

REBECCA HENDRY

## The Legacy

CHARLIE SHUTS THE BULLDOZER down and wipes the sweat from his face with the balled-up t-shirt he removed hours ago when the sun started to beat down on him full-force. He longs for a big slug of lemonade. Elizabeth made it first thing that morning, a little wrinkle of determination on her forehead as she squeezed the lemons into the pitcher, getting out every last drop.

Unfortunately, his thermos is sitting on the seat of his pickup, which is parked fifty yards away in the shade of a cluster of towering red cedars. He knows he can't get it though, he knows Mason would have his head if he took an unscheduled break. Mason's probably sitting cool as a cucumber in his shiny new '63 Fury with the windows open to let in the ocean breeze that drifts up the hill from town. He's probably listening to Bobby Vinton croon about "Blue Velvet" while he smokes his American cigarettes and looks over the building plans for the new subdivision. What the hell. Charlie jumps down from the bulldozer and takes a seat on the grass, just for a second. Gord looks up from digging around the roots of the stump Charlie just pulled. He drops his shovel and does the same.

"Jesus, it's a scorcher," Charlie says. "Hot enough to fry an egg on Mason's head."

"Sure is." Gord grins and squints up at the blazing sun, his dusky face streaked with dirt and sweat. "That head's big enough to cook a whole omelette."

Charlie can't stop thinking about that lemonade, how the thermos is probably beaded with moisture, how the crushed ice must be in tiny slivers by now. He would share it with Gordo, if he could get it. Charlie doesn't have a problem with the Indians. From the stories some of the guys tell you'd think they all married their sisters and ate from the trash or something. But Elizabeth grew up here, her dad even used to go out and fish with some of the old guys from the reserve when she was a kid, so Charlie knows better.

Also he's been working with Gordo for almost a year now, long enough to know he's not a sicko or a criminal or anything like that.

Charlie hears the familiar sound of the Fury door slamming shut.

"Mason's on the move," he warns Gord, and they both stand. Charlie grabs another shovel and they start digging like there's no tomorrow, pulling up the blackberries and thick clumps of sword fern the bulldozer passed over. Mason taps his clipboard for attention, his face puffy and red as a boiled lobster.

"Lunchtime, boys. Go on now, get the hell out of here." Before he goes off to tell the rest of the crew, he gives them a look like they're spoiled rotten for being allowed a break.

Charlie swings his shovel up on his shoulder. "Well, Gordo, you enjoy your ham-and-cheese. I'm heading off for a home-cooked meal." He's only teasing; usually he's like the rest of the guys, sprawled under the trees sipping Dr. Peppers and eating the white-bread sandwiches their wives packed them. But Elizabeth had a doctor's appointment that morning, and he wants to see how it went. Also, she mentioned that she'd be making him something special for lunch. Despite the heat, Charlie's hoping for a pot roast swimming in thick gravy, maybe mashed potatoes on the side. Elizabeth slices green onion into her mashed potatoes, and man, are they tasty.

Gord picks up his t-shirt from a pile of dirt and pulls it on. "You can keep your home-cooked meal, Chuck. You gotta clean yourself up and sit proper at the table with that pretty wife of yours. Too much work for me."

Charlie smiles. Gord's wife, Abigail, has often come marching up to the site from the reserve, which is just through the trees and down on the seashore. She trails children behind her like the Pied Piper, waving Gord's forgotten lunch bags with her big round arms, her eyes sparkling with mischief.

When Gord's last baby was born, Elizabeth brought over a gift to Abigail. She told Charlie how the women were all sitting around the kitchen, drinking boiled coffee while their children rolled around outside like puppies. Some of the women were making earrings from tiny sparkling beads as they told stories about their relatives, laughing their deep, infectious belly laughs.

"Pretty crazy around your house, hey?" he says to Gord.

"Sure is, Chuck. A regular zoo." Gord says it like he wouldn't have it any other way, then he wanders off toward a group of men who have settled on a fallen log at the edge of the clearing. Charlie heads across the clear-cut field to his rusty Fargo. He tries to imagine the shiny new houses

with picket fences where the stumps and brambles and the dry dust of the path lie now, but he can't do it. Seeing things that aren't there has never been his specialty.



