

Chapter Two

‘MARCH WINDS AND APRIL SHOWERS’

Teddy Joyce & his Orchestra

Sergeant Trinder was feeling the chill of a keen wind, despite it being a sunny morning. As white clouds scudded overhead he stepped behind the shunter's hut and pressed himself flat against a creosoted wall. He took out a small box of Moreland's Glory from his jacket pocket and with one hand deftly opened it, extracted a match and struck it on the rough edge of the box, but needed to cup it with both hands as he struggled to light a cigarette. Once alight though, he straightened up, tossed the match to the ground and carefully readjusted his cap, trying not to disturb his immaculately brilliantined hair, which he liked to wear with a perfect side parting. The cap was greasy, dirty and too small, but it was the best he could do under the circumstances. He had found it lying behind one of the benches in the hut and borrowed it to try and help him look more like one of the many railwaymen working in the yard.

The poor little building he was standing beside was not much more than a shed, being rather like those built by pigeon fanciers in allotment gardens. However this one had a brick-built chimney which was belching a yellowy smoke from the small, pot-bellied iron stove being stoked to a scorching fury by the men and women who were crammed inside for their rest break. The rusting, corrugated-iron roof was patched with felt and washes of treacly black tar, smothered by great swathes of bindweed that was encroaching with its curling tendrils from the hedgerow that bordered the yard.

Trinder had tried sitting inside, but the filth upon the floor plus the stench of oily rags, sour milk and stale cigarette smoke, all stewed in the fearsome heat from the stove, combined to make him prefer the bracing wind whipping across the goods' yards. Anyway, Trinder had a far better view from outside of the engineman's mess room, where his quarry was presently holed-up. This was little better than the shed he was currently standing beside, but the powerful social demarcations of the railway forbade gangers and shunters to mix with the more elevated ranks of footplate crew. So for now Sergeant Trinder was careful to adopt the classic pose of the resting workman, leaning against the wall with cigarette in hand, whilst remaining vigilant for when his men left the other building.