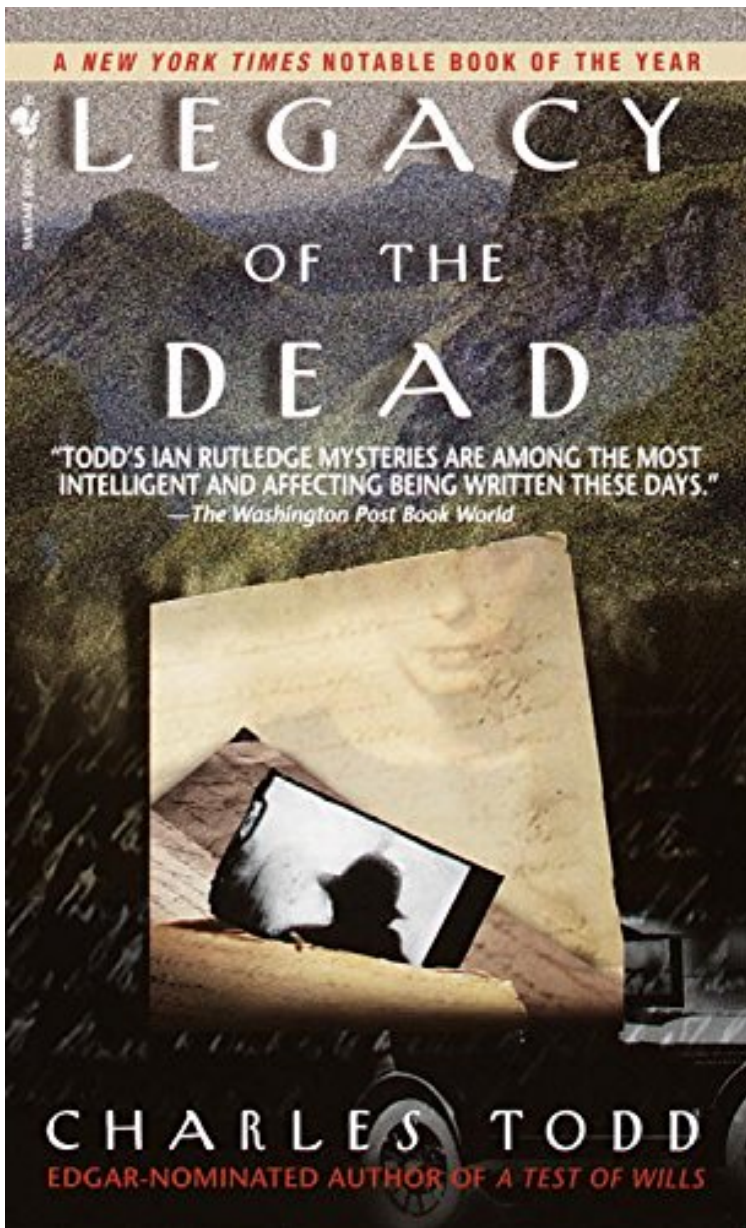


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Legacy of the Dead



Par Charles Todd
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe weathered remains found on a Scottish mountainside may be those of Eleanor Gray, but the imperious Lady Maude Gray, Eleanor's mother, will have to be handled delicately. This is not the only ground that Inspector Ian Rutledge of Scotland Yard must tread carefully, for the case will soon lead him to Scotland, where many of Rutledge's ghosts rest uneasily. But it is an unexpected encounter that will hold the most peril.For in Scotland Rutledge will find that the young mother accused of killing Eleanor Gray is a woman to whom he owes a terrible debt. And his harrowing journey to find the truth will lead him

back through the fires of his past, into secrets that still have the power to kill. Extrait 1916 Glasgow

