

# A Deadly Covenant

## Chapter 1

Amos Sebina peered through the dust at the bucket of his backhoe. He blinked and looked again. He had to be mistaken, but it did look like a skull sticking out of the sand. He turned off the engine and jumped out of the cab, shielding his eyes from the sun. He eased forward to inspect it more closely.

It was definitely a skull.

He took a step back. Was it human? Or could it be a baboon's? He didn't know the difference. He scratched his head. If it was human, why wasn't it buried in a graveyard? And if it was a baboon's, why would anyone bury it in the first place?

He retreated further. He wasn't going to touch it, because that could bring him very bad luck. He looked around for a stick but didn't see one. So he broke a branch off a bush and stripped off the leaves and twigs.

He edged closer to the bucket, reached forward and poked the skull. It didn't move.

He wanted to see more, but it would be disrespectful to stick the branch into the eye socket and try to lift it. So, he used the branch to sweep away the fine Kalahari sand. In a few minutes, most of the skull was visible, but he was none the wiser as to what sort of creature it had belonged to.

He stepped back, unsure of what to do. If he dumped the skull and continued digging, his boss would be happy, but the police wouldn't – if it was a human skull. If he stopped digging, and the skull turned out to be a baboon's, his boss would be furious and probably fire him for delaying the project.

Sebina knew that his best course of action was to tell his boss as soon as possible and let him make the decision. However, there was no way to contact him. He'd only see him at the end of the day when he came to take him back to Ncamasere, the village where he lived.

Sebina shrugged. Whatever it was had been dead for a long time. A few more hours weren't going to change anything.

He glanced at the trench that he'd been digging. He gasped and jumped backwards. Numerous bones of different shapes and sizes were protruding from the sand.

Now it was obvious that he couldn't do any more digging that day. But it was only just before noon and at least five hours before his boss arrived. More likely six. He would bake if he sat in the cab for all that time doing nothing, to say nothing of the heat he'd take from his boss.

So he decided to walk to the farmhouse down the road to see if he could find some shade. His boss had told him in no uncertain terms that the farmhouse was off limits, but to hell with that. The skull was a good-enough reason to disobey orders. He could always say he had to

report what he'd found as soon as possible, and the only way to do that was to have someone at the farmhouse call the police.

Sebina picked up his lunchbox and a bottle of now-tepid water, and set off across the sand towards the road that led to the farmhouse. Maybe a car would pass, or a bakkie, that could drop him off a kilometre down the road. That would leave only a few hundred metres to his destination. However, nothing came down the road, not even a bicycle, leaving Sebina a nearly thirty-minute walk to the farm gate.

When he reached the driveway to the house, he stopped. Not only was there a high wall around the property, topped with razor wire, but his way forward was blocked by a metal swing gate with a large *DO NOT ENTER* sign, topped with more razor wire. Most frightening was the picture of two ferocious-looking black dogs, mouths open, teeth showing. With red eyes.

He looked around to see if there was an intercom he could use to alert the house. There wasn't. In a final effort, he cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted, 'Dumela! Hello!' Nobody came out of the house. He tried again with the same result.

The only response was two huge dogs racing towards the gate, barking, snarling and jumping up against the gate. Sebina backed away. He looked at the house, but no one appeared. They were either out or not interested.

'Amos Sebina,' he said out loud. 'Now don't waste your time here. The skull can wait.'

After a couple of minutes, he turned and trudged back to the backhoe. The cab would have to do until his boss arrived to take him home later that afternoon.

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At nearly half past six, Sebina was returning to the scene once more, but this time in the back of a police Land Rover. There was still enough light, so he led Abram Nteba, the local detective, and a constable across the sand to where the backhoe stood, looking like a huge scorpion.

Sebina pointed. 'I saw the skull in the bucket first.'

The constable kept his distance while the detective edged forward.

'It's definitely a skull.'

'And there are bones in the ditch.' Sebina took a wide path around the bucket and pointed at the ground. 'See, there.'

The detective nodded. 'We'll have to call in the pathologist from Gaborone. He won't be able to do anything until the day after tomorrow even if he flies.' He turned. 'Constable, put police-scene tape around the whole area. No one is to come in. You'll stay here until morning—'

'No way. You must be mad if you think I'm going to spend the night near those things.'

‘Sorry, Constable. You don’t have a choice. Build a big fire. That should keep the spirits away.’

The constable backed away, fear in his eyes.

‘There’s a tent and sleeping bag in the back of the Land Rover. I think there’s water and some cans of food too, and a little gas stove. You’ll be fine. Now get moving, I want to get home, and I’ve still got to call the CID in Gabs.’

Fifteen minutes later the area had been cordoned off, and the constable had fetched everything he needed for the night, putting them on the ground nearly fifty metres away.

The detective laughed as he walked back to the vehicle. ‘I hope the ancestors aren’t angry at being disturbed.’

The constable glowered and headed off to find some wood.

‘And what about me?’ Sebina asked as he climbed into the Land Rover.

‘I’ll drop you off at your house.’

‘No. What I mean is what am I going to do tomorrow and the next day. The boss will be angry and won’t pay me.’

‘That’s too bad, but there’s nothing I can do.’