

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

Nobody

by Sue Hitchcock

He did not look like anything special at all. If he had cared he might have worried that he was beginning to resemble Mr McGoo, short of the blunderbuss, small, bald and extremely shortsighted. People tended to ignore him, though his valuable computer work made him famous, by name at least, with the management of the International Digital Machine Company, who would find him difficult to replace. Even the doormen couldn't identify him, though they never challenged him.

He didn't consider himself modest, he was not that self-aware. From childhood he had been an observer, sometimes puzzled by people but with sufficient curiosity to look up in encyclopedias and textbooks behaviour, which seemed unreasonable. The earliest computers had been like chess games, fun, but with no explanations for the irrational people he observed in the office or on the train. His best tutors were to be found on his long rambles in the countryside. Each living thing seemed to be a prey and a predator, neatly fitting into a food chain. Humans didn't seem capable of accepting their own place. They considered themselves top predators, and felt no shame about it.

At home, his observations continued. The large spider which had taken up residence in the corner of the kite shaped step two from the top was his favourite. It would keep watch for flies and moths, but a little tap a few inches away would send it scurrying into its nest for the time being. It seemed a comfortable relationship until he found himself under attack by ravenous clothes moths. They demolished his best suit, which he would have worn if he had been promoted, or, more likely, retired. The spider could not cope, well she was a ground-dwelling type and the moths seemed to prefer the ceiling. Those spiders with their fishing webs were pretty useless up there. Maybe they were lazy.

As an observer the unnoticeable man took it to be simply a natural part of the system, till one morning he found a moth in his hair. Had it considered him suitable host for its caterpillars? Thinking about the moth's role in the bigger picture, he realized what a valuable job they did. When scavengers had finished with the carcass of an animal which had died, what would happen to the fleece or pelt lying, smelly in the sun? Moths or at least their offspring could demolish it in no time.

Perhaps the moths were telling him an important message. Maybe his carcass would be more useful to them and to the Earth than it was to the International Digital Machine Supply company.