

## **Animal Hospitality**

Yesterday it was cold out, the coldest day of winter, and the city invited all the bums inside and I felt bad for the squirrels because my hair is much longer than a squirrel's and I was inside and I know I was still a little bit cold. So I thought about letting them all come inside to get warm.

And I did.

I made a fire in both fireplaces and turned up the heaters full blast after my parents left for work, and I baited them with an array of baskets filled with nuts and dried fruits and cheeses and candy that were leftover from Christmas last week when my parents' clients like to say thank you, sending lots of these things. With all the exits open to the bitter air, I hunkered down under a sleeping bag and waited, watching TV and munching a chocolate reindeer.

And they came.

They came, o boy did they come. A lot, like thirteen or something.

But it was cool for a while, like a couple of hours. Then it got old.

And even though today is truly frigid, colder than yesterday maybe, I think they should leave. The initial effect has worn off. They're more than cramping my style. But the squirrels won't leave, and other animals have started coming in too. I caught the neighbor's dog in the kitchen, for instance, and last night I heard what sounded like a couple of crows in my older sister's bedroom.

There's frost everywhere and my parents have left me. They say they are staying at a hotel until I go back to college. Basically it has come down to this: Just us. Me and the animals.

In desperation, I sit down in front of the television to pray, in Latin: "Pater Noster, que es in caelis..." The noises in the house are varied, made up of my own mumbling, the rodent chatter of the creatures around me, gusty winds, and the sound of the television, the Travel Channel, a

show about the La Brea tar pits, all the way on Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles, where the scene is sunny and well-lit, but with a definite creeping overcast. I'm praying, but I'm still watching, wrapped up in blankets and surrounded by the elements, which have completely taken over, and the tar pits have been found to contain over one million fossilized skeleton parts, including mammoth, sabre-tooth cats, ground sloth, and mastodons, which reminds me of field trips to DC as a kid and the dinosaur bones I used to see there. They were huge and white and authentic. They loomed over me, proof of something too big to imagine.

A chipmunk bumps my foot, apparently confused by the patterns on the carpet, and I stop praying, suddenly embarrassed.

I remember asking my mother about God's bones after one such trip to the museum. She laughed and said He didn't have any. I was suspicious of course. I'd seen a *dinosaur* that afternoon. If He exists, shouldn't He have bones or something?

Those bones, gigantic, too big to be looked at, were terrible and uncanny to consider and they gave me nightmares, like a vampire movie or a frightening deformity I'd seen once on the street that made me hide in my mother's jacket. Freezing, I pull the blankets tighter, and shut my eyes. The animals are laughing at me and the wind howls.