

THE
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Kay Murphy

The Temple of the Tooth

Some time between my son's death and his funeral
my only grandson has lost a tooth, so his mother
has fastened it to a small, red, silk ruffled heart,
and my grandson, needing to be lifted, is placing it
in the casket beside my son's crushed heart,

both unaware that a tooth of the Buddha is enshrined
in Ceylon where it is paraded through the streets
of Kandy every night, for a week, once a year,
as it is believed that possession of the tooth
confers the power to rule over kingdoms.

We do not know who, exactly, at this moment,
among us, is the Buddha, or whether the living
rule over the dead, or the dead, the living, as my son,
enshrined, is paraded through the streets just once.