

# Chapter One

## It Starts with a Necklace

London 1887

Evie Sullivan scoured the highest shelf of books, clutching the rolling ladder firmly with one hand and the shelf with the other. The excited ringing from the new telephone gave her such a start she nearly lost her balance.

“Good gracious,” she said mainly to herself, “it’s as if the darned thing has to prove something to us. The one at my house doesn’t chirp near as loud.”

She pulled the desired book from the shelf and dismounted the ladder as the shop owner, Mrs. Hubb, rushed to pick up the telephone. She had scarcely put it to her ear before she lowered the little cone-shaped piece used to listen and looked at Evie who was now behind the counter, ready to ring up the book for the waiting customer.

“It’s for you, Evie dear,” she said, holding the brass cone out to her.

Evie rushed to the phone. Dobbs was the only person to ever call her at work. She’d bought the phone for her flat with the money from her last case specifically for that purpose. She put the cone to her ear and spoke into the identical one set into the top of the device.

“Hello, Dobbs, what is it? Another case I hope.”

“It is in fact,” came Dobbs’ deep voice through the ear piece, “And I’ve told you time and time again to call me Eli.”

“Ah yes, but I have told you time and time again that it is quite

unprofessional, and I will not call you that while in public company,” said Evie in an attempt at a whisper.

She had never been much good at whispering and Mrs. Hubb smiled.

“Either way, a lady will arrive at your flat to see you right as your shift ends. I will be here to greet her in case she arrives early.”

“Thank you, Dobbs. I will see you in one hour. Good day.”

“Good day, Evie.”

Precisely one hour later, Evie pulled on her vest and checked her hair in the mirror. She sighed. Her vibrant red hair was becoming frizzy. When wet, it came to her shoulders, but as it dried it pulled up into perfect, large, loose ringlets that fell just below her chin. It was rather hard to pull it into elaborate fashions at the top of her head, because women who achieved that only curled the hair that remained down. Evie’s was curled all the time and was very prone to frizzing. Nonetheless, women in the streets would stop her and inquire how she achieved such curls, to which she would always respond, “I haven’t the faintest idea; God does them for me.” She knew many women were under the impression that she was simply too selfish to share her secret, and she loved to snicker at their faces as she walked off.

She now strolled the streets toward her flat with a new vigor. She hadn’t had a case in months. Working in a book store, though helpful to her work, was boring to say the least. Not to mention, rent was due at the end of the week and at the moment she would either have to be late and pay interest or go without food for a few days. She was sure Eli would have been happy to lend her money, but she had somewhat of a big pride and couldn’t possibly accept. He knew better than to even mention it by now. Getting cases was much harder for her because she was a woman. Many people looked upon her with disdain, thinking detective work was not the occupation for a lady.

She was broad shouldered for a woman and her hips were just as wide, so she parted the crowd easily. In her youth she had been known for her large hips because they had grown much faster than anything else, and she’d always looked disproportional. But now she donned a much

more defined hourglass figure than most women, even without a corset, and they looked at her enviously.

The hustle and bustle of the streets didn't phase her. She hardly heard the snap of whips from the carriages, barely noticed the stench of the beggars and drunkards. The local pickpockets knew better than to mess with her, so she needn't bother about them either. Finally, nearly running with excitement, she reached her home. She hastened up the staircase leading to the two rooms on the top floor. The one on the right belonged to her, the one across the hall belonged to Eli. He was her partner and needed to be in close proximity. Not to mention she adored his company. He was her best friend and had been since youth, though he was three years her senior.

She withdrew her key from the folds of her skirt and unlocked the door. When she walked in there stood Eli Dobbs. He smiled and stood from his chair in respect as she entered. He was short, stocky, broad, and in spectacular shape for a man who had just turned thirty. His jaw was thick and defined, but his hazel eyes were always aglow with a sort of youthful innocence and excitement. Evie had always said he was the perfect example that if you felt young, you looked young. He could easily have passed as younger than her. Not one grey hair could be found amongst his loose, slightly unkempt, caramel curls.

Next to him sat an elegant woman in a lavish dress, bonnet, and lace gloves. No doubt she was from the upper class who lived in mansions scattered amongst the humble streets of London.

