

Rick Campbell

Heart of Dependent Arising

My wife is rolled into surgery
and as the drugs wash over her
she tries to remember her
Medicine Buddha meditation.

Her heart is still at the center
of her chest, the lotus flower
still eight-petalled and white.

The Healing Buddha, though
his light's still blue, has begun
to float off his moon disc. The
icons that surround him: Actualized
Wisdom, Simultaneous Wealth
are only colors now. But Peacock's
Throat, she remembers. Remembers
too blissful, radiant light.

I figure this is enough
to let her go with the nurses
to the hands and scalpel
of her Georgia gynecologist
who yesterday told us
that the ovary is the size of a pecan.
I am left to sit in the cafeteria
with pager 209—that will flash
and beep when her doctor wants me.

We go for refuge to the Buddha.
We go for refuge to the empty clarity

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of our minds. She prays too
to the Virgin, but skips
in the hour of our death.

I have echoed our doctor's mantra
that this surgery is routine, a quick
in and out. But nothing
to the terminally nervous
is routine, anesthesia's 2 % death rate
looms in her thoughts.

She dislikes hospital staff's blanket
reassurances and rolls
to surgery with yak bone mala
twisted in her right hand,

her Immaculate Heart of Mary scapula
wrapped around her wrist.
My pager blinks every three seconds
like a slowed heart beat,

and I wait in the secular world
I've made for myself through subtraction,
through sloughing off catechism, prayer,
Jesus, God, the saints and archangels.

I've nothing left but sin and hope.
A resolute faith in whom and what I love.
Many paths in a wood.
Many shafts of light.