

# THE SILVER LINING

Anthony John Warren

The Peacemaker pointing at me seemed very convincing as did the cold, dark eyes of the man holding it. I let my .44 drop to the ground.

"Kick it away." I complied.

"Where has she gone?" he demanded.

"I don't know."

"I think you do. Maybe you need reminding." He waved his gun menacingly.

"When I woke up, she was gone. No note, no message. I was angry. It had been a good lay."

"Maybe you've been a fool," he growled.

"Yeah. Maybe I have," I replied.

He was relaxing a bit. The Peacemaker wasn't seeming so menacing. Could be he was deciding not to kill me. I wasn't much use to him dead, but I wasn't much use to him alive, either. The decision was his.

"You want to find her; I want to find her," he said, almost thoughtfully. "Maybe we should work together to find her."

"Does that mean you're not going to kill me?"

"Not for the moment." He lowered the Peacemaker a little. "That will depend how helpful you are... co-operative."

I relaxed a little. I wasn't afraid of dying, but not yet. Sometimes I feel more afraid of living.

It was kept out of the media. No newspapers, television and especially the social media; the imbecilic Facebook and Twitter which dominate the lives of the young and middle-age generations of the twenty-first century and even some of the older generation, some of whom would have preferred to remain in the twentieth century. The London Silver Vaults at 53 – 64 Chancery Lane is a subterranean market, claimed to be the largest single collection of silver for sale in the world. It opened as the Chancery Lane Safe Deposit in 1885 before transforming to its present use in the twentieth century. Its above ground building was destroyed by a direct hit by a bomb during the Second German War, but the vaults survived entirely.

Such an institution, jealous of and dependent upon its tradition, reputation and security does not want it disclosed to the world that it has lost five million pounds in used twenty pound notes. The news, however, would have been dwarfed by that of the Hatton Garden safe deposit burglary, also an underground location and also in April 2015, in which items to the value of fourteen million pounds were stolen.

How does this connect with myself and this man with the Peacemaker? There had been four of us, led by the delicious Felicity Jane, who had timed in right and stolen the entire day's takings on the busiest day of trading the market had known. The operation had been planned and financed by the Mafia who would take possession of the money and pay us a commission on it. All sounded very professional. The only problem was that Felicity Jane had absconded with all the money and I was left holding the empty bag. The Mafia wanted the money which they regarded as being theirs. And this was a rather unpleasant Sicilian family of the Mafia, hence the hit man with the Peacemaker.

In the West of England there is a large, well-managed open prison, category D I believe. It houses the better-classed criminals, the white-collared fraudsters, ex-cops and lawyers and lifers coming near the end of their sentences and awaiting parole. About a thousand prisoners pass through this prison each year and only about half-a-dozen, an almost zero percentage, decide to leave prematurely. They are soon recaptured and sent to a closed prison, so not very clever on their part.

There was just one who was never recaptured. During one night a helicopter landed in one of the prison's many fields and collected an inmate, still dressed in his prison uniform of blue and white striped shirt and grey flannel trousers, and whisked him off to his Mafia family in Sicily. It was he who would lead the operation to "recover" the five million pounds.

You will excuse me if, for obvious reasons, I do not give you my real name. For the purposes of this narrative I will be known as Morgan Morgan, just to pretend that my parents had a similar sense of humour as those of Jerome Klapka Jerome. Felicity Jane is also not her real name, but I thought it sounded a bit glamorous. She was a bird I picked up in the Little Driver in the Mile End Road.

