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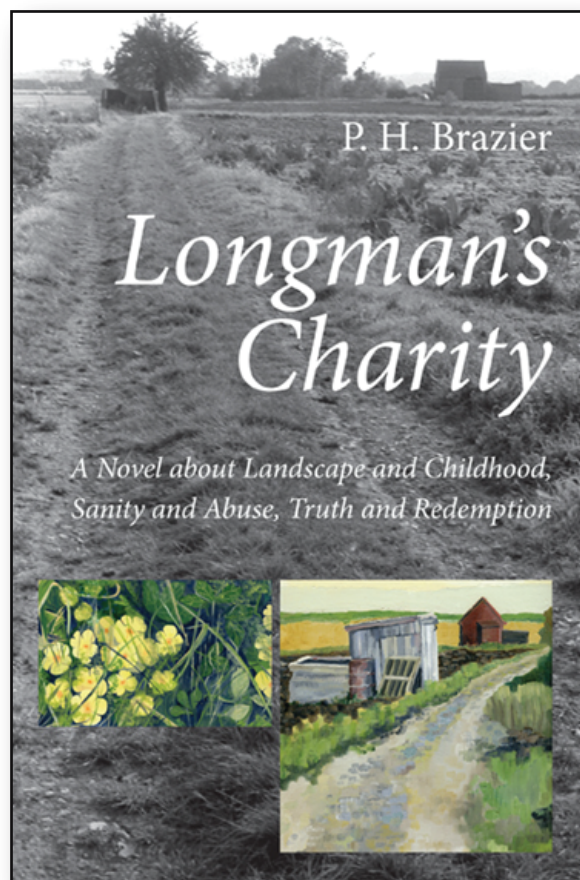
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# Longman's Charity

*A Novel about Landscape and Childhood,  
Sanity and Abuse, Truth and Redemption*

**P. H. Brazier**

Damaged by an attempted abortion, preyed upon by the violence of his parents' marriage, abused from the age of seven, and shut away in a mental hospital at thirteen, Paul Broadley never ceases to love the landscape he grows up in, which acts as a precursor to his salvation. But there is a serpent in that garden bent on willfully corrupting people—and yet redemption is strewn widely for those able to respond. *Longman's Charity* is a novel and theological parable about landscape and childhood, sanity and abuse, truth and redemption. Stigmatized and avoided by his peers, Paul suffers deep psychological trauma as he represses memories of abuse, yet there is a passionate joy in his love of the natural world: the hills, the vale, the glorious fecundity of God's creation. When he climbs out of the vale onto Bredon Hill for the first time, he is struck by the realization of the beauty and the joy of God's creation, but also of the evil that infects it. *Longman's Charity* is an illustration of the Book of the Psalms and the existence portrayed by the psalm writers: as he grows up, redemption comes through realizing the Truth in Christ.



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"Paul Brazier describes a Dantean personal journey from the living hell of his childhood and adolescence through the purgatory of finding forgiveness for those who wronged him to the paradise of his faith and loving devotion to his wife. Guided by his Virgil, the natural beauty of the world, he comes to see that the world is, indeed, fused with the beauty and grandeur of God. A moving and ultimately uplifting story of the triumph of love over evil."

—**Suzanne M. Wolfe**, Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, WA

"Paul articulates his powerful story in a beautiful profound way. It is a powerful story that compels readers to consider the presence of God in the midst of terrible lifelong circumstances. It was helpful for me as a fellow victim of child abuse and other life circumstances that He suffered (along with the aftereffects of relatives that committed suicide.) Thank you, Paul, for bringing me hope through the presence of Christ as your hope."

—**Julie Woodley**, Restoring the Heart Ministries, Inc., Setauket, NY

An independent theologian and scholar living in London, **P. H. Brazier** holds degrees in Fine Art (BA), Education (MPhil), and Systematic Theology (MA and PhD). Paul has published widely in theology and philosophy, including an in-depth, five-volume systematic analysis of C. S. Lewis's theology, *C. S. Lewis: Revelation and the Christ* (Wipf & Stock). A retired teacher, the author is the caregiver for his wife Hilary, who has epilepsy.

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P. H. Brazier

[www.longmanscharity.net](http://www.longmanscharity.net)

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LONGMAN'S CHARITY

A Novel about Landscape and Childhood, Sanity and Abuse, Truth and Redemption

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*For Hilary*

“Paul Brazier describes a Dantean personal journey  
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—JULIE WOODLEY, RESTORING THE HEART MINISTRIES, INC., SETAUKET, NY

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This story, in its setting and landscape, culture and town,  
is considered here to be evocative of England.

Therefore the spelling conventions used by the writer—  
those of his indigenous language, British English—are retained.

The landscape, town, setting for this story is real:  
the Vale of Evesham, on the borders of Worcestershire  
and Gloucestershire, England.

The author has attempted where relevant to reproduce the dialect often referred to as Ayssum (or Asum), that is the local dialect spoken around the Vale of Evesham. Most locals born since the Second World War either spoke standard English or used some fragments of this dialect. Many, even of an older generation, would mix traditional pronouns (thees and thous) with their modern equivalents (you) in the same sentence. The word “bist” was often used simply for “is” or “are”, sometimes “been!” Truncation of words, or elision, was often personal, and varied from village to village. The dialect around the village of Badsey to the east of Evesham was often purer, unadulterated, and more guttural than used by gardeners around Elmley Castle to the south west. Often men exhibited a variation of the dialect different from women; often mothers used a subtly different dialect when talking to their children. However flawed the writer’s attempts may be, he has attempted to reproduce the nuances of dialect he heard and observed as a child, with the multiple regional variations evident in the Vale of Evesham.

There is a complementary website to this book,  
which has photographs (landscape, town, and family), maps,  
explanatory background, details about the cover photographs and paintings,  
the author, the psalms used, and more, which readers may find of use:

[www.longmanscharity.net](http://www.longmanscharity.net)

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## *Prologue— A Welcoming*

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~ “Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak;  
O Lord, heal me, for my very bones are troubled.”

