

GOINGS ON AT AMBERLEY

BY TED COOK

INTRODUCTION

This story is based on an actual place of Amberley Railway Station where I worked from 1967 until 1970. I have used Amberley as the location as I have affection for the place having spent three happy years working there. Amberley station today although the signal box is still there, unfortunately no longer has the post office or booking office it once encompassed. Amberley Station sits on the Mid Sussex Line beside the River Arun. Like a lot of railway stations it is not actually in the location it bears the name of. Amberley Railway Station is a mile from Amberley Village and is actually located in the village of Houghton Bridge. Sometimes the reason for this was the Lord of the Manor did not want dirty noisy steam engines near his castle or estate but quite liked the idea of a railway station he and his villagers could use.

The station Signal Box was located in the Booking Office. It was moved there many years earlier under a cost cutting exercise. So the Signalman not only worked the signal box but issued the tickets.

The Signal Lever frame goes out onto the platform in a bay window affect. Above the levers are the bell instruments to send messages from signal box to signal box using a sort of Morse code in bell form. As you entered the station building the booking office and associated signal box were on your left hand side and walking through would take you out onto the platform. There was and still is a footbridge to take you over to opposite platform from which trains to the London direction can be boarded. There still is a little waiting room on this platform however the entrance hall which served as a waiting room is now closed off. One thing as now about both of these waiting areas they never had any heating provided and could be quite cold places to sit in cold weather. Inside the booking office/signal box there was the usual rack of tickets fixed to the wall and next to that was the ticket window which looked out into the entrance hall for the station. There are the usual comforts, fire, cooker, kettle but also a couple of arm chairs. Which like most Signal Boxes Amberley Signal Box is a little home from home for those who work in them and although not standard issue are tolerated by the Railway as the long hours working in a small room alone for most of the time is seen as a concession that can be allowed.

If you visit the station today you will see the signal box still in use. The booking office and post office are long gone however the building is still intact.

I set this story in the spring of 1970 the post office had closed by then but the booking office was still open. Some of the stories have an element of truth as they are based on real events

(See - The Sussex Signalman by Ted Cook).

All the characters mentioned are fictional and bear no resemblance to anyone whoever was associated with Amberley at that time.

GOINGS ON AT AMBERLEY

CHAPTER 1

It is a sunny spring morning in 1970. At Amberley railway station a train for London is due in the next few minutes. The block bell rings in the Signal Box. Amberley is one of a few stations that the signal box is not only located on the platform but also incorporates the booking office into the same room. Coming up the driveway to the station gives no indication of what wonders the station building holds. As you enter through the outside door into the large entrance hall there is still no sign of anything other than a normal countryside station booking office. There is a wooden bench on one side of the room and if the weather is a bit on the cold side the intending passengers will notice that there is no fire provided to keep them warm while waiting for their train. The surprise and uniqueness of the station will suddenly become apparent when reaching the ticket window and looking inside or by suddenly hearing bells or the crashing of the signal levers in the signal box. To someone on their first visit to the station is a marvel to behold and is of interest to even the most non interested railway fan.

Looking in through the ticket window can be seen the gleaming signal levers they are not as big as some might expect as these are set in what is commonly known as a knee frame the levers only starting from the frame below at knee level unlike most signal boxes where the levers would go down to floor level. Above the signal levers are the signal box instruments and bells. These are used by the Signalman to communicate with the signal boxes either side using bell codes something like a Morse code system which would be quite unreadable to the untrained ear. The signal box as it was moved into the station building under a cost saving exercise many years before. It is built as an extension of the original office so goes out onto the platform in a sort of bay window effect. So the Signalman has a step to come down to come back into the booking office. Inside the booking office along one side by the ticket window are the racks of tickets and the cash machine. Here also is the area for the Signalman to rest when not dealing with his many duties of signalling or booking office work. There are two armchairs not company issue but like most signal boxes are common. This little room has to be the Signalman's home for eight or maybe twelve hours a day so a little comfort is allowed.

There are also the usual tea making facilities as it is well known amongst railway staff and other passing souls that a signal box although supposed to be private is a good place to call to shelter for awhile and maybe get a cup of something warm. Signalmen usually do not see many people during their shifts and usually welcome the company. Although the Signalman at Amberley sees more than most he is always welcoming to anyone who calls and will always have the kettle on. This does mean that sometimes he can be taken advantage of!

David Clarkson is the Signalman on duty at Amberley station this bright spring morning in April 1970. David is sitting in one of the armchairs reading the morning paper. The bell rings in the signal box, David gets up from his armchair. Puts the newspaper he was reading down on the counter of the booking office. The paper is open at page 3. David is 19 years old and has been at Amberley station for the last two years. He wanted to work in the travel industry when leaving school and was always interested in railways, so this work actually gives him a taste of both. At least that is what David tells himself. The shift work including weekends unfortunately does not help towards a healthy social life or any sort of relationship with the opposite sex

David is a good looking young man and although he had met one or two young ladies over the last few years with whom he had started a relationship, things had always fell apart when work got in the way. He lives in a flat on the south coast which meant some fifteen miles travel by car each day. However he is always on the lookout to move to a signal box nearer to his home although he does like working at Amberley it being his first signal box to have worked on his own. There is always something different going on at Amberley unlike a signal box where it is the same train same time each day and nothing ever happens to relieve the boredom. So at present he is very contented to work here. David had worked in signal boxes before where he learnt all the things he would want to know when like now he got a signal box of his own. For the first couple of years he worked as a Signal Lad in a big signal box on the main line from London to Brighton where his duty was to record train times and report delays. Then as now to keep the signal box clean, the difference now was he not only had the signal box to keep clean but the booking office and the station to look after. However there were two of them to do the cleaning. The signal box was staffed on two shifts early and late.

So David's opposite number who would take over from him this afternoon Chris Fuller was also responsible for the same duties and between them they kept the whole place in shinning condition. David answers the bell signal from Arundel the next box to the south from where the London bound train is coming. He passes on the bell signal to the next box to the north which is Pulborough this means it is safe to let the train proceed on its journey northwards. Permission having been obtained David pulls the levers in the signal box which puts the signals to green to allow the train a clear run towards its London destination. David goes to the table on which lies the Train Register Book. This is where a record of all bell signals and actions in the signal box are recorded. As this signal box is one of the older types anything to do with the signal box is still recorded in ink in this book, unlike the modern power signal boxes where most things are recorded electronically. Luckily for David Amberley is not that busy a signal box so there are not too many entries to be made in the book. He puts down the pen on the page of the open Train Register and turns to go back into the booking office part of the room. He is stopped in his tracks by the sight of two young ladies at the ticket window.

These two always go around together. They are local girls in their late teens. Both are slim and very good looking. Susan Morris is dark haired with brown eyes while Linda Hughes could be described as a blue eyed "Blonde Bombshell," Either of them would set any young man's heart racing but together they make a young man or even an old man's "Dream Team!" It did no good for a young or even an older man's heart rate when the addition of what they were wearing or what not they were wearing would have been more accurate! Both were in miniskirts with very low tops which gave more than an inclining of what they were supposed to cover! Linda and Susan were stretched across the ticket office window. Both with their faces pressed up against the glass causing it to steam up.

"My you really know how to pull those big levers" Susan purred in a sexy voice. Leaning over even further so the view of her top with one too many buttons undone was visible to David who was trying not to look as if he was looking, when it was quite obvious he was!

"Yeh I bet you could pull almost anything with those big muscles of yours!" Linda added seductively lifting her arm and showing her muscle as if to emphasise her point.

"I think we could find something for you to pull if you'd like to try" Susan added leaning even harder against the glass window. Both girls laughed at David's reaction. He knew these two as they often went out together by train, Amberley not having a big social life for a couple of wild cats like Susan and Linda!

"I am sure you could," David replied trying to bring some sense to this conversation, "but at present I am stuck here working"

Susan pressed her young body even harder against the glass but her hot breath was misting up the glass. "We could always come in and help you if you like" she offered.

"Yes," Linda added, "Old Harry used to lets us come in when it was cold"

"He let us in warm up our little bodies as there is no fire out here" Susan purred, running her hand down her body to make her point.

"Well" replied David. "A, it is not cold today and B, I am not Harry!"

"No you can say that again" Linda said with raised eyebrows. "Harry was old and wrinkly" stated Susan, "and you're not old"

"Or wrinkly" added Linda.

"Certainly not" confirmed David, "but like I said I am not Harry, and neither is it cold!"

"Ohhhh" cooed the girls together.

"So now we have got that sorted" David said a bit relieved. "Where would you like tickets for? Presuming you are travelling by train today"

"Depends, where you would like to take us?" asked Linda leaning heavily against the ticket window again. "Two lonely girls going out for the day for a bit of fun" added Susan.

"We could go to Brighton, London or we could just stay here and make our own fun" whispered Linda her hot breath missing up the glass again.

"I think Littlehampton would suit you perfectly ladies" David suggested.

"Little---Hampton!" repeated Susan.

"The place," David added, "Littlehampton by the sea" "Oh! Littlehampton! Sea sun and sex!!" said Susan in a low sexy voice. This caused both girls to break into shrill laughter.

"So are you coming with us" asked Linda calming down from her laughter attack. "David," she added seeing David's name badge.

"No sorry I have to stay here," David replied.

"Does that mean you are giving us the elbow?" asked Susan.

"I would not dream of it," said David although he, as he would put it, "had been around a bit," still felt a bit uneasy with two flirty young women.

"Good" continued Susan, "because we usually get what we want!"

"In the end" added Linda. This started them both laughing again. David thought to himself that he could quite believe that. However wanting to move things on from this conversation he once again asked them where they would like tickets to. Just at this point the train to London which was the fast service and did not stop at Amberley flashes through the station on the opposite platform. It makes the whole of the station buildings shake as it rattles through.

"My" exclaimed Susan, "he was moving!"

"Where's that one going?" asked Linda.

"Victoria" stated David, "Or London to you!"

"Alright clever clogs," Linda replied "we know where Victoria is we have been to London many times!"

"Yes" agreed Susan. "Last time we went on the back of a motor bike!"

"Some ride that was!" laughed Linda. Susan joined in seeing the double meaning.

David just smiled not wanting to be drawn into their little game. David goes across to the signal box pushed the bell key a couple of times to Pulborough Signal Box replaced the levers back in the frame and send another bell signal to Arundel Box. Both boxes acknowledged the signal sent by repeating the same code back. David went to the train register book to record the times.

"What was all that for?" asked Linda.

"You don't want to know" replied David feeling a bit pleased that he knew something that these two did not!

"Oh but we do" confirmed Susan, "we like to know everything that a man does!"

"Now that is something I would have thought you would know!" David nodded.

"So are you going to tell us?" asked Linda.

David feeling a bit superior for a change and in reality showing off a bit said, "It takes years of training to work a signal box even one like this"

"We are very quick learners!" stated Linda.

"Yes we pick up things very quickly!" agreed Susan. They both laughed again both seeing the double meaning once again. "So tell us that bell ringing what was it all about"

"Ok" replied David seeing he was not going to get any peace until he told them. "It was just telling Pulborough the train was coming and Arundel it had passed here safely and he can let the next train come"

"All that in those few bells?" Linda asked.

Just as David was about to agree the Pulborough Bell sounded again. David went over and answered it and then went back to the train book to record the time.

"Aren't you going to flex some of those muscles and pull those levers?" asked Linda.

"Not yet the train is not actually coming yet" David told her.

"Oh what a shame we like seeing you pull those things." Susan sounded genuinely disappointed.

"Well, anyway" David started, "Do you want to go on the train or not as it will be on its way soon?"

"Yeh, I suppose we had better go somewhere" agreed Linda.

"Littlehampton then" stated Susan.

"Right, two returns to Littlehampton." David reached across to the ticket rack and drew out two Littlehampton returns.

"No!" shrieked Linda, "Singles!"

"Oh you are not coming back then?" asked David trying to sound disappointed. "That is a bit of a shame"

"Really" asked Susan leaning towards the window again.

"Were you looking forward to seeing us again?"

"Not really" laughed David, "but if you had bought returns we make twice the money!"

For once both girls looked a bit taken aback. Linda spoke first. "We will probably find a couple of fellers and who knows where we shall finish up!"

"Where indeed" confirmed David. The bell rang in the signal box again. David went back to his signalling duties pulling the signal levers for the Littlehampton train which had now left Pulborough.

"My pulling those levers does show how strong you are" stated Linda.

"And we do like strong men don't we Susan?" Susan nodded in agreement with her friend.

Meanwhile David ignoring this remark gave them their tickets and taking the note Linda passed under the ticket window proceeded to give her the change.

"Thanks David Darling" said Linda in a deliberate and slow way, "we might see you later, so save some of that energy you might need it!"

David told them by the time they got back he would probably be off duty.

"Does that mean you will have gone home to bed?" asked Linda.

"There's a thought" Susan said with a wicked smile.

"Yes" added Linda. "You all alone in your bed! You will be alone won't you?"

Both laughing, the young ladies made their way out onto the platform to wait the arrival of the Littlehampton train. David gave a sigh of relief, he thought that was enough entertainment for one day, let's hope the rest of the shift is a bit less hectic!

CHAPTER 2

A Police Van pulls up outside the station entrance. Terry Walsh the local "Bobby" gets out slamming the van door behind him. He walks towards the station buildings using his radio as he approaches the booking hall door. Terry has been the local policeman for the area around Amberley Railway Station for the past four years. He had been in the Police Force for over twenty years, mostly spent in the big cities. Now he had decided it was time for a quieter life and it was certainly for him now. Terry has his radio in his hand and puts it to his mouth. "247 to Whisky" he says into the radio. The radio sparks into life and a voice acknowledges his call. "Yes 247 to Whisky" continues Terry. "On foot patrol Bury Village, 247 over." The female voice on the other end of the call acknowledges and records the time at "1030 hours." "247 out" replies Terry and puts the radio in his pocket. A piece of cake he thinks to himself. Terry enters the Booking Hall and knocks on the Booking Office/ Signal box door. David opens it with a wry smile on his face, knowing full well it is Terry as he has heard the radio.

"Hello Terry knew it was you I heard the radio. Where was it you said you were? Only I thought I was working at Amberley Station?"

"I am on foot patrol in Bury village" Terry informed David.

"Bury village must have moved or is a lot bigger than I always thought" David suggested raising his eyebrows.

"You know very well I cannot keep signing off here.

People in high places will want to know what is going on at Amberley station that needs my visiting so often!"

Terry visited Amberley station at least once sometimes more than once a shift as it was a nice port of call, out of the way, always got a cuppa and usually the place to collect any news from the villages.

"You could always tell them why you are always here" David told him. "Great company, refreshments provided and of course a good place to hide out for an hour or two!!!"

"That's enough of your cheek young David" said Terry, "Just remember you are speaking to a member of Her Majesty's Police Force"

"Well be careful, one of these days you might just get caught out" warned David.

"Not me" Terry beamed, "I'm too clever for them. Besides as long as I keep this area crime free I don't think anyone from high up will bother me"

"I don't know about crime free" said David, "but you sure don't seem to arrest anybody!"

"Too true young David. Too much paperwork and for what, a fine, caution or a couple of hours community work" David remarked that was all very well but had nobody ever picked up on his lack of arrests?

"Funny you should say that" Terry replied, "I did have to see the Inspector the other day, but I soon put him right"

David nodded as if to say I told you so and was not surprised.

Terry walking round the room described the scene with the Inspector. "He calls me into the office to talk about my record"

David chipped in. "I did not know you played with the Police! I love their records no wonder you never have time to arrest anyone you would be too busy in the recording studio!"

"My record with the police force you Pratt!" Terry corrected. David nodded and gave a smile, both of them knowing what Terry was mentioning, but both enjoying David's little wind up.

"My Police Record showing reported crimes and those solved etc." Terry continued.

"What crime? What record?" asked David amazed! "I bet that was a short document?" David surprised at there was a crime reported in the area being as Terry had never said he had ever arrested anyone since being appointed to the area.

"That's enough of your cheek young David." Terry replied. "So I am telling him, there is no crime on my patch so none has been reported!"

"The reason being?" asked David and then continued to answer his own question. "Is that you cannot be bothered with the paperwork!"

"Yes – No!" Terry corrected. "It is because I am so good at my job that this is a crime free area!"

David doubted whether the Inspector would believe that.

"No I did not think he would be truthful" agreed Terry, "but as there have not been any complaints and my local supervisors were pleased with my efforts he only had praise for my work! He thought I was so good that they want me to write a report on local rural policing. The idea being it might show where lessons could be learned in other areas!"

David said that would be one report he would love to read!

"On top of that he also gave me a commendation on my record!" Terry beamed with pride.

"You jammy sod" exclaimed David, but secretly he was a bit jealous.

Terry suggested that being called "a jammy sod" was no way to address a member of Her Majesty's Police Force! To which David apologised whole heartedly and offered to make the Officer his usual cup of coffee.

"That would be lovely," replied Terry, "but I cannot stop too long I have to show myself on the beat to prevent any crime in the area from starting."

"Or at least not let it be reported!" David chipped in.

"Hey," Terry called out, "just make the coffee!"

"Yes Sir, Chief Constable Sir," David mocked.

"Not yet," Terry replied thoughtfully, "not yet."

Terry walked to the window to look out onto the station platform. "Eh up young David you didn't tell me the Terrible Twosome were on the platform."

"Oh yes" confirmed David, "They're off to Littlehampton"

"Well that's appropriate" Terry smiled.

"Are they really as wild as I've heard?" asked David.

"Listen mate, you don't get one without the other with those two. So if you are thinking of doing anything with them be prepared! Mind you it would be a lovely way to go!"

"Yes they have certainly got all the right bits in all the right places!" confirmed David.

"Just be careful," Terry warned David. "Susan's Dad is a big chap, not one to be messed with! You must know the Morris family? I don't think the old man or his boys would take kindly to you messing around with their little girl?"

"Hmm perhaps you're right," agreed David.

"I know I'm right young David." Terry confirmed. "Just remember who is related to whom in this village. It pays to be careful."

"Sounds like advise from someone who knows" stated David.

"It's my job to know" Terry gave David a knowing look. Suddenly there was the singing of the rails which signalled the approach of the Littlehampton train. David goes out on the platform as the four coach electric unit grinds to a halt with a screech of brakes filling the air with a cloud of brake dust and a burning smell.

The Train Guard opens his door opposite where David is standing.

"I told that manic in front he is not driving in the British Grand Prix, but does he take any notice does he fuck" exclaimed the Guard. As the two girls climb into the adjacent carriage, their short skirts ride up, exposing quite a bit of thigh. "My things are looking up here!" "See you later David" calls Susan as she attempts rather unsuccessfully to pull down her short skirt.

"Have a good time girls" calls back David. Susan blows him a kiss and closes the door.

"You're got your hands full there young man" states the Guard, "good luck to you" He puts his hand up and rings the starting bell twice, the driver acknowledges the call with the same two rings. "I will put a good word in for you on the way" The Guard closes his door and the train moves off.

"Thanks" mouths David to the Guard through the closed door. As the train leaves, the coach with the girls in passes David. They wave at him as they pass. David does not have time to react as the train is racing out of the station by now. David goes back into the booking office/signal box where Terry is sitting in the armchair drinking coffee. "I could not wait for you while you are flirting with the terrible twosome, so I've made my own drink!"

"That's ok I will make my own" says David, "Once I have the time!" He goes over to the signal box and sends the bell signals to Arundel and Pulborough and replaces the levers back in frame.

Terry sitting in the armchair goes into reflective mood. "Mind you" he said, "there was another time I got a commendation for something that was not quite what I made it out to be." David commented that something like that would not surprise him.

Terry unperturbed continued with the story. "About a year ago we had just got one of these new vans and I went round a round-a-bout a bit fast and tipped over!" David sipping his coffee wanted to know how fast?

Terry was unwilling to come up with a figure.

"So by the sound of it you got a commendation for smashing up a police van?" David asked.

"Not quite" Terry continued. "As I said I tipped the van over. Luckily I wasn't hurt, only my pride!" David was going to make a comment about luck, but Terry was already onto the next part of the story.

"So I climb out feeling a bit of a fool!" Terry looked at David who was just about to comment when Terry hurried on with the story. "I look at the damage to the van and think this is not going to go down well with the Inspector."

Again David was going to say something but did not get the chance as Terry was off again. "As there was no one else around I seized my opportunity. I get a can of oil out of the van and throw it over the road."

"That sounds a bit drastic!" David exclaimed.

"It needed something drastic to get me off the hook!"

Terry rubbed his hand across his forehead as if to show relief. "So I put some traffic cones out to avoid anyone else slipping on the oil spillage!"

"That was very good of you considering you had made the spillage in the first place!" praised David mockingly.

"Like I said" Terry continued, "I had to think and act fast to save my skin"

"Pity you did not save the van!" said David with a smile.

"So come on how did you manage to convince everyone you had not just tipped the van over?"

"Well" Terry smiled, "this is the best bit. I go onto Control and report an oil spillage and unfortunately I have skidded off the road on it, but I was ok and diverting traffic around it!"

"Well I suppose that bit was true at least," said David a bit amazed that any of this story could be put down as truthful.

"So they send police back up, the fire brigade to wash down the road, the breakdown truck for the van, oh and an ambulance for me!"

"An ambulance" exclaims David, "what was that for because you were overcome with emotion of telling so many lies!"

"No don't forget I had been in an accident!" Terry continued, "of course I refused to go to the hospital" "Naturally, it was no more than I expected" said David with a wry smile.

"They made me go to hospital in case of any reaction later." By now the whole story was becoming a bit unbelievable thought David? "Then to top it all I got a commendation for quick police work after being involved in an accident!"

"A commendation?" asked David, "now I have heard everything! You smash up a police vehicle and tell a tale to your superiors and they thank you for doing it!"

"It was not quite like that, was it?" asked Terry.

"Oh yes it was, oh yes it was!" David corrected. "I bet you had your fingers crossed when you accepted the award?"

"No" replied Terry, "I just had a big smile on my face!"

Suddenly the police radio springs into life. "Control to 247."

"Shit!" exclaims Terry as he reaches for his radio from his pocket.

"247 receiving go ahead over" Terry calls into his radio.

"Control to 247 message from Sergeant Cooper he will meet you at Bury village in five minutes over"

"Bollocks" Terry puts the radio back to his mouth, "247 received will go." Terry makes for the door at double quick speed. The radio operator still acknowledging his reply and logging the time.

"Got to go" Terry calls to David as he is leaving, "Thanks for the coffee. I may have to break a few laws to get to Bury village before my Sarg!"

"I told you one day you would get caught out," David called as Terry ran to his van.

"Yes, thanks pal!" Terry shouted as he closed the van door and with blue light on the top flashing sped off down the station yard. He is leaving in such a hurry he nearly collides with an incoming car. The car pulls up in the station car park. A well dressed man in his early fifties wearing a well pressed pin stripped suit gets out of the car. He makes his way towards the booking office. As he walks through to the platform he calls through the ticket window.

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"Now of course if anyone asks you have not heard this from me! However with all your connections in the city I thought someone would have told you by now?" David thought maybe he might be being set up, wrongly as it turned out.

"No" assured Mr. Marshall, "these days they all think increases in travel are put on their expenses so nobody worries if fares go up. I unfortunately am a bit old fashioned and try to keep my costs to the company down."

"But don't you own the company? David asked.

"Exactly!" agreed Mr. Marshall, "That's more reason to save on company costs"

"I suppose it pays for those little trips abroad of yours?"

David said with a touch of envy

"Exactly!" agreed Mr. Marshall. "So what can you tell me about the price rises?"

"What you will have to do is hand your season ticket in for a refund at the end of this week, as you are going on a little trip" David told him.

"Oh a little trip" repeated Mr. Marshall, "anywhere nice?"

"Probably just to the village pub as usual" David smiled.

"Oh, right, so once I have been on my little trip and I end up back here on Monday morning?" Mr. Marshall already guessed what was coming as this little procedure had taken place for the last couple of years. "I shall have your new season ticket waiting for you at the present price less your refund, because of course your little trip you planned was cancelled at the last minute so you have had to return to work" David informed him. "Thus saving you a few green notes and helping your company survive into next year"

"Wonderful" agreed Mr. Marshall.

"Of course this information has not come from me" David told him, "any resemblance to my voice is purely coincidental!"

"I understand" nodded Mr. Marshall. "I shall see you Friday and possibly next Monday morning!"

Mr. Marshall makes his way back onto the platform and heads for the footbridge to take him over to the other platform for the London train. The signal box bells ring and David answers them, it is the London train. He records the time in the train register.

The phone rings in the booking office.

"Amberley Station" announces David to the caller.

It is one of those calls that someone has tried to ring another larger station and got no reply so has started to work their way down the list of stations in the phone book until someone answers. This is quite common at Amberley being near the top of the list and one they will probably get an answer from. However this is a call that cannot be given a straight answer too. The caller is travelling from Brighton to Manchester and she has seen on the weather forecast on tv and there is thick fog north of London and would this delay her train journey! David always diplomatic in these calls says he really cannot say but thinks the fog will clear by the time she gets to London so hopefully she should have a trouble free journey. This seems to satisfy the intending passenger. David replaces the receiver as the block bell from Arundel in the signal box rings again. David goes over and deals with the signalling, finishing off by pulling three of the levers across. Then picking up an envelope from the counter and making his way out of the office locking the door behind him he makes his way across to the far platform where Mr. Marshall is waiting. Mr. Marshall makes conversation about the weather and David tells him about the recent phone call. Mr. Marshall is impressed that David would even bother with such calls.

"I could do with a young man like you in my organisation" he tells him. "Anytime you feel like a change let me know"

David thanked him for the offer but says the thought of commuting to London each day did not appeal.

Especially when he thought it would be a lot earlier start and later finish than Mr. Marshall did. He was usually home in a couple of hours, even if sometimes he brought his work home with him. This work was usually in the form of one of the girls from the typing pool!

"This train is a long time coming" says Mr. Marshall looking at his watch.

"Arundel probably pushed it a bit" suggests David.

"Pushed it!" repeated Mr. Marshall. "Does that mean it has failed?"

"No" David smiled. "Just a railway term means he told me it was coming before it actually left the station, probably because he wanted to go to the loo!"

Just then the train appears out of the tunnel in the distance. It pulls slowly into the station and comes to a halt at the end of the platform. Doors fly open and a party of hikers detains onto the platform accompanied by various rucksacks. Mr. Marshall opens one of the doors near him and gets into the train and the Guard gives the two beats on the bell signal to the driver.

As the train starts to move David holds up the envelope he has brought across with him. The Guard leans out as the train passes David. The Guard grabs the envelope out of David's hand.

"Pulborough," David shouts to the Guard as he passes. The Guard acknowledges with a wave of the envelope. The hikers are slowly making their way over the footbridge. David goes to the end of the platform and crosses over the track. He arrives at the booking office door in front of the arriving party. David goes inside and deals with the signalling putting back the signals behind the London train and sending the necessary bell signals. "My, that is impressive." It is one of the hiker's party standing at the office door. "Do you want to check the tickets as well?"

David walks over to the door and checks the tickets all are in order and he hands them back to the man in shorts and tee shirt standing at the door.

"We're off for a walk over your lovely South Downs" he informs David, who tells them the weather looks good for them. "Yes we shall be back about seven for the train back to Brighton. I suppose we will have to change again on the way back?" he asks. David tells them that is correct and to ask when they get back to the station as to where to change, and with that they set off.

CHAPTER 4

As the hikers are leaving the station yard a car roars by them tooting at them as it races up the slope to the station buildings. It screeches to a halt by the station entrance. The car door flies open and Chris Fuller the late turn Signalman at Amberley climbs out and runs into the booking hall. Chris a local lad is a couple of years older than David. He does not always take his job at the station as seriously as David, something that does annoy David at times. Chris has always done jobs on the side. His latest is helping out on a local farm as it is lambing time, but he has been known to drive a tractor or milk the cows before coming to work! He would describe himself as a "lad of the village." Quite what Chris meant by this David never knew, but he did know the two young men had become great friends while working together at Amberley station. Chris bangs on the booking office door. David opens the door and Chris pushes his way in.

"Hey up where's the fire?" shouts David. One problem David has found out about Chris is, he is a bit unreliable and today is no exception.

"Sorry Dave" says Chris turning round at the end of the room. "Just called in to tell you I might be a bit late today"

"Will I notice any difference I ask myself?" David says sarcastically.

