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POETRY | FALL 2018

## Cancer Speaks in Tongues

By Suzanne Edison

*for M*

### I.

After we recounted her life  
in two languages—*las palabras*  
*y historias*, her red wine love,  
her edgy name, *la jefa*, words,  
meant to keep *su vida* close,

all I could think of was the wasp  
clinging to her kitchen-door screen,  
caution-yellow stripes fading  
into black. Its buzz, like the words

spoken earlier, vibrating, papering  
the air, hanging too  
like the wasp's nest—wood-scraped,  
chewed and spit into a delicate hollow.

When its chambered cells are empty, lightness  
betrays the colony it once held.

And at the service, weren't some of us thinking,  
not wanting to think,  
what will be said of us?

### II.

Maybe also the gray-metal toolbox  
she left me—unable to close,  
no matter how much oil I salvaged  
on its rusted hinges, reminded me

we lie about the dead,  
trying to shut out  
what's unfinished or stuck,  
in our heads.

### III.

Yes, the dead call to us in foreign dialects:  
once-wet paintings hanging dried  
in apple trees, the *plunk* and roll  
of apples letting go the branch,  
a bruised heaviness.

Grief buzzing.

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Suzanne Edison MA, MFA, writes most often about the intersection of illness, healing, medicine and art. She has a child living with Juvenile Myositis. Finishing Line Press published her chapbook, *The Moth Eaten World*. She has been awarded grants from Artist Trust; Seattle City Artists, and 4Culture of King County, Seattle. Poems are forthcoming in *About Place Journal*; other poetry can be found in *JAMA*; *SWWIM*, *What Rough Beast*, *Bombay Gin*, *The Naugatuck River Review*, *The Ekphrastic Review* and in several anthologies including *The Healing Art of Writing, Volume One*. She is a board member of the Cure JM Foundation and teaches writing workshops at Seattle Children's Hospital and Richard Hugo House in Seattle. [www.seedison.com](http://www.seedison.com)