

Anatomy of an apology

The difference between roadkill deaths and other deaths is everything. There is always an excuse, a reason as to why the death was necessary and valid, and thereby guiltless.

When I am five, I am in the back seat of our burgundy suburban with my cousins. My mom drives and my aunt is in the passenger seat. Already, I know my heart is softer than the edges of theirs. Maybe we are going somewhere or coming back from somewhere, but it is dark and I am in the middle, looking right out of the windshield like an open wound.

My mom says she doesn't remember, hitting the family of raccoons that is, but I remember so clearly it almost breaks my heart still. There were four or five bumps, four or five moments of resistance as my mom and aunt both shriek and laugh, four or five bumps as our large SUV crushes bone and fur and family.

The point is, they weren't sorry they hit them.

There is always an excuse, a reason as to why the death was necessary and valid, and thereby guiltless. The act of motion is important in this deniability. Because X was in Y's way and Y was going faster and talking on a cell phone, and X has hooves or maybe paws and should have known better. And we say keep our eyes on the road, but divert from the carcass, and that one, and that one too.

Almost 20 years later, I'm 400 miles north and the sky has opened its blue mouth wide, white cumulus cloud molars sparkling and I am driving down the road with my partner when we pass three raccoons alongside the shoulder. One on the left and two on the right, their bodies so close together they could probably hear each other coo into death. This image stays with me, and my partner who knows about the suburban massacre so long ago. For a week, we say to each other *that was just so sad* and what we really mean is, *do you think they know we are sorry?*

And we say keep our eyes on the road, but divert from the carcass, and that one, and that one too. We look away because the brutality is hot and white to the touch, it burns through skin to bone to heart. But this isn't the truth for everyone. Some people could care less about this moment a body is broken by way of another body. And here, when I say body, I am of course talking about the human body adding agency to the car, which is also a body. We say "look at the damage to the body from when I hit a deer", but we do not say "look at the way the deer's ribs cracked open as if in invitation" – we do not say "look at what my body did to this body, which was so recently living, the last breath still leaving the nostrils".

And what I really mean is, *how many ways can I say I am sorry?*