Eli watched with a smile as Evie's rounded face shone with happiness, her pale blue eyes sparkled, and her already rosy cheeks flushed with excitement. He dearly hoped this woman would give Evie a case she could relish, one that would challenge her. Evie rarely took a case unless she believed it to be challenging, but Eli knew she was desperate for money and even if this woman's case turned out to be a bore, Evie would most likely have to take it. This woman was rich beyond anything he or Evie could imagine.

"How do you do, madam?" said Evie, coming to sit in the armchair opposite the woman. Eli sat in his designated place in the chair beside

hers.

“Not well, I daresay, or I would not be here,” replied the woman.

“Too true. I am Evie Sullivan, and may I ask your name?”

“Eda Hassle, Miss Sullivan.”

“And what seems to be the trouble, Mrs. Hassle.”

“Well, two nights ago my necklace was stolen.” Eli saw Evie’s face drop. “It’s not just any old necklace, mind you.” Evie’s face showed another glimmer of hope. “It’s extremely expensive and valuable.” Evie drooped like a flower. “It was passed down to me from my great grandmother.”

“I see,” said Evie, looking over at Dobbs with a barely concealed grimace. He shook his head sadly. “Was anything else stolen?”

“Well, a few other pieces of jewelry, but those can be easily replaced. It’s the necklace that I’m worried about.”

Evie barely stifled a sigh.

“Alright, Mrs. Hassle, where was the necklace stolen from exactly?”

“My jewelry box.”

“How many people touch this jewelry box of yours?”

“Just me. It’s a very expensive wood and must be cleaned and treated with care, so I clean it myself for fear the silly maids will scratch or damage it. My husband doesn’t touch the thing either, of course.”

“Well, that’s quite useful. You haven’t cleaned the box since the robbery, have you?”

“No, no, I’ve been too distraught; I can hardly look at the thing. I’ve gone to the police, but they won’t pay it any special attention. That’s why I came to you. I thought you, being a woman, would understand the dilemma in the proper light.”

Dobbs stifled a chuckle behind tightly pressed lips.

“That’s excellent, Mrs. Hassle, don’t clean it until Mr. Dobbs and I have had a chance to examine it. Don’t let anyone touch it. If it’s convenient for you, we will stop by your house this time tomorrow to

examine it properly.”

“That will be fine. Thank you, Miss Sullivan.”

“No problem, madam,” Evie said. “I assume, Mr. Dobbs, that you have informed Mrs. Hassle of my prices and regulations.”

“Correct, ma’am.” Dobbs put a small emphasis on the last word and grinned with satisfaction at Evie’s disgruntled reaction.

“I am more than willing to comply,” said Mrs. Hassle. “In fact I already gave him the money before you arrived. I will see you both tomorrow. Thank you again. Good day.”

She rose from the couch as they bid her goodbye and was out of the flat in an instant.

“Well,” said Dobbs as soon as the door closed, “this should be an interesting one.”

“Like hell it will!” said Evie, jumping up from her chair and crossing her arms in frustration.

“Madam, such language!” Dobbs’ look of feigned incredulity made Evie laugh.

“Now, Eli, you know my father cursed like a sailor, you should have expected me to pick up on it. I bet I could cuss you into oblivion if I felt like it. Father had some choice ones.”

“Oh yes, of course I remember,” said Dobbs. “In fact, one of my most vivid memories of him was the time I came to your house after he’d heard a rumor that we were courting without his permission. I think I’m emotionally scarred from the verbal beating I received.”

“Oh yes,” said Evie, her loud laugh echoing throughout the flat, “I feared you would be too scared to even say hello to me on the street after that. And by the way, when did you start calling me ma’am?”

“The moment you refused to stop calling me Dobbs.”

Evie rolled her eyes and sighed.

“I told you, it’s not professional to call you Eli,” she said. “You already live across the hall from me, and you practically live in here. People already talk. I can’t give them more fuel for the fire by calling you

Eli in public.”

“And since when do you care what people think?”

