

CHAPTER ONE

The yellow JCB digger was backhoeing a deep trench for the concrete foundations to be laid. As Barry, the driver, started to scoop up another load of rain-sodden soil he knew, from the tension on the digger arm, the bucket had struck something solid under the ground.

Opening the cab window, he shouted to his colleague who was sitting in a large open-top dumper truck waiting for the digger to empty its next load of soil.

‘Oi, Dermot, I’ve hit something hard. See if you can make out what it is.’

Dermot did a thumbs up and slowly stepped down from the dumper truck.

‘Get a move on, Dermot,’ Barry shouted.

‘Whatever it is, it’s still under the soil. Give it a prod with the bucket so I can hear if it sounds like stone or metal.’

Barry raised then lowered the bucket. When it struck the unknown object, there was a clanging sound.

‘I reckon it’s something metal,’ Dermot said.

As Barry pulled back on the bucket the sudden unbearable screech of metal scraping on metal made Dermot wince. He frantically waved his arms. ‘Whoa, stop digging!’

Barry repositioned the bucket, so it was lower in the ground. This time he was able to pull the unknown object up so part of it was sticking out of the soil. It was still covered in dirt, so Barry jumped down from the cab into the trench and brushed away the topsoil with his hands. ‘It’s a bloody coffin!’

‘We’d better let Lee know about it. This area could be the old convent graveyard,’ Dermot said warily as he walked off.

Barry grabbed him by the arm. 'We've been digging the new foundations for two weeks now and we ain't uncovered no other coffins, so this can't be a proper graveyard, can it?'

'Better safe than sorry, Barry.'

'You'll be sorry if Lee calls the Old Bill and the site gets shut down. No work means no bloody wages. I say we dig a hole somewhere in the woodland over there and put the coffin in it. No one will be any the wiser.'

Dermot shook his head. 'You can't treat the dead like that. We have to tell Lee. He's in charge of the site.'

'Let's have a look inside first . . .'

'No way. That would be sacrilege,' a shaken Dermot exclaimed.

'If it's an empty coffin, there's no harm in moving it.'

'I told you, I ain't touching it.'

'You're frightened, aren't you?' Barry scoffed.

Dermot went to the builders' hut and returned a couple of minutes later with Lee, the site foreman.

Lee looked at the coffin and sighed. 'That's all we bloody well need.'

'I think we should move it or at least have a look inside,' Barry suggested.

'I don't know . . .'

 Lee said hesitantly.

'If you do, I'm having no part of it,' Dermot said firmly.

'All right, Dermot, calm down. You two wait here while I go speak with Mr Durham. And don't touch the coffin.' Lee headed towards the walled gardens of the old convent.

Dermot waited until Lee was out of sight before walking off.

'You going back to the hut?' Barry asked.

'No, I'm going to the phone box down the lane to call the police.'

'Tosser,' Barry muttered under his breath. He watched as Dermot got in his Vauxhall Astra and drove towards the lane. Barry nipped to his van and looked in a toolbox. 'You'll do the job nicely,' he smirked as he pulled out a crowbar.