

# ZOOLOGY, OR THE DEATHBED CONVERSION OF MRS. MURRAY O'HAIR

Matthew Mairs

Imagine Madalyn, housecoated and plump,  
hiding eggs in the backyard, for her granddaughter  
at Easter. The little girl knows there is no God,  
but about the Easter Bunny she's not so certain.

Imagine Madalyn, smelling of sugarcookies  
and superglue, pulling trays from the oven,  
getting fatter and fatter and fatter  
and fatter, diabetic too, with insulin  
a sacrament. The little girl knows that  
Grandma herself is God so all gods are fat  
if, in fact, there are gods. The little girl also  
knows a thing or two about the separation  
of church and state.

The legbone is connected to the hipbone.  
The hipbone is connected to the heartbone.  
The heartbone is connected to some other bone,  
unless, of course, it's not.

Imagine Madalyn, less catholic even than usual,  
patiently explaining particle physics  
and office politics to Saint Peter  
at the Gate. The little girl knows that  
Saint Peter isn't real but Grandma likes  
those jokes that start and end  
at the Pearly Gates. Also, the one  
that begins "Madelyn walks into a bar  
with a monkey."

Imagine Madalyn, old, fat and  
on the lam in Argentina,  
necklaced in garlic  
to keep the Christians off her, or  
Madalyn in the Middle Kingdom,  
studying tai chi, practicing that very  
particular slit of the eye, determined to  
pass for an Auntie, or at least,  
an ugly Chinese.

Madalyn grown older and fatter  
and fatter and older and older  
and fatter and fatter and older,  
in her hospital bed,  
chewing on the stems of roses,  
hoping to promote a final  
photosynthesis, before they  
take the leg.  
Or, perhaps, Madalyn  
at the zoo. She always said  
there is no afterlife but  
little did she know there is,  
or that heaven is the  
Houston Zoo, or that she'd  
lose that limp finally  
when she crossed over.

Imagine Madalyn, outside the lion's den,  
or maybe bug-eyed at the aviary,  
marveling at the accident of it all. The little girl likes  
the reptile house the best and sits in its cool darkness  
most days now picking at her skin. Evenings, though,  
when the Texas sun has dropped behind zoo walls  
and the mosquitos buzz their heads  
like a humming of "Happy Birthday,"  
they walk, Grandmother and granddaughter together,  
from one end of that zoo to the other,  
looking for an exit.

The little girl says, "Grandma, why can't we get out?"  
And Grandma says, "Because we're dead, honey."

"Where's Daddy?" she says.  
"I don't know, honey, haven't seen him since we got here."

"And how come you're not limping anymore, Grandma?"

"I don't know, honey, I don't know nothing,  
but since we're here let's go take us a look  
at some of them longhorn steer. They left our  
bones on a cattle ranch, honey, and my play hip too.

"If we sleep there, tonight, with the cows, who knows?  
We might even find your daddy,  
groaning his way out of the ground."

"OK, Grandma," she says.  
"OK, Grandma, OK."



Raised by wolves and churchpeople. Prefers to pray to air now, by way of words, spoken,  
sung, shouted from rooftops. Occasionally these words have been written down, and then  
bound into books; occasionally they have been multitracked and layered with musical  
noises and played on the radio. Also, can play ping pong like an Asian person.