“When it became so hard to get a case. I go without one for months on end because everyone thinks a woman as a detective is unsuitable and unprofessional. I can’t give them any more reason to injure my reputation. If business would just step up a bit, I could quit my job at the bookshop and make a living doing what I love.”

She rolled her eyes. During her rant, Dobbs had become engrossed in the notes he had taken during Mrs. Hassle’s meeting as if trying to commit them to memory.

“Do you have any idea what I just said to you?” she said, hands on her large hips.

He gazed over at her absentmindedly.

“Haven’t the foggiest.”

The next afternoon, Eli arrived at the bookshop at the end of Evie’s shift with a horse drawn carriage waiting to take them to Mrs. Hassle’s mansion. And what a mansion it was. A beautiful garden ran up the drive from the gate to the front steps. The mansion itself was made in the fanciest European style. The inside glittered with tapestries and fine crystal objects. They even had light bulbs in one of the chandeliers. The jewelry box was in Mrs. Hassle’s bedchamber which was the most beautiful room of all, in Evie’s opinion. Fancy paintings hung on the walls and the counter tops of the connecting bathroom were made of marble. The bed frame was a beautiful mahogany and the bed covers were burgundy and gold satin.

The jewelry box itself was quite impressive. It took up most of the vanity and even had hidden compartments which swung out when a latch was pulled. The engravings covering the entirety of it were intricately detailed pictures of young lovers dancing and designs of various flowers. Evie could tell Mrs. Hassle was waiting for her to compliment and faun over the box, but she was determined not to give her the satisfaction.

“Alright, Mrs. Hassle, down to business,” she said. “First we will need your fingerprints.”

“Why my fingerprints?”

“Because, ma’am,” said Dobbs, “we need to compare your prints to those we find on your box. If any do not match yours, since you are the only one who touches the box, those prints are those of the thief. Now come over here, and I’ll take your fingerprints.”

Evie sighed. The whole scenario was just too simple and completely asinine. She watched as Eli took each of Mrs. Hassle’s fingers in turn, pressed them in ink, and then pressed them on a sheet of paper, leaving a perfect print. His former work as a police officer came in handy.

“Ugh, I must wash up,” said Mrs. Hassle, examining her hands.

She rushed to the bathroom, her hands held up in front of her face. Evie rolled her eyes and Eli chuckled softly. Together they set to work dusting the box with the special powder Eli had obtained in his current job as a chemist. It brought prints visibly to the surface while leaving everything else unchanged. Eli had tried to explain how it worked once, but she didn’t understand all that scientific jibber jabber. Mrs. Hassle came back in the room, looking indignantly at the grey fingerprints on her box, just as Eli pulled out the clear, sticky paper called tape. He gave Evie a few pieces and they began the painstakingly long task of putting the tape over every print and then pulling it off again to pull the print onto the tape. Keeping track of which prints they’d already done was the hardest part. When all the prints were on pieces of tape, Eli put them in a special compartment in his briefcase.

“Thank you, Mrs. Hassle, you will hear from me within the week. Good day to you,” said Evie.

Eli tipped his hat, and they walked out of the mansion together and back into the carriage.

Back at the flat, Evie and Dobbs sat hunched over the fingerprints. Both had their elbows resting on the tabletop with fingers pressed to their temples in concentration.

“I’ve always hated this part,” said Dobbs.

Evie heaved an even greater sigh than him and sat back, quickly scanning all the prints. The ones they’d already ruled out as Mrs. Hassle’s lay discarded in a pile, and the ones they had yet to examine were lined in a row above the ink prints of Mrs. Hassle. Evie sat up very straight, very quickly, causing Dobbs to jerk in surprise.

“Eli! Look at this print!” she said, her enthusiasm taking her voice up a few decibels, the way it always did when she was on the verge of a discovery. “It’s much more slender and quite a bit smaller than any of the others.”

“Maybe it’s her pinkie,” said Dobbs, a little disappointed that this was all she’d come up with.

“Oh don’t be silly,” she tittered. “No one opens a jewelry box with their pinkie; they primarily use thumb, forefinger, and or middle finger. Besides, Mrs. Hassle would have to have a rather large pinkie, and looking at her prints, her pinkie is smaller than this.”

