

# Losing a Breast: Prayer Before Surgery

*Linda Parsons Burggraf*

*for Libba*

In another time and place  
I would show your hand the way  
under this bloom shimmering like a hunter's  
moon just below the skyline. Under, because  
it's heavier than you think, fibrous bulb,  
paper-white fountain in your mouth, roots  
now severed at body and soul. Though deep  
in the last moment there's time to remember  
the lilacs I broke off to sell down on Russell Street.  
They always ripened in rain.  
Am I anything like that purple time,  
those buds down on Russell?  
Am I lovely today as you take up the knife?

*Valium, howl through me.*  
*Surgeon, bless and keep me.*  
*Lights, burn above me.*  
*Birches, dance round me.*

Here is the pulse of my children.  
Will you cut it? Will you throw it away  
like a bag of beans? not knowing a mother's nights,  
old as the pounding of a baby's heart  
in the soft cleft of bone. Its head a globe,  
my breast a globe, the milk divine ocean,  
darkness against the rocker in unchanging song.  
We are all so young to empty out our time like this.  
Warm and sticky, we have grown up together  
in the long, the beautiful hunger.