PSALM 6:2

The sky was clear, bright, sharp. It was early March. The air was cool, the frost had cleared, and the sun was strong for the time of year—its light was bright, piercing, but it gave no heat. The land was bare. The trees were bare. A rabbit sat nervously twitching on the furrowed earth, looking, ever looking. A crow cawed from the nearby copse, startling the rabbit as though it expected something to swoop and tear its flesh with beak and claws. The crow cawed again. The rabbit shot across the field, hopping over the brown furrowed ridges, weathered down now by winter rains and frost. The crow cawed once more. Then, falling more than flying, it flapped its way down from the top of the ivy-strangled naked elm on which it stood, landing on the bare earth. It hopped clumsily over the soil to a stone. Picking up a snail from the earth in its beak it hopped its wide-legged drunken gait this time to the stone. Twitching its eyes and head for a second or two it struck the snail against the stone. Stopping for a moment to move its head from one side to another, then, crack, it brought the snail down again. Crack, it turned to pecking at the flesh through the opening in the shell. Peck, peck, peck, shake, hop, peck; soon the crow had finished. Looking around from side to side, it lurched itself upwards, flapping its wings clumsily, gaining a little height, then touching the ground, flapping with tremendous effort against the cold air.

The boy had seen it all. He had seen the rabbit, he had watched it slowly, fitfully, making its way across the ground. Saw its nervous terror as the crow cawed. Paul watched its panic, sensed its fear. Felt for it. The boy felt the same fear,



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often fearing his fellow humans. The boy had seen the crow, watched its clumsy flight earthward. He listened to the cracking of the snail shell, he flinched as with each smash the struggle seemed more and more hopeless. The boy seemed to shrink back nervously, his face twitching as if he were the snail, as if he were being broken, eaten. He twitched his mouth, nose, nodded his head involuntarily. This often happened when he was being teased by other children, when he was being set upon by a group of other boys and girls—teasing, taunting, pillorying him. It wasn't just the names that hurt, but the loneliness, having no friends, being called mental, being made to feel different, odd, not wanted. His head nodded, twitched, particularly when his father was rowing, storming about the kitchen, banging the stove, thumping down saucepans. He could usually stop this nodding, twitching, but the terror in him returned as he watched his father's face screw up with the pain and hurt following some despicable comment his mother would say, the child not fully realizing or understanding what was said. But then when his mother was hit! The terror was too much, he would curl up tight on the floor and cry quietly to himself, his head nodding, slightly to the left, hung slightly over to his left shoulder. Sometimes he would run out of the house, across the smallholding he lived on, into the hedgerows and curl up into his own little world.

Today he had gone further, through several smallholdings, along the lane, through Longman's Charity, to a small hideaway that was precious to him. It was in the centre of a small copse nearly two miles away from home. No more than four hundred yards long, by about sixty wide, tapering to a point at the far end. It consisted mainly of rowan, ash, and elm, with holly and bramble at ground level. This, coupled with the barbed wire fence that surrounded it, made the copse quite difficult to penetrate. However, at one point, near where the brook emerged from the trees, there was a small hole through the wire, and by lying on his stomach he could crawl under the holly bushes, through the brambles, for about ten yards, to find himself clear of the undergrowth, and inside. Inside! He felt like he was in another world. If he then clambered still further through the thinner undergrowth, heading south towards the centre of the copse, the struggle abated.

The tallest trees were in the centre, and their crowns allowed little light through. As the undergrowth thinned the ground opened up. Near the centre there was even thin, pale, grass, with the brook trickling gently over the stony earth. This was the boy's favourite spot. No one else knew of his secret. No one else had ever ventured into here—or so he believed. He had run and walked, and walked then run from the house, wanting the security of this, his secret hideaway. The peace was almost magical, the stillness was complemented by the trickling of the water over the stones, with the light dappling through the bare

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*Prologue—A Welcoming*

branches overhead. The boy flopped down on the grass, desperately trying to get his breath. No other house was near. No other person was in sight. It was his own little world, his sanctuary. He was safe. He sat up. Hooking his arms around his knees, he looked around. The grassy glade he sat on was about four yards by two, with the brook gently traversing from south to north, widening a little to form a shallow pool. He looked at the tall, smooth trunks of ash, with their black buds swelling, preparing to burst forth into spring in a matter of days. He looked around at the holly bushes, the brambles that created an enclosure around the glade. He was happy. But then his head started to spin, the high-pitched squeal in his ears got worse. He listened to the stream, lay back . . . and slept.

Paul woke to the sound of men's voices, men shouting, calling—calling his name. He soon realized two things: first, that he must have slept for quite a long time, and secondly, that if they found him here his secret refuge would be lost. They would know about it. Even if they never came back to it, they would know: it would no longer be his secret. So, quietly he left the peace, the still quietude of this inner sanctuary. The shouts sounded closer, so he quickly darted through the holly and brambles, out west to the edge of the copse, pausing for a few minutes to observe the frightened rabbit, and the crow with the snail, watching in empty pain, wishing in one sense that he was the crow, getting his own back, yet much deeper, deep down, sensing an affinity with the snail in its pain, its brokenness, its loss, its fate. Quickly regaining his senses he dashed across the muddy field to the hedge that formed the boundary between this part of the farm, and the Charity. Moving up the hedge about fifty yards, he crawled through, then lay low in the ditch between the hedge and the lane.

“Here's ee!”

It was the voice of Alan, one of the hands who worked for his father on the smallholding.

“Come here you little. . . . Your father 'ul kill 'ou if he gits 'is 'ands on 'ee!”

