpose. I am your object. I am your reason of being.

I am your hand.