"Thanks mate. Look I know I am a bit pushed at times." Chris admitted.

"A bit!" exclaimed David.

"Yeh, yeh, ok most days but today I have a ewe about to lamb." Chris's part time occupation as a shepherd was getting in the way of his railway duties again. Chris's idea being that he could pull both jobs in together and make twice the pay. Unfortunately it did not work out quite how Chris had wanted, and most of the time both jobs overlapped far too often, especially today!

"You and your sheep" David was not pleased. "It's about time you sorted out which job you are doing!"

Chris looked hurt. "Like most people in this village David I have more than one job to try to eke out a living!"

"Oh you poor soul!" David mocked wiping an imaginary tear away from his eye.

"You'll see!" Chris told him. "When you get old enough to start dating how much it costs to keep these women happy!"

"You cheeky sod!" returned David. "What do you mean WHEN I start dating?"

"Sorry mate" Chris apologised, "did I hit a sore spot!"

"Bollocks!" was the only reply David got to give as by now Chris was on his way out of the door.

"See you later" he shouts as he is leaving, "I try not to be too late! Thanks mate" With that Chris was gone. His car roared into life and away back down the station yard. David was left on his own in the office with the door still open. "Sometimes I think I must be the biggest mug around" he says out loud to himself.

"I don't know if I agree with that statement David" says a voice outside the door. David turns round in surprise as Mr. Williams the Station Master comes in. Mister Williams was the Station Master for three of the stations on the line. He was stationed at the middle and largest one of the three at Pulborough. He was one of the "old school" railwayman. He had started as a junior clerk and worked his way up to the position of Station Master. Not yet at one of the big stations but enough for him to have a certain standing in his home town. He was a man in his late fifties and wore the Station Master's uniform with pride including the hat with the gold badge in the middle at the front denoting his position in the life of the railway.

"Morning Mr. Williams" says David recovering from the shock of someone being there without him knowing. "I did not hear you arrive"

"No I don't suppose you would have heard my car with that one of Chris's tearing off down the road" Mr. Williams explained. "That was him I saw was it not. He seemed in a bit of a hurry."

"Yes" confirmed David, "he was just asking me if I could hang on a few minutes for him today."

"You are too kind hearted David," Mr. Williams told him. "Give Chris an inch and he will take a mile. I know you two run this station on your own very well but I sometimes wonder if it is on a 50/50 basis?"

"Oh Chris is ok." David confirmed. "He will give me the time back another day, and I know he can be a bit scatter brained at times but he is a good worker and we compliment ourselves here"

"Yes, well just make sure he pulls his weight and does not put on your good nature too much" advised Mr. Williams.

"Anyway" said David, "what brings you here at this time? It's not your usual time or day come to that! Is something up? Have we been caught fiddling the books?"

Just then the bells ring in the signal box and David goes over to answer them and record the times, while Mr. Williams takes the chance to sit down in the armchair. "No you're not been found out, well not yet anyway!" he says. "I have to vary my times and days to keep the element of surprise just in case you are up to some wrong doings!"

"Well so long as I know" responds David. "It's a good job then that I got rid of the cider, the radio, the television and the young lady five minutes before you arrived!!"

"And it's a good thing I know you are joking" replied Mr. Williams.

"Who's joking?" mocked David.

"If this was Chris talking I might be worried" the Station Master said. David was not too sure he liked that remark. He had no intention of being as wild as Chris was sometimes, but again did not want to be a goodie, goodie!! The bells rang again in the signal box and David went and answered them and after all the ringing pulled the levers on right hand side of the box.

"The down express" he told the Station Master, as he recorded the times in the train register book.

Mr. Williams got up and walked over to the book. "I suppose I had better sign the book to show I have been"

Taking his red pen out of his pocket he said, "I better sign the accounts book as well while I am here. I'm sure it will all be in order?"

"Always in order" confirmed David. "Down to the very last penny."

Mr. Williams signed both books and looking through the accounts record said, "I see it is mostly your writing David, does Chris ever do the books?"

"I said it before we work together." David told him. "I do these Chris does the other jobs." Then under his breath he said "like rearing sheep!"

"Sorry" said Mr. Williams, "I did not catch the last bit"

"Only joking" David smiled, "Like I said we work well together as a team"

"Well let me know if things are not being done equal and I will have a word with young Chris" Mr. Williams said sternly.

"Don't worry about Chris." David told him. "He is alright, just needs to be kept in check now and again!"

"Well make sure you do," Mr. Williams told him. "You know I leave you two to run this little show on your own providing you both do it properly."

"Yes Boss" acknowledged David. "And we do appreciate your faith in us, so be assured we will not let you down."

"I hope not as I am counting on you two. This is excellent experience for you both and could start you off on a long and rewarding career," promised Mr. Williams. "You never know when an opportunity to move will come up." David did not know what to make of that remark, but just then the down express roared through the station lifting the counter off the ground about an inch with the wind turbulence of the passing train. David goes to the signal box to replace the signals behind the train and send the bell signals. As he records the time in the train register book, Mr. Williams remarks on the fact that it is lucky the station survives these fast services racing through. David tells him it has been around over a hundred years and will probably still be around for another hundred even with the fast trains trying to take the station with them each time they race through.

"Yes I suppose you are right" agreed the Station Master. "Well I had better get going I have two other stations to see before the end of the day." With that he turned to leave. "Keep up the good work David. I shall probably try and call when Chris is on next" David says he will tell Chris to expect a visit and with that the Station Master is gone. David thinks to himself if Chris's timekeeping gets any worse he will never get a visit.

David is still thinking this over when there is a screech of brakes outside the window and the sound of a car door slamming.

Chris comes in. "Was that the old man I nearly ran into for the second time today?"

"Most probably" confirmed David.

"Shit!" exclaimed Chris, "I shall be in his bad books again"

"I don't think you are ever out of them!" David laughed.

"Oh yes very funny" agreed Chris.

"I thought so" David laughed again.

"Look" said Chris, "I am just dropping something off and I will be back"

"There is no rush your shift has not started yet and you said you might be a bit late" David informed him. Chris holds up a thumb as a sign he understands and goes back out to his car. When he returns David is in the signal box dealing with another train. As he turns round he has an almighty shock! Chris has pushed a large woolly sheep into the office in front of him. All of a sudden the sheep lets out a loud bleat!!

"What the fucking hell is that?" asks David although he knows the answer it is all he can say at that moment!

Chris ignoring the obvious answer says, "Isn't she lovely?"

"Lovely was not want I was thinking" David shouts back.

"Now David" starts Chris, "all is not all it seems!"

"It seems to be you have brought a fucking sheep into my signal box!" exclaims David still in a fit of anger at the intruder.

"Yes ten out of ten for observation" says Chris, trying to hold onto the sheep's head. "This is a prize ewe and she thinks the world of you!!!"

"So what's it doing here?" David asks still coming down from the initial shock.

"Ah yes, that is what I have been trying to tell you" Chris explains. "She is due to lamb shortly"

"How shortly?" asks David with a sense of apprehension.

"About now actually!" confirms Chris.

"Chris!" shouts David.

Ignoring his work mate Chris continues. "Anyway just make sure she stays in here until I get back. She'll be ok see she is lying down now. Just leave her be and she will be alright. I shalln't be long" With that Chris shuts the door and was gone. David still in a state of shock shouted after him, but it was too late his car was already off down the drive. David looked at the animal sitting in the corner of the booking office.

"Barr!"

"Fucking bar to you too!" shouted David to the animal. The ewe in the corner winked at David, who just turned and went back to his signalling duties shaking his head. Another vehicle could be heard arriving outside and the sound of the police radio came floating through to the office.

"That's all I need!" said David to the ewe. There was a knock on the booking office door.

"Barr" said the white fleeced animal.

"Exactly!" exclaimed David opening the door to the returning local policeman Terry Walsh.

"What the?" asked the policeman as the door opened.

"Don't ask!" David told him, "Just don't ask!"

"Ok I will just say one word" replied the officer, "Chris?"

"You've got it in one!" confirmed David.

"So it looks like he has really lumbered you in it this time!" stated the police officer. "You know David you really are too good to him, if you are not careful Chris will end up getting you the sack and the worse thing is he will walk away back to his sheep and you will be on the scrap heap!"

"You know Terry you are about right! But you know me I am too nice!" David confessed.

Just then the bells rang in the box and the ewe bleated, Terry laughed David swore. Another train raced through and David through threw the levers back in the frame. "Steady on young David" said Terry a little worried that the all the noise might frighten the animal anymore than the poor animal was already.

"Don't worry Terry" assured David, "If that sheep starts I shall personally kick it out into the yard!"

"Now that's not in your nature David," Terry told him. "I think its better you just put the kettle on! Does the ewe (this was a play on the word "new") starter want one?"

"Oh very funny!!" David did not need any funny remarks at this time; he had already had enough of the farm visitor.

Unfortunately the policeman had not. "Now that attitude is not like ewe David!!" David was about to give it both barrels when the bell rang in the signal box and his attention was drawn to his signalling duties.

"Ewe know David I have told ewe before I think Chris takes ewe for a mug" Terry tells David, "and ewe fall for it every time, but as ewe are making me a lovely cup of coffee I will not mention it again!"

"That's very kind of EWE" David replied mimicking, "but am I making you this wonderful cup of coffee?

"Yes please" agreed Terry, "and one for the sheep. Oh and one for EWE of course!!!!" David banged down the full cup of steaming coffee beside the policeman. The ewe moved around in the corner of the room at the noise of the cup hitting the table.

"Looks like she's on the move," Terry moves his feet away from the table as the woolly animal starts to walk around the small room.

"I hope she is not starting!" exclaimed David.

"Starting?" asked Terry. David told him that according to Chris the sheep was set to start lambing at any minute!

"Ah that's great," Terry had a big smile on his face. David did not know how Terry could look so pleased at the fact that soon the place could be turned into a birthing room!

"It's a new life coming into the world," Terry told him. "I was there for all of mine!" David asserted that neither of them were in any way connected to the imminent new arrival! With which Terry wholeheartedly agreed.

"The thing is David us country people know all about this sort of thing and any one of us just takes things like this in our stride!"

"Right," said David, "Just remind me where you come from? Manchester wasn't it? I take it there are folks of sheep in Coronation Street are there?"

"I am not sure about the sheep" replied Terry. "There were a few rams!!"

"Very funny," David tried to smile but not with much success. The ewe settled down again in the corner of the office and for once looked quite content and not acting as if she wanted to give birth, at least not in the next few minutes! Terry suggested that she looked to be settling down and perhaps things will be alright until Chris got back. David agreed but still was not too sure, either about the birth or when Chris might re-appear! In the meantime David makes another coffee for the two of them. The outside door bangs and an elderly lady's face appears at the ticket window. David goes over to the ticket counter and greets the intending passenger. The ewe lying down in the corner bleats.

"Pardon?" asks the lady at the window.

"Sorry" said David. "Can I help you?" There is a bleating sound from the corner again. Terry shakes his head and assures the woman at the window it is not him making the noise.

"It sounds like you are the one needing help" suggests the lady at the window.

"Yes I do" confirms David. "Do you know anything about sheep?"

"Sheep?" repeats the woman. "I am sure the world is going mad!" David points to the animal in the corner. The woman looks amazed but says nothing. David knowing this is getting neither of them anywhere asks where the lady would like to go.

"Judging by all I have seen here" she says, "as far away as possible.

"Single or return?" asks David. Terry in the back of the office sniggers. The woman at the window looks hard at the policeman and says that if she does get away she would not want to come back to this mad house!

"Right" says David, "a single as far away as possible then!"

"Oh wouldn't that be heaven" confirmed the intending passenger. David did not think they had a fare to Heaven and probably the furthest they could get was Wick in the north of Scotland.

"Wick!" exclaimed the lady, "I only want a return to Littlehampton!" David a bit taken aback reaches for the ticket while Terry tries not to laugh. The lady passenger takes a five pound note from her purse and puts it on the counter. David gives her the ticket and her change.

"Is the train due soon?" she asks. David informs her it should be here in ten minutes. With a look of disbelief the lady walks away towards the platform muttering quietly to herself. David turns to Terry and is just about to make remark on the type of passenger he has to deal with when the bells in the signal box ring and David attention is drawn to his signalling duties. Terry however does comment on the fact that not many of his fellow Signalmen have so much entertainment during a shift as David gets here! Before David can reply there is a knock at the ticket window. Dreading it is the old lady come back again David slowly makes his way to the counter.

"Afternoon!" says a friendly face at the window. It is Sam a retired farm worker. Sam's face shows the hours spent in the open sun, wind and rain out in the fields over many years. David is relieved that the previous passenger has not reappeared at the window.

"Good afternoon Sam" shouts Terry from across the room. "How are you today?"

"Hello Constable" replies Sam, "Not out cracking the crime wave in the village today then?"

"Now you know as well as I do Sam that there isn't any crime wave in the village" replies the Constable.

Two bells ring in the signal box. David went to deal with it.

"Is that my train?" asks Sam.

"I think it belongs to the Railway" Terry suggested.

"Very funny" intervened David, "don't go upsetting our customer"

"Customer eh?" repeated Sam, "I remember when I was your favourite passenger. Fancy new names! Just another way of getting more money out of you!"

"Well Sir either way I am always pleased to serve you.

What can I do for you?" David asked.

"I want a return" stated Sam.

"Yes Sir where too"

"Back here of course!" Terry bursts out laughing and even the ewe that had been very quiet in the corner made a slight bleat.

"You fell for that one David" Terry told him still laughing.

David nodded slightly annoyed with himself. "I suppose it will be Littlehampton it is always Littlehampton isn't it Sam?"

"Yes always except when I go elsewhere!" Sam agreed. David issued the ticket just as the Littlehampton train arrived at the station.

"Is that the train?" asks Sam. David tells him it is and goes out onto the platform with him closely followed by Terry. Leaving the ewe to look after the office on her own. David pulling the office door too as they all parade onto the platform.

The Guard gets out onto the platform. "My what's this Prisoner and escort?"

"Oh very funny" says Sam. "Not yet anyway as I am not fiddling the Railway until later!"

"Oh how's that then?" asks the Guard.

"I have bought a return and I am not coming back by train!" The Guard looks at Sam and then at David who just shrugs his shoulders in amazement.

"There is no answer to that one Sam" Terry tells him. Sam getting into the carriage agrees. "The last time I came back from Littlehampton they told me to get in the front of the train"

"Well that was probably because it was a long train and not all the carriages would fit onto the platform," the Guard informed him.

"Ah that's alright but no one tells you where the front of the train is!" explained Sam. The Guard and David look at each other. Terry shrugs his shoulders.

"Well you will be alright today Sir if you are not coming back" the Guard informs him.

"No but don't tell them when we get to Littlehampton"
Sam tells him.

"No your secret safe with me" says the Guard. "Well we had better go or we will never reach Littlehampton"
With that he rang the train bell twice and closed his door. The driver gave a toot on the train whistle and the train moved off.

"Are they all as bad as Sam?" asked Terry as they made their way back to the office.

"No" David told him. "Some are a lot worse! But as the Bishop said to the Actress it is nothing to laugh at"

"I know," Terry replied, "but as the Actress said to the Bishop it is from where I am standing!" David and Terry made their way into the office laughing. David went to the signal box part of the office and started sending bell signals and replacing the levers back in the frame. The ewe in the corner starred in amazement at the sudden activity but this time was silent. Time passed without any further incidents and the ewe has stayed quietly in the corner. There is a roar of a car engine and then the squeal of its brakes. A car door slams and it all finishes with a bang on the door.

David goes over and opens the door.

Chris the late turn Signalman and part time shepherd enters. "Ok mate I'm here off you go!"

"You can't say further than that" says Terry sitting in the opposite corner from the wholly animal.

"Oh hello Terry" calls Chris, I see you have met Gertrude."

"Have I?" asks Terry, "who's that the new girl friend?"

"No! That's Gertrude" Chris points to the ewe.

"Yeh, that's what I said the new girl friend!" Terry smiled.

There was a bleat from the corner. "She knows her name" Chris tells them.

"I don't care whether it's her name or if it's your new girl friend just make sure it is gone by tomorrow." David looks with displeasure towards the corner. Another bleat is heard.

"David mate, you cannot go moving a mother to be" informs Chris.

"I hope by tomorrow she will not be a mother to be and not be here!!" David was losing the last of his patience with Chris. "Anyway all is in order. All trains due have gone and the sections are all clear at the moment. I have signed off and I am off to a more sensible place!"

"Where's that David?" asks Terry.

"Anywhere that is not here!" David tells him and with that David exits to freedom in the outside world.

CHAPTER 5

Terry looks across at Chris who is dealing with the signal box and suggests to him it is a bit unusual to keep a sheep in the office even if she is due to lamb and needs that extra bit of TLC.

"There is always a first time for anything" suggests Chris. Terry smiles and says that is what he tells his wife. "You wish?" Chris replies. Terry nods in agreement but asks Chris when he is going to move the animal.

"Not yet" Chris answers a little shocked, "it would not be right to send her to be slaughtered in her condition!"

"I didn't mean that way" Terry corrected him, "I mean when are you going to move her out of here?" Chris shook his head and thought for a moment, before finally saying that the ewe would probably be here until he finished his shift tonight and he would take her back to the pen.

"Well good luck" said Terry. "I had better be on my way someone might be committing a crime and I want to be well away before they do!!"

"Yes very good joke" agreed Chris.

"Who's joking?" asked Terry, "see you later." With that he was gone out of the door and into the police van.

With a roar of the engine the white police van was off down the station yard heading away from any possible crime! Chris goes back to his signalling duties. The train from London arrives Chris never one too keen to go out to the trains goes up to the window to look out on its arrival.

"What the .." he says to himself. Getting out of the train are what appears to be two tourists, which if you asked where they came from the answer all be a guess work and would be USA every time! The man, would be probably in his 60's very much overweight in a bright red shirt and light coloured trousers and a woman about the same age and size but trying to look a lot younger in a pink trouser suit and large hat. The man has two expensive looking cameras around his neck. The Guard waves at them behind their back as if to say.

"What on earth is this?" However he rings the train bell and the train moves off leaving the couple alone on the platform. The two arriving passengers walk towards the booking hall. As they enter the man is waving his arms around, pointing out various things to the lady accompanying him. He speaks with a broad American accent. "Will you look at this Clementine ain't it quaint?"

"Quaint?" repeated Chris looking at the large sheep in the corner of the office. The animal just stared back in agreement! Meanwhile the couple in the booking hall were still looking excitedly round the building. When the lady spoke she too had the same American accent. "Ronnie look here it is just like something out of that film Brief Encounters. It is a shame there isn't a huge clock!"

"This is only a wayside station Clementine I don't suppose they worry about time here!" Ronnie replied. "That's what you think mate!" Chris said under his breath.

"It still has that oldie world atmosphere though, don't you think Ronnie?" said the American lady, because that is obviously what she was, and she seemed "taken" with the station in all its glory thought Chris.

"Oldie world atmosphere? Must be those toilets again!" Chris said quietly to himself. Ronnie was taking pictures from every angle of what seemed to be every part of the station using both of his two cameras around his neck. "They will never believe us back home in the States"

"You had better take some photos of the station sign to prove what we say," Clementine told him.

Ronnie goes back outside onto the platform leaving Clementine admiring the booking hall decor. Which was a lovely dark brown colour caused by years of smoking customers sitting and coughing, while waiting patiently for their train to arrive. Ronnie spies the outside of the signal box on the platform and excitedly shouts to Clementine to come outside.

"Will you look at this!" he shouts. Clementine makes her way out on to the platform. Ronnie grabs her by the hand and drags her towards the outside of the signal box.

"Steady!" she says as she is dragged outside.

"What about that?" Ronnie points towards the signal box.

"Yes very quaint, but what is it?" asks Clementine looking puzzled.

"It's a signal cabin combined into the station" explains an excited Ronnie. "Now ain't that some-it!"

"Yes fascinating" agrees Clementine who is busy looking elsewhere. "You know Ronnie," she continues, "Ricky and Sharron would love one of those station signs to hang on their porch. Fancy them having a railway station in little old England named after them!"

"I am not so sure they named the station after Ricky and Sharron" Ronnie thought, "but maybe their ancestors might have done. It would be really good for them to have their name on an English Railway Station sign hanging over their door though"

"It's a pity it could not read Ricky and Sharron Amberley of Wisconsin!" Clementine suggested.

"Then it would not be authentic," stated Ronnie, "and besides the sign would be bigger than the doorway!"

"Yes I guess you are right," agreed Clementine.

"As I usually am!" boasted Ronnie.

"Do you think they will let us have a sign to take back to the states?" Clementine looked hopefully at Ronnie knowing he usually got what she wanted.

"You know these English Country folk. I'm sure I can talk 'um into giving me one for a few dollars!" Ronnie assured her.

"You are so clever Ronnie."

"Yes, you're right there babe." Ronnie agreed. "Come on let's go and talk to the station fella." They both make their way back into the booking hall. Chris although he had been busy with his signalling duties had also been keeping an eye on the two new arrivals in town.

Ronnie goes up to the ticket window and calls to Chris who leaves his writing in the train register and moves to the ticket window to speak.

"Yes Sir" he asks, "What can I do for you? I have seen you admiring our station and signal box. Amberley is quite unique in this respect" The American gentleman agrees that it is a very unique place.

"Have you just arrived from America?" Chris enquires. The man is surprised at Chris knowing where he is from. Chris soon explains that Amberley being a small village anyone unfamiliar is soon noticed and with the man's accent it is soon obvious that he is not from this country let alone a local!

"Actually" says Ronnie, "my wife Clementine and I are staying in Storrington with some friends. We are over here on holiday for a month. We missed our stop at Pulborough so we will have to get them to come here to pick us up."

"That's no problem you can ring them from here. Besides you are just as close here as at Pulborough" Chris informed them.

"Oh that's so kind of you" said Clementine with a big smile showing off a fine set of teeth which Chris thought must have cost a fortune in America.

Ronnie continued "Yes thanks for that. It's a real treat though coming to Amberley. We never knew it existed until today."

"Oh it's been here for a few years and even the station for over a hundred or more" Chris boasted.

"Is that right" Clementine was amazed, "fancy that Ronnie?"

"Yes nearly as old as your Mother!" Ronnie laughed but soon stopped when he looked at Clementine's face.

Quickly he changed the subject. "I know our accent does give us away a bit but we do try to blend in"

Chris thought the clothes and the two cameras around his neck were a bit of a giveaway but decided to keep his answer to the fact that anyone not local stood out straight away in the local towns or villages. "You have to be here for about ten years before you are accepted as a local," he informed them.

"That's no good for us we go back in a fortnight!" said a dismayed looking Ronnie. "Still we can still see a good bit of your beautiful country before we go back."

Suddenly the bells ring in the signal box and this frightens the sheep that has been lying quietly in the corner.

Ronnie who had not noticed the animal until now did not know what to look at first! His attention had been drawn to Chris dealing with the signal box bells but now the woolly animal took his gaze. Chris having dealt with his signal box duties came back to the ticket window.
"Say do they let you keep pets at work?" asked Ronnie.
Chris looked round at the bundle of wool in the corner.
"Oh she's not a pet," he told Ronnie. "She's my other job. The trouble is she is due to lamb and I have to be here until this evening and I could not leave her on her own"

"So the Railroad Company is ok with that?" asked Ronnie.

"Eh, well, no," Chris stammered. "Actually they don't know."

"So what happens when the Big Boss Man finds out?" asks Ronnie.

"Well," stammers Chris again, "hopefully they will never know!"

"The best of luck then bud" said Ronnie looking a bit optimistically at Chris. Then his attention turns to look towards the signal box. "Clementine will you look at this old fashioned signal cabin."

Clementine comes over to look through ticket window.

"You know me Ronnie I don't understand these old things you go mad about."

"Yes I know Honey but just look how rustic it all is, why they even have a sheep here look." Ronnie points to the corner of the room.

Clementine leans over to look into the room. "Well that's just like Grandma Weston back home"

Ronnie nods and then asks Chris if he minds if he takes some photos of the station and maybe the signal box.

"You see," continued Ronnie, "we have got some friends back home in little old U.S. of A. called Mister and Misses Amberley. They will never believe that there is a railroad station named after them!"

Chris looked disbelieving at Ronnie. "I don't think that would really be the case. Like I said before the station has been here for well over a hundred years. I must admit I have never heard of anybody called Amberley living round here or anywhere else for that matter."

"The thing is," Ronnie spoke in a hushed tone, not that there was anyone about to overhear. "The thing is it is alright taking photos of the station it would be better if we could take a souvenir back to show them?"

Chris said it would be a great idea but asked what they could take?

"Well," Ronnie moved closer to the ticket window and lowered his voice even more, "I was wondering if I could purchase one of your station signs. It would look great hanging over the porch of our friend's homestead they are named Amberley as well. Do you think the Railroad Company would sell me one?" Chris looked amazed at the request and told Ronnie that there would be no chance and anyway how would he get it home to America?! Ronnie told him not to worry about small problems like that he would sort it.

"Yes he always gets his way," Clementine told Chris. "I'm sure he does" replied Chris. Chris thought for a minute and then said, "If you come back tomorrow I will see what I can do. I can't promise anything these things are not usually on general sale" Ronnie nodded, knowing as usual that he would get his own way, and said he would make it well worth Chris's trouble. Chris said he would see what he could do. "You had better ring your friends to pick you up," he said opening the door to allow Ronnie access to the phone. Ronnie called his friends and took a few more photos before going outside to await their lift.

CHAPTER 6

Meanwhile Chris had returned to his signal box duties. An express rushed through en route to London Victoria and from there a stopping service approached. The electric unit screeched to a halt opposite the signal box. Chris looked out onto the platform and then rushed back inside. He had seen Mister Williams the Station Master from Pulborough getting out of the train, and quite rightly he thought the Station Master would not be too keen to see a woolly sheep sharing his signal box and booking office!!! Quickly Chris opened the office door and pushed the large animal out into the booking hall and out into the station yard. Now sheep do not tend to be the most co-operative of farm animals, and this one was no exception!! Luckily for Chris after being shut in the office for the last couple of hours the animal found being pushed into the fresh air non too displeasing, and once it eyed the grassy bank beside the roadway it trotted off to have its fill quite happily. A relieved young signalman made his way back into the station. Just in time as the Station Master was emerging from the platform.

"Ah there you are Chris," stated Mister Williams as Chris made his appearance. "Have you got a problem outside?" The SM looked past Chris towards the station yard.

"Eh, no," replied Chris. The SM walked towards the outside door, but before he could say or see anymore Chris spoke up.

"It's just one of Farmer Brown's sheep has strayed into the yard."

"Well you had better ring him to get it back before it strays into the road or worse onto the line," Mister Williams told him.

Chris lied that he had just done so and the farmer would be down as soon as possible but at the moment the sheep was doing us a favour and keeping the grass down on the side of the yard. Mister Williams thought that maybe we could hire out the sheep it might be easier than getting the engineers to trim the grass banks! Chris thought he was joking or at least he hoped he probably was! Meanwhile the SM had gone into the office; Chris followed and went straight to the signal box to deal with the departing train that had brought the SM to Amberley. Mister Williams opened his briefcase and put a paper file on the desk.

Chris looked at it and said, "What's that our cards?"

The SM did not contradict Chris. Not getting the answer he expected Chris looked worried! Had someone told the SM about the sheep, but he thought that it would have been too quick. Mister Williams seeing Chris's worried face picked up the folder. "Not quite Chris. But it does not look like good news. I would say that this is just a proposal at present but the facts are overwhelming in the railway's favour and you might have a job convincing them otherwise I'm afraid, although I will do my best for both of you two young lads and I am sure we can find you another signal box so no one will be heading down the road."

Chris opened the folder, took out the paper work and scanned through the pages. "By the look of it," he said, "They are closing the box and the booking office. Thus making a longer section between signal boxes and reducing the number of trains being able to run at one time, then making passengers pay on the train and what about our season ticket holders?"

"I think you will find they have to buy their tickets at the London End or maybe at Pulborough," Mister Williams said. "They seem to have covered everything and as for the train running they are prepared to put up with a bit of delay if trains get too close together."

"So what happens now?" asked Chris.