The boy crawled out of the ditch. His secret was safe. It was not that this small wiry ten-year-old boy got up to anything in the copse; he didn't kill any animals, did not collect birds' eggs, did not steal and store like other boys. No, this was one of the few safe havens, a sanctuary for the boy, living as he did in a world dominated by violence and abuse: by bitterness between his parents: of anger, frustration, and sexual taunts between those who had brought him, albeit accidentally, into this world. But there was worse, this safe haven masked out the near daily memory of abuse, of the touch and feel of abuse; of intention and touch that a child will sense and want to run from so that the memory is locked away, lost, and escaped from. But however much the memory of being touched in ways no child should experience could be escaped from, the effect on his personality

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and behaviour remained. At its most explicit this disturbance exhibited itself when the child nodded his head involuntarily, repeatedly, screwed up his eyes, repeatedly, could not keep still, moving his limbs, repeatedly. . . .

His father walked up the lane from the Red Barn. He could see the boy with Alan, walking down towards them.

"Your mother's been tearing her hair out don't you know! Come here. Where you 'bin? If it wer'n't for old Jim Beason having seen 'ou running down 'ere about an 'our gone, then, then, I don't know." His father turned and clasping his cap, tore it from his head, hurling it at the boy's feet.

They were stood near to a pigsty, itself behind a small ramshackle shed. The boy looked longingly at the pig, shut as it was in this small concrete sty, with barely enough room to turn around.

"You're not listening to me, bist thee? You're not even listening!" And with one sweep he grabbed the boy by the arm and dragged him back down the lane to where an old Austin lorry was parked. Throwing the boy into the cab, he started up the engine; Alan jumped onto the rear end of the flat bed of the lorry to help guide the boy's father as he carefully reversed the vehicle back up the lane to Gypsies' Corner.

# *Longman's Charity*

## *Part One The Land and The Child*

*"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
and in sin my mother did conceive me."*

PSALM 51:5

## Chapter One

### *Creation: Fruitfulness and the Serpent*

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~ “He sends the springs into the valleys,  
they flow among the hills.  
They give drink to every beast of the field. . . .  
He causes the grass to grow for the cattle,  
and vegetation for man,  
that he may bring forth food from the earth. . . .”

PSALM 104:10–11a & 14

#### One

The lane led down a shallow gradient to a brook. The land, as far as one could see, was green: grey-greens, rich forest-greens, light pea-greens, beige-greens, blue-greens, brown-greens, sandy-greens, yellows, occasional orangey flecks, but everywhere shades of green. The colours were moulded by shape and texture: tall thin shapes, short tight curly shapes, blue-grey wispy shapes, full round beige-greens, tight excited shapes with a multiplicity of shades, or plain flat textures: like a gentle dusting of green snow on the soil. The land was covered with crops. Crops growing. Vegetables growing in short rows, in long rows, in patches, in large rectangles, in isolated strips, in groups: and all in this beautiful cadence of greens and related shades or flecks of yellow, sand, blue, grey, red, purple, and orange; underlined everywhere by the rich dark brown soil. They formed a patchwork. The crops were no more than two feet in height, interrupted only by occasional scrubby trees, stunted through being cut for firewood. Most of the crops were separated by small embankments, with occasional hedgerows

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of hawthorn and brambles. Everywhere there was a low undulating flatness, with, in the distance, the hazy pattern of a small, ancient market town on the horizon. If one looked closer, many of the grey patches one took for hawthorn or blackthorn scrub were tiny ramshackle sheds made from old weathered, irregular grey timber, or rusted corrugated tin. Some had a thin trickle of smoke coming from them. Most had a small but substantial wooden barrow, timbers grey with age parked next to the shed—the sole means for getting produce out and into the market town. The lowliest were single-wheeled barrows; others boasted four steel-rimmed wooden wheels mounted on leaf springs, steered by means of the bar used for pulling it at the front. Others, a rare few, had pick-ups parked next to them: small half-lorry half-car vehicles—some being converted from a Ford Model T, others being a newer Austin with a small wooden bed about five feet by four behind the single seat cab, with the four cylinder engine, headlights, and bonnet in front. Only one of the men working the Charity had such a luxurious vehicle for transporting the goods to market. Most relied on the sturdy old barrows, or the larger market gardening firms to come and collect the produce for them in lorries.

The sky was a clear blue-grey, with occasional wisps of white cloud. There was no breeze, and the slight chill in the air showed how it was now quite late in the year. Over to the west the sky was leaden, the blue-grey indicating, as this was the direction for the prevailing weather, that there might be rain later. Along the centre of this landscape, as if to echo the darker blue-grey sky over to the west, ran a darker green—the sides of the brook. The landscape was thin, fragile, made of multiple patches and textures of green with the occasional grey swatches from sheds, pick-ups, or scrub; indeed, it was an entirely manmade landscape. The only apparently natural line was the brook snaking through the *mêlée* of textures made by the crops, despite their confinement into rows, strips, patches.

Ordinarily the brook would have run clear, northwards to the River Avon about two and a half miles away. The condition of the brook was no longer natural. If one walked along its length, in this part of the vale, then shallow dams, ponds, railings, scoured deeps—all made by men and women—interrupted its course. It was a working brook. Many who worked the land grumbled that it was not fuller, faster flowing. They grumbled that many took water out upstream, put in too much silt, impeded its flow: it was a working brook. The accusation was true to a degree. If one followed the lane as it divided, branched, multiplied, over the distance of about two miles through this landscape (but always following upstream the shallow depression where the brook flowed) then one would come to a copse, a small deciduous wood—the remnant of a much larger natural wood that several hundred years ago had covered most of the vale. If one continued

## *Chapter One, Creation: Fruitfulness and the Serpent*

to follow the brook upstream, crawling through the barbed wire surrounding the copse where the brook emerged from the trees, and if one crawled on all fours through the undergrowth into the wood, to a small glade where the brook widened out to form a small pool—no more than a few feet in diameter—then one found cool, clear water. If one walked, crawled, further through the wood, following the brook upstream, it became smaller, narrower, faster, and as one came to the wire fencing on its furthest perimeter, one saw—in the distance—a farm surrounded by wheat fields. The brook skirted its edge. Beyond lay more wheat fields and pastures, across the flat vale, leading within a couple of miles to the foot of the North Cotswold escarpment. The scarp slope rose within one half mile to the height of just under one thousand feet above sea level; it stood like a pale hazy green-grey wall on the horizon.

