

What Remains

By Joan Baranow

to my mother

I wish I'd been there when the tumor
tore through and poured a flood of blood
into your lungs. I would have sat beside you,
looking away, preserving your privacy,
your fierce resistance to our hapless help.
Just weeks before, you wrote in your notes
WHY AM I HERE? and now I know
something of what you felt.
After the PET scan I lay in bed, reading the results.
The tracer lit tongue and tonsil, seeped into
two bloated lymph nodes, signal lights
flashing to proceed prepared. Since your own
diagnosis showed metastases beyond repair,
I will not risk arriving at that station
where you lay dismantled, inviolate—yet
the question grieves me—
Did you think your life so slight?
Those hand-patched jeans, white work shirts,
bras whose elastic straps had given out,
that meager heap we stashed in trash bags
for the Goodwill run—
If only you'd known
you kept us kids intact all those years
calling up the stairs, *Rise and shine*
my sweet chickadees.

Joan Baranow is the author of six poetry collections, including *Reading Szyborska in a Time of Plague*, winner of the 2021 Brick Road Poetry Book Contest. Her poems have appeared in *The Paris Review*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *Blackbird*, *Forklift OH*, *Poetry East*, *JAMA* and elsewhere. A VCCA fellow and member of the Community of Writers, she founded and teaches in the Low-Residency MFA program in Creative Writing at Dominican University of CA. With her husband Dr. David Watts, she produced the PBS documentary “Healing Words: Poetry & Medicine.” Her feature-length documentary, “The Time We Have,” presents an intimate portrait of a teenager facing terminal illness.