



**“I shout to time that nothing stays
Nothing lasts and damn to change
Though then I read a book a line
Which says we sleep in blind sublime
Deaf and dumb in human lands
To break and free needs different hands
To pull us to a different space
Where things are wider, out of place**

**It looks a dream
And smells the same
I could conquer it
And still feel sane”**

Peter Murphy

The Mississippi slides golden through the hazing blue-green of the hills passing with little note some thirty miles downstream from Dubuque, Iowa sits a goodly sized island...against the shore opposite the main channel is a small steam-boat nestled and tethered to the trees...now much of an anachronism, the Julia Belle Swain though herself built in 1970, is propelled by engines from the turn of the century that have logged well over a million miles...she embodies the Twainian archetype with staggered decks set each a bit smaller like stages of a wedding cake all done in blue and white icing...the box pilot house sits high atop and set behind two tall black smoke stacks embellished at the top with a bulb of iron feathers...

At the end of the first of our two-day run, it's the shutting down the main generator that always gets to me...the ladder to the fire-room's near the bow just in front of the kitchen...a long line of low-ceiling staggered hatches inconveniently laced and braced with I-beams lead from hull compartment/ compartment to the flat box stern that's floor rises just an angle slight to taper tail away from rudders...and from this tail I fear an apparition stays awakened only once every day at the shutting down...it



roars out to deaden all else as the two switches down to cut power out then the little brass one to kill the roaring rotations and as down they wind it comes unheard as the whines die and tear I up the ladder for fear it's at my feet and out...

I'm on main deck...all's quiet...crickets...frogs...two miles to the nearest house only by boat through swamps inking black by now and a cellular phone I've no idea how to use...and yet, now...no fear...content...the last of fear for the night spent in ritual...

...and I not ready to hear more roar so I leave the Honda generator cold (the gas back-up so main generator doesn't have to run all night) and sun hasn't quite set yet so I dine a bit on cold chicken and Mozart and red wine although the meat's white...

The day's been naught but strain as with first morning step out of bed at 7:00 a.m. when it seemed but only that the head hit the pillow after having to stay up late and wait for the dryer to finish churning out today's millionth time laundered uniform. Striding out from my room on our wharf boat the Baton Rouge onto the second deck where the River vision was marred at the sight of mayflies covering every available space like ivy. One morning I was graced if you can call it that with the opportunity to see them rise from the River in a cloud just before sunrise. Their life entailing little more than hatching, procreating and dying. A single day to see the sun, catch a breath, feel the angst of life and the sting of death. The only purpose they fill is fish food as around the boat the water thrashes glutinous with life as with each broom sweep we send another hundred into the water below. If swept too hard, they mark with a black stain that can only be removed with Comet cleanser and elbow grease.



If swept to light, they simply fly out and wait a bit till they can flutter back into their favorite sunning place. There is an effective point in between. No one has mastered it so far. And so the morning started with these stowaways fought frantically in the hour before boarding in addition to all the other routine events which in themselves take about an hour such as sweeping and mopping decks to ready them for still stacked lounge chairs which inevitably need drying off either of rain or dew in addition to changing can liners and cleaning

bathrooms making sure all is in place with fresh urinal mints and sanitized sanitary napkin dispensers (ever smell a full sanitary napkin bag in mid August?)

Pandering to the expectations of 100 sum various elderly passengers still acclimating to the fact that there's no air conditioning takes us into the afternoon and never a chance to so much as sit for a bite. Right in the middle of serving lunch comes lock and damn #13. The upstream side holds a basin some five miles wide with only the straight and narrow channel navigable. All else outside is composed of fields of stumps ready to remove bucket boards from the stern paddle wheel and mud and stone to break rudders as it did last year. The charcoal sky comes as summoned simply by our presence as the first of winds hits at about 60 m.p.h. and threatens the precarious turn as Cpt. JohnVaughn attempts to pull the stern into the storm which seems to be (as opposite to other vessels)



the most effective and shouts down “FULL ASTERN” to the engineer. Wind makes the stage planks hung out over the bow to be as little more than cardboard construction and makes their chains slack then snap each time a threat to break. We roll down the plastic from the ceiling of main and stretch the bungees and arm strength in attempt tie them to stanchions and seal off the open main deck. Then up to stack lounge chairs

that they won't be taken by the wind and fed to the River. Luckily (and rarely) we finish before the rain really hits. A passenger asks if there's danger from the lightening.

“We're a three story vessel of metal on one of the largest inland bodies of water in the world. I'm sure we'll be fine.” And run off before response.

After the pool the air cools and calms and the steady rain diminishes. The sun is served along with dinner although mine comes not till now after tying to the island side and adding an extra breast line. The last of garbage is taken out by Johnboat and I return alone to cleanse as best I can and regard my surrounding so indifferent and unafected either by tempest or Mozart.



After, I haul my sleeping bag and ashtray and flashlight and stereo and Coke and bag o' tapes up the two flights to open section of third out front where an old friend and I dance once upon a time...