It was here, on the face of the Cotswolds, that so many of these brooks and streams rose. They would start as a tiny spring, usually marked by a rock on the limestone scarp, on a windswept face, where the covering of beige-green grass thinned to allow the rock to erupt. Here the water flowed readily. The water dribbled and trickled lightly through the thin grass of this rough, steep, ancient pasture, eventually finding a course for itself and flowing under ancient dry-stone walls—often through small neat stone arches made to accommodate the trickling streams centuries earlier—then to flow through small hamlets standing at the foot of the escarpment. In some villages the waters ran down the side of the main street in open culverts made of finely cut limestone. These tiny villages, a handful of cottages and a church, nestled into the small sculpted valleys, gleaning whatever protection they could from the winds that tore up the side of the scarp from the prevailing west. The villages were enclosed by old yew and ash trees, which, along with most of the buildings, came from an era when monks and nuns regularly walked the yellow limestone roads, to and from Hailes Abbey. The streams flowed on through marshy patches in the corner of fields, then crossed under by-roads serving and connecting many of the small hamlets and villages nestled into the foot of the escarpment. On flowed the streams, keeping strictly to the field boundaries and hedgerows they had been designated to, then trickling over the white-yellow limestone of occasional farm tracks, till the waters reached the richer, darker soils of the Vale of Evesham. There were many such streams. Our brook first appears near to Hinton Green, draining the flat arable land at the foot of the escarpment. It skirted Long Acre farm, then flowing through hedgerows and past wheat fields till it entered the copse.

As the brook emerged out from the copse it flowed into a long rectangular pool—quite perfectly rectangular, for it was kept so. About four feet in depth it provided water for the pig, soaking for the onions, and washing for just about

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anything and everything. Next to the rectangular pool was a redbrick barn—light entered the building through tiny gaps between the bricks, which overall formed a diamond pattern about five feet by four. About thirty feet in length, it was built of Midlands red brick with characteristic curved bricks around the entrance—the door itself, in two halves, was about ten feet tall, by eight feet wide. Running over the whole structure was a large pitched roof of clay tiles. The barn had been built during the middle of the nineteenth century—surrounded by acres of orchards—before the land had changed use. The barn stood at right angles to the rectangular pool so that the entrance served a dirt yard, itself flanked by the pool, the whole being set about fifteen yards from the lane.

Around the barn, and growing up to its edges, as if to scale its walls, were grasses, rye and wild, along with tall hollyhocks and, depending on the seasons, harebells, ox-eyed daisy, and primrose. But this was a verge, and not practical to maintaining the land, and so the wild flowers were never allowed to invade the land reserved for vegetables, but at various times of the year, along the narrow banks of grassy earth that separated plots, corn marigolds, vetches, poppies, stitchwort, knapweeds, daisy, and many more could all be seen, with primrose and foxglove around the copse, and ragged robin in the wetter parts. The one exception to this were the yellow flags, which were tolerated along the banks of the brook. In season they could run along its length, but in fact were patchy: some growers tolerated them, others pulled them out.

In amongst this wild growth, around the edge of the barn, were the twisted remains of ancient and obsolete agricultural implements—equipment all of which was for hand use, or to be pulled by a small horse. None was of a size and scale for use in a farm field. Seemingly inexorably trapped by couch grass, was a small hand push-hoe. Made from two steel strips, each the size and thickness of a man's thumb, both strips ran parallel for about two feet before turning up to travel two feet further to form handles. The pair of metal strips was set apart by thin steel rods, with a metal-shod wooden wheel between the front of these runners. Similarly set to the rear of the strips, before their turn towards the handles, was suspended a hoe—a metal strip about six inches by two, set to cut the entire width of a soil between two rows of seedlings, thus dislodging any weeds growing. The entire was now a rusty black in colour, with no portion of smooth metal remaining—the whole, pitted with sweat and work, and the erosion of innumerable grains of soil and grit, and finally rust. Similarly, if one penetrated the bindweed and hawthorn at the rear of the barn, one found chipped white-blue enamelled basins, with the steel rusted right through wherever the enamel was missing; buried even deeper was an old beige earthenware butler sink. Scattered broadly throughout the undergrowth were innumerable bits of



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wood and metal, some with ornate Edwardian tracery, but with their discernible purpose now sadly rusted and rotted away.

### Two

A couple approached. A man and a woman in their fifties, bent double. They were carrying crates, one each filled with onions, spring onions, neatly trimmed, outer skins removed, in bunches of about five or six onions, tied with fine string; each crate containing about one hundred and fifty bunches. The crates were wooden, held together with wire, grey black, with the edges to each plank worn smooth, indeed eroded and sculpted by water. The couple put the crates down on the side of the pool. As they stood, straightening their backs, their features revealed a coarseness that for centuries has been the hallmark of land workers. They both wore old overcoats, tied tight around the waist with the same string. Both wore Wellington boots, worn almost white in places, with a smooth moulded look reminiscent of a well-rounded pebble from a streambed. The man took hold of the crates, first one then the other, and slid more than dropped them into the cool clear water of the pool. They floated down stream to the neck of the pool, where they joined three more crates of onions, their path halted by a section of park railing thrust many years earlier into the silt at the bottom of the brook, and secured with twine to posts on either side.

“Let’um sow’k.”

The remark came from the man, as much a part of his breathing out, as was the exhalation of air. So tired was he that he did not waste precious energy and breath exhaling, inhaling, and then passing comment: all became one action. He slumped down by his wife, drew out a packet of Woodbines, carefully removed one, examined it with minute attention, placed it in his mouth, paused, and with a conservation of energy unknown to those unfamiliar with working, let alone living on the land, he slowly lit a match, drew in on his cigarette, let the match drop into the pool, took out the cigarette, and let his head fall into his hands:

“‘Bout three’apence, I reck’n—sor’l we’ll git.”