It's a two-minute drive down the hill to the tiny waterfront cottage he shares with Elizabeth. The yellow tea roses and bright pink petunias are in full bloom in the front garden under the kitchen window. Elizabeth spends hours out there with her floppy straw hat, fertilizing, pulling weeds, watering. In the fall she carries buckets of kelp up from the beach and spreads it on her flowerbeds. She doesn't seem to mind that the smell of low tide drifts in and invades their house, so Charlie doesn't mention it.

He dislodges gravel and clumps of grass and clay onto the welcome mat before he walks into the kitchen. She's wearing her yellow dress while she stands at the sink, washing up the breakfast dishes. He knows she can't stand that dress. She says she feels like a big lemon drop in it, round and sickly sweet. The only maternity clothes available on the Peninsula are through the Eaton's catalogue, and since it takes two ferries and a long drive to get to the city, she's pretty much stuck for designer clothes. Charlie could care less what she's wearing. With her blonde curls and the fact that she's standing by the window in the light she looks almost exactly like a sunbeam.

"Hey, lady . . ." He encircles her rounded waist. From behind she doesn't look pregnant in the least, though she's a full six months. She's not like those women who blow up like a balloon. Not that he would mind. In fact, Charlie is always bugging her to eat more and put some meat on her bones. "What did the doctor say?"

She ignores his question, leaning back against him and resting her warm cheek against his. "It's so beautiful today, Charlie. Look." She points to the gulls swooping and screaming, the waves crashing into the shore and breaking out in white foam across the pebbles, the mainland shimmering like a mirage on the other side of the inlet.

Charlie doesn't want to look at the beach. "The doctor? Is everything okay?"

Elizabeth moves back to the sink, dismissing his concern with a wave of her hand. "He said I should be resting instead of starting vegetable gardens and painting nurseries." She smiles vaguely. "If I rest anymore I'll end up fat and stupid, watching 'Laugh-in' and drinking gin fizzes at two in the afternoon."

"Well, I'm glad everything's alright." Charlie isn't entirely convinced, but he lets it go. He's used to Elizabeth and her distracted moods. She's

been almost a different person since they moved back to her hometown a couple of years ago. He knows she's missing her black-garbed friends from college, the dinner parties, the coffee houses. She used to drag Charlie out to hear sombre characters read poetry that didn't rhyme and made no sense or sing mournful folk songs where everybody died. He has to admit, he's glad those days are over.

He knows she gets bored sometimes, and he feels bad for her, he does, but it's not like he loves pulling stumps or anything. Thanks to Elizabeth's father offering them the old family cottage for their wedding present, Charlie will soon have saved enough to open up his appliance repair business. Elizabeth can use those brains of hers to help with the books. And of course, once the baby comes, she won't even have time to be bored.

He wants to know what's for lunch, but he doesn't want to be rude or anything. It's just that he hasn't got much time, and Mason will dock him if he's even a minute late.

"Boy, I'm hungry," he tries. "They got us working like dogs, honey, I'm not kidding. Just like dogs." He sits down at the arborite table, the tiny silver stars a galaxy on the white surface. The chiffon curtains sway in the ocean breeze, the windows flung wide open. She stares at him for a long time, and Charlie knows he's blown it. He gives her a hangdog look.

Finally she mops her forehead with the dishtowel and gives him a tired smile. "Well, of course you're hungry. Of course you are. And hot." She heads for the refrigerator and rummages until she finds a wet, beaded bottle of Black Label. She flips the cap with the wall-mounted opener. Even though Charlie drained the whole thermos of lemonade on his way home his mouth is still watering, he's just that thirsty. She sets the bottle in front of him. Then she produces a platter with two ham-and-cheese sandwiches studded with toothpicks. Charlie smiles to himself. It's like she knew he'd been bragging to Gord about home-cooked meals. Somehow he wouldn't put it past her.

"Great, this looks just great." Charlie digs in. Elizabeth perches on her chair. Her curls are damp around her smooth cheeks, her eyes as brilliant as cut sapphire. He takes an enormous bite and chews thoughtfully as he watches her strike a match from the tiny box on the table and light an Export Mild. Strange, he thinks. Just a few weeks after they had found out Elizabeth was pregnant, they had watched this special report on the six o'clock news about smoking and pregnancy, and how the doctors thought maybe it wasn't such a hot idea anymore. Elizabeth was sitting right there making a little tsk-sound against her teeth. She had even said, "Now they tell us," with a snort. But she had stubbed out her cigarette then and there, and Charlie hadn't seen her smoke another until now.

He clears his throat. "Are you sure you should be doing that? What with the baby and all ...?"

