

Lots of things look like turtles.

(Sentences often get stuck in my head that mean nothing in context but they sound good -- somehow satisfying. They bounce to the right rhythm.)

"Lots of things look like turtles," I wanted to say. We were walking down a trail in the Trinities, packing out from the camp we'd set up the night before. The night before, when we slept alone by a fork in the river I'd noticed, for the first time, how many trees and stumps and rocks and piles of fallen leaves look like bears. Things don't look like turtles when there are bears to worry about. We tied our food high into a tree before we fell asleep.

I wanted to tell him that lots of things look like turtles because we walked past one moss-covered granite boulder that resembled a turtle's head. It wasn't lots of things, only one rock. But the down-the-mountain rhythm of my feet, my heart beat, my musically firing synapses made the sentence, "Lots of things look like turtles," and then danced to it like a Samba. I repeated it over and over in my head, drowning out "Good-bye Ruby Tuesday" which I'd been humming for two miles. (Come to think of it, that's a song full of sentences that sound good and mean nothing...)

I wanted to tell the backpack in front of me (the one that held our tent and most of our supplies so I didn't have to carry much), "Hey Nolan, lots of things look like turtles." But instead I asked, "Do you ever get a sentence stuck in your head that is completely out of context but you like the sound of it?"

"No."

I wondered if maybe lots of things did look like turtles after all and perhaps the sentence would proclaim some valid observation if I said it out loud. I looked around.

The scenery was breathtaking, but there were no subliminal turtle-icons hiding in the forest. "Sometimes I get these rhythms in my head and . . ." I scrambled for an explanation.

"Is that why you're constantly changing radio stations in the car?" he asked.

I know that drives him nuts. I really wanted to tell him about the satisfaction of finding sounds that match the pace of my brainwaves, that the wheels in my head crank at ever-changing speeds and I try to accommodate them with proper accompaniment -- be it a song or a poem or a single sentence.

But all I could say was, "Lots of things look like turtles."

He stopped to scan the alpine scenery and in a tone reserved for appeasing me he replied, "Yeah, I guess they do."

I hiked along with a new thought in my head. . .

No they don't you dummy.

No they don't you dummy.

No they don't you dummy.