The hit man escorted me to a Mafia house in the East End, just past Bow, near the River Lea. The next morning when I awoke, there was no sign of him. When I found his dead body lying on his bed, I realised that there was a new force at hand, much more deadly than the Mafia. The killing had the trademark of Patto, the master of the Mexican stiletto, but it couldn't be ... he was no longer active, could hardly walk, following being blown up in North Harrow. Someone else was copying his method. I later found it to be an unpleasant character known simply as Little Fido, controlled and maybe kept in check by the Terrible Twins, Jonathon Steiner and Julian Sinclair of the Blue Brigade, not an organisation to cross. Felicity Jane would discover that. So there were two vicious organisations seeking the five million pounds, one for themselves and one to return it to the London Silver Market. I was in the middle right between them and thus in severe danger. Both would think that I was the lead to the money.

It seemed to me that I had three possible options if I wanted to stay alive. I could try and find Felicity Jane and retrieve the five million. If I was successful in this, what would I do with that money? Although I would liked to have kept it, or at least part of it, that would be very dangerous with two murderous organisations seeking it. The second option was to co-operate with the Mafia to find the money, but successful or unsuccessful they could still kill me. The third option was to co-operate with the Blue Brigade to find the money. This was the safest option for me and that is what I will do. Meanwhile I had vacated my flat in Mile End for fear of the Mafia and gone to stay with another girlfriend in Fetter Lane.

I knew an old man who once lived in Mile End or Bow. He had been a priest there. Now he's dying in a hospice in Mile End. He used to know some people in the Blue Brigade. Maybe he could help me, point me in the right direction. From the stories he used to tell me, I had heard about Marcias and Patto, but they were no longer available. I would stay well clear of the Little Fido character, but I knew of the Terrible Twins, Steiner and Sinclair.

The old priest told me to go to the Crown and Sugarloaf pub in Bride Lane off the bottom of Fleet Street near Ludgate Circus. This was just a short walk from Fetter Lane. Some of the Blue Brigade still frequented this pub, but it would have to be on a Tuesday or Wednesday about 5.00 pm. I went there on a Tuesday at the suggested time, but no one there. The long-standing manageress had transferred to a pub in the Strand, but her replacement was helpful and confirmed to me that Steiner and Sinclair would appear there late one Tuesday or Wednesday afternoon. When I went the next day, the Wednesday, they were there, as if expecting me. Steiner beckoned me to join them at their table in the far corner. It was then that I noticed that he never smiled with his mouth, only his eyes.

"Where can we find her?" Steiner demanded.

"She loves Oxford," I replied, "She has a friend there that she stays with. They go down to the pub by Folly Bridge on the Isis. She doesn't know that I know this, so she will not be expecting me to find her there. That is if that is where she's gone, but I can't think of anywhere else she would go if she needs to hide. She hasn't got anywhere else, as far as I know."

"Where about in Oxford does her friend live?"

"In Rawlinson Road. It links the Banbury Road and the Woodstock Road. A short walk up from St. Giles."

"We can temporarily accommodate you in our HQ down by the Elephant where you will be safe from the Mafia. Once we have caught Felicity Jane and retrieved the cash, the Mafia will no longer be interested in you, only us. They are always bent on revenge, but as they will see it, this girl double-crossed you as well as them."

Sinclair had gone to the bar and returned with a tray with three pints of Old Brewery. Steiner looked at him questionly and they were both silent for some moments. Mobile phones were banned in Samuel Smith pub, but Sinclair produced one and placed it beneath the table. He didn't use the phone, just pressed some instructions into it.

"We're going to Oxford, right now," said Steiner. "You're coming with us."

We left the pub and waited at the bottom of Fleet Street. In seconds a car appeared into which the three of us got in.

We joined the A30 near Northolt and then down the A4165, the Banbury Road. The driver dropped the three of us at the Banbury Road end of Rawlinson Road. And drove away. We walked along the north side of the road, but soon stopped. There were several police cars blocking the road, some with their sirens still on.