“Nev’r mind dear, never mind,” his wife offered, “we’ve done it. We’ve got’um. They’re awl in. They’re awl in.”

“Yes. Yes, but three’apence,” he drew on his Woodbine.

“But we got the land,” she said, pressing her point, “they can’t tak’it, they can’t, the church, not so long as we pays our bit.”

“Aye”, he conceded “and s’long as we look after et, so long as we is right by et, they can’t take et.”

“Besides, we’as got each other, we’as, we been through worse.” She added, with

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a slight hint of triumph, loving triumph, in her voice, "you think on, we's seen worse."

True, on reflection the man could see she was right. She knew it—for he did not answer back. The winter of 1947, six years earlier, was one example, the frost and snow that winter, the hardest that century, lost them over half of their crops; over thirty pounds in seed and labour was lost—not to mention the lost income that would have come from the crop. Four years before that, when the war was at its height, she had lost her Jim; he had been in a Japanese prisoner of war camp, but she had not been informed. They had no children, had tried, but never really minded. He had his job to go back to. True it was not much of a job, but as secure a job as was possible in market gardening, with prices and demand up and down. Men were taken on and laid off at monotonous regularity, but because he was a charge hand, looking after the loading, seeing orders were got from the fields and allotments, he knew that whatever the prevailing economic climate, he had a job. And he had his land: one and a half acres, to the south of the town of Evesham. It was leased on a secure tenure for a set rent of one guinea per quarter, and provided it was looked after and kept in order then this was as safe as owning it. The smallholding, the one and a half acres, near to the Red Barn, and access rights down both lanes, provided them with a second income. It also gave them a sense of independence. Some years, this one in particular, he fretted that he would not have the rent. It was due, and the rains were wreaking havoc with the crop of onions and cabbage.

The Charity consisted of more than one charity—Hampton Charity, Christchurch Charity (Christchurch, that is Cathedral and College, in Oxford from whom Jim rented his plot), the John Martin Charity, and several more, all occupying the flat undulating land just to the south of the town. All of this land had once belonged to Evesham Abbey and its monks, but then the land was split up with the Reformation. In the nineteenth century all of this area was covered with orchards. After the First World War, Hampton Parish, the principal owner, set aside one acre of the land for each man of the parish returning from the trenches. Over the intervening thirty years many of the men had died, or relinquished their right to hold their acre, and so now the holdings varied in size from some of the original one-acre plots to some that were three acres in size, plots having been amalgamated. Jim and Doris both knew that they had one of the best holdings in the Charity: it was upstream of the others (good when it came to using the brook for washing out crops, such as onions, leeks, and so forth); it had good drainage; and it had access to the Red Barn. There was good access for when lorries or pick-ups came to collect goods, and it was protected from the prevailing westerlies by the copse, from which the brook flowed. There were

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about one hundred and thirty holders in all—many of whom tried to hide the fact that they held charity land, particularly in the company of more prosperous landowners.

The brook wound its way for nearly two miles through The Charities. By the time it flowed round the skirts of the local council estate, it was a thick murky khaki-brown. The one factor the holders never complained of was the smell—they were so used to it that they either did not notice it, or pretended it was not there. They smelt of it when they went home or drove to the market. The tenants of the newly built council estate houses complained vociferously (except for the stony silence from those tenants who either worked the land or were holders): the smell could be sensed day and night, through spring, summer, and into autumn—only relieved by the first frosts. The smell was an aromatic mixture of putrefying onions and rank vegetable matter. The brook was so full of vegetable debris from crop washing that the smell was overpowering to strangers. This was bad enough at most times during the onion growing season; but worse was to come when the brook flooded: a welcome sight to the holders, for it rejuvenated their meagre holdings with rich nutrients from this soup, but for anyone living near, the situation became desperate. After passing through the estate, the brook joined a much larger stream where the added waters diluted the debris; it flowed past the building site for a local secondary modern school. Then flowed through older parts of the town, finally to divulge its remaining contents into the river Avon. In the height of the spring onion season, a thick khaki-brown delta-shaped web could be perceived in the dark grey-black of the river, where the Charity Brook joined. Although many holders bickered and moaned that it was always “sumun else,” not them, who fouled the Charity Brook, and although it was holders near top end (like Jim and Doris), who got most stick, there was one sight to bring them all back together, to form an impenetrable wall of obstinate silence and prevarication: a “Minstry-Ag” (a health inspector from the Ministry of Agriculture)—who needless to say got nowhere fast, particularly as it was usually some young green sapling of an officer sent down from Birmingham.

Since the early nineteenth century the area had been developing as a centre for market gardening, and men were eager for land to start a business—however small. For some holders this land formed the staple, or sole income, to others a second, or parallel income. The plots, or holdings, were no more than a few acres—some only a half-acre. Not only were the holders at the whim of the market away in the great northern cities as to the price of their produce, and hence their labour, but they were also, by and large, subject to the whim and discretion of the next level of land workers/gardeners in the hierarchy: those who owned the let on a large piece of land, or even the freehold of the land they

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worked, and had established links with customers away in the cities. There was a very strictly defined hierarchy amongst those working the land. It was, of course, dominated by men.

Women were in large evidence on the land, but only for menial tasks. Women had kept the farms and smallholdings going during the war—the Land Army had carried out all the tasks that the men had done as well as, if not better. But they had by and large returned to their kitchens with the peace, only to come out to tie onions, pick runner beans, or gather plums and apples, tend and bind asparagus, indeed the hundreds of jobs there were in neatening and presenting fruit and vegetables for sale, packaged either loose or tied, in an assortment of chips (thin wood baskets with a pressed tin handle), trays, boats (deep, heavy wooden trays for leeks), crates, nets, boxes, bags, and so on. The women did most of the fine, finicky, and tedious work. This was always considered “ooman’s werk,” even during hard times when many of the regular men were used for these tasks—to keep them in work.

