

**Bourne**  
**toWrite...**  
creative writing  
workshops

## Clickety-click

by Sheridan Maguire

He hated the word 'retirement', but not as much as he hated the word 'village', as if aging made you a peasant or a fool. In fact, God how he hated words. It was like he had a word phobia. He hated long words he couldn't pronounce and short words he didn't know the meaning of. He hated words that made him feel emotions because he feared his reactions would be judged. He hated loud words and soft words, and bitter words that ripped the back of your throat as you swallowed them. He hated words that didn't make sense. Lewis Carroll was his bete noire.

People who could string a sentence together made him feel inferior and he felt inferior constantly, so he hated people too. This phobia was a migraine biting the nerves at the base of his skull. It's steel-bright voice had an acid tongue and it told him that he was looked down upon, reviled behind his back, sniggered about when he left the checkout at Aldi. He couldn't shake it no matter what. He sensed a persistent grease of servility in his manner, yet he could not help but be nauseatingly fawning with those whom he met. It disgusted him, he felt like a damp handshake.

And now he was sixty-six and a part-time bingo caller. Sixty-effing-six. Clickety-effing-click. From playground to retirement he looked back, not so much in anger as in loathing. All the world's a stage, and he had spent all of it in the wings. At first the infant, mewling and puking in its mother's arms, then a whining kid, and then what - a lover, a soldier, a justice?

The bile rose in his throat. In this life, you're either superior or inferior, a have or a have not, you're either in or you're out. Well, he knew he was out and always had been. Actually, not just out, but *way* out.

Out on a limb, up a creek without a paddle, without a spade - in fact, without even a bloody shovel. On the roulette wheel of life, he'd placed his last bet before he could barely walk, before even the first hateful word had passed his baby lips - and now it was *rien ne vas plus*. The system had beaten his father, who had passed the beating to his mother and she then to the boy through her milk. They'd had no words for either themselves or for him and so the terrible parcel had stopped there.

He had wrapped it up this thing without a name and kept it hidden at the back of his skull like a migraine in waiting. How he had longed to pass it on, this voice with no tongue, to pass the speaking of it to another. What a joke. Even Shakespeare didn't have the words to describe the insipid and pointless hell that was his life. Welcome to retirement. Sixty-effing-six. Clickety-effing-click.