Mister Williams told him to look through the paperwork with David and in about a week's time there will be a meeting with headquarters and then it will be sorted out as to what happens and if necessary where everyone goes. Chris nodded not feeling too happy for his work mate David, for himself there was always the farm work. Mister Williams having passed on the bad news said he was getting the next train back to Pulborough but he would call back in a couple of days to see their views on the plans. Chris had just cleared the signals for the London stopping service which would take the SM back, so Mister Williams said he would be in touch and left for the other platform to await the arrival of his train. Meanwhile Chris wrote a note about the visit and pinned it to the folder for when David arrived for work the next morning. The rest of the afternoon passed without further incident. Chris kept an eye on the animal outside but she seemed quite happy munching the lush grass on the side of the station yard. So once the evening rush of commuter trains had passed, Chris decided to go and get the American's present so it would be there for him to take home when he called back the following day!

Getting a ladder out of the station shed he went to one of the station lamp-posts. Placing the ladder against the post he climbed up so he was level with the station sign attached to the post. Taking the screw driver he had brought with him from the station tool box he started to unscrew the sign. This was the cleanest looking of all the station signs but still took some undoing. A few swear words and scratches later he had managed to get the first screw undone! It took another three visits in between trains to finally get the Amberley sign down on the platform! Chris put the ladder and screwdriver away and then went back and brought the sign into the signal box. By now it was getting late and it was even later when Chris had finally cleaned and polished the sign so it gleamed like new. He wrapped up the sign in some newspaper and put it away in the cupboard for safe keeping until the next day. By now it was getting quite late in the day. Chris looked out in the station yard to check on the ewe but she seemed content and was munching away on the grass bank. Thank goodness for that thought Chris if she starts to produce her lamb while here it could cause problems.

The last train from the coast arrived and Chris was starting to think of making a move home soon. There were sounds of carriage doors closing and laughter from the far platform. The train moved off and Chris could see the reason for all the noise. Susan and Linda had returned and were in a merry mood by the look of it! "That's all I need!" thought Chris. Being a local lad he knew the girls well and was quite fond of them both especially Susan. The girls strolled through the booking hall arm in arm laughing together and then spied Chris in the booking office. They made straight for the ticket window. Both the girls leaned against the window their hot breath steaming up the glass.

"Evening ladies," Chris said coming towards the ticket window from the signal box. "Been out for the evening have we?"

"Actually" Susan informed him, "we have been out for most of the day!"

"Yes" added Linda that very nice young David was here when we went out."

"Very nice young David" repeated Chris, "I shall have to tell him what you called him I expect he will be pleased to know what you think of him."

"He is nice" Linda agreed, "Does he have a girl friend?"

"Ah you offering then?" asked Chris.

"Well he could do a lot worse, and he did look a bit lonely working here," Linda told him. Chris told her as far as he knew David did not have a regular girlfriend, but as he lived in Worthing, and did not say too much about his home life he might be wrong. Linda said that would be ok as she thought most people living there were too old to want boyfriends! Chris did not think that was really the truth as he had known quite a few young people from that area.

"Anyway we shall have to call back another time to see him," Linda said. "Now we must be getting off home it is dark and we don't want to be too long walking to the village at this time of night you never know what weirdo's are lurking in the bushes!"

"The only thing lurking round here will be a fox or a few rats," Chris told them.

"What big rats" asked Susan? Chris nodded.

"Oh that's even worse than the human sort!" Susan shivered to show her disgust at the thought! Chris said that if they wanted to hang about for about half an hour he would give them a lift back to the village.

"Oh yes," said Susan, "and what sort of payment would you want for this taxi service?"

Chris looked hurt and told the girls that he was shocked that they would think that he would want any payment for taking them home. Susan replied that they had both known Chris for many years and knew what he was like. They both knew he called his van a passion wagon! Chris told them they would be safe tonight as there was another lady going back with them! The girls said they were quite tired and would like the offer of the lift.

Chris said he just had to see the last train away and then they could get going. In the meantime they had better come into the office and wait in the warm. The two of them quickly came into the office and dropped onto the two seats. Chris could not help noticing the expanse of flesh showing under the girl's short skirts as they rode up their thighs.

"We don't mind you looking" Susan told Chris, "but that's as far as it gets!" Chris said they could not blame him for looking. Again Susan told him that was as far as it would go. The last train from London arrived and Chris went out to see it away. Locking up the booking hall and putting out the outside lights as he returned to the office.

"Is that it can we go now?" asked Linda. Chris said he had to wait for the train to clear Arundel and then close the signal box.

"How long is that going to take?" Linda asked thinking they had waited long enough already. Chris told her that it would only take five minutes to clear. In actual time it was a bit longer and then with bells ringing in all directions Chris closed the signal box to both boxes on either side. He cleared the signals in both directions. Then picking up the phone to ensure he was all clear to go he went to the train register book to sign off.

"What the hell was all that?" asked Susan.

"I don't know" answered Linda, "but I hope it means we are going soon."

"Yes"

agreed Chris putting down the pen on the register.

"Follow me girls your carriage awaits." They all leave the office, Chris locking the doors behind them and putting out the lights. It is dark outside in the station yard.

"Hang on girls" called Chris, "I will just put on the van lights and you can see what you are doing." Chris put on the van lights and the girls climbed in the front.

"It's going to be a crush in here" stated Susan.

"Even more so when I get our elderly lady in," Chris told them.

"Well she won't get in the front!" Susan called out. Chris told them not to worry she was going in the back of the van. Linda did not think that would be a suitable place for an elderly lady.

All of a sudden the rear doors opened and Chris pushed a large woolly animal into the back of the van.

"What the fuck is that?" asked Susan very unladylike!

"That is Gertrude," Chris informed her. Gertrude bleated! Chris slammed the back door of the van.

Susan looked at Linda and Linda looked back at Susan.

The sheep bleated. The girls jumped. Chris climbed into the van and closed the van door. It was a bit of a crush in the front of the van, but Gertrude seemed to have plenty of room in the back. They set off at top speed towards the village.

"Why are we sharing this van with a sheep?" asked Susan.

"You did not seem to mind when I told you we were taking an old lady home!" Chris told them. Susan informed him that they did not think the lady was a sheep! By now they were approaching the village and Chris pulled into the car park of the local public house. The girls got out pleased to be home safe and not trampled over by a wild sheep! They thanked Chris for the unusual ride and walked off towards their respective houses. Chris closed the van door behind them and set off for the farm with Gertrude.

CHAPTER 7

Bright and early the next morning David arrived to open up the station. He scanned the area in case there was still a pregnant ewe around but was relieved to find no sign. A horrible thought crossed his mind as he let himself into the station building perhaps she is still in the office! He turned the key to the signal box and booking office door slowly. There were no bleating sounds from within. His hopes raised he pushed open the door.

"Morning, lovely day" called a voice. David jumped and then jumped again as someone or something patted him on the back!

"Sorry," said the voice. "I didn't mean to make you jump, only I was just on my early morning rounds and I thought there's young David going to open up and put the kettle on!"

David turned round to see the gleaming buttons on the uniform of Terry Walsh the local policeman. "Fucking hell Terry!" exclaimed David, "you nearly gave me a heart attack. Do you creep up on people like that all the time?"

"All part of the training," Terry smiled

David getting his breath back said Terry should try putting his training to better use and maybe he might arrest someone someday!

"Now young David," replied Terry, "That is no way to talk to an officer of the law who has got up early to protect you from a dangerous escaped prisoner!" It was too early in the morning for David to be dealing with all this information and suggested that they go inside so David could do his own protecting of his biscuits before the policeman could scoff the lot! Terry agreed it was a good idea as they did not want to be outside with dangerous criminals around! David filled the kettle, plugged it in and switched it on. Next he proceeded to ring the signal boxes on either side to find out the situation before opening the signal box. There were no trains signalled so he replaced the signal levers in the frame with a crash one after the other.

"Hey" shouted Terry. "Do you have to make such a noise this time of the morning? There is a dangerous man around and I don't want to have to try and arrest him single handed!"

At this remark David, who was just making the first entry of the day in the train register book laughed. He looked at Terry and with a mocking smile asked when was the last time he had arrested anyone let alone a dangerous man single handed! Terry agreed that it would take some remembering but he was sure in his long career in the police force there had been a time or even times! He reminded David he had worked in the big cities before coming to Amberley! David went over to make the first brew of the day and then it suddenly occurred to him that Terry was not usually out and about this time of the morning, neither for that matter, were most of his community he was supposed to be protecting!

"And anyway," continued David, "who is this dangerous man you are NOT looking for?"

"What do you mean NOT looking for? I am doing just that now!" Terry informed him. David handed Terry his cup of coffee. Terry continued, "You might have noticed that I am up and about rather earlier than usual. This is because I have had an important call from HQ. We have an escaped prisoner on the run from Ford Prison!"

"I thought they only put low key prisoners and harmless ones in there?" David gave a wicked smile. "Surely it is an open prison? Still how you can have an open prison? It must be a contradiction in terms?"

"Either way young David you should be on your guard today for anyone acting suspiciously" Terry told him.

"You mean out of the ordinary?" David asked. Terry agreed.

"Right!" David walked over to the phone, "what's your HQ number?" Terry looked surprised and asked why he would want that. Unfortunately for him he had fallen into David's trap.

"I'm reporting a person not acting himself today. Up earlier than usual and have delusions of arresting dangerous man all on his own!"

"Alright! Very funny," agreed Terry but when I do find this man you will be most grateful that I did not leave you to his mercy!"

"Just what has this hardened criminal done?" asked David. Terry answered a bit evasively. David asked the question again and finally Terry had to admit that the reason this man was in prison was for tax fiddling!

"That is very dangerous!" exclaimed David, "What did he use a loaded pen?"

"You don't know the half of it young David" explained Terry. "It was what he was doing with the money we could never pin on him!"

"Oh he was plotting a long holiday in Brazil?" David smiled.

"No," Terry continued we think he was setting up a huge bank robbery and maybe he has done a runner now to finish the job?"

"And then take a long holiday in Brazil?" asked David with an even bigger smile this time. Terry told him he had already given out too much information, but David was distracted now to his signal box duties as the first London service was on its way and he was pulling the levers to let it through. Suddenly there was a bang of the outside door and in rushed the first passenger of the day. Terry jumped up from his stool he had been sitting on drinking his coffee.

"Relax" called David. "It's only Mr Brown he is always in a rush for the first train."

"What about his ticket?" Terry asked.

David put his mind at rest informing Terry that Mr Brown had a weekly season which he bought every Friday after work as he never had time to buy it on a Monday morning!

Outside in the booking hall there was a loud banging and the sound of a door trying to be opened.

"Oh God" shouted David picking up his keys and rushing out into the booking hall. "Sorry!" he shouted as he put the key into the door onto the platform. "I am running a bit late today as well." Mr Brown just glared at David and dashed out onto the platform as the train pulled into the other side of the station.

"That's what I get for you disturbing me first thing in the morning he nearly missed his train because I had not unlocked all the doors!" David looked at Terry as if it was Terry's fault.

Terry however walked across to look out at the train. He turned to David. "Did this one stop at Ford?" he asked.

"Yes the first one stops all stations," David informed him. "Why do you ask?"

"That's why I am here to check any trains coming from Ford to London," Terry explained.

"And you are doing that how?" enquired David.

"I have just checked that train and he wasn't on it" explained Terry.

"Oh so from twenty yards away through the box and train windows and a moving train after the first coach you could see whether there was a dangerous criminal on board!" David asked in amazement.

"Exactly! Now I am off to radio in my findings to HQ."

With that Terry left the office to go out to his police van.

David started to set out the books for the day ahead.

Then he saw the folder that Chris had left the day before with his note pinned to the top. The note read "They're trying to finish us brother! – See inside" David opened the folder and started to read the papers inside. It did not make for good reading. He was still flicking through the pages when Terry came back in from reporting to his Control.

"Good is it?" pointing to the folder.

"Not really" David looked up from the paperwork, "they are getting rid of us!"

"They can't do that!" exclaimed Terry, "where would I get my free brew? And where would I go when I had nothing to do?"

"Like now!" said David trying to put the details of the folder out of his mind?

"Now then young David this is serious!" Terry told him. David repeated that was it serious for him and Chris or just for Terry. Terry a little hurt by the remark let it go as it was partly true but also being as David had just had some bad news.

"There must be something that can be done?" asked Terry in a concerned voice.

"There will be a meeting," David told him, "but I do not expect it will do any good."

"What about the signals and the tickets?" asked Terry.

"Oh they will have an answer for everything, you can be sure of that!" explained David.

"So what is the answer?" asked Terry again. David had gone over to the signal box to deal with the bells. "Like that what you have just done?"

"As far as the signalling goes the box will switch out as it does at night making a long section but it will stay here to open if required. They are prepared for a few minutes delay if trains get too close together and have to wait for the longer section to clear." David explained. Terry nodded but wanted to know about the station and tickets.

"The station becomes unstaffed." David told him.

"Tickets are obtained from the Guard and season tickets from the other end of the line. We are not the first station to not have staff."

"Well I can see I shall be down here even more trying to keep the place in order!" Terry commented.

"Well I am glad someone will do well out of it!" David said sarcastically.

"Where will you and Chris go?" asked Terry.

"Oh you finally thought about us!" David nodded pleased that at last Terry realised he would not see his railway colleges again! "Well" David continued "I do not know about Chris he might go back on the farm but they will offer me another box hopefully along the coast and nearer to home!"

"Well that will not be too bad then will it?" asked Terry.
"Oh well we shall see" agreed David reluctantly.
Just then the next London service pulled into the station.

"Has that one stopped at Ford?" asked Terry thinking it would be another train he could say he had checked.
"Yes" replied David, "I told you they all call all stations this time of the morning. I suppose this is another train you will have checked from 50 yards away!"

"There is method in what I am doing young David," explained Terry.

"You mean the usual way you do things by not getting involved!" David asked.

"Just think about it David" Terry said. "If I go over and start going through the train and this desperate criminal starts to kick off I am on my own with him. So a lot better for us to be meet him with a band of heavy policemen to arrest him further down the line."

"What I cannot see is how you can spot this desperate man from inside here?" asked David.

"That is where the years of police training come in!" Terry told him.

The train departs with no sign of the runaway prisoner. Terry goes out to the police vehicle to report in, while David is getting busy with the morning rush of trains and the odd passenger or two. After a few minutes Terry comes back in with a big smile on his face.

"All's well," Terry beamed. "The ladies of Amberley can rest easily in their beds we have caught him."

"What do you mean the ladies of Amberley can rest easily?" asked David.

"In their beds!" added Terry.

"In their beds!" David repeated.

"What I mean is," Terry told him. "The West Sussex Police Force has put right what the Prison Service Buggered Up! We have found the escaped prisoner on a bench on Littlehampton sea front!"

"So you are off the hook?" asked David.

"I know you think nothing ever happens in Amberley but I "WAS" involved in the Amberley Ghost!" Terry looked at David with staring eyes.

David asked what was the Amberley Ghost? Terry told David be prepared to be scared as he started to tell David the story. "A Mister James Crabtree lived in a cottage in Pulborough. He was in his late sixties. He had never married and been retired for the last four years. His still had a full head of hair which had turned white over the last few years. He also sported a large white beard which made him look a formidable looking character and well known around the village. Mrs. Crabtree the ninety year old mother of James Crabtree still lived in the family home in Amberley village. She lived on her own and although frail she managed well for her great age. Mrs. Crabtree had a lot of friends in the village that kept an eye on her and did various errands for her, except on Fridays. That was the day when her son came to visit, and he took care of his Mother's needs for that day each week. As usual this Friday James Crabtree made his way from his home in Pulborough to his Mum's cottage in Amberley. He always travelled by the same train each Friday. This Friday was no exception. It was Friday 13th February 1959 and it was a cold winter's day."

"You were not around then were you?" asked David.

"No of course not" Terry told David not to interrupt. "I will get to my part in a bit.

So the dark clouds of the day looked like there could be snow on the way and the biting wind made anyone outside wrap their coat around themselves to try to keep the little warmth of their bodies inside. The train which James Crabtree caught each Friday morning left Pulborough station at nine minutes past eight. With the cold weather that morning the train was slightly behind time. James waited on the open platform stamping his feet to try to keep the circulation going round his body.

The wind was whistling under the station canopy making anyone standing on the platform wonder why they had even got out of bed that morning! Some ten minutes after it was due to arrive there appeared out of the gloom a green coloured object approaching at speed. The few intending passengers moved forward towards the edge of the platform. The four car electric train screeched to a halt at the side of them. James Crabtree along with the other passengers who had been awaiting the overdue train boarded. It looked like there would be snow before he got home that night. If it did get too heavy he could always bed down at his Mother's cottage for the night. He would not be missed at his home living there all alone as he did. Now he had retired he spent his time walking on the Downs or fishing in the local river.

Except on Fridays, like today the one day in the week when he would visit his Mother. There were other days in the year Easter, Christmas when he would stay overnight and on her birthday but his Mother had always been independent and only accepted the minimum of help. Like every Friday James after arriving at Amberley station made his way towards the village and his Mother's house. The walk took him down the station yard to the road and turning right out of the gate up the hill to the village."

"I don't see any ghosts yet" David suddenly realised what he had said. "Then you do not normally see a ghost do you?"

Terry thought David was not getting into the story and told him to wait for the end of the story and then see what he thought.

Terry carried on. "Eventually James made it to the village and the village shop. Each week James would get some groceries for his Mother and himself. As he was used to cooking for himself, James always cooked for his Mum on his weekly visit. He also got a couple of cream cakes as an after lunch treat. So armed with his groceries and cakes he set off for the last few yards to his Mother's house.

When James arrived at his Mum's house he entered with his own key. He called out a welcome but gets no reply. James took the groceries into the kitchen and left them on the table. Returning to the front room there is no sign of his Mother. He calls out but gets no reply. James goes to his Mother's bedroom. Knocking on her door he still gets no reply. Pushing the door open slowly, he finds his aged Mum still in bed. She looks so peaceful, but lifeless. Mrs Crabtree had lived a long life but during the night the Angels had come to take her."

"So is she the ghost?" asked David. Terry tells him to stop interrupting and carries on with the story.

"Over the next few hours James's day sped by in the affairs that followed his Mother's passing. So it was late that day that he found himself back at Amberley Station. It had been snowing during the evening and the fresh crisp layer of snow was undisturbed as James made his way to the station. James bought a single ticket back to Pulborough. He always brought a single ticket each way in case he stayed over at his Mother's place. This particular night there was no way he was going to stay in the now empty cottage. James was feeling distraught by the events of the day.

James made his way across the footbridge to the opposite platform to await the arrival of the seven minutes past eight train. The Signalman on duty that evening had to send in the daily report to Pulborough as this was the main station for the accounts. As the train approached the Signalman left the office/signal box. Locking the door he made his way across to the far platform with the day's accounts to go to Pulborough. The train appeared out of the tunnel its headlight shinning bright in the darkness. Snow covered the platform and the Signalman could see the footprints of James Crabtree in the snow. It looked like he had come down from the footbridge and walked towards the front end of the platform but there was no sign of him returning to the main part of the platform. In fact there was no sign of James Crabtree anywhere on the station."

"Now we are getting somewhere" said a relieved David. Terry told him to wait it gets better. The Signalman walked to the Guard and gave him the letter for Pulborough station. He also mentioned the fact that there should be a passenger to get on for Pulborough. The Guard thought nobody should be about on a night like this.

The Signalman was a bit concerned however as to where James Crabtree had gone as he told the Guard about the footprints in the snow and the events of the day in James's life. The Guard suggested the Signalman to advise the Driver to keep a lookout in case the said person had decided to continue walking off the end of the platform and worse still be lying on or near the track. The Signalman went and told the Driver the tale and showed him where the footprints ended at the end of the platform. The Driver was not happy about taking the train forward in the dark if there was someone wandering around on the line. In the end he persuaded the Guard to ride up front with him to give an extra pair of eyes. So eventually after some delay the train moved slowly out of the station. The Signalman watched it slowly moving away and as he did he again looked at the footprints in the snow, they just seemed to go off the end of the platform. After that the snow lay crisp and even apart from the rails where the train had departed. Where had James Crabtree gone? The Signalman could not understand it where were James's returning footprints in the snow? It would have been impossible to retrace his own his own footprints! No sign was ever found of James Crabtree."

David was just about to ask if James was the ghost when Terry held up his hand to silence him and carried on with the story. Moving onto the same day Friday February 13th but it is now 1970. It is again a cold evening and it has been snowing in the area of Amberley.

"Hang about!" said David. "You mean this February just gone?"

"Yes that's right," Terry agreed.

"Well where was I on this day I do not remember anything about a ghost?" David asked.

"No from what I remember weren't you off with an ingrowing toe nail or something?" Terry smiled.

"No!" exclaimed David. "You are right I was off for three weeks but I had chicken pox. I caught it off my young nephew. I do not think I have ever felt so bad."

"So it was not you on that night. I seem to remember it was old Harry who covers here when one of you two are off."

"Well in that case there is probably not a word of truth in it!" David told Terry that Harry could never remember things properly and it was a good thing he was retiring soon.

"Well he seems to have got this right," Terry continued.

"Like 11 years previous the snow lay thickly on the ground. The clock in the signal box come booking office at Amberley Railway Station showed eight o'clock.

Suddenly the outside door to the booking hall opened letting a flood of cold air in, followed by an elderly man in his late 60's. The man came over to the booking office window and asked the Signalman whether the seven minutes past eight train to Pulborough was on time. The Signalman looked at the man and asked if he meant the 8.12 train? The man looked puzzled but asked if the times had changed. The Signalman replied that yes the services going north are now at 12 minutes past the hour. The man nodded and said it had been a long time since he had travelled at that time of night."

"Now that does amaze me. I don't think Harry would know the times of trains at Amberley!" David intervened.

"Well he said he did!" Terry told him. "Shall I go on?" David nodded.

"So after buying his ticket, a single to Pulborough, he left the booking hall to make his way to the opposite platform. The snow lay evenly on the tarmac of the station platform. The Signalman watched the man head for the footbridge leaving his footprints in the snow.

The bells in the signal box announced the train was on its way. The Signalman pulled the levers in the box to clear the signals for the approaching train. For some reason he seemed drawn to go over to the other platform to see the train away. Normally the trains in that direction the Guard would see that passengers were on and off safely and all the doors were shut before giving the Driver the all clear to depart."

"So it was unusual for the Signalman to go over to that side of the station unless there was a reason to speak to the train crew. So why on this one occasion was he drawn to go over to see this particular train? Later on he would be unable to say why he had gone over to see this particular train, apart from thinking perhaps he thought the platform might be dangerous and the elderly passenger might want help. However at the time he was not sure why he was so keen to go out from the warm of the station buildings into the cold night air."

"Now I can believe that!" David laughed. "Firstly that Harry would not want to leave the warmth of the signal box and that he would not remember if he did why he did!"

"However" Terry continued. "Go he did. When he reached the opposite platform there was no sign of the elderly passenger!

The Signalman could see the footprints in the snow where the intending passenger had come over the footbridge but instead of going to the cover of the waiting room the footprints went to the end of the platform! After that the snow laid unbroken either side of the rails, and there were no signs of the footprints returning. The Signalman stood looking at the footprints in amazement! There seemed no logical explanation for what he was looking at. He was brought back to reality with the arrival of the train in the platform. The Guard opened his door. The Signalman walked up to him. The Guard asked the Signalman if he was alright as he looked like he had seen a ghost! Signalman replied that he thought he had. The Guard told him that was all he was likely to see at this time of night. The Signalman told the Guard about the vanishing passenger.

It was now the Guard whose face drained of colour! By a strange coincidence 11 years ago to the day this Guard was on the same train although this day it was timed a few minutes later. It was he and the Driver on that fateful day that looked out in vain for James Crabtree!

The Guard told about the fateful trip 11 years before and he recalled it was the same date Friday 13th February. Both the men shuddered as they thought about what had happened all those years before and this evening. The Guard asked the Signalman what he wanted to do about the missing passenger. The Rule Book did not cover disappearing passengers especially 11 years apart! So the Guard suggested they keep an eye out en route to Pulborough as he had done years before! This they did and as 11 years before, but there was no sign of the intending passenger. The next day the local policeman hearing the tale of the night before brought in a photo from 11 years ago of missing person James Crabtree. The Signalman looked at the photo in absolute shock staring back at him was the face of the passenger that never boarded the train the night before!!!! Could this have been James Crabtree trying to get to Pulborough on the same train as 11 years ago? Even if this was so he would have been 11 years older and this person had looked the same as 11 years previous! The original thoughts years ago were that James had either disappeared to pastures new or even fallen in the river and been swept away in the dark of the night! So could this have been the Ghost of James Crabtree still trying to get home???

It had been Friday 13th February and it had been snowing just as 11 years before!!!!

"Yes so you are telling me that you were the Policeman?" asked David.

"Yes I WAS that Policeman!" Terry stated.

"So where is this ghost now and where has it been for the last eleven years?" asked David.

"It could be" started Terry. "It could be that it has to be that particular date. Friday 13th February and just say it has to be snowing."

"And perhaps it is all a tall story?" asked David.

"You think what you like young David but I believe what I have heard and if I were you I would work out when the 13th February falls on a Friday next and make sure you are not here especially if it is snowing!" Terry advised him.

"Well if they go ahead with the staff cuts it will not matter there will not be anyone here to see or not see a ghost!" David said sarcastically.

After trying to frighten David, Terry thought that he had better be off back to the Police House for some well earned breakfast!! Leaving David to wait for some snow and a ghost to arrive!! David was not too sure about the ghost story bit, but before he could follow up his thoughts Terry was gone.

David carried on with the rest of his shift until after nine o'clock. When there was a bang on the office door. David opened the door to find the station's main season holder standing there. Mister Marshall was very smartly dressed in a pin striped suit and blue tie. He looked the very part of a city gent.

"David I think I have made a bit of a mess of my plans for today. I need to be in London by half past ten is it possible.

"I'm afraid you have missed the London service and the next one will not get you in until after eleven." David told him. "There is the express but you will not have time to get to Pulborough for it and of course it does not stop here!"

"Oh that's no good!" Mister Marshall exclaimed. "Is there no way of getting the express or any other service? It is very important I get to London asp!"

David thought for a moment and then told Mister Marshall if he got himself over to the other platform he could put him on the fast service to London. Mister Marshall said that David had just told him that service did not stop at Amberley.

"It doesn't normally!" David looked at Mister Marshall with raised eyebrows, "but today it might have too!" Mister Marshall understood only too well. "Thanks David I will see you alright."

David said not to worry about that but just to keep quiet and when he gave him the nod to board the train and he should get to London in time. Mister Marshall left to go over the footbridge to await the arrival of the train. He did not have long to wait but the train came into the platform very slowly. David came across to talk to the Driver.

"Sorry to stop you driver" called David, "but there has been a report of sheep on the line about a mile from the station can you have a look out and if you see anything report at the next station."

The driver agreed and David thanked him and then as an afterthought asked if this passenger could jump in as he had missed the previous service. The driver agreed and David nodded to Mister Marshall to get on board.

With that David ran back to the signal box to clear the signal for the train to proceed. Having done so, the train and its additional passenger were on their way. David watched from the signal box thinking what a nice person he must be or on the other hand what a mug he was!!!! David thought it had been quite a morning so far and was glad when the rest of the morning seemed to be going by quietly. That was until the phone rang. It was Mr Williams the Station Master from Pulborough. He asked if David had seen the paperwork he had left there yesterday. David said he had looked through it and was not impressed, especially after what Mr. Williams had said the day before about how well they were doing at Amberley. Mr. Williams apologised but he had meant all he said the day before, and there was no need to worry he was sure David would be assured a signalling job not too far away. David did not know what to make of this call, did the SM know more than he was letting on. He still was concerned about the passengers at Amberley he had got to know them all very well and the thought of not seeing them each day would be disappointing to say the least. David was still thinking over the phone call when there was a knock at the door.

On the other side of the door was a couple. The man was about twenty he looked a bit scruffy with a three or four day beard and clothes that looked like they had been slept in. His companion was a young lady who looked about seventeen. Her clothes looked a little better but still would not make a fashion parade. The man told David that they had run away together about four days ago and had nowhere to sleep and had been sleeping rough but it was not the best idea. They only had one more day and were getting a lift north to London. He was hoping that they could stay somewhere at the station that night. David was not happy with the idea and did not see where they could sleep. The man said they had seen the waiting room on the other side of the station did not have a lock on it, what about if they stayed there and left before the first train. David being a big softy at heart said that if they came after the last train at eleven at night and gone before half past six in the morning he would not suspect anyone would know but he had not told them that. The young woman thanked David followed by the man who added they would not leave a mess and no one would know they had been. So David nodded in agreement. Thanking David again they left saying they were going to get something to eat in the local pub.