### Three

This hierarchy of land-use and land-ownership was essential to the local economy, and was in essence somewhat feudal. On the bottom rung were the landless workers, many of them migrant labourers, most living in barns, sheds, or tied accommodation on large market gardening estates or farms. They owed their livelihood, and hence their loyalty to their employer. Some stayed with one gardener for many years—family commitments were often the cause of this degree of allegiance—others moved every few months around different gardeners according to demand, still others moved over to the rich plains in Herefordshire, or to gardening in Somerset or Kent, and would return years later looking for work. For those whose family commitments kept them in the Vale there was always the temptation of better-paid work on another farm or holding. Business was volatile, changeable, and subject not just to market forces, but the weather. If there was better-paid work elsewhere, or another gardener had a better crop, and hence there was more casual work in harvesting, then they had a stiff choice: stay put on a low basic wage or leave and lose house and home; tied accommodation was endemic. Such was the lot of the landless labourer.

On the next rung were those who held charity land: most often too little to provide more than a subsistence income, or a valued second income to a job as either a land worker or employment in one of the small factories in the town. Those who grew on church land considered themselves better than those who worked charity land. But then those who worked one of these larger church

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holdings were considered lesser people by those who actually owned the freehold of the land they worked. In addition there was a sense of privilege and status even amongst holders: a gardener working a small half-acre plot was considered a lesser individual than someone who worked a plot of say two or three acres. However, holders had a degree of independence that was valued—however large or small the plot they grew. What they grew was their own. It belonged to them, and not to whoever was employing them. They could—and many did—use some of the land to grow their own food (many of the holders down the Charity kept a pig in a brick or concrete sty, and several chickens), and were nigh self-sufficient in a modest sort of way. Money was generated by selling a surplus. Holders had a choice: prepare and take the produce to one of the two daily fruit and vegetable markets and trust to the best bid, or sell through word of mouth to another gardener who sent his produce away.

On the next rung of the ladder stood those who actually owned some land. Many of these men and women were also merchants who earned a living buying produce from charity landholders, or from the local fruit and vegetable markets, or from the big estates. They would then send the produce by rail to the great northern cities, either to wholesale markets, or direct to shops and customers who had been established over a number of years: these activities were referred to as a gardeners' dealings. During the height of a crop's season, many lorries could be seen labouring to the railway sidings with several hundred chips of plums or beans stacked meticulously. Running a lorry or a pick-up was considered an essential part of the status and responsibility for this group of gardeners. They worked long hours, growing crops and trading as merchants, and considered themselves much more respectable, and somehow more beholden of God's grace, than charity holders. That success was sometimes short lived as it was subject to the vagaries of a market economy. The social status attributable to any freehold gardener was in direct proportion to the land owned, the size of his dealings, and the number of men employed: they were the direct descendants of the yeoman class of freemen, with their small plots of land and their independence which no man could take from them. However large and prosperous such an individual's dealings and holdings might become, such a gardener could never cross the Rubicon to the next, and final, group within the hierarchy.

Finally, there were the farm and market garden estate-owning classes, whose wealth and status was effectively inherited. These were long-established land-owning families, who sent their sons and daughters to public school, who employed estate managers for everything, and owned large businesses dealing with all aspects of farming and market gardening, from seeds, through machinery, to land management. Many owned large fruit estates—orchards—or tracts of

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land growing vegetables, though they never really admitted to being market gardeners: they really aspired to be gentleman farmers—wheat or livestock was somehow more respectable. Outside of the church, this group was the largest landowner in the vale, but their contribution to the local economy—their direct contribution—was arguably the smallest, though they had heritage, tradition, and social cultivation to compensate, which was an essential ingredient in the rural lifestyle.

Outside of this hierarchy were the gypsies and travelling classes who not only were apart from the social aspiration of many, but they also kept themselves very much to themselves. At the appropriate time within the growing season they would appear, as it were from nowhere, always to the day or within a few days. Many growers relied upon them; a landowner could raise five acres of runner beans, sowing in the early spring, with the crop to be harvested between late June and early August, or later. If that landowner had a long-established tradition with a group of travellers or gypsies, then he knew that they would turn up, by tradition on a particular day, or week, come what may, year in year out. It was an unwritten agreement; it was a tradition. He knew that for the established period they would come, camp with their lorries and caravans in the same place each year, usually a little-used corner of a field; they would require water, nothing else, save privacy, and no interference, and for that few weeks they were the best workforce on God's earth. With care they would pick through and harvest, taking each day what was just at the right stage of growth and ripeness, leaving others to grow on. They knew best, and any landowner who valued his crop and income, acknowledged it. They cropped what was ready from a field; they did not pick to meet orders. If the landowner had too little, then he could buy in from other growers or from the markets; likewise, if he had too much, he could sell, within the markets.

All the members of a travelling family worked, except nursing mothers. Children did their bit, except when being schooled by the elders—schooled in what was necessary for their lives and within the tradition of travelling families; state education was too much in its infancy in the early 1950s to bother travelling families about their children's conformity to national standards. They spoke little to either land workers or to bosses. They relied upon one from their midst to act as spokesman. He would talk to the gaffer, come to terms, discuss their thoughts on the crop, how they wanted to go about picking it, how much they would earn, any other work that might be around, and so on. This was usually a fair arrangement, after all, market and social forces ruled—if they stung a grower, they knew their livelihood was in jeopardy: it was a two-way relationship, reliant upon trust.

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If some of the men went drinking, it was usually to just one of two pubs in the town, and they usually held their drink impeccably. Those who were likely to cause trouble stayed at the ground, or so the elders would believe when it came to reassuring local people. Trouble there was—but not always from the gypsies or travellers. It was usually from either land workers or townsfolk. Land workers were often jealous of the gypsies' mobility, their freedom to dictate terms, and their immunity from local authorities. Townsfolk were the worst. Many were jealous of the travellers' independence, but they also despised the gypsy traditions, their culture, their song and dances, and worse still, the rugged, sallow complexion, their dress, their language, even allegedly their smell: in a word, prejudice—it amounted to racial prejudice.