The two women sat huddled together in the small carriage, looking around them in dismay, staring at the filthy, closed-in street, the drunken old man sprawled in one of the doorways, the tall tenements ugly and bleak and perilously ill-kept. There was no grace here, only an air of despondency and gloom and poverty. "It's a horrible place!" one said at last. She was the elder, but not by much. They were both young and very frightened. "Are you quite sure this is the street we want? I can't believe--" Her companion, the reins lying in her lap, let the words die. In answer, the passenger dug in her purse for the tattered piece of paper, pulled it out, and read it again. Her lips were trembling, and she felt cold, sick. "Look for yourself. Oh--" The paper slipped from her fingers, and she caught it just before it tumbled into the fetid running gutter beneath the wheel. It was the street and the house they had searched over an hour to find. There was silence, only the rain and the whistle of a train somewhere in the distance making any sound at all. The horse waited patiently. "You'll remember, won't you?" the older woman went on breathlessly. "I'm Mrs. Cook. And you're Sarah. My mother had a housekeeper called Mrs. Cook. And a sewing woman called Sarah. That makes it easier for me--" She stared at the house. "It's a cursed place, dreadful." "I only have to remember who you are. And I've called you that all day. Mrs. Cook. Don't fret so -- you'll make yourself ill!" "Yes." She smoothed the rug across her knees, felt its dampness. The horse blew, shifting uncomfortably in the rain. Finally the older woman squeezed her companion's hand and said, "We must go in, Sarah. We're expected. It must be nearly time." They climbed stiffly out of the carriage, two respectable young women looking as out of place here as they felt. The stench of bad sewers and boiled cabbage, overlaid with coal smoke and dirty streets, heavy in the dampness, seemed to wrap itself around them. A miasma of the city. They made their way up to the door, stepping over old newsprint and brown sacking that had been turned to the consistency of porridge by the downpour. Lifting the latch, they could just see down a dark, awful tunnel that was only a rubbish-littered hallway but seemed like the final path to hell. The door they were after was the second on the left, a barely discernible Number Three on a grimy card marking it.

Someone shouted "Come!" to their tentative knock, and they found themselves in a bare, high-ceilinged room with a half-dozen broken-down chairs and no windows. It was cold with damp, smelled of cigars and stale beer, and to their fastidious eyes hadn't been cleaned in years. They could hear someone crying in the next room beyond a second door. The older woman caught her friend's hand and said, "F -- Sarah -- I'm going to be sick!" "No, it's only fright. Here, sit down." She quickly found the best chair and brought it forward, then took another one for herself. It wobbled, one leg uneven. A nondescript paint, peeled from the walls and ceiling, gave the floor a dappled look, and the old brown carpet in the center seemed to be woven of all the hopelessness that had been brought here. The older of the two began to tremble. "I'm not frightened -- I'm terrified!" "It will be all right -- wait and see." It was a comforting lie, and they both recognized it for what it was. They sat there for a time, not speaking, their hands gripped together, their faces blanched with the thought of what must lie ahead. The crying went on and on, and overhead there was the sound of furniture being shifted, first this way, then that, an endless screech that seemed half human, half demon. Somewhere in the hallway a man's voice shouted, and they both jumped. Watching the inner door, they could feel the minutes drag into the half hour. "Sarah" found herself wishing it would open, then dreading that it would. They'd been here a very long time -- why had no one come out to speak to them? They had been expected at two sharp--If only the crying would stop--Suddenly the older woman stood up. "No, I can't do it!" Her voice was thick, unnaturally loud to her own ears. "You must! He'll kill you if you don't!" "I'd rather kill myself. Oh, God, I can't carry the memory of this place around with me for the rest of my life, I can't--! It was a mistake, I want to go home! Sarah -- take me home, for the love of heaven, take me home!" Her friend, compassion in her eyes, said, "You're sure? It's not to be done again? I can't borrow the carriage again without questions being asked." "No, just take me home!" She was shaking in earnest, cold with dread, cold with fear, cold with the decision she knew she dared not make. Her friend put an arm around her shoulders, and in the hallway, she was sick, leaning there for several minutes in such pain that she seemed to collapse in on herself, frail and helpless. Weak to the point of fainting, her breath a sob, she pressed her forehead against the drab, dirty paint, grateful for its coolness. They could hear voices behind the other doors, barely muffled -- children crying, a man swearing, a woman singing something mournful and off-key. A cat meowing impatiently, pans banging, and thumps, as if somewhere someone was beating a carpet. But mercifully no one came out into the hall. Still -- they might -- at any moment--"Can you walk as far as the carriage?" her companion asked softly. "I must try--" The older woman straightened herself with an effort and pressed a handkerchief to her lips. "I wish I'd never come here -- I wish I'd never heard of this place,

much less seen it! If I died, how would I have faced him, with this place on my soul!""He would understand.