"It's okay, Charlie. Everything in moderation." She takes a long drag, watching him through the curl of smoke.

He nods. He takes another bite. "This sure is good," he says.



Before he leaves, he tells her that maybe she should have a little lie-down, since she looks so hot. By the time he's finished his lunch, Elizabeth is flushed pink, sweat trickling down into her dress as she fans herself with a copy of *Life* magazine, Kennedy's big white teeth flashing back and forth at Charlie.

"Just hormones," she says. "Don't fuss." But all the same, she wanders to the bedroom with the magazine tucked under her arm.



Half an hour before quitting time Charlie feels like he might just die of heat stroke. The crew has been clearing brush all afternoon. They started out with some good-natured ribbing, Gordo teasing Charlie about looking like James Dean with his floppy hair and squinty eyes, and some of the guys breaking out in a raunchy version of "Hey Paula" that didn't involve marriage at all. But the men are silent now as they methodically swing debris from the path and start thinking about their wives and the suppers that will be waiting for them. Charlie is imagining sitting on his veranda with Elizabeth, letting the ocean breeze play through his hair. The sound of Mason's boots crunching though the brush at the edge of the path rouses him from his daydream.

"Chuck, go on over and pull that stump over by those alders." He points to the edge of the clearing where the pale jagged stump of a giant fir sits. Charlie's heart sinks. He knows this job will take him past quitting time.

"Sure thing, sir," Charlie says, and he hurls the armful of cedar branches he's holding to the side of the path and heads toward the bulldozer.

Gord helps him fasten the chains around the tired looking stump, and then Charlie hops on the seat and starts up the machine. After about three feet he can feel the weight of the stump as the tracks dig in, and he slows down. The engine is deafening, but he hears his name and he looks over his shoulder. Gord is staring at the ground, holding his hands up for

Charlie to stop. Charlie shuts it down and jumps to the ground, irritated. The chain has probably come loose, or it's buried under the stump and Gord can't get at it. Charlie's not in the mood for any hitches. He just wants to pull the damn thing and get out of here.

He heads to the gaping dark hole the stump has made in the soft earth. "What the hell is it, Gordo? The chain?"

Gord shakes his head silently and points several feet to the left of where the stump was pulled. The soft earth has been disturbed and turned over where the deep roots broke to the surface. Charlie peers closer. He still can't tell what he's looking at, it just looks like shards of grey rock scattered across the surface of the soil. He turns to Gord.

"What is it, slate?"

Gord shakes his head silently, then walks toward where he left his shovel. He returns and digs gently into the ground, working away from the stump. Charlie watches. He doesn't offer to help. He's not sure what Gord's doing. Finally, Gord sets down the shovel.

"Bones, Chuck." Gord looks a little sick, like he's been on a boat for a few days and he's trying to get used to being on land. He kneels down and sifts a handful of earth through his fingers. Charlie kneels beside him, and suddenly he can see it. The shards that look like slate. They're bones, alright. But not just a few bones. There are hundreds of broken pieces, hundreds, the rich black earth is studded with them.

"What the ..." Charlie reaches over and dislodges what appears to be a skull. It's small and human, though too small to be an adult's. His stomach lurches. In a daze, he picks it up to examine it.

"Put that down, Chuck," Gord growls. Charlie looks up, startled. Gord's staring at him like he's never laid eyes on him before in his life. Like he's a stranger. Charlie drops the bone and backs away from the hole, chills raising goosebumps on his arms even through the heat.

Gord stands, brushes his hands on his jeans briskly. He points at Charlie, holding his thick finger inches from his face. "Don't you touch that stump, you hear?" He's still using that new Gord voice, the one that doesn't sound like anyone Charlie knows. Charlie nods silently and watches him disappear through the trees.

By now it's quitting time, and the rest of the crew comes sauntering over to find out what the hold-up is. He tries to explain the situation to Mason, who seems less than thrilled by the sudden appearance of the bones.

"Jesus," he says. "Now I'll have to call goddam Walt. Where the hell did you say Gord went to?"

“The reserve, I think.” Charlie shrugs. He’s still pretty confused. Bones. Jesus. And Walt? Why did they have to call the police chief? Was this some old unsolved murder or something?

Mason shakes his head in disbelief. “Goddam it to hell. The reserve. Great.” He heads off to his car so he can drive down to the village to use the phone.