The gypsies' roots were Irish and East European. Many around the vale in the early 1950s were Romanian, or from the southern Russian republics; they had intermingled with those of Irish descent, and they shared a culture. They shared religion: many caravans had ornate crucifixes within, and on many an occasion the local Catholic priest was seen visiting; but they were not seen in the local Catholic church—at least, only on a couple of occasions. Although many of the young men went along to the local dance hall, to swing to the big band sound, they were equally as at home listening to, and accompanying, the elders with their fiddles, squeezeboxes, tabors, and dances. A sound blended from Moorish, oriental folk tunes, wedded with English Morris, Irish airs, and scraps of music hall and modern songs: a rich cosmopolitan, yet historic, tradition. A sound culture fed during the day by the sound of work being carried out on diesel engines, and the air waves from occasional wireless sets, with an aerial precariously placed in a tree, its wire leading into the smokey interior of a caravan.

During the summer and autumn seasons, they could be seen camped in lay-bys, on wide grass verges, in fields, on the edge of woods; a migrant workforce without which the vale's economy, based as it was on fruit and vegetables, would have ground to a halt. Hundreds of tons of plums, apples, pears, runner beans, peas, dwarf beans, onions, carrots, cabbage, and more, were carefully harvested and packed by them. No one really knew what happened to this workforce in the winter and spring. Many children of land workers grew up with the notion that they were magical, had deep ancient powers; that they slept in the hillsides in winter, or disappeared to some far-flung oriental lands. Then they would reawaken as the earth brought forth and was ready for harvest. There were stories of young woman going away with them to be gypsy queens, though these stories were becoming scarce. There were still stories of children running away with the gypsies, or worse, of babies being kidnapped and carried away, to grow up to be a proud gypsy warrior; there were still families prepared to claim that their baby had died or that the wife had miscarried due to a spell cast by the gypsies.

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Many did return to Ireland. Most earned enough in the summer to keep them going through the winter and spring. If there was a bad year, or a poor harvest, many would stay on, to work root crops, or fields of frozen leeks and sprouts in winter, but that impinged on the staple work for local land workers. Then there were real arguments. Local land workers argued that they should take the rough with the smooth, they took the lion's share of work of the big summer crops, and then they should go, leave in the autumn, and see what they could find elsewhere. There was only a limited amount of winter work. These winter crops were earmarked for local labour; in addition there was a marked increase in poaching if many of them stayed on and were hard up: first the rabbit and fish population was decimated, then if the winter was tough, local poultry. But the gypsies provided a scapegoat. Sometimes vicious fights broke out. A proud people, the travelling gypsies always steered clear of contact with the authorities, and once matters had degenerated thus, it would not be long before health inspectors, school inspectors, or the police would be round, just to look and chat of course. So they left. And if there was no work, they still kept together, and struggled through. Most in the early 1950s were too independent to approach the authorities for benefit, and relied upon the extended families they were born into. Ironically many growers would have liked to keep a group of families based on their land permanently, with more than enough work to go round, but they were a fiercely independent people, and always moved on when they felt they were putting down roots. They'd be back, at Whitsun, or the last Monday in June, or whatever the tradition was.

When it was time to leave, move on, they cleared away the ground they camped on, tidied up, and then early in the morning, while it was still dark, the first lorry would leave, pulling a large caravan. Within the train were still some old wooden caravans, but very few still used horses; they kept the horses, for local journeys, but when the caravan train was on the move, they carried the horses in their wagons—they were part of the family. Some small groups of gypsies could still be seen travelling by horse-drawn van, but for long journeys, most large troops used lorries, many dating from the early 1930s, and everyone in impeccable order mechanically, with gleaming polished panels. Once they had left, there was a scorched grey charred patch about six feet wide on the ground where the campfire had been, there was flattened grass where the vans had been parked, but nothing else, save an eerie silence, and an emptiness, where colour, vibrancy, and excitement had flown.

It was easy to see how the folklore of their magic still lived on in the imaginations of the children of land workers in this period: before television, and when radios were for grown-ups, and cars were still not that common-place.



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There was very little mechanization, the soil was worked with hand tools, small implements, or sometimes, if the land really needed breaking up, a small Fordson tractor was brought in. Many growers still used horses, they bought them in from farriers to plough small patches, or strips. The whole agriculture of the Charity and of market gardening on this scale was almost a reverting to medieval strip farming; the hills, the vale, the glorious fecundity of God's creation was clothed in a pre-chemicalization, small-scale, almost Biblical, agrarian economy (the mass use of expensive pesticides and fertilizers was a generation away). The world revolved around sun and water, soil and fields, strips of crops, greens and browns of every hue and texture, rain, and the sky: the never-ending sky in all its moods, and seasons, and changes. A child could lie on his or her back on the low grass and wild-flower-clothed embankments that separated holdings, gazing into the sky, listening to the wind, eavesdropping on the birds, and watch the changes in clouds, the colours of the sky, or the larks as they rose and danced on the air, singing incessantly. Lying on these grassy banks, with the minutest of life teeming within it, gazing to the sky, it would seem to many a small child that heaven could not be more perfect.

### Four

Jim drew on the Woodbine stump in the corner of his lips, the hot smoke from the remains of the cigarette caused him to catch his breath; with the fit of coughing, he sharply flicked the stump into the pool, caught his breath, and stood up.

"Aye, well, suppose we is best on our way," came out between coughs.

Doris gathered together the few remains from their tea—eaten within minutes of their arrival that afternoon. Jim had been at work since 6.00am, home mid-afternoon, whereupon they both walked from the small Victorian terraced house they lived in, between Merstow Green and the Bewdley, walked the three and a half miles to their charity plot, had a light meal of cheese, cold potatoes, ham, and bread, with tea from a rather battered thermos, then set-to tying the onions that had been pulled the previous evening, and had been stored in the barn. It was now 7.30 in the evening and the two trudged wearily along the lane from the barn heading West to the Cheltenham Road, the yellow-beige of the lane's limestone chippings levelled out as they approached Gypsies' Corner. Here they met the main road running south to Gloucestershire.