He would. It's what made him special, poor man. ""Yes." They linked arms for comfort and walked unsteadily back to the outside door. It swung open as they reached it, and a man smelling strongly of sweat and too much beer grinned knowingly at them for an instant, eyes raking both of them. The tenants here must be aware of what went on in Number Three. "Sarah" felt herself flush with embarrassment. But the man held the door wide and let them pass unmolested. It was all the older woman could do to climb back into the carriage. Once there, she slumped to the side, clinging to one of the braces that held the top in place. Her companion gently wrapped the damp blanket around her and looked pityingly at her. What were they to do? What were they to do? She took her own seat, remembered she hadn't untied the horse, and climbed down again. Several people were coming down the street now, hurrying past, heads bowed, their shoes splashing in the puddles. Three children, grubby-faced and thin, stopped to stare at her, knowing her for a stranger, before running on. A sudden gust of wind sent skirts whipping, and two houses away a man's hat blew off, to roll down the street like a top. The rain began in earnest and she barked her shin climbing back to her seat. Close to tears herself, she lifted the reins and spoke to the horse. "Walk on." It was a very long drive back to where they'd come from. Long and cold and wet and dreary. She glanced at the other woman from time to time, saw that she was silently crying with her eyes closed, her lower lip caught between her teeth. Her pale face reflected misery and exhaustion. I don't know how I'd feel, "Sarah" said to herself despairingly. In her shoes. Bleak of heart. Afraid. But I'll think of something. God help me -- I must think of something! We can't come back here again. We haven't the strength! It was very late when they reached their destination. The town was dark and still, a dog howling somewhere, the wind whispering around the church tower and swooping among the gravestones of the churchyard -- as if confiding the latest news, "Sarah" thought, turning the old horse toward his stable. I'm so weary, I'm imagining things. She glanced for the hundredth time at the woman beside her. Her eyes were still closed, but she wasn't asleep. "We're home," she told her friend gently, trying not to startle her. They were wet through, hungry because they'd been reluctant to stop along the way at the rough pubs or places where decent travelers stayed. They had been afraid of being seen, of being recognized. Of someone remembering that they'd been on the road from Glasgow, where they weren't supposed to be. "Yes." She opened her eyes, saw the churchyard, and shuddered. The cold white stones seemed to be pointing fingers. "I wish I were dead too!" Following a path through the stones with her eyes, the younger woman murmured with infinite sadness, "So do I." 21919 Duncarrick The letters began to arrive in the middle of June, hardly more than a few words scribbled in cheap ink on cheap paper. Fiona never discovered who had received the first of them. Or even -- in the beginning -- what had caused the coldness toward her. It seemed over the course of the month that one by one the women who were her neighbors found excuses not to hang out their laundry or weed their gardens when she worked in the inn yard. The friendly greetings across the fence, the occasional offer of flowers for the bar parlor or a treat for the child, stopped. Soon people no longer nodded to her on the street. And failed to speak in the shops. Custom fell off at the bar. Men who often came in for a pint in the long summer evenings avoided her eyes now and hurried past the inn door. The coldness frightened her. She didn't know how to fight it because there was no one to tell her what lay at the bottom of it. She wished, for the hundredth time, that her aunt were still alive. Even Alistair McKinstry, the young constable, shook his head in bewilderment when she asked him what she had done to offend. "For it must be that," she told him. "Someone's taken a word wrong, or I neglected to do something I'd promised. But what? I've tried and tried to think of anything!" He had seen the looks cast her way behind her back. "I don't know. Nothing's been said in my hearing. It's as if I'm shut out as well." He smiled wryly. Half the town must know how he felt about her. "It may be a small thing, Fiona. I'd not take it to heart." Which was no comfort at all. She had already taken it to heart, and wondered if that was the intent, to give her pain. But why? On the first Sunday in July, the old woman who invariably sat in the back of the church hissed at her as she came in with the little boy, leading him to their accustomed place. The single word was lost in the first hymn, but she knew what it was. Wanton. It made her flush, and the woman grinned toothlessly in grim satisfaction. She had meant to hurt. The shunning had been supplanted by attack. The sermon that morning was on Ruth and Mary Magdalen. The good, faithful woman who had kept her place at her mother-in-law's side and the wanton whose sins Christ had forgiven. The Scottish minister, Mr. Elliot, made no bones about which he'd have favored, in Christ's stead. His harsh, loud voice made it clear that good women were jewels in the sight of God. Humility was their shibboleth -- such women knew their place and kept their hearts clean of sin. It would take Christ Himself to forgive a sinful woman -- they were beyond redemption, in his personal view. You'd have thought, Fiona told herself, that

