

The Bank

Delia was bored. She had tidied her counter at least six times since lunch. She glanced out of the front windows and noticed that the rain had grown stronger. No wonder there were no customers in the building society, if they had any sense they would be indoors and in the dry.

Even as she thought this, the glass doors slid open and three people entered, a short, slightly built woman wearing a dark, shapeless raincoat and two men. One of the men had his hand on the woman's arm, as if supporting her. He looked sullen and miserable.

The other man, tall and with broad shoulders smiled at Delia.

"I need to fill out a deposit form. Do you have a pen?" From the way he was dressed Delia thought he must be in the construction industry. She frowned when she noticed the dirty footprints that he had left on the clean floor. She hated untidiness and mess. But there was something about his rich deep voice which made her want to help him.

Smiling, Delia pointed at the shelf on the wall opposite her counter where there were racks of forms and pens.

"Help yourself," she called.

"Thanks love, couldn't seem them for looking, how daft am I?" His voice seemed to melt her normal displeasure for anyone who made a mess or disturbed the order which she craved around her.

Her attention turned to the other couple who were whispering angrily in the middle of the room. The woman was fumbling in her handbag, while her companion seemed to be tightening his grip on her arm.

Delia felt sure she had seen the man before. His face had a distinctive scar across one cheek and she instantly knew that she had seen this before. But where?

Before she could recall his face, two other customers entered, a woman with distinctive red hair, wearing jeans and a battered waxed jacket, and a nun. Delia was intrigued, she had never served a nun in the building society and wondered what she would ask for. She carried a large umbrella which she had folded but it was dripping all over the floor making it even muddier. The other woman was carrying a heavy shopping bag and she recognised her immediately as Isabel Jones, one of the regular customers. Because no one was actually at the counter, Isabel walked straight up to Delia and smiled.

The man, still standing by the woman rummaging through her handbag, glared at her. "Sorry, but you didn't seem to be in the queue, I won't be long." chirped Isabel. Her apology was met with a growl of displeasure and in that instant Delia realised where she had seen his scarred face before. On Facebook. Posted by someone who had been conned out of money. She was sure to it. She even remembered his name. Costin something, an Hungarian. Was that why the woman in the battered old raincoat looked so nervous and unhappy?

Meanwhile the nun had gone to the counter, where the builder was still filling in forms. She smiled at him as he made room for her to share the space.

Isabel chatted as usual to Delia, complaining about the weather, as she completed her withdrawal. By this time, the woman had found her purse in her handbag and had selected her building society card. The couple took up their position behind Delia, the woman looking petrified and the man still glaring.

“Thanks Delia, see you next week,” Isabel moved towards the door but in that instant there was a flash of lightening and an instantaneous clap of thunder. Everyone jumped at the noise.

“I think I’ll wait for a bit” and Isabel sat down in a chair by the window.

By this time the woman had placed her card on the counter.

“I’d like to withdraw £3000 pounds she whispered as she slid the card under the security glass.” Behind her, Costin smiled.

Delia immediately knew she had to do something to help. Trying to sound matter of fact and calm she said,

“I’m sorry but you will need three forms of identity to withdraw such a large amount of money”

Costin pushed the woman aside and thrust his face against the security glass, his eyes blazing with anger.

“It’s her money and she wants it now” he shouted, his voice heavily accented.

Delia’s heart was racing. Her finger hovered over the panic button under her counter.

“I’m sorry but I don’t make the rules, I just have to follow them,” she replied as firmly and calmly as she could.

Suddenly Costin produced a knife from his coat pocket and held it against his victims throat.

“I want that money now! “ and he spun the woman round to face the other customers, using her as a shield.

Delia hit the panic button. A steel lattice clattered down protecting her and an alarm began to wail. Costin, holding his victim with one hand round her neck, with the other thrust the knife towards the burly builder, who had started to advance towards him.

“Don’t come any closer “he warned. The builder retreated, but in that instant the nun raised her stout umbrella and brought it sharply down on the knife wielding hand. Stunned Costin dropped the weapon and realising that his plan had failed, let go of

his victim and ran towards the door. As he did so, Isabel slid her bag of shopping across the muddy floor and her tripped over, sliding headfirst into the glass window.

The builder leapt across the room, but his strength wasn't needed as the impact of his head on the toughened glass had rendered Costin unconscious.

Giving their statements to the police later, it transpired that Costin had selected his victim by being a very charming lodger to a lonely spinster looking to supplement her meagre pension. Margaret, his victim, was happy to have Costin out of her life, and the members of her church rallied round to give her more support. Sister Mary Bernadette refused to be hailed as a hero, saying she had acted instinctively and it was really the hand of God who had intervened, she was merely his instrument. (The police officer thought to himself that the umbrella was the real instrument.) Isabel used her five minutes of fame to promote her latest local environmental campaign. Ben's building firm suddenly received more customers and as for Delia, she got extra holiday from the building society in order to recover from her ordeal, which she did by going to a Muse concert.

Sally