Jim and Doris walked along the grass verge, north along the Cheltenham Road, towards the town of Evesham. They stopped after a couple of hundred yards to buy some fresh eggs from a roadside stall, before walking on, past an assortment of houses on the edge of the town. Some of the houses were new,

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built in the late 1940s for those working in offices, or commuting to Worcester or Gloucester. Other houses were much older, a row of eight narrow Victorian cottages or a pair of Edwardian semi-detached houses from the early years of the century, but everywhere the houses were broken by narrow lanes or a dirt track, linking the road to smallholdings, orchards, or the Charity. Some of the houses, on both sides of the road, were set well back from the line of building, indeed set back within a smallholding. None of the Charity land actually met the road. Those holdings next to the road, particularly those with a house were freehold. The land, the house, the living, were owned lock-stock-and-barrel by those who worked the land.

Jim and Doris stopped by one such holding. Behind the tall hawthorn hedge, set back about sixty yards from the road was an unpretentious post-war detached house, plain brick, with even plainer metal window frames, all within a pitched tiled roof. A lane ran down the side, which served the holding within which the house stood. At the bottom of the lane stood a tall shed made of a timber structure covered with corrugated sheets of metal. Half way down the lane stood a lilac bush, next to the lilac bush stood a young woman in her late twenties holding a young child in her arms. The woman was also pregnant. She held her back with the remaining free arm, shuffled around, wondering where to go, or what to do. She seemed conscious of the possibility of other people around. She noticed Jim and Doris at the top of the drive, turned and went back behind the house.

"Shouldn't we do som'it?"

"No" answered Doris, shaking her head, "there's nowt any un can do wiv'em, you know, young Harry Broadley un's missus. You saw, you saw. . ."

"Aye, aye, she was crying, fretting, and she was bleeding—from her head," interrupted Jim.

"Yes but you know that family, the Broadleys; they's trouble, trouble back from when they come here. They're trouble, trouble. No one can help."

"But . . ." persisted Jim, "but with the little one, and another on the way, and she should git that head seen to . . ."

"I know, I know, but you try—don't forget his father lives just over there, you know, old Jack Broadley. And if you want to take on Jack Broadley, you got another think coming, you have Jim Beason, that you have, you mark my words, you don't tackle old Jack Broadley!"

With that, they moved on, continued on their way home; shortly after the road dropped sharply down an incline, turning a sharp bend, descending about one hundred feet, with old Victorian houses on one side, and a tall yew hedge on the other, down to the river Avon. Jim and Doris turned right at the foot of the hill

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and walked northeast, with the riverbank on their left, and the old Oxford Road on their right. Within half a mile, they came to the Workman Bridge, which they crossed, they then walked up Bridge Street, rising steeply again, but less overall height than they had descended. They walked along the old Bridge Street, past half-timbered Tudor buildings, across to Bewdley Street, finally walking down through the Bewdley. They stopped shortly for Jim to buy some more cigarettes from the shop on the corner of Littleworth Street. Then they continued on down, turning left after the Bewdley Mission, and along a pathway to the terrace that was home.

### Five

The young woman, Margaret Broadley, still not knowing what to do with herself, sat outside the back of the house. Harry Broadley, her husband, had left—she could tell from the slamming of the back door. It was now safe to go back in. He had gone across the road to his father's—he would be there till late, till she had gone to bed, and the baby was asleep. Margaret, or Meg as she had been known for years, quietly got up, went in through the back door, placed the young girl carefully on a chair, and then set-to to bathe the cut on her forehead, the blood still flowing. The child started to cry. The baby was encased from the waist down in plaster—a congenital hip disorder, now set in place with plaster with the legs set wide apart by a rod. Normal bodily functions were restricted to small openings in the plaster, the child, about eighteen months old, only ceased crying when she had been cleaned and attended to. She was then placed on a large settee in the rear living room. Meg returned to bathing her head, then holding her back as she stretched, holding the womb that held the developing child. Slowly she moved across the kitchen, and sat down on a chair—only then did she place her head in her hands, and weep. Weep, with convulsions, but in silence. She wept.

Harry, having slept over the road at his parents, had risen at five to take the men and women to fields south of Dumbleton, and to Badsey and Bretforton to harvest spring onions. Harry walked in to the kitchen just after nine to sit down to breakfast with Meg. Having eaten he slammed down a paper bag on the table—

“Take that. Now. Go on.”

Meg took the bag, opened it, and took out a small round card tub—a medicine box, no bigger than a half-crown coin. She removed the lid. Inside were two tablets.

“They cost me good money, damn good money.”

Meg said nothing. Closed the box and looked at Harry.

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"We can't afford another babby. Take 'um."

Harry always slipped into an Evesham accent when he got annoyed at situations he could not control.

"I got 'um from him in town—you know, the chemist."

"And you want me to take them."

"Yes—it'll get rid of it. Damn thing. We can't afford it."

Meg threw the box into the sink and walked out. Harry went after her—

"You agreed. You did. Damn it, take 'um."

Still smarting from the row and being struck the evening before, Meg relented and took the two tablets, swallowing them with a cup of cold tea.

A few weeks later when nothing had happened and Meg was clearly still pregnant Harry visited the pharmacist again, and arranged to buy more "under-the-counter" drugs to abort. He went round to the pharmacist's house to collect them, paying an exorbitant amount of money for now three little tablets. Again Meg, after complaining for a time, took the tablets. This time she woke in the night with appalling abdominal pains, cramps, and found she was passing a small amount of placental blood. The cramps lasted for just under three days, and Meg continued to pass blood irregularly. Then the cramps abated. She was still with child: a human being that had been assaulted, attacked by the chemical weapons that were the tablets, weapons aimed at Paul that had almost killed him. But he had survived, just. Despite her intentions, and those of Harry, Meg's body had defended Paul, fought-off the attack, although Paul had not survived unscathed. Harry was more concerned at the money wasted on the tablets—a point he would taunt the boy with as he grew up.