Dobbs really looked at the print in question for the first time and realized she was correct. He immediately began comparing the print with Mrs. Hassle’s prints, Evie breathing down his neck. As he checked the pattern and shape of the small lines he began to grin.

“You’ve done it again, Evie. This is our man. That saved a lot of time.”

“I’d like to correct you on just one point.”

“Oh yes, and what is that?”

“It’s not a man. The print is much too small to be a man. Whoever left that print has very petite hands.”

“Yes, I daresay I would feel for the poor fellow if he had fingers like



those,” said Dobbs with a laugh. “But couldn’t it possibly be a child?”

“Maybe, but I think we’d best put our money on a woman. I don’t think a child has the height or agility to enter that mansion without simply walking through the front door, all the windows were very high up. Not to mention, this thief knew precisely which items would gross the most profit. She left the rest because she was in a hurry and didn’t bother to risk the time needed to steal all the items. I don’t think a child would have such knowledge or restraint.”

“Alright, woman it is then,” said Dobbs. “Sadly, I don’t think you’ll be able to find a similar shortcut for looking through all records of known female criminals and their fingerprints and comparing them to this little gem. I’ll walk across the street to the station and ask Duncan for copies of the police files. Give your brain a rest, I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

As if her brain needed a rest from this silly case. She sighed and walked over to the shelf containing all the files from her previous cases. She smiled. She loved every one of them; they’d sent her mind on reeling adventures. They’d all challenged her in a new way, and she loved the idea of conquering those challenges. Most importantly, all of them had been a breach of justice that she had set right.

Her mother had died giving birth to her, so her father had been the one to read her Bible stories. She had absorbed messages of morality and mercy; heroes and saints; saviors and sinners. The thing that irked Evie about Mrs. Hassle’s case, even more than the fact that it was blatantly boring, was that returning a very rich woman a necklace she didn’t need lacked any real sense of accomplishment and justice. True, stealing was wrong, but she felt she could be doing so much more if people would just give her the chance. She’d worked her first three cases for free, just trying to get her name out into the populace.

“The female criminals pile has grown considerably in the past two years,” said Dobbs, coming through the door with a pile of files up to his nose, “but at least it’s smaller than the male pile.”

Evie held the files while he disposed of all the fingerprints except for

the one they needed, and then she plopped them down on the table they'd pulled in front of their armchairs. Eli picked up half the stack, dropped it in front of Evie, and then pulled the rest toward himself. They both eyed each other's piles, trying to decide if one was larger than the other. When no complaint was found, they turned grumpily to their own pile.

“Lovely,” said Evie, reminding herself that the money she received from this would get her through six months of rent.

They worked until the windows grew dark and the oil lamps became insufficient light. Then Dobbs retired to his flat, and Evie fell asleep unsatisfied. Early next morning, they set to work on the last few files. Evie was beginning to doze off when Dobbs said, “I’ve got her! I’ve got a match!”

“Who?” asked Evie, lifting her cheek from her hand to peer over Dobbs’ shoulder.

“Her name’s Hattie Grey. I’ve heard about her from the boys down at the station; she’s given them plenty of trouble. The only time they ever caught her was when she’d been seen pick pocketing a rich man passing through town. She was thirteen. They took her prints and gave her a warning, and she’s been causing trouble ever since. Her prints have been connected to multiple thefts over the years, but they haven’t ever caught her again.

They obtained this photo from her mother. It was taken two years ago. Now she’s twenty-three. She’s suspected in the murder of that famous inventor who was killed last year, Amos Green. But they can’t convict her if they can’t catch her. She’s turned into something of a myth. They say she disappears like smoke and leads men to their doom with a flash of her smile. But of course that’s all poppycock, she’s just a gypsy woman, never stays tied down, and she’s a master at disappearing.”

Evie studied the picture of Hattie Grey. She was, as Evie had guessed, very petite. She had angular features, deep brown eyes, and long black hair. She gazed out of the photo with a perturbed expression that

said she clearly didn't want to be there. Evie was immediately intrigued.

“Well, Eli, I believe this case just became a lot more interesting.”