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All the Little Pieces, Inga

by Juliet Robinson

She paused at the entrance of the bank, wondering if she should put on a facemask. A young man in the teller's queue wheezed up a barking cough which decided it. Rolling her eyes, she searched through her pockets and pulled out a rather grotty mask. It smelt damp, but she didn't have time to catch covid, or a cold.

The queue moved quickly and she was able to keep a good distance between herself and the cougher. When she was finally called forward the teller smiled politely and thanked her for her patience. She shrugged and tried to smile with her eyes.

'Not a problem. I'm here to collect a safety deposit box,' she lowered her voice suddenly feeling oddly nervous.

The teller didn't catch her anxiety and in a loud voice replied, 'Yes, it's been ages since we have handled a safety deposit box! Take a seat while I get the manager.'

She sat nervously on a hard plastic chair next to a woman who was loudly eating a packet of cheese and onion crisps. She wished she had brought her book and cursed her decision to delete Facebook from her phone, but hopefully the manager wouldn't be long.

When he did appear, he was clearly excited and he ushered her into a side room with glass walls, where he asked her for some identification. Handing him her passport she wondered if it mattered that she was wearing a mask. Apparently, it didn't as he never looked at the photo page.

'It takes ten minutes for the vault to open. I have some paperwork for you to sign while you wait. Again, I am sorry for your loss.'

'Yeah, its rubbish,' she replied dourly. She hated when strangers attempted to sympathise with her about the death of her mother. Being brisk and short always seemed to shoot down any further placations.

They worked their way through the paperwork. She pretended to read it and just signed where he had marked the sheets with an x. Briefly, she wondered if she had ever really read any of the paperwork she had signed. Worryingly, it seemed likely that she probably hadn't.

Two members of staff entered the room carrying a shoebox sized parcel, with G4S stamped on it. It was placed in front of her and she inhaled sharply, the box was the same size as the one her mothers' ashes had been laid to rest in.

'Do I have to open it here?'

'No. But do contact us if you have any issues. Again, I am very sorry for your loss.'

Her teeth nibbled at her gums and she nodded her thanks at him. She just wanted to leave.

The box was heavy and she placed it in a shopping bag that had been her mothers. She had picked it for this reason, not that it mattered it had felt right.

By the time she got to her car curiosity had gotten the better of her and she was desperate to know what was in the box. She had only found out about the box after her mother's death, what might be inside it? She ripped into the plastic wrapping, exposing another layer below, this time a Bank of Scotland bag, which came away to reveal a bright blue cash box. She unclasped the latch and pulled at the lid. It didn't move, it was locked tight. Frowning she searched through the discarded bags, but there was no key.