David was still thinking about the couple there was something about the girl that worried him although he could not put his finger on it, when there was a screeching of car tyres outside. Within thirty seconds Chris burst into the office.

"Are you going to congratulate me?" shouted Chris as he bounded in.

"Congratulations" answered David. "What for?"

"I'm a Dad!" Chris announced.

David looked at him in amazement, "I didn't even know you were with anyone seriously."

"It's not someone it's Gertrude!" Chris exclaimed.

"Gertrude!" repeated David, "who the fuck is Gertrude?"

"You saw her yesterday she was with you most of the shift!" Chris told him.

"You mean the sheep?" asked David. "You've been shagging a sheep?"

"Don't be a Pratt!" Chris told him.

"I think it sounds like you are being the Pratt!" David said.

"Of course I'm talking about the sheep, but I was talking as a proud adopted father of a new baby lamb!" Chris informed him.

"So no cigars or champagne yet then?" David asked.

"No but maybe some nice lamb chops later in the year!"
Chris laughed.

"Oh that's awful!" said David.

"Come on," Chris told him, "You will be tucking into them later in the year!" David said after being told, and having seen Gertrude yesterday he might become a vegetarian!

"That's up to you" Chris said. David agreed it was and anyway he was off home. With that he told Chris all he needed to know about the traffic situation and the phone call he had had regarding the paperwork from Mr. Williams. Chris said they could not do too much until the meeting was arranged with HQ. He would probably go back to the farm at the end of the day and he was sure David was bound for higher things on the railway. David said he would have to see what came out of the meeting in the meantime he was off home.

The afternoon started as most afternoons at Amberley, very quietly. Chris got the station sign he had took down from one of the station lamp standards the day before. It gleamed as the day it was first put up. He looked at it with pride it was a shame to have to part with it.

A wicked thought crossed his mind. If the railway were going to do away with staff on the station they might not miss the odd sign or two! He was still pondering this thought when there was a knock on the door. Opening it he was confronted with a blaze of colour. There stood the American gentleman from the day before. Today he was even more outlandishly dressed in the brightest multicoloured shirt Chris had ever seen and probably the biggest! It crossed Chris's mind that it was true that everything in America was bigger than in England including the people!

"Howdy!" said the Shirt! "We were just passing and thought we would just drop by to see if you had managed to persuade the Railroad Company to sell me one of those signs?" Chris was still wondering who the "we" was and whether the man meant himself and the shirt when he spied the American's wife looking round the booking hall behind her husband.

"You know I am willing to pay a good price?" the American continued.

Chris coming back to reality said, "The trouble is the Railway is not keen on selling items that are still in use. If they sell a sign they will have to replace it. That does not mean though that you and I cannot come to an agreement."

The American leaned forward through the open door. "I did not get to be head of a large corporation in America by always doing things by the book," he told Chris. "So can you get me this sign? What would the agreed price be?"

Chris was a bit out of his depth. What sort of price to ask he had no idea, but thought he should aim for as high as he could get!

"What would it be worth to you?" asked Chris, trying to get the American to name a price he would go to.

"Well I don't know much about your English pounds but let's say a hundred pounds should cover your trouble I think that would be reasonable don't you?" asked the American. Chris was overwhelmed, but was determined not to show his joy. He rubbed his chin with his right hand as if thinking it over.

"Ok a hundred and fifty" said the American in a determined voice that gave the impression that that was as high as he would go.

"You've got a deal" Chris informed him. Thinking that he had a deal at the hundred pounds, but Chris was happy to accept the revised offer!

"Great," replied the American gentleman. "When can I pick it up?"

Chris told him that it was ready now and opened the door wider to show the sign in all its glory on the counter.

"Will you look at that!" exclaimed the man and called to his wife. "Clementine look at this sign isn't that dandy?" Clementine who had been inspecting the dust in the booking hall came over. She agreed it was just the thing they wanted.

"Our friends back in the states Mister Amberley and his wife will so love it won't they Ronnie?" she said. Ronnie agreed and reached into the back pocket of his trousers and pulled out a large bulging wallet. Again the phrase everything bigger in America statement flashed through Chris's mind.

"Now let's see if I can work out this funny money for you," said Ronnie. He started to count out the hundred and fifty pounds in ten pound notes. When he reached fifteen he stopped. Put his wallet back in his hip pocket still bulging Chris noticed, and then recounted the notes.

"I think you will find it is all there?" he said handing the notes to Chris who quickly put them to one side away from the booking office till in case someone mistook them for railway takings!

It did occur to him that it would be unlikely as some days the station only took about one percent of that total!!!

"Don't you want to count it?" asked Ronnie. Chris told he had seen him count it twice and that was enough. With that Chris wrapped up the sign in the newspaper and handed it to Ronnie who took it with a look of "what's with the newspaper."

Chris seeing his look told him that it was to keep the sign clean and of course out of sight. Ronnie agreed and Chris went on to tell him it went without saying to keep it out of sight until he got the sign home. Chris did wonder how he was going to get it on the plane back home to America. Ronnie told him not to worry no one would see it and he would manage it with no trouble! With that the Americans picked up their prize and left the station to return to the car they had borrowed from their friends for the afternoon.

Outside a beaming Ronnie put the station sign into the boot of the car, or as he called it the "trunk."

"The Amberley's will be so pleased with this," Clementine said.

Ronnie beamed even more, "and for that price it was a real bargain!"

"I knew you would do it Ronnie, you always win!"

Ronnie closed the boot and went to close the car door behind his wife. Still beaming he climbed into the driver's seat and started the car's engine and with a roar of the high powered engine they set off into the sunset!! Meanwhile Chris carried on with his signalling and station duties for the rest of the shift. Every now and again he got the money obtained for the sign out of his pocket counted it and put it back again, it had been a good day!

CHAPTER 8

The next morning David's car pulled up at the entrance to Amberley station. It was a wet morning the rain dripping off the car door as David gets out and makes his way to the outside door which leads into the booking hall. David quickly gets in the dry of the booking hall and selects a different key for the booking office door. Once inside he puts down his bag on the counter and goes over to the signal box area to open the signal box. He picks up the phone and rings the signal boxes on either side. There are no trains about so David opens the signal box replacing the signals to danger. After making a note in the Train Register Book he starts to open the booking office side he also checks the far side of the station in case the couple who had wanted to use the station at night were still there but there did not seem to be any sign of them. Before long the few regulars are making their way through to their trains. The rain was still coming down two hours later when there is the sound of a vehicle pulling up outside the booking office window.

There followed a sound of a car door being slammed and large footsteps coming rapidly into the booking hall, followed by a loud bang on the door. David opens the door and is pushed back against the wall as Terry the village policeman barges in.

"Do come in Constable!" calls David extracting himself from the wall.

"Sorry" apologises Terry, "but it is pissing down out there and I thought where is the best place to dry off and have a lovely cup of coffee and get some scintillating conversation!"

"And the pub is not open yet!" mocks David.

"You know for one I call here as my first port of call and second the local policeman cannot be seen in the pub drinking whilst on duty" Terry told him.

"But I have heard that the local policeman does nip in for a drink when not on duty is that not true?" asks David.

"Now young David a lot of information is learned from meeting the locals on their own ground" Terry told him. "It helps to know what is going on so I can keep my finger on the pulse of the village!"

"What" replied David, "so you can make sure you are nowhere near the scene of the crime when it happens!?"

"I have told you before David there is no crime in this village mainly because I stop it before it happens!" Terry explained.

"Yes whatever!" David replied, "I think I had better put the kettle on."

"That's the best thing you've said so far" agreed Terry. As David puts the kettle on and sorts out the mugs for the beverage he turns to Terry. "You know being as I am looking after you so well today and the fact that it is raining and on top of that, today is the day the distant signal lamp needs changing and normally after the shift it is a nice mile walk each way but today it could be a bit messy."

"So what you are saying is at the end of the shift you would like to use the local police vehicle to deliver paraffin to one of your signals!" asked Terry.

"That's a wonderful idea Terry!" exclaims David. "I would take my car but the farm track is hardly suitable for a luxury vehicle like mine"

"Are you saying the Austin Van of West Sussex Police Force isn't a luxury vehicle?" asked Terry, "because if you are you are exactly right!"

"Eh right" replied David, "so does that mean you will be taking me out to the distant signal after I hand over to Chris at 2pm?"

"Yes I suppose so" confirmed Terry, "providing I am not chasing a dangerous criminal at that time!"

David said he would be ready at 2pm then as he did not think there would be any dangerous criminals around at that time today. Terry reluctantly had to agree, although he had heard the local residents of North Stoke were being terrorised by one particular individual. "Really?" asked David amazed at such a revelation! "Yes" replied Terry, "A large fox has been chasing the local sheep!!!"

David said after that perhaps Terry should be on his way as soon as he had finished his break. As he was getting ready to go Terry asked who would be doing these lamps if the station became unstaffed. David told him the Railway Bosses had thought of that and would get the man who did some other signal box lamps to do the ones at Amberley as well. Terry told David they seemed to have thought of everything. David sadly had to agree. With that Terry finished his coffee and said he would be back at around two o'clock.

The morning passed in its usual sleepy way at Amberley station until the arrival of the ten thirty six train. This was from Victoria to the coast as most services were the difference with this service it again brought the Station Master Mister Williams with it from Pulborough and he did not look too happy as he entered the office.

“Morning David” Mister Williams said.

David greeted him with the usual “hello” and offered to put the kettle on for the usual cup of coffee but the Station Master refused the offer today saying he had had a worrying conversation with the General Manager at Waterloo this morning. David asked if it was about the planned changes planned at the station but Mister Williams stated it was a bit more serious than that. This made David a bit nervous as far as he was concerned losing his job at Amberley was as serious as it got! Mister Williams went on to say the General Manager had heard that a certain Signalman stopped a train especially yesterday so a passenger could board at Amberley. Now I know you like to help out as much as you can but we cannot go stopping express trains for passengers who want to get going quicker than waiting for a booked service.

A relieved David looked at the Station Master and said, "If this is to do with stopping the express yesterday there was a report of sheep on the line and I had to caution the express through and luckily for this passenger I asked the driver if he could jump in as he had missed the train before." The Station Master did not see that David had his fingers crossed while talking! "It is all in the train register book"

The Station Master went over and looked at the book listings for the day before. He nodded but still not sure reading through the report. "And who reported these sheep on the line?"

David told him that as it says in the book a motorist reported seeing sheep on the railway as he came by along the road overlooking the line. The Station Master asked if David had got this man's name and address but David said he just ran in told him and was gone as quick. Mister Williams looked at David in disbelief but could do no more than believe what was written in the train register book.

"So how come the General Manager got the wrong end of the story?" asked David.

"He was told that the Signalman ought to be thanked and praised for helping this passenger for stopping the express for him!" Mister Williams told him!

David said that it was obvious that the passenger had got the wrong end of the stick!! Mister Williams said he would have to report back but hopefully he would be able to convince the General Manager that although David would not get praise he would not get the sack either!! David said he would hope not as he was only following regulations for sheep being reported on the line! The Station Master told David he would be off back to Pulborough to clear up the matter but just as he was leaving he turned back and asked David if the express had seen any sheep on the line. David said that the answer was in the negative but sheep were like that through the fence and back again when they hear a train coming!! Mister Williams just sighed and left for his train back to Pulborough! Another hour goes by and Mister Marshall the passenger whom David had stopped the express train for yesterday came to catch his train to London.

"Morning David" he calls as he passes through the booking hall. "Thanks for yesterday I made that meeting with minutes to spare."

"Ah I was going to have a word with you about that. You didn't tell anyone about me stopping that train for you did you?" asked David.

"Well I know you told me not to mention it to anybody" Mister Marshall said. "After that meeting I went to my club in town and who was there having lunch but dear old George your top man. We have known each other since University days so I mentioned that there was a brilliant young man at Amberley who needed to be fast tracked."

"And I you told him I had stopped the express for you?" David asked.

"Of course that should have put you in line for promotion soon!" Mister Marshall added.

"Promotion?!!" David exclaimed. "Promotion! You nearly got me the sack!!!!" David went on to tell him why he should have kept what had happened to himself. Mister Marshall apologised and said he would have another word with George! David told him no thank you once had been enough. Mister Marshall said he had better go and get his train but as he was leaving he said to David that if the worse came to the worse he would always have a job for him with his organisation. David was not impressed and just told Mister Marshall to hurry over to his train.

The rest of the morning passed without further incident and it was now approaching two o'clock when Terry returned. He was surprised not to see David ready and waiting outside with the signal lamps. He did not have to wait long as with a screech of brakes Chris arrived just in time for his shift. David gave Chris all the necessary information to hand over the station and the signal box. He then informed him he was off to do the distant signal lamp in the local police vehicle! Chris told him he was a jammy sod!! David just smiled and carried on out to the police vehicle. After loading the signal lamp into the back of the police van, Terry and David set off for the Distant Signal, the smell of paraffin filtering through from the back of the vehicle. Terry told David that had both have to get rid of the smell of paraffin before the end of the day otherwise their respective females will not come within a mile of them. David said he had had this problem before and usually tried to fob them off with the tale that it was the new fragrance of Brute! Terry asked if telling them that had the desired effect? David had to agree that the usual reply was that in the negative!

Now the farm track alongside Farmer Brown forty acre field was hardly the M1 to get to the Distant Signal in fact it could hardly be called a track, and with the rain earlier that day it was more like a mud slide! Terry was not happy about the police vehicle getting slashed with all the mud from the puddles. Trying to avoid the bigger puddles and at the same time trying to catch one of Farmer Brown's prize chickens which had wondered out trying to find a bit of dry earth to scratch around in but like the police vehicle not having much luck. Terry was going not quite flat out in the Police vehicle but to say he was pushing it to the limits in the conditions would be tell to the truth. David was getting a bit worried about his own safety and the safety of the lamp in the back of the van! He did suggest to Terry that he slow down a bit. Terry instead put on the blue flashing lights and the siren. Now the few prize chickens running around frightened by the noise and flashing lights were running in all directions!

"I'll bloody get one in a minute!" exclaimed Terry. David suggested it was not the done thing for the local Bobby to be trying to kill one of the local residents!!!!

Fortunately or unfortunately as the case might be the chickens survived and the police vehicle arrived safely opposite the Distant Signal. Terry is not happy about not yet getting a bird for his tea.

"A bird!" repeats David, "I thought you were a happily married man!"

"I meant a feathered bird you Pratt!" exclaimed Terry. "You mean like one of them fan dancers?" asked David knowing full well what Terry was on about.

"No I fucking don't!" Terry was getting really wound up.
"Just go and get this blooming lamp done!"

David thought it was better to do just that. He picked up the oil lamp from the back of the police van and made his way across the embankment towards the railway line. He climbed through the fence and down to the trackside. The Distant Signal was not one of the tallest signals in his area which was good for David as he was not keen on heights. David put the lamp down on the ground and opened up the back to light the cloth wick. The wick was long enough to reach into the bottom of the small paraffin tank in the lamp. Once alight the lamp should last all week. Carrying the new lamp in one hand and climbing the signal ladder with his other David made his way to the top of the ladder. Due to the rain the ladder steps were wet and slippery.

David was glad this was a short ladder as every step up his foot slipped on the rung of the ladder. Even getting onto the small wooden platform at the top was no better. The wood was old and still wet from the morning rain which made it slippery to stand on. David was not at all keen on having to change the signal lamps and he was thinking that if he did have to leave Amberley this was the one job he would be pleased to be rid of. He put the new lamp down on the little wooden base at the top of the ladder. The signal arm was raised which meant that Chris back at the signal box had cleared the signal for a train, so quickly taking out the old lamp and placing it on the wooden platform beside the new lamp. David leaned over and wiped the signal arm and yellow and green glasses that gave the signal its colour to approaching drivers either in the dark or bad visibility. Having finished his cleaning he put the cloth he had used back in his pocket. All of a sudden he nearly fell off the little base he was standing on, as around the corner like a flash of lightening appeared the latest Victoria to the South Coast electric service. The driver on seeing David at the top of the signal gave a blast on the whistle.

David trying to keep his balance and wave an acknowledgement to the driver just about managed to raise an arm to show he had seen and heard the train. The train raced past with a swirl of rushing wind nearly knocking David off the signal. As soon as it appeared it was gone. David picked up the old signal lamp opened up the back of the lamp and blew out the light. He climbed back down the ladder his feet still slipping on the ladder. At the bottom of the signal David checked that there was not a train coming in the opposite direction before crossing back over the tracks to where Terry was waiting in the police vehicle, carefully stepping over the electrified lines which gave power to the trains in the middle of the two train tracks, and made his way back to the police van. Terry was still seated in the driving seat writing up his police diary. "I hope you are not putting down in there that you took me to the Distant Signal?" asked David.

"I am a Police Officer and everything I do should go down in this book," Terry told David.

David smiled, "Only should! That's alright then!"

"What do you mean by that young David?" asked Terry.
"I was just wondering what you did put in that book!"
David asked.

Terry suggested that David get back in the van if he wanted a lift back to the station, and not wanting to walk back to the station. David not really thinking he wanted to do that walk quickly climbed into the vehicle. Speeding back down the farm track with the remaining chickens of Farmer Brown flapping off out of the way just in time before the white van decapitated them! The two arrived back at the station somehow without a chicken hanging off the front of the police vehicle. David climbed out thanking Terry for an entertaining ride! He went round to the back of the vehicle and collected the old signal lamp. No sooner had David closed the door of the van than Terry gave a toot on the horn and was off down the yard. David watched the police vehicle disappear out of the station yard and turned to put the lamp in the lamping hut. He should really have cleaned and re-filled the lamp but with the wet weather looking like it might be on the way back and the time were against him, David thought the lamp would wait for another day. Anyway there were another four already cleaned and filled ready to go out. So he pulled the door to the lamp room closed and headed for this car and home.

CHAPTER 9

Meanwhile back in the station Chris was working through his afternoon shift. The down stopping train from London pulled into the station stopping alongside the signal box and booking hall. Chris wandered out onto the platform to see what there was to see on the train, female wise! Unfortunately for Chris the only passenger to get off the train was Mr. Williams the Station Manager. Chris was a bit surprised to see the Station Master he normally only visited in the morning but it seem lately that times of visits were being varied. Chris wondered if this was to catch them out with a radio on or someone unauthorised in the signal box. Both of which were against the rules. Maybe he thought perhaps it was the fact that the Station Master did not have a lot to do and was trying to fill in his time in case there could be made a case for him to be moved on as well as it looked like his and David's job would be. Still thinking on this Chris thought that without staff at Amberley perhaps there were plans to move the Station Master's job as well or at least give him a bigger area. However Chris's thoughts were interrupted as the Guard shouted to him if they were alright to go.

Chris coming back from his thoughts gave the right away signal by waving his arm to the Guard. The Guard acknowledged the hand signal and rang two beats on the bell to the Driver which the Driver repeated back and the train moved slowly off southwards. Chris went back into the signal box to carry out his signalling duties. Mr Williams after looking around outside for a couple of minutes followed him in.

"This is a surprise," stated Chris to the Station Master as Mister Williams entered.

"It's all part of the job," Mr. Williams told Chris. "Keep you young lads on your toes!"

Chris forced a slight smile not really knowing how to react.

"Now before we go any further I would like you to come outside with me," Mr. Williams told Chris. Chris was about to say that his Mum had told him about men asking him to go outside with them, when he thought better of it, and by now Mr. Williams was already out on the platform. Mr. Williams made his way down to the lamp standard where Chris had removed the station sign from. The Station Manager stopped and looked up at the bare post. Chris joined him but did not look up at what the SM was staring at.

"It seems we have lost a station sign Chris," Mr. Williams stated.

Chris forced himself to look up and put on a face of amazement. "Well jigger me Boss," he exclaimed. "What do you think has happened Chris?" asked Mr. Williams. "Do you have any idea?" Chris shook his head he was wondering how far the Amberley sign had travelled and if it was yet on its way to Texas!

"You know station signs are like engine nameplates they are collector's masterpieces these days" Chris hoped this might satisfy the SM.

"What are you telling me Chris? Someone stole the sign?" asked Mr. Williams.

"It seems the only answer," suggested Chris.

"But who and why would anyone want an Amberley sign it is not as if the station is going to close?" Mr. Williams asked.

"No it will just have no staff!" Chris decided it was good to make a comment on the proposals in the folder in the signal box.

"That has not yet been decided Chris," added the SM.

"No maybe not," Chris knew it was a foregone conclusion, but was not going to say so.

"Maybe someone wanted to hang the sign as a House-Name" Chris could not believe he had said that! Mr. Williams could not see it and asked why anyone would want to name their house after a railway station! "Perhaps it's their family name?" Again Chris could not believe what he was saying! Mr. Williams said that he had never heard of anybody with the name of Amberley had Chris? Chris had to cross his fingers and looked up to the heavens mouthed sorry and admitted he had never heard of anybody with that name either. Mr. Williams told Chris he would have a word with HQ about a replacement sign. With that he turned and headed back to the booking office/signal box. Chris quickly followed the SM pleased with himself that it appeared he had got away with disposing of the sign. Back in the signal box come booking office Mr. Williams asked if Chris and David had had a chance to look through the proposals of the station staffing. Chris told him they were working on it and asked if there was to be some sort of meeting where they could put their case. Mr. Williams said that they would have their chance to have their say and he would let them know when the meeting was arranged.

"Now," Mr. Williams said, "I had better be getting back. I only came to get out of the way we have a couple of Wise Guys from Croydon doing a Time and Motion at Pulborough. So yours might not be the only station up for staff cuts!" Chris thought what he had been thinking before might have not been far from the truth. With that and not giving Chris a chance to reply perhaps thinking he had said too much the SM was off towards the other platform and the next train back to Pulborough. Leaving Chris still thinking that maybe it was not just the jobs at Amberley that were at risk. It was now Friday evening and Chris was still pondering on the events of the afternoon. Had he got away with selling an Amberley station sign to the American Couple? What was he going to spend the money on that he made on the sign? Were the staff cuts spread further than just at Amberley. All of a sudden there was a burst of noise as two young females from the village came through the outside door into the booking hall.

"Hello Chris" shouted the first of the young ladies. It was Susan and her friend Linda. "On your own are you?" she asked. "Linda here was hoping your good looking mate might have been here"

"No I wasn't!" answered Linda, quickly putting her friend right.

"Yes you were Linda" Susan replied. "You know you fancy him!"

"Yes well he does have a lovely nature" Linda said coyly. "Is that so?" asked Chris. "I can't say I have ever noticed his nature!"

"Ah well if he is not here we'll be off" Susan turned back towards the outside door. "Come on Linda."

"You could always stop here and keep me company?" suggested Chris, but Susan was already on her way out. "Hang on a minute," called back Linda, who was still at the booking office window. "When will David be on duty again?"

"He will be on in the morning," Chris told her. "And then he is doubling back to do the night shift."

"Night shift!" repeated Linda.

"Yes" confirmed Chris. "We don't do nights here unless they are working on the line, and being as tomorrow is Saturday there are some weekend engineering works taking place and it needs the signal box open."

"So will David be here all night?" asked Linda with a slight hint of hope in her voice. Chris confirmed that that would be the case and he noticed a slight hint of a smile on Linda's face.

"Right might be back tomorrow then," Linda gave Chris a wink and followed Susan out of the booking hall door. Chris was left wondering if David knew what was in line for him! The last train of the day came and went. Chris closed the signal box and put all the lights out on the station. Locking up he made his way to his car. Looking at his watch he thought he might be alright for a drink in the local pub. Even though it was after hours he knew the code for the back door!! He was hoping perhaps the two girls might still be there. If Linda fancied David, he had always had a thing for her friend Susan even though he had known both girls for years he had never followed up any romance with Susan, until now! What Chris did not see was a young couple waiting for him to go so they could make their way towards the station waiting room to shelter for the night. After Chris's car disappeared out of the station yard the young couple who had been hiding in the bushes alongside the driveway came out into the yard.

"Come on Claire" called the young man. "Let's get to this waiting room at least again tonight we shall have some shelter over our heads."

The young lady was none too pleased at their lifestyle at the present time. The man told her this would be the last night she would have to suffer and tomorrow his friend was driving down from London to pick them up and they would have a proper bed for the night in his spare room while they sorted out where to go from there. Claire the young lady replied that perhaps they had thought better about things before running away and she was missing her home, parents and friends she had left behind. The man told her that once they were settled and he had found work they could contact everyone and once they saw how they had sorted out their lives they would come around to their way of thinking and all would be well again. The young lady was still not so sure but her partner put his arm around her and told to come on let's go and get in our love nest for the night. Luckily for the couple the side gate to the platform was always open in case anything ever went wrong in the morning and there would still be access to the station for the few passengers that used the station that early in the day. Quickly the couple ran over the footbridge and into the waiting room on the other side of the station.

Luckily the night was clear and there was a full moon which gave a lot of illumination to the station. Going into the waiting room the young man found a light switch and putting it on looked around the sparse waiting room. All it consisted of was a wooden seat fixed to the wall of the building. Claire did not think much to it. The young man said at least it was covered and in the dry. Opening up the bag he had carried in with him he got out a sleeping bag and laid it out on the floor. Next he put the carrying bag at the top of the sleeping bag as a pillow.

"Your bed for the night your Majesty!" he says. Claire looks at it with disgust saying it is hardly like her bed at home.

"I hope this will be the last time we have to sleep on the floor Luke? You told me last night would be the last on this floor" asks Claire. "I know at least we are under cover better than we have done so far but it is not a lot better having to sneak in and hide and be out before someone finds us. I cannot go on like this much longer." Luke leans across and kisses his runaway friend and tells her this will be the last night sleeping like this so let's get in and keep warm together. Although not the best way of spending the night they do eventually get into the sleeping bag and settle down as best they can.

CHAPTER 10

Saturday morning dawned cold and overcast. Early on before anyone arrived at the station saw a couple of young people emerge from the station waiting room and make their way out of the side gate and walk away down the station yard.

"So are you sure that we shall be on our way to London today Luke?" asks Claire the young lady who has been sharing the last week with Luke her runaway boy friend. "I've told you Babe. Ron will be here later in the day and we shall have a proper little room for us by tonight."

Luke the boyfriend replied.

"Well I hope you are right," stated Claire. "If not I am off home as I cannot go on like this!" Luke assured her what he had said would happen. Just after the couple had left and headed towards the village of Amberley a car came into the yard from the opposite direction. The car pulled into the station yard and stopped behind the window of the booking office/signal box. David the early turn Signalman got out shut and locked the car door. Putting his key into the lock of the Booking Hall door and turning the key the big door swung open. David stepped inside and continued to open the booking office door this also led into the signal box.

David put his bag down on the counter and went out into the booking hall again. He went out onto the platform and scouted round for any sign of life. Normally he would not have done this but he had remembered his conversation with the rough looking couple the days before and them saying they were going to kip down in the waiting room for the one night, and maybe more David wanted to make sure that if the station had had visitors they had already gone. To make sure they were at least out of the waiting room he quickly walked across the footbridge to the waiting room on the far platform. Opening the door it did look like someone had been in there but there was no way of knowing if this was during the time the station was open or when it was closed. David picked up a couple of crisp packets and put them in the bin by the door. Closing the door he went back to the booking office happy to find that although there did look as though someone had been there the waiting room was clear. David on arriving back in the office got into the routine of opening the signal box and getting the ticket section set up for an improbable rush of customers. It being a Saturday morning he was not surprised the first train came and went without the sign of anyone to get on or anyone getting off for that matter.

While draining the last drop of his second coffee to wake him up David pondered if anyone would have missed him if he had had another hour in bed. It also occurred to him that maybe this is the reasoning behind the taking away of staff at Amberley station.

His thoughts were suddenly ended by the sound of a vehicle braking hard and coming to a halt outside the station door. David recognised that sound and immediately went to open the door and refill the kettle. He had just plugged the kettle in again when there was a thump on the outside door.

David called, "Come in Terry the door is open." The door was pushed open. "You know you ought to be in the Police Force young David" remarked Terry the village policeman with a big smile on his face as he entered the booking office. "I know you don't get many callers but knowing it was me was really good!"

"Bollocks!" called David from the other side of the room where he was getting the cups ready for the intended drink. "It does not take a Sherlock Holmes to know it is you screeching to a halt outside my window at this unearthly hour!"

"Unearthly hour the day is nearly half over!" exclaimed the policeman.

