

David Musgrove

Old Man Fishing

.....Old, brown, withered man
shaves while the coffee's brewing.
So early in the morning
nighttime ghosts shudder and sigh,
indignant, disturbed.
His hair is grey, but
leaps from his thick, dark scalp
like a tangled tumbling of young animals.
He fries an egg, two slices of bacon,
eats their smoky, animal smell,
their sizzle, their sustenance.
Finished, he leaves the house.
Suspenders hold trousers
high on his gaunt frame.
Old boots, the sour dankness of wool socks,
a crumpled hat,
stained and faded by a thousand outings,
all seem to hold him up, carry him along,
offer protection,
the pajamas and wheelchairs of nursing homes
cannot provide.
 Old cigar box
filled with dirt and worms;
he takes one out,
hurts it with the hook.
Blood, bile, slippery,
wetting his rough, brown fingers.
The worms wriggle with the pain of existence.
He leans against the rail
of an old wooden bridge,
drops a hook and squirt of tobacco
into the murky, moccasin water
sliding slowly by the bridge
as the years
have touched, then slid past
the old man

hunched now over the water,
along with the warped wood,
forgotten iron rails
and the silence that comes after a train passes.
The old man dangles death on a hook,
and waits for the fish. He remembers
other waiting,
things that never came.
He can vaguely recall,
like the bridge can the train,
her face,
but he no longer remembers her name.
He pulls up a bream
slips in it a dirty cloth sack,
then two more, then heads on back.
And the rotted bridge
whose purpose is done,
remains waiting for the train
that no longer runs.