

Bourne toWrite...

creative writing
workshops

Obsessions

by Sue Hitchcock

Beech had two obsessions – trains and trees. As a child he had been rather shy and uncommunicative, disappointing his talkative mother, who wanted him to play with other children, so she could make friends amongst her peer group. Consequently she was happy, when he wanted to spend time with his father, who was a station master, the family living in the station house nearby. The station, just north-east of London, had Up and Down lines and a platform where a local train terminated. Beside the local train and the slow trains which stopped there, express trains came through, travelling to Cambridge and beyond.

At first Toby, Beech's first name, simply enjoyed the coming and going, but once he had mastered his numbers, and later the concept of time, correlating the timetable which was shown in the twenty-four hour clock with the big, old, station clock, he became an avid trainspotter.

If he crossed to the further platform, there was a way out onto a Country Park and when only routine traffic was expected, he would go out and explore. He loved the smell of the clean air and if he climbed a tree, he could see all the way to the next station to the north. The habit of identifying what he was seeing was similar. Instead of train numbers, he was now checking leaf shapes and seeds. He was soon an expert.

His solitary happiness was worrying to his parents, but Beech felt himself complete.

As he studied the history of the railways, he became annoyed that he shared the arboreal part of his name with the Dr. Beeching, who had closed down so many branch lines and he became a campaigner for public transport, averse to cars and roads. However when the preparations for a high-speed rail link, known as H.S.2 , was threatening many ancient woodlands, he was in a dilemma. He had to protect the forests and surely there were already rail lines to the cities to which H.S.2 would go?

Then the final blow to his love of trains came with a new virus, highly contagious, which made public transport excessively dangerous. There were rules for social distancing and the wearing of facemasks. Private cars were much safer, even though the air pollution made respiratory complications more likely.

There was only one solution: to retire to his beloved trees.