"Maybe for you," answered David. "For me it has just begun and not only that I shall be back tonight and then again tomorrow afternoon!"

"But think of all that lovely overtime you are making," Terry stated.

"Yes get it while I can because they won't thank you for it and when they don't want you anymore its cheerio and fuck you!" said David with a angry tone to his voice.

"That sounds very bitter young David," said Terry. "I know they are thinking of moving you but sometimes it can work out for the better."

"Yeh!" David smirked.

"Yes," Terry continued. "I had the same thing when I was transferred here and look what a good move it was for me."

"Hmm," David certainly was not convinced however, he just carried on making the coffee.

"Anyway changing the subject," said Terry. "I saw your college in the village pub after work with the terrible twins last night."

"And what time was that?" asked David.

"About half past midnight" Terry replied.

"That was after hours for the local pub wasn't it?" asked David. "Were you there on a raid?"

"A Raid! God no! I was having a pint after my shift."

Terry explained.

"So how come everyone was drinking after hours?" asked David.

"David," Terry continued, "this is a small village and things aren't always run according to the laws made in London. Sometimes you have to go with the flow and besides I won't have got my pint!" David just raised his eyebrows. Nothing that happened in Amberley these days amazed him. So he just asked what his work mate Chris was doing with the two girls. Terry told him as far as he could see they were just having a drink. However Linda did not look too interested and left before Chris and Susan. David wanted to know if she left on her own. Terry said as far as he could tell she did. David was a bit concerned of someone walking home on their own at that time of night.

"For one thing," said Terry. "She was perfectly safe as I was still around! The other thing is it was only a short walk home for her, anyway why would you be so interested?"

"I'm not!" exclaimed David. Terry seemed to think that there was more to it than David was telling. David felt himself getting hot.

Terry smiled knowing he was right. "So how long have you had a thing for Linda?" he asked.

"I don't have a thing for her!" David's voice did not sound convincing. "I just think that she looks nice and away from her pal she could be a very lovely person to get to know."

"In other words you fancy her rotten!" Terry stated his smile spreading across his face. "Mate there is nothing to be ashamed of she is a smashing girl. High spirited yes but go for it."

"It will probably never get anywhere," David started shaking his head. "I have never said anything to her and anyway I shall be moving on soon by the look of things." Terry told David even more reason to make a move as quick as possible. David was none too sure as he had no idea if she felt the same way. Terry told David that he was a young man and she was a young woman both unattached to anybody what more did he want. "Go for it!"

David said for now he would have to wait and see as he did not go into the village he had little chance of meeting her. Terry said he would put in a good word for him. David said that was the last thing he needed!

The conversation was interrupted by the first customer of the day. One of the local lads from the village wanting a day return ticket to London to see Arsenal play Newcastle. David a Brighton fan was tempted to ask why the lad was not supporting his local county side, when he thought top division football against what he would see on the south coast- no contest if you could afford it! David issued the ticket and gave the chap his change. David was then drawn to his signal box duties to signal the train for the Arsenal fan. After downing the perfect brew Terry was getting ready to go when David asked him if he had seen the couple in the village that had been sleeping rough. Terry said he had been aware of the two strangers but as neither of them had been reported missing and both said they were over the age of consent as he had a word with them at the pub the other day. He knew they were probably sleeping rough somewhere around the area but could not do anything unless someone complained. He asked what they had to do with David. Had they caught a train as he understood they would be moving soon? David told him about them staying at the station. Terry said was that not against the rules.

David told him he felt sorry for them and told them as long as they came after the last train and went before the first that day which they had he would turn a blind eye. David added perhaps a bit like Terry might do!

Terry about to say something when David put in that he said Terry only might do! Terry decided after that remark it was time he made a move and go and deal with the latest crime wave in Amberley village! David asked what this was.

"I'm sorry," Terry explained, "I cannot tell you but it has something to do with a major tax evasion going on in the village."

David looked in disbelief at Terry, and asked what on earth was going on in a little village like Amberley.

"There are two cars whose tax has run out and the owners need a kick up the bum to renew them otherwise I might end up with unwanted paperwork!"

Terry told David.

David said that was more believable and asked what will happen if they still ignore the reminder? Terry told him he would get one of his colleges to book them!

"And that way it still saves you the paperwork?" David asked.

"Exactly!" confirmed Terry, and with that he was on his way to sort out the latest crime wave!!!

As Terry was leaving a very nice and lovely looking young lady was on her way in.

"Morning Linda" called Terry, loud enough for David to hear.

"Yes very funny," called back David from inside the booking off. "Now piss off!"

"That's not a good way to treat a customer" commented Linda arriving at the booking office window.

David was taken aback and started to stutter. Linda just stood there letting David squirm for a minute before holding up her hand. "Ok I accept your apology"

"Sorry" said David, "what can I do for you?"

"Well where shall I start?" Linda asked with a smile.

David said that he thought she should start from here. Linda was getting a bit impatient, but agreed that yes they should start from here.

David was not too sure what Linda was talking about. Did she want to go anywhere by train.

"No" confirmed Linda. "I came to see you but trying to get you to see that is proving very hard going!"

David was a bit lost for words. He had of course had thoughts on Linda, as he had confessed to the local policeman earlier that day, and now here she was here answering his dreams!

"I am not use to being in this position so how do we go from here? David asked. "Or have I got it completely wrong? If I have I am sorry."

Linda leaned forward so her warm breath started to mist up the ticket office window. Just then the bell rang in the signal box.

"Shit!" shouted David. "Sorry" he continued. Linda said not to worry but should he not be doing something about that bell? David agreed and went into the signal box and signalled the next train. Coming back into the booking office area carried on the conversation they had started before. Within minutes the two were like old friends chattering away forty to the dozen.

Eventually David asked if Linda would like a coffee. To his delight she said yes and David invited her into the office. Some hours and drinks later, after the whole morning when trains and passengers had come and gone, the two of them were still sitting close together in the booking office. All of a sudden there was a screech of brakes in the car park outside the station building window. There was the sound of a car door slamming and someone running in and thumping hard on the office door. David opened the door and his relief Chris fell in!

"Come on Dave I would have thought you would have been ready to shoot and fuck off into the sun..."Chris stopped before the end of the sentence when he saw Linda sitting in the corner.

Quickly recovering from the shock of seeing a young lady in the office Chris continued, "Sorry Linda I did not see you sitting there."

"Obviously" stated Linda.

"This is why you disappeared so fast last night then?" asked Chris.

"No" replied Linda, "not that it is any of your business!" Chris looked at Linda as if to say he knew what the situation was but decided not to say anymore on the subject.

Instead David took over the conversation telling Chris the situation in the signal box. When he had finished he took Linda's hand and said, "Come on then my shift has done here let's get out before we get anymore wise cracks." Linda agreed, smiled at Chris and holding on tightly to David's hand followed him out of the office. "Bye Dave, Linda, have fun!" called Chris. He did not get a reply and he really did not expect one! Then as an afterthought he called, "Don't forget you are back tonight to relieve me!"

Again he did not get an answer but knowing David, and knowing how dedicated David was Chris was sure David would be back on time for the extra night shift due that night for the planned engineering work. Meanwhile David and Linda had left in David's car. After a couple of minutes David realised he had no idea where he was heading!

"Ah" David looked towards the young lady in the car.
"Where am I taking you?"

"You mean you have dragged me out of your castle into your chariot and whisked me away to have your wicked way with me and you don't know where you are going to do it!!" asked Linda with the straightest of faces!!
David turned his head to look at the lovely girl sitting beside him in the car he could not believe what she had just said or if to take her seriously he had never met anyone quite like her before.

"David!!" shouted Linda, pointing to a very large tractor coming down the road towards them!

David turned his eyes back to the road ahead just in time to avoid the car hitting the side of the oncoming tractor.

"Sorry" he apologised, as the tractor and its load of hay passed safely by.

"I know I like to live dangerously," replied Linda, "but not that dangerously. Do you always drive like that?"

"Only when a lovely girl sitting beside me and distracts me!" David assured her.

"Remember to tell me not talk to you while you are driving then," Linda informed him. David pulled the car into a lay by at the side of the country lane. By now they had passed the village and were heading towards the next village.

"Sorry" said David again once the car was at a stand.

"Will you stop saying sorry?" Linda asked. "And come here!" She pulled David across towards her and planted her lips on his. If David wanted to disapprove of her actions he did not show it and joined in wholeheartedly. Their first kiss went on and on, only ending when they both had to take a breath. The widows of the car were steamed up! David looked at the heavenly person next to him in the car. His life had seemed to have flashed before him! He wanted to say so much about how that was the most fabulous kiss he had ever had, but words would not come out. Instead actions spoke more and he took Linda's face in his hands and returned the kiss. The couple continued like this for quite awhile until eventually Linda put her finger to David's lips and brought them both back to earth.

"Like I was saying," she said with the hint of a wicked smile, "where are you taking me?"

David recovering his composure, "do you know I haven't got a clue? Where do you want to go?" They both laughed. This led to another tantalising embrace, from which they finally unlocked themselves. David said the trouble was he should be getting some rest as he was back at work tonight. Linda was not keen on him doing that, the work part any way. She did seem quite ok with the resting part though! David told her that perhaps he should take her home and maybe Linda could drop down to the station tomorrow afternoon as he would be doubling back again after the Saturday night shift to do his usual Sunday afternoon. Linda was not happy at David working all these hours and should there not be someone else sharing the work. David told her that Chris was doing the same tonight coming back on the Sunday morning. This was an exception to the usual work pattern. It was due to the need to open the signal box for the engineering work that weekend. Linda looked at David and nodded not really taking in the reason for him to work all weekend. However agreeing that he should get some rest without her being there and told David to turn the car around and take her back to Amberley village.

Arriving at the edge of the village he stopped the car where Linda had indicated. After a quick kiss and Linda was out of the car and off towards her parent's house. David watched her go and thinking to himself what a vision of loveliness she was. Linda turned and blew another kiss before disappearing out of sight into the village. David let off the handbrake of the car and as if in a dream drove off for his home, a small flat, in fact a very small flat in Worthing.

CHAPTER 11

Back at the station Chris was settling into his Saturday Afternoon shift. Saturday afternoons tended to be quiet especially this time of the year. All of a sudden a car could be heard racing up the station approach and screeching to a halt outside the booking hall entrance. There is the sound of two car doors being slammed. Two young men literary burst through the outside door and bang on the booking office door.

“Chris! Chris!” shout the lads together. These two young men are friends of Chris from the village. Andy Barton is 24 years old with short dark mosey brown hair and wearing the regulation jeans, t-shirt and trainers from a well known manufacturer. His college in this barrage of noise is John Dawson. He is a year older. His hair is a bit more stylish as are his clothes in fitting with him being that bit older than Andy. Chris was used to these two turning up in this way. He opens the booking office door. “Hello lads are you alright?” Andy and John piled into the booking office.

“So what do I owe this visit too?” asked Chris.

“Well,” started Andy. “We thought you might like join us this afternoon?” added John.

"In case you had not noticed I am working here this afternoon" Chris informed them.

"The thing is we are one short in the village footie team this afternoon" Andy told him. "And it is a vital match we are getting towards the end of the season and we still have a chance of the title."

"Now you are talking rubbish the only title our team ever gets is the Why Do They Bother Title!" Chris told them.

"That's not fair we have been doing well this season!" John corrected. "So can you help us keep up our chance of the league?"

"I suppose you could not get David Beckham then" Chris replied sarcastically. "So you wanted someone as good and you immediately thought of me!"

"Well there is Mister Davidson but he has not played for a while" said Andy.

"I should think not he must be ninety if he is a day!" Chris informed them.

"So my friend that leaves you to keep the village team from a heavy defeat," John stated. "You do realise it is Bury Village we are playing?"

"What all of them!" Chris exclaimed in amazement!

"Just those eleven big guys who tend to kick a ball and anything else in their way!" Andy corrected.

"But I told you I am working here all afternoon!" exclaimed Chris. John suggested that Chris could shut the place up for a couple of hours and leave the side gate open as had been done before when there were no staff on duty.

"That is alright but the signal box is open" explained Chris. Andy asked Chris if he could not close the box for a couple of hours as it was Saturday afternoon as it could not be that busy. Chris thought about this for a couple of minutes. Then he agreed that it would be possible but he would have to tell the Control he was going out to do a signal lamp that was showing no light. John said, "Whatever, but get a move on the kick off is getting close." Chris told him to have patience these things took time to sort out. Andy told him they would wait in the car for him. Inside the car Andy was tapping his fingers against the steering wheel. "Come on Chris" he shouted and then lowering his voice he turned towards John. "We'll never make the kick off at his rate!"

"He'll be out in a minute. Relax the game is not due to start for another fifteen minutes." John told him.

"Yeh but we have got to get there and get changed yet!" yelled Andy.

"Clam down we'll make it ok." John reassured him. All of a sudden there is a crash of a door slamming shut and a figure rushing towards them.

It opens the rear door of the car and Chris climbs in.

"You'll both get me fucking shot for this you know!"

Andy is not listening he has put the car into gear and the vehicle is off with a screech as the brakes are released!

"Steady on!" shouts John above the noise of the car racing away. "We want to get there in one piece!"

"And my nerves are bad enough with leaving this place unattended without having you drive like a bat out of hell!" Chris added.

"You want to get there for the start don't you?" Andy asked.

"Yes but in one piece" Chris told him. Before anyone could say anymore the car swung into the local football pitch car park and skidded to a halt beside the changing rooms.

"Come on!" shouted Andy as he dived out of the vehicle, closely followed by the other two. All three ran into the changing room.

The cold wind was blowing across the local football pitch which made the corner flags extend and flap wildly about. On the far side of the pitch stood two figures rapped up against the cold. It was Linda and Susan, at least one waiting to see the local talent from the two villages. It was not the football talent that she was here to look at either!!

"Susan can you tell me why we are stood on this cold wet piece of earth with the wind whistling around our fannies!" asked Linda through the scarf wrapped around her face.

Susan tried to put her right. "Because dear Linda," she started, "Something else might want to whip round our fannies very shortly!"

"Well I hope it's a bit hotter than this wind!" stated Linda.

"Oh I'm sure it will be," Susan assured her. "Look here it comes now" The two football teams emerge from the changing rooms and run out onto the pitch. The small crowd of hardy spectators clap and the odd cheer can be heard. Susan did both as well as adding a wolf whistle to the other noises. Her friend Linda did neither and just pulled her coat tighter around herself.

"Come on Linda" called Susan. "Give the boys a cheer!"

Linda told her that she was frozen stood there in the cold standing in a wet field! "Mind you," she said, "some of those fellers out there could warm me up. Do they swap shorts at the end?"

"Unfortunately it's shirts they swap at the end of football matches." Susan informed Linda. "It doesn't matter here. As we don't do either! Otherwise we would need a new kit every week and we are not as rich as Manchester United!"

Linda replied she thought that if they to swap shorts it might be fun as it did not look like any of the boys were wearing underpants! Susan was amazed at this remark but turned it back by suggesting Linda was sex mad. However that made two of them! They both broke into fits of laughter at this thought!!

"What's happening now?" asks Linda. The two team captains are in the middle of the pitch with the referee. "They're tossing up to see who gets which end," Susan informs her.

"Now that sounds more interesting!" says Linda excitedly.

Susan shakes her head. "Tossing a coin Linda! Tossing a coin!"

Linda looks deflated "Oh shame!"

The toss up having been made, the teams swap ends. Susan calls to Linda as she makes her way down the side line. "Come on Linda we are playing this way." "There is only one way I like to play!" states Linda. "Later girl! Come on we're kicking towards this goal." Susan points towards the goal at the far end of the pitch. They both stumble off towards the opposition goal mouth, Linda thinking she would have been better off with boots on than the high heels she was wearing! At the centre circle Andy and Chris stand over the ball. Chris looked down the pitch. "I must be mad to have agreed to this! Not only should I be at work but by the look of the opposition we are going to get murdered!" "They're just bigger than us. Size makes no difference you know that?" Andy told him. "Yeh, I've told girls that before and they never believed me!" Chris replied. Andy told him to stop worrying and get on with the game. The Referee blew his whistle and the game was underway. After only ten minutes the away side are kicking hell out of the local Amberley side and on top of that Amberley are two goals down! Chris manages to get the ball and is streaking down the touchline when manhandled into touch falling at the feet of a spectator. As Chris gets up from the cold ground he comes face to face with Mister Williams!!!

"Chris?" asks the astonished Station Master.

Chris thinking quickly replies, "Chris? No mate that's my brother he works at the station."

"Yes that's right," replies Mister Williams. "Or at least he used too!"

"Yes, well Carl is the name. Got to go, got a game to finish." With that the footballer runs off leaving an unimpressed and unbelieving Station Master staring after him!

As he runs back Chris grabs hold of Andy. "I've got to get back to the station the boss is here I forgot this other lot are his local side!"

"Well that's alright then isn't it!" shouted Andy. "In case you hadn't noticed they're two nil up and it's his team in the lead so he won't be going anywhere will he?"

Chris agreed.

Andy asked if the Station Master had seen him.

"Of course he fucking saw me!" shouted back Chris.

Andy asked what the Station Master had said. Chris told him that he had made out to be his brother Carl.

"Who the fuck's Carl?" asked Andy.

"Exactly!" replied Chris. "So I don't want to hang around for him to find out!" Andy told him to stick it out until half time as he had a plan.

The next time the Amberley team do manage to get to the opposition goal mouth Andy runs around the goal towards the two girls stood watching in the cold of the afternoon. "Nice shorts!" shouts Susan as Andy runs by. "Listen girls do us a favour try and distract the goalie when we next attack and maybe we might get a goal back!" suggests Andy.

"And how are we supposed to do that?" asks Susan. "I am sure you will think of something!" shouts Andy as he runs back up the pitch while the Goalie prepares to take the goal kick.

"What was that all about?" asks Linda. "Come on Linda, surely even you can work out that the team needs a bit of help?"

"You don't mean we are going on to play do you?" asks Linda.

"Now that would be something in our tight skirts and high heels I think if we did that we could score with the whole team!" Susan laughed. "No, I was thinking we could distract this fellow in goal so the Amberley side might score instead!"

"What the Amberley team are going to score with their goalie and I thought they were all ladies men!" said an amazed Linda.

Susan looked at her friend in horror not really believing what she had just said. After explaining what she really meant a relieved Linda still did not see how they were going to achieve their goal!!! The next time the ball crossed the half way line Susan leaned around the goal post and called to the opposition goal keeper.

"Hey up handsome it must be great playing in those tight shorts I bet there is more in there than meets the eye?" The Goalie not believing what he has just heard turned towards the girls who are standing at the edge of his goal. Susan lifting her leg up the side of the goal post displaying an awful lot of thigh from underneath her long coat! Linda seeing the idea decides it might be fun to join in so opening her coat leans round her friend and pulled down her top slightly to expose more than enough flesh. This distraction was enough to give the Amberley side the break they wanted.

"John! For fuck's sake! John!!" shouts one of the defenders trying to get back only to see Andy's shot fly into the far side of the goal before the distracted Goalie had the time to get across. As he runs back to his cheering team mates Andy looks back to the girls and gives them a thumbs up!

The Goalie picking the ball out of the back of the net and looks towards the two girls who are adjusting their dress. "Thanks a bunch!!"

"We haven't done anything yet!" calls Susan. "We thought you would have to wait for the end of the game before you could do anything?"

"I don't think I want anything from you two!" the disgruntled man turned back to watch the game and hopefully ignore the two spectators at his goal.

"Come on Linda I think our work here is done"

"Thank goodness for that I am freezing!" a relieved Linda says pulling her coat back around her. She starts off towards the gate.

"Where do you think you are going?" asks Susan.

"You said we had done here and I am cold!"

"I said we had done here meaning by the goal there is still work to be done our team is still losing. So come on I have an idea to help!" With that Susan is off towards the changing rooms, a disgruntled Linda following.

"So what are we going to do now!" asks Linda trying to keep up with her friend.

"Wait and see" Susan told her. "It is nearly half time."

"Half time!" calls Linda, "You mean there is another part to this!"

The half time whistle is blown by the Referee. The teams head towards the changing rooms for a break, quick drink and hopefully a few words of encouragement from their Manager! Meanwhile the two girls watch as the teams run past. Susan looks at the teams especially admiring the lad's athletic physic. "They do look fit don't they Linda?" Linda nods still wondering what they are really doing here on a cold Saturday afternoon when other things warmer might be more suitable, like being in front of the fire at home! Chris and Andy pass by the girls into their half of the changing rooms.

"Keep up the good work girls!" calls Andy as he passes. "A few more tricks like that and we might even win this one for a change!"

Chris stops alongside the two girls. "You ought to be careful you know. We all want to win the game but sometimes things can get out of hand this being a local derby and all. Just watch what you are doing don't let Andy talk you into anything else." He blows a kiss towards Susan. "See you later I shall be back at the station after the game."

Susan says she will see him there later as she is going home after the game to change.

Andy shouts Chris to get inside as the team are discussing tactics for the second half. "Got to go see you later," and with that he disappears into the hut.

"Do we really have to watch the rest of the game Susan?" asks Linda. "I am freezing here!"

"Look one more little plan and we can go" Susan tells her.

"I flaming well hope so!" exclaims Linda. The girls are walking around outside the changing rooms trying to keep warm as the teams come out for the second half. "Come on Amberley!" shouts Susan. Linda by now is too cold to even care! Both teams run off towards the pitch the last to exit is the away team goalie. Linda steps up towards him as he is leaving.

"Sorry if we put you off but we both think you are a bit of a hulk!" Linda looks at her friend in amazement wondering what she is up to now!

"Yeh, well it was my fault for looking round. Can you keep away from the goal for the second half?"

"Ok we will stay at the other end out of your way. Oh by the way your mate said to bring the bag out with you as you are the last man," Susan said innocently.

"Bag? What bag?" asked the Goalie.

"I don't know," replied Susan. "Just said as he ran by tell John to bring the bag with him."

"Oh he must mean the medical bag fancy leaving that." The Goalie returns to the changing rooms. Quick as a flash Susan shuts the door and turns the key in the lock. "What the hell do you think you are doing?" asks Linda in shock at the actions of her friend who by now has taken the key out of the lock and is walking back towards the pitch. "Come on!" she shouts. "Before anyone notices!"

"Just what the hell are you doing Susan?" asks a bemused Linda.

"Just giving our team a bit of help! It is all in the game!" With that she is off towards the Amberley end of the pitch.

"I thought we were going and not stopping for the second half? Linda asked. "Why are we going to this end again I thought they changed ends at half time."

"No need if my plan works we shall win this without any more help from us!" Susan tells her.

"Does that mean we can go now then?" Linda asks hopefully.

"Unfortunately not just yet dear sister in crime I just want to see if my plan works!" says a smiling Susan. The Referee checks his watch and signals to the Amberley Goalie to see if he is ready who acknowledges his signal. The Ref looks towards the opposition goal which is bare.

"Where is your Goalie?" he shouts to the Manager on the touchline. The Manager looking in vain at the empty goal puts his arms up as if to say he has no idea.

"Well we cannot wait it will be too dark to play if we wait any longer put someone in goal until you find him."

"The Manager starts to argue with the Referee that, that is silly, but the Referee says he will start the game without a Goalie if necessary. Quickly the Manager digs a goal keeping shirt out of the kit bag and throws it at one of his players. "Mike go and get in goal for a minute while I go and find the Pratt!" Mike pulls the yellow shirt over his own shirt, and runs towards the goal muttering what he will do to the missing goal keeper when he turns up. Having sorted out the problem the Referee blows his whistle and the game resumes.

"So what has that achieved?" asks a puzzled Linda.

"Just wait and see," Susan tells her. "Firstly they only have ten players and their goalie cannot be as good as the other one so we should be better off."

"But what is going to happen when they find out you have locked the goalie in the hut!" Linda asks.

"Don't worry Linda have you ever known me to let us down?"

"US!" exclaims Linda. "This is all your doing this!"

"Two for One and all together that's us is it not?" asks Susan. "So we are in it together as always and as always we shall come out victorious! You know I have never let you down yet have I?"

"Well" Linda started, "there was the time in Brighton in the men's toilets!"

"Yes well that was because we fancied that DJ!"

"Then there was the time on the train with those lads and the Guard caught us!" Linda continued. "And on the top of the 700 bus coming back to Littlehampton when you flashed your bits at those lads on the seafront!"

"Oh I had forgotten about that their faces were a picture!" Susan laughed.

"And" Linda started.

"Alright you have made your point. However it has all been in fun as it is today." Susan explained.

"Well I do not think the other team will see it that way?" Linda said shaking her head. "I think we should go before we or rather you get found out!"

"In a few minutes just give the game time to turn." Susan told her friend.

"And how long will that take?" Linda did not get a reply as a cheer had gone up from the few brave home team supporters watching.

"Yes!" shouted Susan. "We have equalised!"

"Great does that mean we can go now?" Linda asks hopefully.

"Not just yet" Linda tells her. Meanwhile at the changing rooms hut the away team Manager has arrived at the door to find it locked and no key being in the lock. Banging on the door he hears a shout from inside.

"Is that you John?" shouts the Manager.

"Yes! Some Pratt has locked me in!" Was the reply from inside the hut.

"Well who has got the key?" shouts the Manager at the locked door.

"How the fuck do I know! Just find whoever has got it and get me out!"

"Stay there I will see what I can do" advises the Manager.

"I'd have a job to do anything else won't I?" the trapped Goalie shouts back. The Manager nodding makes his way back to the touchline to enquire who has the key for the changing rooms. Ron Davison the Amberley Manager says that if anybody it should be the last man out and he should give it to him until the end of the game but as yet no one has given him the key. Ron is amazed when told that the last man does not seem to have come out of the changing room yet!

"So who has got it?" asks the away team Manager seemingly getting nowhere with his efforts to free his trapped Goalie. Ron says that if no one else the grounds-man will have one.

"Where's he then?" asks the Manager.

"I suppose he has gone home and will be back at the end to lock up after us," Ron tells him.

"That's no good for me is it?" shouts the Manager.

"Not a lot more I can do unless you can find the person that has got the key, sorry. Meanwhile we have a game to concentrate on."

"Don't I know it? I think there is some funny business going on here!" Ron just shakes his head and says that perhaps the other man should keep a better eye on his team. The Manager makes a remark under his breath and walks off towards his assistant who has been trying to re-arrange the team without a proper goal-keeper and playing with ten men. Unfortunately Amberley were right back in the game but could not take advantage until the last couple of minutes when Andy goes on a run down the right wing and crosses the ball which the stand-in Goalie only manages to palm out into the path of the incoming Chris who hammers it into the back of the net! Amberley go into the lead for the first time with only a few minutes to go.

On the other side of the pitch the two girls watch as Amberley take the lead. A happy Susan tells her friend it is time they went.

"I thought you were never going to say that!" says a relieved Linda. As the two walk past the changing rooms Susan takes the so called lost key out of her pocket and quietly puts it into the lock holding a finger over her lips to silence any comment from her friend. Then waving to her friend to follow her, they both make their way off the ground and head back to the village. As the girls leave the final whistle is blown by the referee Amberley have beaten their biggest rivals for the first time in a very long time. Chris hurriedly makes his way to the changing rooms and finding the key in the lock turns it and goes inside to find a very annoyed away team Goalie inside!

"Sorry I haven't time to argue the toss mate I have to get back to work," Chris tells him. Quickly he is changed and dragging Andy towards the car telling him he needs to get back to the station in case the Station Master happens to call in on his way home! With the two of them in the car they speed off towards the railway station.

Five minutes later Chris is back at work and Andy happy with the day's result is off back to celebrate with the rest of the team. Chris was just settling down to a well earned cuppa when there is a knock at the booking office door. Moaning to himself Chris raises his football weary body from the chair to open the door.

"Evening Chris" says Mister Williams the Station Master standing the other side of the door. "Can I come in?"

"Yes sorry," Chris opens the door to let the Station Master in. "Don't often see you this time of the evening Boss. These out of hour's visits are becoming a regular thing"

"No I've been to the local derby footie game in the village. I met your twin brother at the match Chris. Carl is it? You never mentioned you had a twin brother before and identical one as well."

"Yes but we do not get on that well so I do not say a lot about him."

"That is a shame he seemed a nice guy even if he was playing for your village team," Mister Williams added.

"Yeh at least he helped us win!" Chris smiled.

"My," said the Station Master, "News travels fast in this village the game only finished a few minutes before I left to come here!"