Mr. Elliot knew better than God Almighty what ought to be done about sinners--stone them, very likely! He had a very Old Testament view of such matters, a cold and self-righteous man. She had never been able to like him. In three years, she had not found an iota of generosity or compassion in him, not even when her aunt was dying. He had thundered at the ill woman, demanding to know if all her sins had been confessed and forgiven. Reminding her that Hell was full of horrors and demons. In the end, he had had no comfort to give. Fiona had simply shut him out. She found herself wondering if Mr. Elliot had forgiven her for doing that. As he warmed to his theme now, she felt eyes moving toward her surreptitiously, a merest glance cast from under the brim of a hat or from under pale lashes. She knew what they were thinking. The point was being made publicly that in Duncarrick she herself was Mary Magdalen. A wanton. Because of her child? That made no sense: they'd all been told when she brought the boy here that she had lost her husband in the war. Even her aunt, a stickler for propriety, had held her and cried, then taken her around the town to meet everyone of consequence, lamenting the tragedy of a lad growing up without his father, and the wicked fighting in France that had killed so many good men. Fiona wasn't the only young widow in the town. Why had she been singled out in this fashion? Why had people suddenly -- and without explanation -- turned so strongly against her? She'd never so much as looked at another man since 1914. She had never wanted another man in place of the one lost. On the following Monday morning, outside the butcher's shop, someone shook a letter in her face and demanded to know what Fiona meant by walking boldly amongst decent folk, putting all their souls in danger. Managing to reach the letter in the red, waving fingers of the woman who did washing for a living, she took it and smoothed it enough to read it. Have you taken in her washing? The sheets soiled by her wickedness and the linens that have touched her foul flesh? Have you no care for your own soul? It wasn't signed--The shock turned Fiona's heart over in her chest. She read the lines again, feeling sick. Mrs. Turnbull was watching her, something avidly nasty in the set of her face, as if she relished the pain she'd caused. "You don't do my laundry--" Fiona began, bewildered, and then realized that it didn't matter. *Revue de presse* A New York Times Notable Book of the Year "Todd's Ian Rutledge mysteries are among the most intelligent and affecting being written these days." -- The Washington Post Book World "With his tortured detective Ian Rutledge and the ghost who inhabits his mind ... Charles Todd has swiftly become one of the most respected writers in the mystery genre.... The pair is unique among sleuths."-- The Denver Post "A rich, complex novel intelligently written and very affecting."-- The Purloined Letter "Eloquent ... rich." -- The New York Times Book "Tightly worked, poignant ... a most moving story."-- Booknews from The Poisoned Pen Also by Charles Todd: A Test of Wills (available from Bantam Books) A New York Times Notable Book of the Year Wings of Fire A New York Times Notable Book of the Year Search the Dark and coming soon in hardcover: Watchers of Time