When Walt shows up a half-hour later the white men are standing to one side of the hole, smoking and talking quietly. Gord came back from the reserve with an elderly Indian man, and he hasn’t said another word to Charlie, separating with the rest of the Indians to the other side of the bone-riddled hole like oil from water. Charlie watches the old man regard the work site solemnly, his hair hanging in two long silver braids, his thumbs hooked in the belt loops of his sagging jeans.

Mason leads Walt over to the freshly dug earth, and then Walt looks thoughtfully back at the two groups of men.

“Fellows, fellows.” Walt smiles good-naturedly, talking loud enough so everyone in the two groups can hear. His white button-up shirt is so wet with sweat it clings to his arms. “We have ourselves a situation here. We certainly do.” He regards the crowd, his brow wrinkled with concentration, until his eyes settle on the old Indian man.

Walt walks over and guides the old man farther into the trees. They’re arguing, Charlie can tell from the tones of their voices and the angry gesturing on Walt’s part, but Charlie can’t hear a word. Walt finally holds his hands up in defeat and walks toward the patrol car. The old man goes back over to the bones, and the rest of the Indians gather around him.

Mason heads over to Charlie and the group of white men and scratches his chin, gold rings glinting in the harsh sun. “Well, boys. Nothing to write home about. Just some Indian bones. Walt just talked to the old chief there and it looks like we have to call up the Indian Affairs folks, since this used to be Indian land and all. We won’t be back to work for awhile, I can tell you that right now.” He shakes his head. “What a goddam nuisance. You boys might as well go on home and paint your nails or something.”

Charlie knows it now, that this isn’t any small thing. Not going back to work for awhile is unheard of, unless they found plutonium or something. He looks over and sees Gord with the other Indians. He wants to say something to Gordo about all this, he wants to say he’s sorry for pulling up those bones. But he remembers how Gord had looked at him and instead he turns toward his truck

A storm comes up out of nowhere as he drives down the hill to the cottage. Dark clouds swirl in over the inlet and rain pelts his windshield with such force Charlie can't see a foot in front of him. He runs into the house, slamming the door behind him, and stands shaking himself off in the kitchen. Elizabeth pads in wearing her pink fluffy slippers, an afghan around her shoulders. Her pink cheeks are creased from sleep. She smiles sleepily as he leans over to kiss her.

He wants to tell her, but he can't. He's not sure why. He brushes past her gently and heads for the shower.

It isn't until they are silently eating their meatloaf and creamed spinach at the kitchen table at suppertime that he decides to tell her about the bones. As soon as he opens his mouth to speak, he's interrupted by a gale force wind that blows the kitchen door open, bringing in torrents of rain and flying pine needles. He jumps up to close it and finds the screen door lying on the porch off its hinges. He ventures outside to pick it up and lean it against the house.

When he returns, Elizabeth has curled into the easy chair in the living room. She smiles at him when she sees his hair plastered to his forehead. "You look like a drowned rat," she says as the rain drips from the end of his nose. Charlie walks past her to get a towel from the bathroom and he sits on the sofa to dry off his hair. He takes a long time doing it, longer than he needs to, just rubbing and rubbing his head and then his hands and face as well. He finally sits back and looks over at Elizabeth. She's watching him quietly.

"What is it, Charlie?"

He takes a breath and tells her about the bones. How Gord had dug those careful shallow holes, how Walt had been called, the old Indian, everything, even the look Gordo had given him when he touched the tiny skull.

Elizabeth sucks in her breath when he gets to the last part. "A child?"

Charlie nods. She brings her hand to her forehead, pushes a damp curl from her face. "Smallpox, maybe. I remember Abigail telling me something . . ." She shakes her head sadly. "Why did you touch it? That . . . that was one of their children. Those were their people. Didn't you think about that?"

"Of course I did," he says. He had, of course he had. Now he's starting to get mad. I mean, he's the one who had to go through that whole awful thing. Doesn't he deserve a little sympathy? "Honestly, Elizabeth, sometimes I swear you think I'm stupid."



She rises from her seat and wanders over to the kitchen, ice cubes clinking in the lemonade she holds absently in her hand. She looks out the window into the storm, then walks to the front hall and pulls on her rubber boots. Her round belly gets in the way, and Charlie has to resist the urge to help her as he watches her lean against the wall for leverage. Where on earth is she going? He can hear the sharp crack of lightning. It doesn't sound too far off. She reaches for his grey work slicker and he finally gives in.

"Where are you going? You can't go out there." He gets up, trying to infuse some authority into his voice.