"Well Andy one of the team dropped by to tell me the score." Chris was hoping his explanation would be acceptable! "Right, yes they were lucky though. We seemed to have lost our goalie for the second half!"

"Really, that sounds a bit odd!" Chris agreed.
"Yes no doubt we will have an explanation tomorrow.
Meanwhile are you putting that kettle on?"

After an enjoyable cup of coffee, at least Mister Williams enjoyed it Chris was too worried about the meeting Mister Williams had had with his nonexistent twin brother!"

"Well I had better be on my way" said Mister Williams at last. A relieved Chris opened the door for him to go.
"See you again soon Chris," Mister Williams turned just as he was leaving. "Oh by the way just love the socks Chris or is it Carl?" Chris looked down to see that he had never changed out of his football socks after the game. By the time Chris looked up to try and give an answer as to why he should be wearing footie socks at work his visitor had left to get in his car to return to Pulborough!! Chris was still wondering about the sock problem when a car pulled up at the back of the office window and David his relief for the night shift walked in.

CHAPTER 12

"Evening Chris" says David as he enters. "Alright are we?"

"I am now you have arrived mate it's been a hell of a day!" Chris eases himself out of the chair and goes to the Train Register Book to sign off duty and hand over the working of the signal box and station to his colleague. "Saturday afternoon," replies David. "It should have been a doddle this time of year especially as it is so cold today. What problems could you have had?"

"You cannot imagine young David!" exclaimed Chris handing the pen to David to sign on in the same book. "Try me then. Train failure? Signal Failure? What?"

"No nothing was wrong here in fact the place was shut up for over two hours!" Chris started to reveal his desertion of duty that afternoon. David did not know whether to admire his cheek or reprimand him for leaving the station unattended all afternoon. In the end he felt justice had probably been done by the Station Manager finding out that Chris and Carl were the same person and perhaps he had not heard the last of the incident from his Boss yet! Chris said that it would not matter as the station would be unstaffed anyway soon.

David told him it had not been decided yet but even David did not believe there was much hope to avoid what was planned especially if Chris did any more disappearing acts. Just as Chris was coming to the end of the story of the afternoon and finishing on the fact that he had scored the winning goal for Amberley against their biggest local rivals and how good that was there came a crash as the outside door was flung open and two young ladies fell into the booking hall.

"I won" shouted the first one through the door.

"Only because you cheated by starting before I was ready!" shouted the other. The two girls were Susan and Linda recovered from their cold outing at the football that afternoon and now on the lookout for some more entertaining action.

Chris opened the office door. "Well if it isn't our two little helpers from the football this afternoon!"

"I do not know of what you are referring kind sir!" replied Susan in a very posh voice.

"I am referring," said Chris. "To the fact of a certain couple of ladies who flashed their bits at the away team goalie!" David looked in horror towards Linda who quickly put him right.

"Bits meaning we showed a bit of leg to distract him.
Not..."

She did not get to finish before David said he got the picture and he had not thought they would have flashed anything else!

"No too right it was too cold anyway!" added Susan.

"Secondly," continued Chris. "I don't suppose you know anything about their Goalie being locked in the changing rooms for the whole of the second half do you?"

Susan repeated in her put on voice, "We have no idea of what you are referring do we Linda?"

"Yes we do!" Linda corrected! "It was your crazy idea to get the team an advantage!" Both the boys laughed.

Linda blushed at having let the cat out of the bag. David came to her defence saying that they already knew and so did most of the team and probably the village by now but not to worry as you will both be held in high esteem in the village for years to come. This did not help Linda who felt that people would think what they had done was not in the spirit of the game.

"Sod the spirit of the game!" said Chris. "What matters is we won for the first time in years and they have cheated in other ways over the years with bringing players from higher leagues that do not even play for them or even live in the village.

**So what is good for the goose is good for the gander!
And when people gander at our score we will be
heroes!"**

**"We didn't come here to talk about what went on this
afternoon we are looking for a couple of good looking
fellers but it seems we have come to the wrong place!"**

Susan looked towards Linda for confirmation.

**"Yeh I think we shall have to head back to the village
and see what is on offer there!" Linda agreed.**

"Well I am heading to the village girls if you want a lift?"
asked Chris.

**"And what about you David?" asked Linda looking
hopefully at him.**

**"I am afraid I am stuck here for the night," David told
her.**

"Does that mean you will be all alone here all night?"

Linda had a hopeful tone in her voice, knowing full well
that David had told her he was working at the station all
night. David confirmed that is exactly what he meant.

**"Yes poor soul," mocked Chris. "Well come on ladies
shall we go? Your carriage is waiting."**

Susan looked at Linda knowing full well what she was
thinking. Linda looking at David but talking to Susan,
"You two go on I will follow later."

David thinking it would be nice to have company for a while was more concerned how Linda would get back as he would be stuck here all night and could not leave to take her home in his car while the work on the track was going on. Linda told him that she would get her Dad to pick her up on his way home as he was playing for the darts team in Arundel about five miles away and had to come this way home.

"Right that is settled then," said Chris. "Come on Susan let's leave these two love birds to it!" With that he took Susan's hand and pulled her out of the station door towards his car. Getting in the car he asked Susan what that was going on. Susan told him she did not know what he was on about.

"Come on that was a right set up wasn't it? You could have met me in the pub and as for Linda and you coming down looking for a couple of fellers! Well?" "Well we found a couple of fellers?" Susan told him. "Now come on let's get down to business." Chris put his arm around Susan and pulled her towards him. "Ah I did not mean that business! Not yet anyway I am not that sort of a girl! Apart from that I am busting for a drink, so come on driver put your foot down!"

Chris untangled himself from his passenger. "Yes Mam!
Anything the Lady wants the Lady gets!"

"I shall have to remember that for later!" Susan told
him.

Chris not quite knowing what she meant by that but
hopefully it would be to his or both their advantage he
put the car into gear and headed the vehicle off towards
the village.

CHAPTER 13

Meanwhile back at Amberley station Linda was sitting in the Signalman's chair while David made them a cup of coffee. "So how come you are working through the night?

"There is a bridge to be repaired which means that it can only be done when there are no trains running and to make sure nothing goes through the section while the lads are working the signal box has to be open to block the line and keep it shut until they have finished." David explained.

"So do you get extra pay for tonight then?" asked Linda. David said that it was all overtime pay for tonight so was well worth doing the shift. Linda said it was a bit like the Nurseries where she worked and things like Mother's Day caused extra work. The bell rang in the signal box and David went up to answer it and pulled the levers over to clear signals for the approaching train.

"Is that it is the work starting now?" asked Linda.

"No that is the last train though due here at ten thirty six and is about on time" as David was telling Linda the bells ring in the signal box again.

"I hope we are not going to have that noise all night" Linda stated.

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"I hope we are not going to have that noise all night" Linda stated.

David did wonder what it mattered if it did go on all night as surely Linda would have gone home before too much longer. He did not know the young lady had other ideas. David told her once the last train had gone and the work started then it would be very quiet until the work finished in the morning this seemed to please Linda as a little smile spread across her face.

"So what do you do while it is quiet then?" she asked. David told her that unofficially he would settle down in the chair she was sitting in and wait for the work to finish. When asked what he meant by "settle down" David told her that it meant sleep if possible. Anyway David asked her what did it matter she would be home by then. Linda was not so sure that her Dad would be able to pick her up after all so would it be possible for her to stay the night and David take her home in the morning? David was a bit shocked by the revelation that Linda wanted to stay the whole night but secretly thought the idea was one he might enjoy even if against the rules he should be working to. Before anything could be decided the sound of an approaching train could be heard and David said he was going out onto the platform to see the last train away.

"Wait I am coming out with you," Linda called after David as he made his way out onto the platform. The electric train pulled to a halt. There was no one to get on and nobody got off as was the usual case with a train at this time of night. The Guard opened his door and looked out. "Well we don't usually see this many on the platform this time of night," he commented.

David walked towards the Guard. "You're ok I've only come out in the cold to make sure all is ok before I lock up and then the engineers can get on with their bridge repairs."

"And what about you Miss," asks the Guard. "Are you jumping in?"

"No you're ok to go she is just visiting," David tells him. "Oh I see!" says the Guard. David hoped he did not but told him it was time to be on his way. The Guard winked at Linda and rang two beats on the bell to the driver.

Shutting his door the train moved off towards its southern terminus.

"Come on then," called David. "Let's get back in the warm." Back in the signal box / booking office David went and put the signal levers back and rang the bells to the signal boxes either side. After entering the times in the train register book he turned his attention to Linda.

"Are you really staying the night?" asked David.

"Do you want me to. Otherwise I will have to walk home along the dark lonely country road to the village where I could be attacked by Werewolves or Vampires or the like!"

"Are there many Werewolves and Vampires loose in Amberley then?" asked David.

"You would be surprised have you never seen them coming here to buy tickets?"

"No I cannot say I have although I will admit that we do have some strange people here at times. So just in case there are any werewolves, vampires or the like about, you had better stay here until it is light and I can take you home safely then. Mind you are you sure you are safe with me and I am not going to change into a werewolf or vampire?"

"I am pretty sure you are ok and will not attack an innocent young girl when she is asleep." Linda had such a seductive look on her face David was really tempted to say that perhaps she ought to stay awake in case he could not resist his animal cravings. However David was not the sort to say such things to a young lady who he had not known more than to sell tickets to before this weekend.

"So where am I going to settle down?" asked Linda.

"I am sure I can find you something it may not be what you are used to though." David pointed to the two armchairs.

"And how would you know what my bed is like?" asked Linda.

"I have a vivid imagination!" David smiled.

"I am sure you have and that is how it will have to stay!" David gave a look of disappointment, so Linda came over and gave him a kiss on the cheek whispering that it might not always be the case. David was not sure how to handle this situation it was all new to him. Sure he had had girl friends in the past but this was different. He certainly had not had a lady stay with him in the signal box at night before. At that moment the phone in the signal box rang stopping anything further being said or done.

"Blast that phone!" called David although a little relieved to slow down the situation.

"Don't you have to answer it?" asked Linda.

David walked over to the signal box area and picked up the phone. "Yes the last train has cleared you are alright to take your possession." David stated.

David continued to go through the details of the night's work with the caller. "Right have you contacted Pulborough Box? Right what time are we making it? Yes, ok, twenty three hundred hours that is alright with me. I will hear from you in the morning then. Yes I think I am in the best place it is not the night to be doing bridge repairs. Thanks and good night for now." Putting the phone down David continued to write in the book in the signal box. Again the phone rang and David confirmed a time for the work to start. Going into the signal box area David locked the signals so that no train could go towards the work site by mistake.

"Right" he said to Linda, "It should be quiet for the next few hours."

"So what do we do now then?" asked Linda with a wicked grin on her face. David even if he had wanted to do anything other than sleep, which still was against the rules, he could not consider doing anything else. So he suggested that Linda settle down in the chair while he put a couple of railway cushions on the floor. Linda sat in the first chair and watched as David picked up the second of the two armchairs. He placed the second on in front of Linda indicating that she could put her legs up on that one to make her more computable.

Linda lifted her legs up to her chest so David could push the chairs together. This of course gave David a wonderful view of what passed for the underwear that Linda was wearing. Linda of course knew the show she was giving but deliberately was slow in lowering her legs back down onto the second chair. Linda told him that was fine and sure she would be ok like that. David feeling a bit flushed something Linda had also picked up on said there was a couple of blankets in the cupboard which were left after the camping coaches that used to be at the station and she could have one to cover herself with in case it got cold later in the night. Linda said that as long as they did not have any bugs in but anyway if she got cold perhaps they could think of another way to get warm. David was not too sure how to handle this young lady and did feel a bit out of his depth. So he just remarked that he was sure she would be fine with the blanket. Linda gave him a disappointed look but said she would see how it went. David went to the cupboard and got out the two blankets giving them a good shake he put one over Linda he was a bit disappointed doing this as it hide the view he had had of Linda's shapely legs.

"Are you going to tuck me in?" Linda asked with a saucy grin. David leant over her and pushed the blanket into her sides. Linda pulled him down towards her face and pushed her lips to his. David nearly losing his balance responded.

"Ah you sure there is not room for two under this blanket?" Linda asked still tempting David. He straightened himself and told her that unfortunately this WAS his place of work and although it was quiet at the moment it could all change very quickly.

"Really?" said Linda opened eyed. "Does that mean you..?"

David did not give her the chance to finish, "It means there could be anything on the railway side that could want his attention from phone calls to people turning up at the signal box. Linda asked what would happen if they found her here? David said they would probably be very jealous but his reputation would go up in their eyes no end! Linda was not too sure what to make of that but thought it sounded as if David would be pleased if she was found here that night. David continued to get the couple of old railway carriage cushions out of the same cupboard and put them on the floor.

"You are going to sleep on those?" asked a surprised Linda. David told her that he had done it before and he was quite used to roughing it, and with the other blanket over him he would be fine. So half an hour later saw Linda curled up in the big Signalman's armchairs wrapped in one of the blankets and David laying on the cushions on the floor with the other old railway blanket over him. The weather outside has turned rather wet and the rain can be heard hitting the windows of the booking office and signal box.

"I am glad I am not walking home in this," Linda stated. "Just think of those poor workers on that bridge in this. So what about your Dad won't he be wondering where you are and why he hasn't picked you up on his way home? David asked.

"To tell you the truth Dad was not out tonight and after Match of the Day he would be in bed!" Linda told him. "I'd never have guessed," David laughed.

"You're alright you're secret is safe with me!"

"My secret!" exclaimed David.

"Well otherwise I shall just have to tell everyone how you kept me here against my will and had your wicked way with me!"

"Chance would be a fine thing!" David moaned. Linda said that chance would come but maybe this is not the place however as she told David this she leans out of the chair and passionately kisses him on the lips. David responds being quite overwhelmed by Linda's advances. Unfortunately for David Linda quickly pulls away. David starts to apologise thinking he has misread the situation.

"No listen" whispers Linda. "There is somebody outside!"

David gets up on one arm and listens. "It's the rain," he says.

"No listen!" Linda raises her whisper as loud as she dare.

David again listens and sure enough he can hear voices outside the front door of the station building. "It could be someone from the work site," he suggested. "But I always leave the door to the booking hall open so they can come in to shelter so why are they staying outside? I am going to have to check it out" With that David raised himself off the floor and made his way to the door picking up the hand lamp and large piece of wood by the door.

"Wait for me!" called Linda. "You're not leaving me in here on my own!"

David quietly opened the booking office door and crept out into the darkness of the booking hall. Linda followed right behind him holding onto his shoulder. David could feel her hot breath on his neck.

"Who do you think it is?" whispered Linda in David's ear.

David jumped back in surprise at the voice in his ear. "Bloody hell" he said as loud as he dare. "How the hell do I know? Perhaps it's a ghost!"

"You don't really think it could be a ghost?" asked Linda in a voice quieter than a whisper. David shook his head and put his finger against his lips to show her to be quiet which considering how dark it was Linda could hardly be expected to see. He turned the handle of the outside door and pulled it open shouting as he did it, in the hope that the noise he made might scare off anyone outside. As David opened the door with a quick pull on the handle, a rain soaked man who had been leaning against the outside of the door fell backwards into the station building giving a very surprised yell! The sight that met the young couple's eyes was of a lighted camping stove set up in the porch of the station doorway. On which was a pan with what looked like soup in it simmering away

Beyond that sat another man on a camping stool looking at David and Linda in amazement his face lit up by the light of the camping stove made him look a very ghostly figure. It made Linda give out a scream. David looking at the man who had fallen into the booking hall was the first to react. "What the bloody hell!" he shouted! The man who had fallen started to get to his feet brushing himself down from the dust off the floor of the booking hall that had stuck to his wet clothing. "I think we were about to say the same thing."

"Well me first" started David. "Just what do you think you are doing?" As he said this it occurred to him that it was a pointless question looking at the stove and the soup pan.

"Well" started the man on the stool but he did not get any further as his friend intervened. "We are fishing down by the river bridge and with all this rain we are not having much success."

"I would have thought fish liked the rain" interrupted Linda, who by now had got over the shock that these two were not ghosts.

"No" replied the man. "They just go deeper and will not take the bait."

"So" added the man on the stool, "we decided to have a break but as it is so wet the stove would not light. Then we thought about getting under cover somewhere and Peter" the man on the stool pointed at his friend. "Peter suggested we might find cover up here at the station" "And that is why we are here." His friend Peter added. "We did not see any lights on so we thought the place was empty."

"Well it is not!" David told them. "We are working on the line tonight even though it is raining we cannot stop work."

"We've sorry as I said we did not think there was anybody here after all there weren't any lights on," the sitting man said.

"Not out here but in the signal box we have a light on," David confirmed.

"Signal box?" asked Peter. "We did not see any signal box did you Stan?" Stan sitting on the stool nodded his head in agreement.

"You wouldn't," David told them. "It is located in the booking office." David pointed towards the outside booking office window. "In there."

"Oh that is a bit unusual isn't it?" asked Peter.

David agreed but said it was moved there some years ago.

Normally David would be pleased to give interested parties the history but at after one in the morning now was not the time!

"So are you two working in the signal box tonight then?" asked Stan as he leaned forward to stir the soup on the camp stove, and at the same time looking up at Linda thinking that she did not have on the same sort of uniform as her male colleague and in fact seemed more dressed for a night out. Linda seeing the fisherman looking said, "Oh I am not working here. I am David's wife and on the rare occasions when David has to work nights I do not like to be alone in our flat so he lets me join him at work so she can feel safe."

At the mention of the word "wife" David's eyes open wide.

"Oh that is not a bad idea," says Stan. "And how long have you two been married?"

"To tell you" David starts but is interrupted by Linda. "Two months" she tells them.

"Oh that is lovely" says Peter. "So you are not long back from your honeymoon then?" Linda says that they have not had a honeymoon yet due to David's work here but are saving up for one in the summer. Peter says that is a shame but so romantic.

Peter open up his wet rain mac and puts his hand inside to bring out his wallet. Opening it he gives Linda a five pound note telling her to put it towards her honeymoon and treat it as a late wedding gift. Stan getting up from his position on the camping stool does the same matching Peter's gift. Linda who has created this little make believe story looks at David who is just about to refuse their kind offers when Linda takes both the notes and with the hint of a little tear in her eye thanks both of them so much for their kindness. She says she will send them both a postcard when they are away. Stan says that would be nice and getting out a pen and paper from the kit bag beside him he writes down an address. "Just send the one between us just to let us know where you end up" he tells Linda handing her the piece of paper with the address on it. "My wife and I only got a weekend on the Isle of Wight but it was heaven!" "You were lucky then!" Peter told him. "We only got a night in London before I was posted to Burma it was wartime and our Honeymoon Night was interrupted by an air raid. It was a good thing the hotel did not get hit as there was no way we were going down to the air raid shelter with fifty others on our wedding night."

Linda smiled sympathetically at Peter and again there seemed to be a little tear coming in her eye. Peter seeing this told her not to be upset they had made up for it since he came back from Burma. He had eight children and two grand children now! This made Linda smile and say that she and David were hoping for a big family!

"Were we?" asked a very surprised David who up to five minutes ago was not even aware he was married.

"Yes Darling" continued Linda. "You said you wanted a football team!" David recovering a bit from the shock told her that yes he would like a football team but not necessarily of his own making!!! At this both the fishermen laughed. Peter told them both that what will be, will be had always been his way of looking at life and just to live life to the full and enjoy it. With my lot now I can get away for a bit of quiet fishing knowing there is always someone at home to look after the wife. Linda said she had no worries on that score as David did not like fishing. David added that there was always the football but then remembering that Linda had been to the local match that afternoon said that she also liked to watch the games so there was no problem there.

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Linda although thinking after that afternoon in the cold that might have been her last match did not say so only smiled in agreement.

"So is it ok if we just finish our soup? Then we shall go back and see if we have caught anything" Stan said.

"Yes fine by us" David told them. "Sorry to have disturbed you. We do not get many visitors here in the middle of the night and besides if you had tried the door you would have found it open. I usually leave it open for the track workers coming back in as they sometimes have to wait for the rest of the gang to finish off before they can all go home. I let them use the waiting room so if ever you are stuck again try the door first you might be in luck."

"Thanks" replied both the fishermen together.

"So have you left all your gear down by the river?" asked David. Peter told him they had left their rods secured so they should be alright and if a fish did take the bait he would still be waiting for them but with the rain and the speed of the river he doubted very much if even if a fish saw the bait it would be able to get it! So once we have finished our tomato soup we shall be on our way if it is still raining we shall call it a day or night anyway," Stan said sitting back on his stool.

Peter picking up the other stool which had fallen over when David opened the door and knocked him off of it sat down as well and picking up his tin mug nodded to his friend that it was time to pour out their night's refreshment.

"Yeh, I suppose we had better be getting back inside Darling" David said looking hopefully at Linda. "Sorry to have shocked you." David told them, "enjoy your soup." "And you enjoy the rest of your night!" Peter told David at the same time looking at Linda who gave a little smile back knowing what that statement might mean! Getting back inside the booking office Linda bursts out laughing. "Two very wet fishermen! And you thought it could be a ghost!"

"No I didn't I said that. I said it was not a ghost! Either way was I your protector or what?" David asked.

"Yes my Hero!" Linda said giving David a big kiss on the lips. "Did you see the way they looked when they saw me standing behind you?"

"One other thing" David asked. "Just when did we get married and what is this about a family?" Linda looked at David with her big blue eyes. "Darling" she whispered. "Don't tell me you have forgotten the day already it was only two months ago!"

David never too sure whether Linda was playing along or trying to be serious and just wind him up or perhaps somehow he had stepped into a parallel universe by going outside in the middle of the night! Linda put her arms around David's neck and leant her head on his shoulder her hot breath playing on David's neck. Gently she kissed his neck and whispered. "Do you know how a fox looks when caught in the headlights of a car?" David did not see what that had to do with one minute being a bachelor boy and the next being married and expecting a football team family.

Linda soon put him right. "That is how you looked when I told those two fishermen that we were married and having a big family!" Linda stopped kissing David's neck as she could not help herself from laughing out loud.

David pushed her away so he could look at her and wanted to say how relieved or annoyed he was at what she had said, but Linda showing the biggest smile and her blonde hair was falling over her lovely face David could do no more than pull her back towards him and plant a big kiss on those smiling lips.

"So when are you going to make me an honest woman?" Linda asked. Again David was not sure she was being serious or not.

He stuttered about taking one thing at a time. Again Linda could not help winding poor David up and agreed to wait until he was ready! David suggested that they had both had enough excitement for now and perhaps they should get back to resting. David said although Linda could relax for the rest of the day he would be back here at two that afternoon for another eight hour shift. Linda getting comfortable as best she could on the two chairs said that would have to change when they were married! David just put out the light in the signal box and muttered something like, "That will be the day" to himself!

Linda hearing this just whispered "we shall see!" Then closing her eyes tried to get back to sleep.

Two hours later the two young people inside the station had been settled down for sometime one on the chairs and one on the two railway cushions on the floor. The rain was still hitting the outside window at regular intervals. All of a sudden there was a sound of another regular beat. Linda was the first to re-act. She raised herself up from the chair she was curled up in. The regular beat of sound was coming from outside on the station platform. Linda exited herself from the two chairs letting the blanket fall onto the floor.

She stepped over the still sleeping David on the floor and walked towards the signal box window. What she saw made her retreat back in shock!

“David! David!” she called. Kicking the cushion David was lying on. David looked up and seeing Linda above sat up. “David there is, are,” she pointed to the platform outside.

“What?” he asked, “More ghosts?”

“Men! Lots of them!” Linda exclaimed.

“It will be the workers coming in from the rain,” David told her.

“No! Go and look it is certainly not a group of workers!” Linda urged David forward towards the window. David getting up from the temporary bed on the floor scrambles up to the signal box window looking out onto the platform.

“Bloody hell Russians!” David shouted in surprise.

“Russians?” repeated Linda. “Where did that idea come from?”

Outside a troop of men in combat uniform matched up the platform and formed themselves into two lines.

“Who do you think they really are and what do they want here?” Linda asked. “And what are we going to do?”

"We have to defend our island that's what!" exclaimed David.

"Pardon?" asked an astonished Linda. "You mean we, that's you and me are going to fight all these soldiers?" David said what else could they do? Linda suggested ringing the police. David said it had better be the Army. However coming to a bit more now and realising that things are not always what they seem and Russians landing in Amberley was a bit beyond believe even to him at this hour on a Sunday morning.

"So what ARE we going to do?" asked a worried Linda. "What we did before we will go out and see what the hell is going on. Come on." With that David takes hold of Linda's hand and this time switching on all the station lights he opens the office door and makes his way through the outside door now free of fishermen out into the station yard. Out in the yard there was even more of a shock. There were various army vehicles and men everywhere. One man in particular who appeared to be in charge was shouting out orders. David followed an inch behind by Linda went up to the man.

"Excuse me what the hell do you think you are doing?"

The man in a very smart army uniform turned round. He looked like someone who was head of such a group of men. His uniform David guessed was of a high ranking officer and the medal bands on his chest suggested he had been decorated by the army in the past. Then his hard hat different from the other soldiers also seemed to put him of a higher rank.

"I beg your pardon young man" said the hat in a rather upper class accent!

"You speak good English for a Russian!" stated David. "Russian!" exclaimed the army man. "I am Major Wilson of the Royal Sussex Territorial Army!"

"Is that English?" asked David.

"British! We are part of the British Army Reserve!" came the reply. "And who pray are you and what are you doing in the middle of my command?"

"I was about to ask you the same thing," David told him. "We are," putting his arm around Linda to protect her, "are here working in the signal box which is part of the station buildings." With that he pointed back to where the two of them had come from. "So again what are you doing in my yard at this hour on a Sunday morning?"

"We are on Operation South Downs which is starting from here. This has all been agreed with your bosses in London weeks ago. They told us the area would be clear at this time of the night."

"Normally it would be," David told him. "The difference tonight is that there is work on a railway bridge nearby so the signal box needs to be manned. No one told me we would have half the British Army for company."

"Believe me this is nowhere near being half the British Army," replied the Major. "I am sorry if we disturbed you and you Miss," the Major smiled at Linda. David noticed this and was not pleased at the older man's attention. The Major however carried on, "We shall be on our way shortly so we shall leave you to carry on with whatever you are doing!" Again the Major smiled at Linda as if to imply something other than work! David remarked that he would be taking up the matter with his Control Office for not informing him of the night's events and the use of the station without advising him. The Major said that was alright by him as they had written permission to use the station premises. With that he turned towards his troops and started shouting out orders.

David seeing that no more was to be said took Linda's arm and pulled her back towards the station buildings. Linda however had had time to look over the muscular men making up the gathered troops and was quite willing to stop awhile longer. The men for their part had also noticed the young lady in the tight skirt and top. Especially as Linda had not had time to put any sort of outer covering on before coming out into the yard and the rain was starting to soak through her top causing to look like a contestant in a "wet t-shirt" contest. David on the other hand did not want her watching any competition. "Come on" he called, "let's get back in the warm."

"Mm ok," a distracted Linda managed to murmur. Eventually David managed to get Linda back into the building. "What a night!" David exclaimed. "Perhaps now we can get some rest."

"Yes," agreed Linda. "But those soldiers were fit weren't they?" David said he had noticed her looking. Linda replied that that was a typical male remark and did he not look at young ladies when out or even when in on the TV etc. David not wanting to confess his secrets changed the subject to the fact that it was nearly the end of the shift and it would soon be time to pack things up so had they not better snatch a few minutes.

Linda agreed with a satisfied little smile knowing that perhaps she had won that round! David said he hoped Linda had not caught a cold as her t-shirt was rather wet. He suggested that she might like to take it off her and put it in front of the fire to dry. Linda looked at David with suspicious eyes. David said he was not trying to get her to undress. Linda was trying not to laugh and said she had had some excuses for a lad to try to get to see her tits this must be one of the best yet! David turning a shade of red tried to tell her that was never his intentions. Linda said that was a bit disappointing as most lads she had known could not wait to get her clothes off. David said that he was probably like most but there was a time and place for everything. Linda looked a bit disappointed at David but could only smile and lean over and gently kiss him.

"What was that for?" asked David.

"It was for being so nice," Linda told him kissing him again. "I think I shall be ok though so sorry to disappoint you!" David said that was ok but secretly he had hopes of seeing more of Linda maybe in the not too distant future! David's prediction of the bridgework finishing came true quicker than either of them had thought.

