

## Wilderness House Literary Review 10/3

*Charles Hayes*  
**Mitch**

UNDER THE LONG STEEL SPAN across the Ohio, against the abutment just off the water's edge, I hear the wake of a passing coal barge lapping in the mud a few yards below our hunker spot. It must of rained up the Kanawha, the water didn't seem that close last night. But last night was a little fire and a couple of bottles of Mad Dog. Nothing got too close.

Struggling from the dumpster blanket it hurts to see my breath blossom in front of my face. As if the DTs ain't enough. Looking over at Mitch wrapped in a plastic drop cloth, I wonder if the plastic is any better than my blanket. Stirring not a lick, maybe Mitch is on to something. Seeing his empty bottle at the lip of the plastic, I figure we're even there. Mine was empty before my face hit my hat.

Reaching out my hand to gauge how bad it is, or worse yet, how bad it's going to get, I see my tremble is just inside a sway. My need is alive but Mitch is old, I'll give him a little longer. Hustle then we will, try the trash around town first for maybe a quick one left behind. It will be late enough to beg after that. The rumble above has yet to really get started. Wish I could sleep like Mitch. Those days are gone for me. Maybe 15 minutes more.

Pulling the blanket as much around me as I can get it, my back to the concrete, I stare out at the wide river and the long line of coal barges being pushed on by a single tug. Pushing a load like that, wouldn't take much of an error to hit one of these abutments and bring the bridge down. But coal has enough money to hire good pilots, make sure that doesn't happen..... most of the time. Still most of that money goes somewhere else. Always has. Can't seem to think of anything that coal has left around here that moves on independently or grows much. Coal to China and the money to the Northeast and Midwest. Oh well, too much soot I guess. Dirties the ink on those nice Benjamin Franklins. A warm Mad Dog would do me just as well about now.

"Mitch roll your ass outa that plastic, we got to get something to drink. Ain't no coal barge goin' to pull up and unload us a taste. Get up!"

Staying wrapped and getting to my feet with no small effort, I try again. "Come on Mitch, get up. Ain't a lick of Mad Dog left!"

Going over to Mitch, I hate to do it but need is need. Reaching down and taking the edge of the plastic I unroll him to the elements.

Having no longer any troublesome needs to fill, his pale face to the early rumble above, Mitch is dead.