

People of the Carverse
Agrippa Kellum

Samantha speaks from the driver's seat of a borrowed SUV: "Do you ever, like, think about what it would be like to be another person, and then you stop thinking about it after a while because you start thinking about something else or something, or you go to sleep. But then later you like, realize that that person never stopped thinking about what it would be like to be them, because they are them, and stuff. You know what I mean?" Her foot presses lightly on the gas pedal. Rapid explosions in the SUV's engine keep the wheels moving.

"Oh, yeah, I mean, I guess. What do you mean?" Rob asks.

"I mean, I saw this girl in Florida once. And she had like these massive growths on her face. Or like, her face was made of massive growths. I mean, her face was smooth and everything but like the lower half of her head," Samantha takes a hand off of the wheel to motion an invisible contour of the shape of the girl's face relative to her own. "See what I mean? Like everything below her nose was just a giant blob. And her mouth was like always open and didn't really have lips. Sort of."

"Really? Strange. It sounds like elephantiasis, but that doesn't really happen in America."

Ten seconds of silence pass as Samantha accelerates slowly to reach the speed limit.

"Yeah. So anyway, like, I thought about what it would like to be her. I mean, it must be scary to go outside and be in public and stuff. Or maybe she doesn't care. Does she let people know if she likes them? As in romantically. I mean I don't know what I would do if I had growths like that. It kind of scared me to look at her. I mean I guess it didn't scare me but it made me wonder like, 'is this a dream?' And I guess that made me feel bad for her. Anyways, eventually I stop thinking

about her but like, it never goes away for her. You know? I guess I can never be like fully empathetic because I don't know what it's like for something to be such a constant like that."

"A constant like what?"

"Like having giant growths on your face."

"Oh, I see. I don't think I'd go outside if I had severe Elephantiasis. Though I don't think that's what she had," Rob says, looking straight ahead. Samantha looks at him before continuing to drive in silence.

Carl, driving on Interstate Highway 20, slams his brakes and comes to a halt. He pulls over and steps out of his car, clad in a white fuzzy bathrobe.

"What the hell," he murmurs as he hastily traces his car's path before reaching his destination, about fifty feet behind his tan Camry.

"I killed a turtle. What were you doing on the highway, turtle?" The turtle does not reply. Carl looks across the highway. He scans for a now-broken turtle family, or a "free lettuce" sign.

"There's just a bunch of trees over there. It's the same as on this side. What the hell." Carl nudges the turtle off the highway with his foot, and a car zips by. He watches the automobile fade into the distance as his hair settles from its turbulence. He walks back to his car, and gets in.

"Jesus Christ." He starts his car and begins to move along the highway once again.

"What happened?"

Carl's attention turns to a groggy voice in the backseat. "Huh? Oh. I hit a turtle."

"Oh."

Silence. Carl thinks about dying. *I still have time for the things I want to do. I just have to be careful around highways. Turtles are dumb, but I'm not much smarter. Maybe crossing the*

highway is worth it for a turtle. What else have they got to do? What if they don't like the other side, though? Maybe that's what happened to that turtle, and he was trying to make his way back.

“You know, I had a dream about a turtle once,” the voice states.

“Just now?”

“No, silly. A long time ago. I dreamed I was in a rowboat out on a lake-- except it wasn't really a lake because there wasn't any land nearby, but there was no waves or anything. And this giant turtle came up out of the water and started saying stuff. But I couldn't speak turtle so it just sounded like gibberish. I wonder what the dream meant.”

“Hm. Interesting.” *If that was really interesting to me, why didn't I say anything else? Maybe I'm a bad conversationalist. I talk all the time, though. Why don't I talk to her more? What do I even talk about with people when I do talk? I used to talk to Samantha a lot. I wonder if she still thinks about me.*

Carl hears a yawn from the backseat, and yawns himself. He hears a soft sigh, and sees a sleeping face in the rear-view mirror. His body relaxes and he smiles.

I think I missed my turn. I hate driving cars.