She doesn't look up from her buttons. "I've always loved the beach on stormy days. Ever since I was a kid. Maybe you've just never noticed that about me, but it's true. The power of the waves crashing into the rocks, the seaweed getting pulled up by its roots and tossed in to shore, the starfish losing their anchors and floating around until they find a new home." She finishes the last button, but she won't meet his eyes.

"It's amazing, Charlie, really. The brutality of nature. The tiny injustices. Or the enormous ones, depending on whose perspective you're looking from." She finally looks at him, her blue eyes shining with some mysterious pain. She yanks the door open and slams it behind her, disappearing into the blackness. He stands in the hall. He doesn't go after her.

He waits up for her for a while, using all his willpower not to run out and look for her. The thing about Elizabeth is, when she's upset about something, she just disappears behind a confounding veil of silence. There isn't much he can do to draw her out. He knows if he went after her she would just refuse to come with him. It's happened before. Just not when she was pregnant, or during a storm. He watches television, staring numbly at the flashing screen, thinking about Gordo, the bones, and Elizabeth out there in the dark rain. Finally he heads to bed. She returns almost an hour later, her skin cool and damp as she leans over to kiss his cheek lightly. Charlie is still awake, but his eyes are closed. He doesn't want to give her the satisfaction.



Later that night, he wakes with a start, his heart pounding like a jackhammer. He sits up and tries to catch his breath. Did he scream? He's sure he must have, he can almost hear the echo in the dark room. He rips the chenille bedspread off his legs and Elizabeth stirs in her sleep. No, he couldn't have screamed. She's a light sleeper, she would be shaking him and asking him what was wrong. Charlie tries to remember the dream, but he

honestly can't. All he's left with is a wave of nausea and a feeling like he just witnessed something horrible. Nuclear war or the Kennedy assassination or something else he couldn't do a damn thing about.

He listens to the ocean pound the rocks outside, the wind wailing, rain thundering on the roof as he watches Elizabeth sleep, her skin smooth and luminous in the moonlight. It's funny, he thinks, that she can say all those things about brutality and all, and then go ahead and sleep like a baby. He closes his eyes as the nightmare slowly dissolves into the air around him.



Charlie awakens to a single bolt of sunshine piercing through the bedroom drapes, burning the side of his face. He sits up, rested and clear-headed. He pads to the bathroom and emerges from the shower a new man. Mason was right, he thinks, as he heads to the kitchen. This was nothing to write home about. Just a few bones. In a week they'll be back to work. He hopes he sees Gordo soon, he really does. He thinks about giving him a call, or maybe dropping by the reserve. He wants to apologize about picking up that skull.

Elizabeth pours him a cup of coffee from the electric percolator and sets it in front of him on the table. She smells like soap and Shalimar. She has already showered, already washed her hair and dressed. Her make-up is flawless, though her face is flushed pink again, like a fire is burning just under her skin.

"Morning," Charlie says, but he sounds a bit too sullen for his own liking. He doesn't want her to think he's still sulking about her little walk in the storm.

Elizabeth sets his breakfast in front of him. She sits down, stirring sugar into her coffee. Her lipstick is soft red, the perfect match for the scarf knotted around her throat, which he bought her on their honeymoon to Victoria. It's from a real boutique, not Simpson's or Eaton's or the Hudson's Bay Company. Charlie can hardly stand it sometimes, she's so beautiful.

He looks down at his breakfast and feels a stab of apprehension. The bacon is undercooked, which is unusual for Elizabeth. He picks up his fork tentatively. The eggs are rubbery, the yolks hard.

She stops stirring. "Charlie. I have something to tell you . . ."

He nods his head, encouraging her to go on. And suddenly he remembers his dream; it comes back to him like a fist in the stomach. He was wandering the beach at night in a storm, rain-soaked wind whipping through his hair, tearing at his clothes. It was the beach in front of their

house, the same exact one. Through the darkness he could see hundreds of Indian children, their bones showing through the dirty rags they wore as clothing, their thin fingers reaching for him through the mist.

Elizabeth sits back, hugs her arms to her chest. She's looking out the window, where the sun is blazing furiously in the brilliant summer sky. "It's about the baby. Something's wrong, Charlie. They don't know ..."

Charlie watches her lips move, but he can't hear her anymore. He's remembering that tiny skull he held in his hands. He's remembering the voices of the children, how they sang to him through his cold coastal dream. A mournful sound like the howling of wolves.