I open one of the garden-variety lounge chairs for bed and straight-backed for night-stand on which I set all items out in comfort's reach and turn to face the wide-screen wrap around of Mississippi back-water to deep green hills turning black at setting...water shows blue then turns dark and shards of a broken mirror each with a sky of stars which begin piercing in as night saturates the azure and lets sun-set bands slide colors in each a tinge deeper...Julia's tied to island side as clouds turn to coals that smolder and roast till the eventual quenching as

night shades of eve covet the sky...

I am the night watch

the night

the

**Night comes calmly cool,
too cool as it's August and thus
comes heavy mist smell of day's
rain...**

**All others 'cept me file lined out by
ferry to shore and busses and up all
the blue-hairs who waited so well
through clenched teeth to get to**



here's that appear to differ, up all to warm beds and plastic shelters...as well too the crew all and Captain out across to lounge a bit before bed...leaving me to Julia...and nothing new is this since one always stays to keep refrigerators cool and unwelcome investigators at bay...

But nonesuch have ever come nor come now and so down to main I fill the Honda with premium and toy the choke and turn the key, once it hums, switch the breaker from "MAIN" to "AUXILIARY" and then the smaller breakers on one at time to avoid surges...all set I up to third and nestle in with a new tape I like a bit...

"I remember you
With a chill across my face,
Like the Air of December,
I swear I remember it.
That way.
I swear I remember it,
That way.
Where are you now...?"

Edie Brickell and the New Bohemians
Shooting Rubberbands at the Stars
"Air of December"

Laying under so seemingly fixed stars marred illusion only comes once in a while as one shoots across...

“...where you last see it...” says Tammy.

“Then what...” I ask.

...we stride down Water Street in any town that looks like mine against a River and watch night sky as out here...streetlights aren't strong enough to forget where they are...

“You catch the star where you last saw it fall, then, don't open your fist, you place it in your chest...here, have this one...”

...and her hand clasped rests a moment on my chest, she opens her hand flat against me...

“This is your first...someday you'll have a chest full of stars...”

...crack and crack-crash! from the island behind and I sitting upright and dreary eyed as Great Blue Heron has caused a ruckus at take-off and now dissolves between folds of fog across from me each an island of vapor illumined by setting moon and imperceptibly turning stars...and close eyes again after taking in a bit: the tape's long over as dew has formed a first layer on the radio...

One night I awoke to the sounds of screams coming from the island...neck hairs raised and breath stopped till sudden the scream turned to hooting of a screech owl...

...and turn my eyelids down and head in to sleeping bag and smell only two days gone her perfume left from hair all around my face she presses her stomach's skin against mine with tongue sliding in my mouth...then, sitting up and still straddling me reaches to her back with both hands, the sliding straps to release her breasts all strange toned and black nipple by moonlight...I penetrate for my first and feel unable to believe as few strokes cause ecstasy I've never known in any form till now I look up to the bar in front of which I'm in her on blankets strewn about the floor...the window's behind which shows paddle-wheel blades...windows glow though all else is shaded dark...looking down Shelly smiles and pulls me to her all warm and moist and musk and hummmmmm...

...hummmm cut...hummmm...cut, then stops...

I wake to silence
Honda's outta gas

cold air strikes my face as I peer out of the bag, rubbing clears Sandman's work and stars...not so much each and each but here's so dark they are fine spilled powder and bands of astrosphere's side...stretch turns into a reach for a cigarette lit... and out I look around...

far sounds a train whistle of which must have passed or comes by tracks along shoreline look up stream to the north and note...



in dim pink light wisps about the Northern horizon like silently distant storm yet strange...a pink searchlight stretches three quarters of sky above me, then another, then three, then four all rosy fingers feeling the underside of canopy, they trace over stars...

...the gaseous cloud from which they stem pulsates and ears plug from hearing what should accompany...

...reach for a tape, pull out Steve Roach's expressions of how silence can caress everything creating most subtle of vibrations, light another, and kick back for the show...

pulsing builds then breaks out in luminous pink-ghosts faceless but of form ripple and tumble along fingers' tips...

Shots from Hell touched Heaven heaved against black-backed stars, across nearly all, they disperse before touching the opposite of their origin...seconds timeless scream silent angst spent in neon pink...the rose searchlights split sky into causeways upon which pure essence journeys as I, aware of them yet them uncaring even if ever capable of noticing and I am not...and relation existing only by observation...I come to know my goal...

Warmth overflows center

as for a moment's taste I take their paths...and find my desire...

...'Rory's show wanes a bit after an hour or so...I refill the Honda to let it's roar lull me by two deck's distance and sink into sleep...



...sun and heat are my alarm...

Tidy mess...

...But stayed a moment watch says I've got half an hour to go till gone so I feel a bit of tension toward the island across the stage plank and around all branches are drift-wood so brittle most break at touch, all at pull or tension and I comb for it finding nothing...crossing back there's a staff of pale yellow wood flowing upstream to nudge it's head against the island bank.

Back and down reach it's light but sturdy and smoothed of limbs and sanded by muddy waters...

...I stow it down below...

Throw satchel and empty gas cans into Johnboat to meet my ride up for breakfast...

"How was it out there last night?"

"Fine," I say and say no more...