We stood and waited on the north side. Billy Lou Weldon, the younger of the two Weldon Brothers and a member of the Outer Circle, approached us. He spoke in a matter-of-fact

way as if discussing the weather. "It's carnage, a blood bath over there," he said, nodding to the apartment building across the road. "Four dead bodies. Two girls, both shot. One's Felicity Jane. Two men. One with his throat slit, the other with a small knife stuck in his throat. Police reckon that knife did for them both. One of the men is that Sicilian guy who escaped from the prison in Gloucestershire." He spat out some gum and mouthed a fresh piece. "Little Fido parked the Transit down by the Bird and Babe. He's been shot. He won't make it. All the money, well most of it, is in the van." Having delivered his monologue, he thrust his hands into his trouser pockets and leaned nonchalantly against a wall, chewing indifferently.

Steiner concluded that the two Mafia men had shot and killed both the girls and were about to leave with the money, several bulky packages, when Little Fido arrived and intervened. With his stiletto he slit the throat of the other mafia man and then stabbed the knife into the throat of the Sicilian who at the same time shot and injured Little Fido. The Sicilian died immediately. Fido, injured and dying, but not yet dead, managed, with the help of a colleague who had arrived just behind, to load the money into his Transit and drive it down to alongside the Bird and Babe where he died, still in the driver's seat. The colleague had made a full report to Steiner, but not to the police.

About a fortnight later I left the HQ down by the Elephant and Castle and returned to my flat in Mile End. Everything had settled down. The Mafia had evaporated. The Blue Brigade had returned the money to the London Silver Market, with just £50,000 of the five million unaccounted for and which the Market claimed for against their insurers.

This had all been about greed. Our arrangement with the Mafia had been for Felicity Jane and I to steal the money – we had access, duplicated keys and knew how to disable the alarm and CCTV cameras. We were to receive 10% between the two of us. £250,000 each! It went wrong when FelicityJane disappeared with the lot.

So there was no silver lining for me, but the Blue Brigade did not report my involvement to the police, so I did not lose my freedom and I had learnt a lesson. The whole incident was put down to Felicity Jane and the two Mafia men; a fall-out among thieves.

I was sitting in the Little Driver, sipping a pint of London Pride. There were only five of us there; four old geezers drinking pints of ale or lager. I had just heard that the old priest had died. He used to enjoy a pint of London Pride in the Little Driver. I raised my glass in salute to him. Then I said a prayer for him, the only one I knew, the Our Father.

**Peggy**, a very short story, follows on the next two pages.

# **PEGGY**

A very short story

Anthony John Warren

It was the evening of VE Day and, like hundreds of thousands of others, I was celebrating, singing and dancing in the Mall, gradually easing my way towards Buck House. Suddenly, a few feet and about a dozen people away from me, I spotted a pretty young girl. As we gradually drew nearer our eyes met and I smiled to her and she smiled back, a gentle smile. Soon we were closer and dancing together.

"You're a captain in the army," she said. "Yes," I replied, "The Devonshire Regiment, the Devons." "Did you see much action?" she asked. "The Normandy landings, then through France down to the Rhine. What is your uniform?" I asked. "The Auxiliary Territorials," she laughed. "A truck mechanic," she explained.

"I'm David," I said. "What's your name?" She hesitated, then replied, "Peggy." We carried on dancing and singing. Suddenly I asked, "Have we met before? I seem to know you. You look familiar." "I don't think so," she replied. After a while I suddenly said, "You're a dead ringer for the Princess Elizabeth. Have people told you that before?" She smiled knowingly and nodded. "But I think you're much prettier," I laughed. She smiled again.

After a while she suddenly said, "I have to go now. My parents will be concerned."

"I'll walk you home." "No," she said, "I live nearby." and started to slip through the crowd.

Just before she disappeared she gave me a final wave. I knew that I would never see her again. Ships passing through the night. War brought people together and then separated them again. I carried on dancing and singing and easing my way towards Buck House. Then I started fantasising. What if it was Princess Elizabeth? No, she would not be out here amongst all this throng. She would be safely tucked away in Buck House. I was getting closer to the palace, hoping to see the royal family on the balcony.