They had both only just settled down again in their respective chairs and cushions when the phone in the signal box rang. David with a groan got to his feet and picked up the phone.

"Right Mister Green you are all clear and all work has been completed" There was a pause as David listened. "Well you're clear and everything is fit to run on." There was another pause. "Yes, well it has not been the sort of night to get a lot done. It has been the same here. No nothing like that, more of outside influences. Anyway what time shall we call it?" There was another gap in the conversation while the time is given.

"Right 0500 hours it is. No there should not be anything about for at the moment but if you are walking back just keep an eye out you never know on this job what might turn up as I have found out already tonight. No just referring to outside influences again! Ok you take care I will no doubt hear you again soon. Are you going to inform Pulborough box and you will tell Control you are all finished. Great thanks for that. Good night." David puts the phone down and writes in the Train Register Book.

From her position curled up in the big signal box chairs Linda says, "My! And they say women can talk! I thought you were going to ask him out on a date next!"

David comes across and leans down to kiss Linda. "Why would I want to ask out anyone else especially a hairy arsed P Way Man when I have such a lovely young lady here that I can ask out?"

"Is that an invitation or request for a date then?" asks Linda sitting up in the chair.

"Yes but you have to appreciate I work shifts and sometimes late at night."

"I think I have found that out already!" Linda nodded. "But I might be able to live with that providing that you make up for it when not at work and maybe let me stay if you are."

"That sounds like you are thinking we shall be together for some time?" asked David.

"It is early days yet," Linda told him, "but I quite like you and I get the impression you quite like me? And if we are going to get married we shall be seeing a lot more of each other!"

"I do not know if I would go that far!" mocked David.

"Why you cheeky sod!" shouted Linda throwing the blanket from the chair at David who ducked just in time!

"Sorry you know I was only joking! I think you are the best thing in my life."

"Ah that is sweet," Linda looked at him with a sparkle in her eye.

David looked across at Linda. "Yes," he continued, "At least since yesterday!"

"Why you!" With that Linda was out of the chair and pushing David back towards the signal box. There was a step into the signal box area and as David was back peddling he fell backwards over the step. Linda fell on top of him. David not hurt at all by the fall or the young lady falling on top of him started to laugh. Linda still trying to be angry with him could not keep up the pretence and got an attack of the giggles too. After a minute of laughter and giggling the two realised the position they were in and animal instincts took over! Linda pushed her lips onto David's and a passionate embrace followed. What might have followed this, the couple will never know as the phone in the signal box rang again. David swore but then realising what he had said apologised to the young lady lying on top of him. "No need for an apology," replied Linda, "That is just what I was thinking!" It took David a few seconds to work out the connection which made him feel even worse at having to get up to answer the phone. Lifting his young lady gently to one side and apologising a second time he told her he would have to answer the phone that was still ringing loudly in the signal box.

"Hello Amberley Box," David said as he picked up the phone. "Yes sorry I was outside in the toilet." Linda looked at him and wagged a finger mouthing that he should not tell fibs! "Yes that's right Mister Green's possession given up at 0500 hours has he no told you. Oh right it was a bad line and you could not get the time. Yes we are all done and ready for anything you want to send. No the box is open right through until tonight now. Oh right there might be some diversions as the main line work could over run. That will please my mate for a Sunday morning. No I am off to bed in about thirty minutes." A wide eyed Linda looked up at this last remark. David ignored the look and finished the conversation putting the phone down. "What?" he asked looking at Linda.

"Nothing at all!" she replied.

"I am sorry to disappoint you but I shall be going back to my lonely little flat. Little being the appropriate word and room rather than flat for a few hours' kip as I am back here this afternoon."

"What! You are doing another shift today?" exclaimed Linda.

"Yes afraid so I did tell you before." David confirmed.

"So when are we going to be on this so called date you were on about then?" asked Linda.

"I could finish a bit early tonight and leave the side gate open and the lights on for the last train as we do when there is no one to cover." David looked at her hopefully. "Then I could meet you and take you for a drink before the pubs close?"

"If that is all that is on offer I suppose it will have to do!" Linda replied.

David came over and kissed her, whispered thanks and told her there would be other days. Linda mocked and told him in his dreams. David replied that is where she would be later that morning, in his dreams. She said he had better make the best of it as that might be the only place she would be if work took too much of his time. David just replied that while working all these hours at least it would give him the money to lavish on her.

Before Linda could reply to that there was a screech of a car braking outside the window and the sound of two car doors slamming shut and loud voices with the sound of running coming towards the building.

CHAPTER 14

The outside door was thrown open and then there was a thump on the office door. "Come on you lazy bugger get up off the floor!" It is Chris who is David's relief arriving for the morning shift and alongside him is Susan. Linda goes to open the door while David clears the remaining items left about from the night's work. "Hello!" shouts Chris in surprise as Linda opens the door.

"Linda?" calls Susan in surprise following Chris into the office.

"Yes Susan!" replies Linda. "Is there something you want to ask or should I ask first?"

Susan laughs, "Ok you win I think we can both guess how we have spent last night doing?"

"Eh I doubt it!" starts Linda. "Yes I have been here all night but not doing what you are thinking!"

"And what might I be thinking of an innocent young lady like you spending the night with a young man in a signal box!" Susan asked.

"Come on you two," calls Chris. "Stop trying to score points off each other. I expect my poor college here is tired out and needs to go home after the "HARD" night he has had!" Chris especially put weight on the word "hard."

Susan kicked Chris who looked hurt at her but she just ignored his look. "Yes sorry David I expect you will be taking Linda home?"

"Yes that is the idea if the lady agrees?" David looks towards Linda who nods in agreement. "Ok shall we leave these two to it? You might get a few diversions Control said the Main Line Possession is over-running probably due to the rain. Otherwise all is in order, the work on the bridge finished at five but how much they got done in that rain I don't know. I think there will be another night 's work to be done later."

"Great show more overtime!" Chris smiled.

"You're welcome to it if it is like the night we have just had!" Linda commented.

"I thought you were too busy..." Chris did not get a chance to finish as Susan again gave his ankle a kick. David put them right by telling of the fishermen and then the army on their war games.

“Sounds like you did have an interesting night!” agreed Chris. “Well off you go now and get some rest I expect you back in a couple of hours!”

“You can expect all you want!” David told him. “But I will see you about half one!”

“That is still too soon to be coming back to work,” Linda looked at David. “It does not give you much time to get any rest let alone time to get home and get back!”

“It’s the way it has always been. I am sorry but we all just have to put up with it.” David told her. “Anyway let get going. See you later”

With that David and Linda leave to go towards the car park and David’s car.

“Well what about that!” Susan said as soon as the two had left.

“You heard what David said,” Chris told her. “It does not sound like anything else went on, unlike us?”

“Oh did something go on I must have missed that!” laughed Susan.

"Well I seem to remember waking up early this morning with you beside me!" Chris said with a wicked smile.

"That's where I was! I couldn't remember!" Susan laughed.

Meanwhile David and Linda were in David's car. "Where would you like to go your Majesty?" asked David.

"Home James!" Linda pointed down the station yard in the direction she would like David to go. The fact that that was the only way out did not matter!

"Yes your Majesty!" replied David bowing as he started the car and put it into gear and the vehicle moved slowly down the yard towards the exit. Turning right out of the gate and heading towards the village David glanced at Linda. She was smiling slightly.

"What?" asked David seeing Linda smiling at him.

"Nothing" she replied still smiling. David still not knowing what was amusing her asked again.

"Are you not going to ask me?" Linda asked.

It was now David's turn to smile as the many questions he could ask ran through his mind until Linda asked for him. "Do you know where home is?"

David stopped the car and looked at her in horror! He had to admit although he had dropped her off yesterday he was not sure where she wanted to go now.

"Well as you have stopped here driver this will do nicely. I do not want to get too close to home as my parents will hear the car. At least this way I might be able to blag it that I just got home late after they had gone to bed."

"And do you often do that?" asked David not really wanting to know the answer and if he did hopefully it would be very few. Linda was not really going to tell him she just said last night was special. David was not too sure what to make of that but hoped it meant what it sounded like. Linda leaned across and gave David a passionate kiss on the lips, whispering that she would see him later. As she started to get out of the car David realising they had not made any firm arrangements called out to asking what time and where.

"Being as you now know the area, you can pick me up here when will you be finished in that little box of yours."

David told her he could be here at ten o'clock. Linda said that would be great as they could go to Storrington for last orders she did not want to go to the local pub too many eyes watching! David asked if she was ashamed of being seen with him. In reply Linda leant back into the car and gave him a lingering kiss. "No, but you must know what this village is like with gossip. I do not want us being the latest bit just yet!" With that she blew him another kiss and closed the car door walking away towards the houses looking back every couple of steps. After a few yards she stopped and waved. David took this as a sign he should go and started the car. Pulling away he blew a kiss back and as the car took him away he watched in the rear mirror as Linda carried on towards the houses. Meanwhile back at the station two other young people were enjoying a cup of coffee. "Fancy Linda staying all night here" Susan mussed. "You mean to tell me that the two of you did not cock up last night's little adventure beforehand? Chris asked. "Come on you forget I have known you two a long time and know what games you get up to!"

"I do not know what you mean Christopher!" exclaimed Susan in a hurt voice. "Beside what do you mean you have known us for a long time?"

"Well you cannot live around here and not know everything about everybody!" he explained.

"Really! Is that so? Well then. Why did it take you so long a time to get to know me?" Susan asked.

"I have admired you from afar for ages but just did not think you were interested in me," Chris told her.

"Men!" exclaimed Susan. "All this time I have been trying to attract your attention and you just did not have the courage to do something about it!"

"No it was not that but you have to admit that when the two of you girls are together it can be overwhelming for a single bloke to get a look in!" Chris looked at Susan hoping she would understand. Susan put down her coffee and took Chris's cup out of his hand. Then putting her arms around his neck she gave him the biggest kiss on the lips she could muster. Chris responded and the two were locked in a heated embrace.

"Ah hum Excuse me." Chris looks up there is a well dressed man at the booking office window.

"Sorry to interrupt your little eh!" said the man in the suit.

"Sorry" said Chris untangling himself from Susan. "Can I help you?"

"I don't know seems you were helping yourself too much already!" the man replies.

"Oh that it was just a bit of horseplay!" Chris tells him. Susan repeats the last word in amazement as to think that is all it was!

"Oh" the man continued. "I thought the young lady was ill and you were giving her the kiss of life!"

"Yeh, you could call it that!" Chris laughed.

"Well the young lady looks ok now I take it she will be fit to resume her journey soon?" asked the man.

"Oh she is not going anywhere she is just assisting me this morning," Chris tells the man.

"I take it the young lady is a railway employee then?"

"I do not think that is any of your business," Chris was getting a bit annoyed at the stranger's attitude and he did not see what it was to do with him anyway. The man in the suit says he is afraid it might be and gets out a wallet which he opens and says Chris should read the card on view. Chris looks at the card it reads.

"Mr McDonald Railway Safety Standards Officer
Waterloo"

"Oh sorry Mister McDonald I did not realise who you were"

The man at the window nods in agreement that it was pretty obviously the case.

"Mister McDonald" Susan chips in. "I love your buggers!" The man says surprisingly she is not the first one to say that! Chris trying to clear things apologises and asked what he can do for him.

"Well luckily for you I am off duty," the man tells them. "And believe it or not I was young once and know what it is like to be in love."

"Are but" starts Susan. This time it is Chris who although not kicking her leg intervenes.

"Right well thanks so are you travelling by train today?" Chris asks.

"Yes I have been staying in the village with an old school friend but I have to be in Leeds for early tomorrow morning and need to drop off in town to change clothes, before making my way to Leeds later to be there for an early start tomorrow."

"Right so do you need a ticket to London or Leeds? Chris asks.

"Oh no I just wanted to see if the first London service was on time or if there were any problems on the line it being a Sunday.

As for the ticket I do not suppose you see many like this?" With that he gets out a key holder with an attached gold pass on its ring.

"My" said an amazed Chris. "You are quite right I have never seen one of those before."

"Is it real?" asked Susan leaning over Chris to see. Chris said of course it was but Susan said she meant is it real gold. Mister McDonald said he always thought it was and it allowed him access all areas. Susan said she had had boy friends that wished that! Which made Chris look at her but she soon put him right saying they only wished!! Mister McDonald laughed and told her it meant he could travel on any train at any time, to which she was amazed and wished she could do that sometimes. All of a sudden the bell in the signal box rang and Chris went to answer it.

"Is that my train?" asked the Safety Officer. Chris said it was but it would still be another ten minutes or so. "A great idea having everything in one place, not many places left like this on the railway with all these great big power signal boxes being built. Make sure you keep hold of this place as long as you can."

Chris agreed and said he hoped to be here for a while yet, although remembering the folder that the Station Master had delivered in his heart he was not too sure. Just then the bell rang in the signal box again.

"That's your train just left Arundel," Chris told him. "You had better get over the other side you only have five minutes." Mr McDonald thanked them both and wished them well for the future but just as a reminder of who he was he told Chris to be careful who he had in the signal box with him as he had once been a Signalman and had been caught out with a young lady in the box once and had to hide her in the toilet and she had now been his wife for thirty years!" With that he made a quick exit to catch his train.

"What do you think he meant by that?" Chris asked Susan.

"I am not sure," she replied. "But he seemed a very nice man."

"An H O from H O!" stated Chris.

"Really how could you tell he said he had been married for thirty years?" Susan asked. Chris looked at his young lady friend. "An H O from H O means a High Official from Head Office!"

"Oh it does not mean?" Susan did not get the chance to finish as Chris told her it certainly did not mean what she had been thinking.

"You don't think he will report you for me being here do you?" Susan asked. Chris did not think so as it looked like the man knew the score.

"Oh and what is the score?"

"It is about three one to me at present!" Chris told her. Susan said that as far as she knew he had scored once at the football and once last night so where did he get three from.

"Anticipation?" Chris asked. Susan just gave him a look that just held out a whisper of hope!

The clock in the signal box ticks over to half past one. It has been a fairly quiet morning since their early visitor. The train diversions never materialised so the work on the main line must have finished on time after all. The sound of a car pulling up in the station yard is heard. A very tired looking David gets out and makes his way into the station building.

"Afternoon mate I have seen you looking better" exclaims Chris as he lets his relief for the afternoon shift into the office.

"Leave the poor lad alone Chris he looks all in," a sympathetic Susan says.

"I think it serves him right!" as Chris slaps David on the back. "It is bad enough doubling back but with all that extra curriculum activities last night what does he expect?"

"Oh yes!" David starts none too pleased at being back at work so soon. "You mean the engineering work, the fisherman making soup in the doorway or the British Army on exercise in the station yard!"

"Actually no!" laughs Chris. "But I bet that did not help!" David was not in the mood for the usual banter that usually came at change over time so just asked Chris if everything was in order for the change over and was glad when Chris said it had been a quiet day so far.

With that David signed on duty underneath where Chris had just signed off in the train register book and told him he could go.

"Oh thank you kind sir!" mocked Chris. "Just one more thing I know it is a bit of a cheek but would you like to do early shift tomorrow. I know that means yet another double back but I have a job lined up on the farm tomorrow morning. So what do you say?"

"Well I must say I am not keen on another double back but it would give me Monday evening free to recover I suppose so ok." David was not pleased to be doing so many hours all at once but it might help with seeing Linda he thought. "So I will do the early tomorrow and then back on late shift from Tuesday?"

Chris thanked him and pulling Susan towards the door says. "Thanks and I will see you tomorrow afternoon Dave!" Chris called as he left the office. Susan echoed his good bye as they both left.

Outside Chris was already in his car and starting the engine. "Come on!" he shouted to Susan. "I could do with a drink and something to eat!"

"I'll give you something to eat" said Susan sarcastically getting into the passenger seat. Chris looked at her with a big grin on his face.

"No I know what you are thinking and you can just stop that thought right now!"

"What?" asked Chris in a mock voice. "What did I say?" "It wasn't what you said it was the way you looked and what you were thinking!" Susan replied.

"Sex that is all you women think about!" exclaimed Chris. "All I was thinking was you might be offering to make me a Sunday dinner."

"I think in truth that was the last thing on your mind and as for women thinking of sex all day you can forget that one as well!" Susan told him. "Now drive and do not stop until you find me a nice little country pub doing lunches!"

Chris puts the car into gear and drives off. "Yes mam!" he says raising his hand in salute. Susan tells him to stop taking the piss and keep his hands on the wheel and to keep them there until they reach the next country pub. Meanwhile back at the station David has had a quiet afternoon and got his energy back to normal levels. All of a sudden a car pulls up at the station. There is the sound of people running into the station and straight through the booking hall and out onto the platform. David went to the signal box window and looked out to see what was going on.

A man in his early 20's and a young woman about the same age were running up and down the footbridge steps.

"What the ...?" said David, watching the two and then realising that they were counting the number of steps on the bridge. After a couple of runs up and down the steps of the station footbridge the man stopped and got a pen and notebook out of his pocket and wrote in the book. Next the couple started walking up and down the platform looking at all the advertising boards. They looked puzzled as if looking for something special on one of the boards. David thought it was about time he intervened, so going out onto the platform he asked if he could help the couple.

"Oh sorry," the young man said looking up from studying one of the posters. "We are taking part in a car rally and some of the clues are supposed to be here at the station."

"Clues?" asked David in surprise.

"Yes as part of the rally we have to go around a course and every now and then we have to stop to answer a clue. There are supposed to be two clues here but we cannot find the second," the young lady told him.

"Let me guess the first one is how many steps there are on the station footbridge?" David asked smiling. The young man agreed and said David must have been watching them thinking they were mad or just vandals. However they could not find the second clue they had worked it out to be on one of the posters. David asked him what it was they were looking for. The young lady told him that it was something like a day out poster. David laughed and then told them it would be one showing London Zoo.

"Yes that would be it!" exclaimed the young lady. "The clue is where can you find the animals at Amberley station?"

"So why can't we find this poster?" asked the man. "Because every poster has a date or if we need to replace it with something more important and have not got another board spare." David told them. "And I expect your organiser came round about two weeks ago as I washed the Zoo poster down last week!"

The couple thanked David for his help and said they had better get going the others will be here soon. David asked how many others there were and was told there were twenty cars on the rally and they would all be looking for a nonexistent clue.

David said perhaps he should help them as well but the first couple said hopefully he could let them all look around a bit first so as to keep it fair as they had lost a bit of time looking. David said he would see what he could do. With that the couple thanked David and quickly made their way back to their car. The first couple had not been gone long before the next car in the rally arrived. David gave them a few minutes before going out onto the platform and advising them of the problem with the poster. The man thanked David and gave him a pound tip for saving them the time. David thinking this was too good to be true soon hit on the idea of how to make a few extra tips out of this rally. Each time a car arrived at the station David was quick to offer help with the number of steps on the footbridge and what was on the nonexistent poster all for a little consideration. By the time the last car had departed he had himself quiet a profitable afternoon. "Roll on the next rally!" he thought. This little adventure had taken up most the afternoon and part of the evening and time soon moved on to approaching ten o'clock. He is just thinking he could close up soon when the station phone rings.

"Hello Amberley Railway Station," he answers.

"You want me to do what madam?" asks a surprised David. Then realising who it is who is calling. "I do not think that is part of my railway duties!"

"Yes I am sure we would both enjoy it! Well if you insist I will lock up the station and pick you up in fifteen minutes."

Replacing the phone David quickly closes the signal box telling his colleges either side he is closing the box a bit early to finish off the booking office work. With that he picks up his coat and bag. As he leaves he switches off the office lights, but leaves the platform lights on. He also makes sure the side gate is open in case of the rare event of a passenger using the station after ten on a Sunday evening. It must have been one of the quickest getaways David had made from work as he aims his car out of the station yard and up the hill towards the village. At the crossroads he sees Linda waiting at the side of the road he thinks she looks lovely but thinks it is a bit of a cold night for the wearing of a mini skirt but is pleased Linda has done it.

As he stops beside her he winds down the window.

"Excuse me Miss I am looking for a mad woman who makes suggestive phone calls to the local railway station you don't know where I can find her do you?"

"I haven't a clue" Linda told him, "But will I do instead?" "Yes I am sure you will be equally as good and probably a lot better" David told her. "Climb in"

"Thank you kind sir" Linda opened the car door and slid in. David could not help noticing the amount of flesh that was unveiled as she sat down in the vehicle. Linda knowing what a show she was giving but ignoring it asked.

"So who do you think this mad lady is then who is making these mucky phone calls?" she asked.

David replied that he did not know but the person should know that all phone calls to the station are recorded! Linda looked a little shocked at this revelation but as David could not keep a straight face she soon realised that it was just a wind up!

"Besides who would want to listen to phone calls all day?" She asked.

"I don't know I enjoyed that one very much it is a shame I do not get more like it!" David laughed. "Did you mean what you said?"

"What makes you think it was little old me who made the call?" Linda asked smiling sweetly at David.

"I hope it was I dread to think of some perverted old woman doing it!"

Linda says she would hope if he found out that it was something like that he would have put the phone down quick. David assured her that now and again there were calls from kids or people just being a pain but he knew her call was from the heart. Linda leaned across and kissed David on the cheek whispering that of course she meant what she said and more. Sitting back in her seat she told David the best place to aim for so they could get this drink they were going to have. With that David put the car in motion and they were off in an easterly direction.

"I am afraid I cannot have a lot to drink I am back at work in the morning and I am driving of course," David tells her.

"You are doing what?" asks Linda in surprise.

"I have to drive us home. Well you then me of course." David explains.

"No I did not mean that!" Linda's voice is raised. "I mean the bit about being back at work in the morning! Don't you ever get a day off?"

"Yes but it has just been one of those weekends this week" explains David.

"The thing is now I shall be early turn tomorrow means that after two o'clock I shall be free," David was pleased with his plans.

"That's not much good for me as I do not finish until five at the nursery," Linda told him.

"Can't you leave the kids with one of the others for an hour?" David asked.

"It's not that sort of nursery!" Linda laughed. "It is a flower and plant nursery."

"Oh well that should be even easier then," David said. "The plants will not miss you will they."

"No but my Boss might," Linda told him. "But it will be nice to meet up in the evening but what will happen for the rest of the week does that mean you are at work every afternoon and evening?"

"Yes but I am sure a lonely Signalman at the station might like a bit of female company?" David told her.

"Oh who would that be?" Linda asked knowing full well what David meant. David did not get the chance to explain as before he could say anymore Linda told him to pull into the public house just coming up on the left hand side.

Five minutes later the two young people were sitting very close together in the corner of the lounge bar both with a drink on the table in front of them.

"This is nice," David said looking into Linda's blue eyes. She in turn looked back at David. He leaned across and gently kissed Linda on the lips. The kiss started to get very passionate and after a minute David pulled away conscious that perhaps the public bar was not the place to get carried away. Linda for a second felt a bit deflated but soon realised why David had pulled away.

"Perhaps we had better drink up and go?" Linda suggested. "You have to be up early in the morning." David was not sure that was the reason but thought it was a good idea that they move on. So another five minutes later saw the two young people back in the car heading for Amberley. On arrival back in the village and parked up out of sight of any prying eyes David and Linda carried on with what had started in the pub. After a long session which still ended all too soon they both realised that time was against them and with a last lingering kiss Linda got out of the car to make her way home.

"Where should I pick you up from tomorrow?" David asked.

"Hudson's Nurseries is just back down the road on the left. I get out at five you can pick me up from the front gate."

"Great I shall be there!" David called. Linda leaned back into the car for another kiss and with that was off across the village green towards home. David watched as the mini skirted young lady disappeared from view and thinking life was good. Still thinking this he started the car and drove off towards his home in Worthing.

CHAPTER 15

Monday morning dawned cool and cloudy. At Amberley station the passengers for the first train had already arrived and finding the side gate open were standing just inside on the platform waiting to see if anyone was going to turn up before the first train arrived. All of sudden a car enters the station yard at break neck speed. It screeches to a halt by the booking office door. David gets out and calls to the early morning passengers. "Morning all!"

"Come on young man been sleeping on your shirt tail again," shouts one of the passengers.

"Probably sleeping on somebody else's tail!" shouts another laughing! David does not comment he is too busy trying to find his keys.

"You're alright we all have seasons so there is no rush for tickets," calls another passenger.

"Come on the train is coming!" shouts the first passenger who is by now making his way over the footbridge to the other platform. David eventually finds his keys and opens the door as the first train arrives.

"That's it off you go never mind about me having to double back all weekend!" David says to nobody in particular.

"Ok I won't," says a voice behind him.

David jumps as he enters the booking office and turning round to see the local policeman following him in.

"Bloody hell Terry!" says a shocked David. "I thought policemen were supposed to have big feet so people could hear them coming?"

"Are that is a rumour put about by policemen with big feet!" laughs Terry.

"Well next time can you just make a bit more noise so as not to make me shit myself?" David told him.

"It's the special training we get that even big men like me can creep around with the minimum of sound when necessary," the policeman told him.

"Really!" a surprised David replies.

"No!" laughs Terry. "But it sounds really good! Now are you putting that kettle on as these early starts make me thirsty especially when one local village policeman has had to wait for a late Signalman to turn up to make me a tea!" David makes them both a cup of tea and then David gets about the business of the day by opening the signal box.

"You still look like you are running at half speed David?" asked Terry.

"Alright like I just said I have had to double back all weekend because the engineers needed to repair a bridge in the pouring rain." David told him. "And it did not help that we were disturbed all night on Saturday by two wet fishermen making soup and then the British Army preparing for World War Three!"

Terry laughed "fishermen making soup what in here?" "No they were in the porch with a camp stove warming soup and sheltering from the rain! I was afraid they might ring your lot as they might have wondered what we were doing here." David told him. "Then we had Major Mainwaring or whatever his name was and his Dad's Army!"

"I knew all about them did you not get the brief about Operation South Downs?" asked Terry.

"No I did not! At first I thought it was the Russians!" David told him.

"The Russians!" exclaimed Terry. "Whatever made you think the Russians would be invading Amberley!"

"Alright I was getting five minutes when all of a sudden Linda heard this matching down the platform and..."

David did not finish as Terry interrupted.

"Linda! Would that be the Linda from the terrible twins that were here the other day?"

"It might have been!" David was blushing.

"Wow young David you do like to live dangerously!"

Terry told him. "So how long has long this being going on?"

"I thought you were the local policeman should you not know what is going on on your patch?" David asked.

"Well I do now don't I" Terry told him. "So Linda spent the night here is that not against the rules?"

"Technically anyone in here except me is against the rules. Just remind me how many hours do you spend here in a week?" David asked him.

"It is part of my duties to keep in touch with the public and there is no better place than at the local railway station to do that," Terry thought that sounded good even if it was not always the case for him being here.

"So is this serious?" Terry asked David. "Mind you I did not think you could split the two of them girls up."

"We haven't," David said.

"What you are not dating both are you?" Terry asked.

"No of course not! I am seeing Linda and Chris is seeing Susan."

"A right couple of randy sods aren't you?" asked Terry.

"Give us a chance it has only just started this weekend" David told him.

"You don't hang about do you already she has spent the night with you. My you are a dark horse and no mistake." Terry was not sure to be jealous or just feel sorry for what David was letting himself in for.

"Nothing happened we were too busy with the work on the line, fishermen and the British Army there wasn't any time for anything else even if we had wanted to!" David was getting a bit annoyed with all the questions.

"Well just be careful young David those two can be a bit wild" Terry told him.

"It is fine at the moment we shall just have to see how it goes."

"Yes that is all very well but do you want some advice from someone with a few more years experience?" asked Terry hopefully.

"No!" was the reply!

"Ok then" Terry a bit hurt that he could not pass on words of fatherly advice to his young friend. "Oh before I go you remember that couple that were sleeping rough in the village?"

"And kipping here the other night" David added.

"Yes exactly" continued Terry. "Well would you believe the girl left him on Saturday perhaps she had enough of sleeping rough?"

"But I thought they were off to London on Saturday?" asked David.

"Perhaps she did not want to go?" Terry told him.

"Anyway you have not heard the best. The lad reported her missing and about an hour later we picked her up on the A24 trying to hitch a lift south."

"So that is it?" asked David.

"No" Terry continued. "She then tells us she is only fourteen!"

"You know I thought there was something about her" David states. Then he says. "Is that not against the law?"

"Yes" agrees Terry. "I suppose in the chap's defence he did not know as surely he would not have reported her missing?"

"But they stayed a night here as well!" David said with a hint of concern in his voice.

"Well they probably won't say too much about that and all you will have to do is say you did not know anything about it. You never saw them here at night did you?"

Terry asked. David agreed and said he hoped it did not get out about them staying at the station. Terry said he thought it would be alright. Until it got to court! At that David was worried what the Railway bosses might think!

Terry told him not to worry and just deny any knowledge and he would be alright. David was not so sure. Terry said he had better be off to catch some real criminals.

"Oh you are not working today then!" quipped David. He had started to feel a bit more awake now he had had that first cup of tea, and trying to forget about the couple that had used his station.

"Very funny young David," Terry retorted. "Just because I do not go around arresting everyone in sight does not mean I have not got my finger on the buttons of the criminal elements in Amberley!" David could not keep a straight face when he asked where the criminal elements were in Amberley apart from the odd tax disc being out of date or the fact that the pub did not actually close on time any night of the week. David suggested that perhaps Terry had been watching too many police programmes on TV.

"You might mock young David but the Great Train Robbers were holed up in a farm for weeks just like a lot of the ones we have round here." Terry informed him.

David still laughing. "Well as far as I know we have not had a train robbery lately or any other big crime around here for that matter. Just in case you do find them though I should make sure you ask for back up before you tackle them!"

"You will not be laughing when you see my picture in the papers when I collect my George Medal for bravery from the Queen!"

"I hope when you do you they have a helmet that will fit afterwards!" David said still laughing.

"You should show some respect for an officer of the law," Terry looked sternly at David.

"Yes Sir! Sorry Sir!" David said bowing slightly.

"That is better." Terry picked up his cap and said he would probably see David later if he had time in his busy schedule. David replied he would have the kettle on in case. Terry thanked him and with that was on his way to track down the criminals of Amberley.

David told him to keep him informed about the couple.

"And before you go," David said. "Did you know that there was a car rally in the village yesterday?"

"What?" Terry asked.

"A car rally," David repeated.

"That is what I thought you said," Terry answered.

"Does that mean we had cars racing through our village?"

"It was hardly that," David told him. He went on to explain just what had gone off and how he had made a little profit himself from the event!

"That sounds like if not being against the law; at the very least it should be reported to the tax people as extra income!" Terry looked hard at David but could not keep the face for too long before breaking into a big grin.

"You had me going there for a second," David said with a relieved sigh.

"Next time you might let me know and I could perhaps set up a little catch of my own!" Terry was thinking he could make a little bit out of this rally idea as well.

"Now that does sound like it could be against the law," David stated. Terry just smiled and said what was good for one should be good for another and it would all be above the law. David thought "above" was the appropriate word! With that Terry decided it was time he departed and making his exit he said he would see David later. Of that David was under no doubt.

After the morning rush in so much as you could call it a rush in a small village. It was more a case of the early workers, the few London Commuters and the school kids going in by train. The time had got round to half past nine and the few early shoppers had bought their day return tickets to Littlehampton. In the signal box the levers controlling the signals from the London direction were pulled over. Then there was the sound of the approaching train. David put his hand in his pocket to get the office keys as he intended to go out on the platform to see the incoming train and would have to lock the office while he was out on the platform. Not there was much chance of anyone going in but it would not look good if someone entered the office / signal box without him being there. David pulled out of his pocket not the office keys but a very brief pair of ladies underwear! He looked at it in surprise and then with a big smile as he remembered who they belonged to and how he had come to have them in his pocket! He was brought back to reality by the sound of the arriving train. Quickly he pushed the item down the slot in the signal box lever frame. Quite why he had not just put them back in his pocket he would not remember later perhaps the train arriving made him panic.

David went out of the office closing and locking the door behind him. It was quite common for the Signalman to meet trains from the London direction if only to give the man a break from being in the signal box come booking office for eight or twelve hours. The train pulled into the station and came to a halt with a shudder. The two passengers going off shopping opened one of the doors and boarded the train. David followed them to the train and closed the door behind them.

"Have a good trip ladies" he said. Then turning to the Guard to give him the tip to go he saw that a couple of men had got off the train further up the platform.

"Morning Mister Williams," called David on seeing the Station Master from Pulborough walking towards him.

"You are down here early for a Monday morning. I would have thought you would have enough to do in the metropolis of Pulborough this time of the day. Not that you are more than welcome of course"

"Thank you David," Mister Williams had a very serious look on his face.

"Right" It was now David's turn to look worried. He was wondering if someone had reported him for Linda being with him on Saturday night. Meanwhile the Guard had rung the train bell and the train was moving off gathering speed at a rapid rate.

The other person to get off the train was Fred Guilford the local signalling technician. Fred had worked on the railway all his working life and had seen it all, that was until that day! Back in the signal box David carried on with his signalling duties and then put the kettle on for the usual cup of tea. The Station Master and the Signalling Technician followed David into the signal box. Fred told David that he would go and do a bit of cleaning out under the signal frame before he had his tea. As he would need to get down on track and climb under the platform to clean the signal wires under the signal box lever frame he would need David to stop any trains for a few minutes. David said that was ok as there was not anything due and he would put a block on the line until Fred was clear providing if anything was coming he could stop and let David run the train. The Technician agreed and said it would not take him long. With that he was off back out onto the platform. After drinking the first few mouthfuls of the brew of tea Mister Williams starts. "Right David I will get straight to the point I hope you have looked though the folder from HQ. David says he had and is not impressed with any of it.

"Let me point out it is only proposals at present and there will need to be a meeting with you and Chris before anything is decided."

"I don't like the sound of that" David admitted.

"And it could be the start of you both moving in a new direction but still with us on the railway." Mister Williams did not sound convincing.

"Still sounds like bad news to me" David commented. Mister Williams asked what David thought of the proposals.

"I take it they want to close this place and collect tickets on the train but what about the box? Are they happy to put up with a bit of delay with the service when it gets busy or runs late and things are queuing up? What about engineering work, diversions, and who is going to change the signal lamps?"

"These are things you will have to bring up at the meeting" Mister Williams advised him.

"Yes and a lot of good that will do you know as well as I do that these things are decided long before the meeting" David said very sceptically.

"Now that is not the case there is always room for discussion" Mister Williams told him.

David again emphasised the fact that he did not believe that for a minute and did not think the Station Master did either.

“Well like I said you and Chris will have to think about what you will want to say at the meeting. I will let you know when that has been arranged. Just remember that if your job is cut out here there are plenty of vacancies around at the moment.”

“Yes that is probably why they have not been advertised!” David stated. “They have been deliberately keeping them to allow us to apply!”

“In a way it could help you. I know you cannot get promotion out of redundancy but you could take one job while applying for another. I am sure you did not want to stay here the rest of your life?” Mister Williams asked.

“As it happens I am quite happy here at the moment thanks.” David was thinking more about Linda than the work when saying this. Mister Williams said that yes it was a nice little job to start out on your railway career but he should always be looking to the future. David thought that is exactly what he was doing but did not say so in so many words. The Station Master said to discuss it further with Chris. In the meantime he will be off back to Pulborough on the next train.

David informs him he still has a quarter of an hour to wait. He says that is alright he will go and have a look around the station while waiting. David ironically says it might be a "last look!" Just as the Station Master was about to leave a man enters the booking hall and goes to the ticket window. He asks about Runabout Tickets. These are weekly tickets which cover a set area and allow travel as many times a day as you want to make within that area and are usually for holiday trips and can be very popular from Amberley as it allowed travel to the seaside and as far as Portsmouth Southampton and Salisbury giving a variety of different ideas for a day out. David was still dealing with the inquiry when Fred came back into the office/ signal box and he had something in his hand. Mister Williams was still in the office.

"Ah it's a good thing you are still here Gaffer," Fred started. "I wish you could keep an eye on your randy young staff you have here!"

Mister Williams said he did not understand what Fred was on about. His staff were a couple of the best young lads he had had working for him. Fred was not so sure and held up the pair of ladies brief briefs that he had just retrieved from under the signal box lever frame.

Mister Williams was still not sure what these had to do with Chris or David surely he did not think they were theirs!

"No!" replied Fred. "But you do not know what goes on here when you are not here!" Fred went on to say he thought perhaps a young lady might have put them through the signal lever frame! David quickly reminded the company present that it had just been a weekend and possibly someone on one of the trains coming back from the coast had thrown them out of the window and like all the other stuff that gets blown in that is where these had come from.

"There you are Fred," said the Station Master. "That is the more probable explanation."

The man was still at the ticket window now joined in the conversation. "Yes all the young girls wear those sort of knickers my daughter Linda must have a dozen or more like those!" David who had just took another sip of his tea about chocked. Fred who was about to say something about the fact that these probably belonged to the said Linda when he heard David spluttering his drink and realised that he was nearer the truth than he thought. So he decided to leave it to Mister Williams to put things in perspective.

"There you are then they could have come from anywhere," he said. With that the Station Master told them he would be off to the other platform for his train. Fred said he was about done so it was about time David made him a cup of tea. David agreed. The man at the window thanked David for the information and said he would be back in a week to get the tickets, and with that he left. Fred now drinking his tea said, "Do you want to return these to their owner young David?" He said holding up the item of ladies underwear that he had retrieved from under the signal box. David asked why he thought Fred would think he would know who they belonged to. Fred said he saw David's face when the man at the window mentioned his daughter's name. David said he had never seen the man before. Fred said he did not think that applied to the man's daughter. David reluctantly agreed that he might know who they belong to so he would look after them for now but he would be glad if Fred did not tell anyone what had happened to the item, Fred agreed. So David put the article back in his pocket with the thought he would return it later that day. Meanwhile the signalling technician having finished his tea decided it was time to get on with his work.

He told David he would walk through to Arundel checking out the line side phones so he will call en route. With that he is on his way. The rest of the morning David spent his free time he had between trains reading through the proposals again and making a few phone calls about what signalling vacancies there are on the area. Before he knew it a car screeches to a halt outside the window. The sound of a door slamming can be heard followed by someone whistling loudly entering the building.

Chris throws open the door. "Hello Mate!" he calls. "Alright are we? The world is a wonderful place for you and me is it not?" David says he would hope so but he has had the Station Master here this morning on about the cutting their jobs out.

"Yes but you know me there will always be someone who wants me," Chris stated.

"Yeh! But maybe not this lot!" David told him. "But it all amounts to our redundancy!"

"Redundancy!" Exclaimed Chris. "Great how much will we get?"

David explained that being as neither of them had been on the railway that long it would not be a lot and it was an awfully long time to their old age pension!

"Well like I said for me there is always farm work" Chris told him.

"And if that doesn't work?" asked David. Chris did not have an answer. So David told they would offer them another job but that might be in the north of Scotland! Chris said that he would want a bit of travelling time to get there. David told him it would not be that far as he had already made some enquires and there were some signalling vacancies on the coast line. Chris said that might suit David but he would not be too keen on the travelling and he could probably get a full time position on the farm which would be more up his alley. David said that he would not be too happy about leaving Amberley either.

"And would that be because of a certain young lady?" asked Chris. David turning slightly red agreed that that would be one of the reasons.

"Don't worry mate if she feels the same way I am sure she will follow you."

"You know!" exclaimed David.

"It's true I know!" Chris told him.

"And what about her mate and family?" asked David. Chris said it was not as if he was going to the end of the world.

David had to agree that maybe anything was possible but he would have to tread carefully as not to ruin everything that had started. Chris smiled and said he did not think anything had started between them yet! David agreed that it was early days but it looked like it could get serious.

"What about you and Susan?" David asked.

"No problem," Chris told him. "There are always the sheep!"

"Well everyone to his own but have you told Susan?" David smiled.

"Not like that you Pratt!" Exclaimed Chris. "I meant that there will always be the sheep to keep me in work."

"Oh you rent them out you mean?" David said still smiling.

Chris told David he knew exactly what he meant and was it not the time and he should off. They would sort out what they were going to say at this meeting another day but if was really worried he could go home and think up some questions to put at the meeting. David stated that he was meeting Linda from work later so he probably might be otherwise engaged to be worrying such things tonight.

"Well at least you can ask her how she would like to live in the north of Scotland when you get moved!" It was Chris's time to smile. David was not impressed. Chris continued that perhaps Linda could find David a job in the nursery! David thought that might not be a bad idea working with all those girls every day!

"They would have you for breakfast!" laughed Chris.

"What a way to go!" David thought out loud.

"Go being the appropriate word!" Chris agreed.

David said that "go" is what he was going to do and he would have another think about the plans for the station tomorrow. He also reminded Chris that they had changed shifts today so he would be doubling back in the morning and David would be doing the late shift tomorrow and the rest of the week. Chris agreed he knew so David bade farewell and left towards the car park and his vehicle.

CHAPTER 16

It is just after five in the evening. David is sitting in his car parked outside the gate to the nursery. In the distance he can see the glass houses with their windows all white washed making them gleam brightly in the evening sunshine. All of a sudden there is an explosion of noise as the workers pour out into the sunlight. David can see Linda and Susan walking up the driveway towards the gate where he is parked.

"Hey look your fella is waiting for you" calls Susan to Linda as they approach the gate and she spies David sitting in his car.

"Ah isn't that nice of him," smiles Linda. "He is lovely." "So you keep telling me!" says Susan smiling at Linda. "Well he is!" Linda confirms. Susan agrees. Linda tells her she will see her tomorrow as she runs over to David as he gets out of the car and gives David a big kiss.

"Alright you two that is enough of that this time of the day" Susan says as she draws level with the car. David says he did not think it mattered what time it was.

"And who told you that?" asked Linda.

"You did!" David told her.

"Oh yeh so I did" Linda agreed.

"I will leave you two love birds to it" said Susan as she starts to walk off towards the village.

"Before you go I have got something to tell you both," David looked a bit apprehensive at the two girls. Susan stopped and walked back towards them.

"Oh no Susan!" said Linda in a shocked voice. "He is going to tell us he cannot split us and he must have both of us! Well I am sorry David it will not work you cannot share us! It will mean that Susan and I will just have to go off together without you!"

"A?" surprised Susan looked at Linda in horror! Not knowing if she is joking or not.

"No it is nothing like that" David tells them.

"Thank goodness for that" states a relieved Susan.

"Chris and I received a Précis from HQ the other day" David tells the two girls.

"Great well done" Linda looked pleased.

"What's a Précis?" asked Susan.

"It must be good" Linda thought.

"Actually it is not," David corrected them. "It's a proposal to cut out Chris and my jobs."

"Does that mean you are redundant?" asked a concerned Linda.

"In a word- yes" David confirmed.

"Well that's bad" stated Susan. "No station how will we get about?"

"No they are not closing the station just making it unstaffed," David told them.

"Great does that mean we will not have to pay when we go by train?" Susan asked.

"It might be great and free but it will not be for Chris and David!" exclaimed Linda.

"Firstly I am afraid you will still have to pay. You pay the Guard instead and as for jobs the railway will offer us another signal box elsewhere," David corrected her.

"That's ok then" Susan patted Linda on the back in encouragement.

"No it's not! Where is this other signal box? Is it close by?" asked a worried Linda.

"It will not be that far away in fact it could be closer to home for me," David told her.

"Maybe it might be better for you but what about me?" Linda had real concern in her voice.

"There is nothing settled yet and then there is no need for us not to see each other," David reassured her.

Linda looked at David with a very unhappy expression on her face. "With me here and you God knows where. How will that work?

Susan thinking that it was time she left the other two to it said she would be off to the station to see what Chris had to say on the matter. So saying her goodbyes to them both she walked off in the direction of the village and the station. David watched her go and then turns towards Linda. "If it does come to the fact that I have to move to another job I would want you to come with me." David looked at Linda for a response.

Linda was not quite sure what David was getting at. "Hang on a minute. Are you saying what I think you are saying? Do you want me to give up all that I have here my work, my family and my friends to move away with you to goodness knows where?"

David said that was basically what he was saying. Linda asked exactly where she would fit in to this master plan. "I thought," started David.

Linda interrupted, "I know what you thought! You thought we could sail off into the sunset and share a life together happily ever after!"

David was a bit taken aback by what Linda was saying. "Well yes but"

A big smile came over Linda's young face. "I think it is a wonderful idea!"

"I am sorry," said David. "But I did think we were getting on well and maybe I am rushing things and last night."

He stopped looked at Linda smiling at him. "You think it is what?"

Linda leaned towards him putting her finger on his lips to stop him saying anything else. Then removing her finger replaced it with her lips giving him the biggest kiss. After this tender moment Linda moved her face back slightly and repeated. "I said I think it would be a great idea."

David told her he had been so worried all day what this move would mean for them. He could not see her wanting to move away even if it meant being with him. He had been afraid that things were going to be over before they had really had a chance to begin. He had never met anyone like her before and he had never felt about anyone like he did for Linda.

"Listen," Linda told him. "I have, how shall I put it been around a bit and have known one or two boys in my life."

"Only one or two?" asked David. Linda told him to listen she was trying to be serious. David apologised and said he would keep quiet.

Linda continued. "Like I said I have known other lads but I have not felt the same with them as I do with you. I cannot explain it but I and Susan always thought we were free spirits and would never find someone who we would want to with more than a day at the most. With you it is completely different I do not know but I think I could be in love!"

David tried to lower the tension in the air. "Oh and may I ask who with?" Linda hit him playfully but then put her arms around his neck and gave him another big kiss. David moved away, saying he did not know what to say. "You could say that you were in love as well," Linda suggested.

"I shall have to think about that one!" David mocked. Linda said he should not have to think about it after she had just told him that she loved him. David looked straight into her eyes.

"I think I love you" he said and kissed her. Linda responded by locking her arms around him and pushing her lips even harder onto his. After this lasting embrace they pull apart enough for Linda to ask what next. David suggests they get in the car as people passing by are noticing them. Linda says that was not what she meant. Where do they go from here? David suggests finding somewhere for tea as he is staving!

Again Linda getting a bit annoyed at David not grasping what she means says again that it is not the rest of the day she is on about but the rest of their lives!

"Well I suppose we get married have ten kids and end up as old age pensioners together!" David quipped.

"Ten!" shouted an amazed Linda.

"Alright nine then!" corrected David.

"You are joking?" asked Linda. David agreed he was.

Linda suggested they go one step at a time and usually if you mention anything like marriage and kids to men they run a mile. David said he was not going anywhere until the railway forced him out. With another quick kiss Linda said they ought to go and celebrate. David said he knew a nice little place his flat in Worthing but he did not think it sold champagne.

"I do not need champagne," Linda stated. "Not when I have got you."

David thought that was a lovely thing to say and leaned across and kissed Linda again. "Well come on let's get going to this little place that does not serve champagne then as all this has made me hungry."

With that they both get into the car and David starts the engine.

All of a sudden he reaches into his pocket and pulls out the item that he found earlier in the day in the same pocket. "I think these might be yours?" he asks Linda. Linda looked at him with a truly innocent look.

"And what makes you think these are mine," she says taking the underwear in her hands. "Are you sure they do not belong to someone else?"

"Well unfortunately this morning I found these where I had put them yesterday when we were." David did not get to finish the sentence.

"Ok!" Linda intervened.

"Are but there is more" David told her. "When I found them I was a bit surprised or shocked I was looking for my keys. So I quickly shoved them down the signal lever frame."

Linda asked what he had done that for. David said it was the first place handy at the time and he was not thinking. Linda asked how he got them back. David said he was coming to that. He then went on to tell her the story of how the panties turned up back in the box.

Linda thought this was very amusing until David told her about the man at the ticket window.

"Now it could have been anyone with a daughter named Linda who wears these, like he said all the young ladies wear this sort and his daughter Linda has many pairs like this!"

"Oh God!" A shocked Linda exclaimed. "That must have been Dad he is on holiday for a few days and he was looking at taking Mum out on a few trips."

"I am sorry but I don't think he will associate them with you or me do you." David asked.

"I do not know what to be worried about." Linda said.

"Either the fact that he knows what my underwear looks like or the fact that all young ladies have the same or the fact that once he knows you and me are together he might work out whose pants those in the station were!" David said he was sorry and had never meant to make any trouble between Linda and her father.

Linda looked at David's sad face. "Don't worry. He will be ok with it all he is a man of the world and he has two other daughters both older than me, so nothing will surprise him!" David was not so sure and if or when he met Linda's father he would be hard not to apologise for the panties incident.

Linda told him that when that time came he should not say anything about it and if it did get a mention just to bluff it out and stick to the story that was said at the station. David agreed. Linda said that was sorted then and put the panties into her bag.

"Right," she said. "Let's go now as I am ready for some food."

David said there was a nice little restaurant near his flat which served some great stuff would that be alright. Linda told him as long as it did not take ages to get there anywhere would do. So David started the car and within a minute they are off en route towards Worthing.

CHAPTER 17

Meanwhile back at the railway station Susan has arrived and is settling down in the big armchair with a cup of coffee while Chris deals with his duties in the signal box. Bells ringing and levers crashing over, Susan says it is a bit too much noise. Chris tells her this is a working environment and it must be the same in the nursery with all those girls talking at once!! Susan asks what makes him think they have time to talk while picking and looking after all those flowers and vegetables! Chris says he would not know but he would think there would be a way of doing it! Susan just smiles in return knowing full well he is correct in what he has said. After Susan has mentioned what David had said about the lads being made redundant Chris explains what he planned to do if they took away the Signalman's work from Amberley and he asks Susan what she and Linda had thought of the plans for the station, the fact that David might be moving away and that he would probably move to work on the farm full time instead of the railway. Susan told him that Linda was far from impressed especially when it looked like her and David were just starting to get it together.

Chris said they would be alright as David would be offered another job not that far away.

"I do hope they will be alright," hoped Susan. "It will be a shame to not see Linda every day if she moves to be close to David. Then there is us!"

"Us?" asked Chris. "What about us?"

"Exactly!" Susan repeated. "Where do we go from here?"

"Well" started Chris. "If they do kick me out of here I do not want to go anywhere else so I will take on the sheep full time."

"That is alright for you but what about me?" Susan asked.

"You can have a couple of sheep!" Chris tells her.

"I don't want sheep it is you I am thinking about!" Susan told him. "So when would we see each other it is bad enough now meeting up here. I am not sure I want to meet up in a field full of sheep! I mean at other times you will be at your flat and I shall still be at home with Mum and Dad."

"Yes well you could always move into my flat," Chris suggested.

Susan got up and put her arms around Chris's neck.

"How nice an idea that would be"

"Yes and I would find another flat nearby!" Chris laughed.

"Christopher Fuller you are terrible!" Susan hit him gently around the back of the neck. "If I did not know you I would think you are being serious!"

"There is an alternative we could emigrate and take the sheep with us. Australia like sheep I think?" Chris tried to keep a straight face but was losing the battle. Susan agreed that even she had not thought of that idea.

"I think the best idea for now is that you move in with me in my flat that way we shall be able to make the most of our time together," Chris told her. "You know it makes sense!"

"Where have I heard that before?" asked Susan.

"Probably when your Mother told you to avoid men like me!" Chris told her. "So what do you think is it a good idea?" Susan put her arms around Chris again and kissed her tenderly.

"Do I take that as a yes?" asked Chris unlocking his lips from Susan's.

Susan just put her lips back on Chris's there was no need for her to say anything.

Over the next week Susan moved in with Chris and Linda had spent the odd night at David's flat. The meeting with the railway management went the way they all thought it would. Chris and David were offered other signal boxes in the area. However Chris had secured full time work on the farm and decided to take that and leave the railway life behind. David accepted a signal box job further up the line towards London but while that was being sorted he had applied for a higher grade Signalman's position on the coast line and had been awarded this so he would go straight there which was ideal as the signal box was a lot closer to his flat in Worthing. The meeting with the management decided the station was to become unstaffed with the signal box only going to open when the service needed it usually doing engineering work and or diversions this would be manned by relief staff. So once everything was sorted and a date agreed Chris would take his redundancy. As for David he would move to another signal box nearer to his home. All this meant that Linda would have to leave her job in the nursery but had already found another job working in David's home town with a local firm and would move in full time in David's flat.

Although splitting up their partnership the girls would still keep in touch and realised that things had to move on and they could not be the "terrible twins" forever!

The only one really to suffer would be Terry the local policeman who lost his "port of call" for his daily cuppa, but it was rumoured that the police van would be seen more often on a certain local farm especially around the fields where the sheep would be grazing!!!

As for the young man who had been caught running away with an underage young lady. When he appeared in court it did come out that they had stayed at Amberley station but luckily for David the young man said they arrived after the last train and left before the first on the next day so the staff would never have known. David was most relieved at this.

CHAPTER 18

It had now got to the last day of the station being staffed and it is a Saturday. After today the station would be unstaffed. The tickets would be issued or checked by the Guard on each train. The lights on the station would come on and go off on a time switch. Hopefully everything had been thought of. Chris and David had a few doubts, but were not really concerned after today it would not be their worry. It is late evening and there are four cups on the table in the booking office/signal box. The cups have freshly made coffee in them. Two young ladies are sitting while two young men are standing beside them. They are of course Linda, Susan, David and Chris. The only person who was supposed to be there was Chris who was the Signalman on duty that last evening. Chris had already closed the signal box so all the signals were showing clear and the last train of the day was on the way from London. Chris picked up one of the cups. "Here's to the life after Amberley" he called, and raised his cup. "After what?" Susan asked. "After this of course" David added. Susan still looked puzzled.

"I think he means the life after working here" Linda told her.

"Oh I'll drink to that" said Susan lifting her cup. They all put their cups together with a satisfying clink. Susan thought they should have something stronger than coffee. Chris said there would be time enough to celebrate their new lives and being as he was still on duty there was no way he could have alcohol on the premises. Susan said let's hope that time would soon come.

"So where do we see the future taking us all?" asked Chris.

"Well we are staying around here in your flat for now" says Susan looking at Chris. "But I think we shall have to look for something bigger in due course." Chris looked at her in horror. Susan quickly put his mind at rest. She meant that what might have been alright for one was not really big enough for the both of them.

"We shall be alright in our little love nest for now shalln't we?" Linda asked David.

"Yes now you have moved things around to suit you and the fact I cannot find anything of mine!" David laughed. Linda said that it was not really like that it was just that a young man living on his own was not that tidy and now everything was in its place.

Susan agreed that Chris was still as bad as when she had moved in she spent most of the time picking up things after him.

"In a way it is a shame we could not keep things as they were we did have some good times here didn't we?" David winked at Linda.

"Yes but we would not be starting out on this new life if we stayed here would we?" Chris asked. To which they all had to agree. The sound of the approaching train could be heard. So linking arms the four young people decided to go out onto the platform for the last time. They stood together as the train pulled to a loud halt in the platform.

"So this is the last train?" asked Susan.

"It is the last one with any staff here to meet it." Chris told her. The Guard opened his door and looked out surprised to see so many on the platform this time of the night at such a country station.

"Well" he asked. "Are you lot getting on? Only this station does not have any staff now so if you want tickets you have to buy them on the train."

"We know!" the four of them laughed.

"And yes we are going but no we are not going anywhere on this train!" Susan told him.

The Guard looked at them with the look that said he thought they were either drunk or on drugs. "Right we'll go then!" he called, and slamming his door shut he rang the train bell twice. Within a minute the train had started and was off towards the coast.

"Off you go," called David as the train departed. "We have better places to go!"

"Yes pastures green" noted Chris.

"And sea of blue!" added Linda. With that the four young people put their arms around each other and made their way back into the station building. Five minutes later after locking up the station and booking office / signal box for the last time Chris joined his friends in the station yard.

"What are you doing with the keys?" David asked Chris.

"Why do you want them as a souvenir? Chris smiled.

"Well I am afraid that you cannot have them I have got to drop them in at Pulborough station tomorrow."

"I hope they will pay you the extra day for doing it" stated David.

"Quite honestly the payoff is good so it is the most I can do for the old place," Chris told him.

With that the four of them joined hands again before making their way towards the two cars.

"I never liked the place anyway!" Chris stated.

"Cold, dull and dingy!" added Susan.

"All those early mornings and late nights," David put in.

"But the company was good at times wasn't it?" asked Linda smiling.

"I suppose it wasn't a bad place to work" Chris said looking back at the buildings.

"We have had some good times here," agreed David.

"I shall miss coming down here," Susan looked a bit sad.

"I will too. I really liked the old place!" Linda summed up how they all really felt.

"We all will!" replied the other three together. With that they all burst into a bout of laughter as they climbed into the cars and headed off for their new lives.

THE END.