

Untitled, Part 1

They speak of capacity
As if a heart or brain is a stadium
A superdome leaking after the hurricane.
If you have capacity, do you make room
For kittens and pauraques
In the casita (with your loves)
Propped up on cinderblocks
Before it all launches?
How do you anchor your soul
When wind whips in your lungs,
Trumpets at rising water?
And if you breathe again,
With capacity, is the oak
Still rooted? If not, do the living
Feel, as I have, “better it than me?”
And would we ever have the capacity
To seek out the indigenous
Descendants of the land we own
On paper america and write nations
Into patchwork wills decades before our deaths?
Would we also pay both mortgage and rent
If we have the means? And if “home”
Is 100 miles and years away, before
The seed of unions with another 400 miles
And years, must we live with the sting of no
True return ever. “Go back,” white america says,
Especially when back is less than a day’s drive south
And some here, some there
Hard to know exactly where they all began
Or when the ancestors arrived
Enslaved, or when the ancestors
Arrived Muslim, or when the ancestors
Arrived with another tongue
They refused to understand or pronounce.
And as for this liberty inked in calligraphy
On old parchment or in our own skin
Where do I find my place in all of this
With or without the pandemic’s
Flames at our doorsteps?

—*Emmy Pérez*



Cancer

Management

If your breast cancer returns
as Stage IV, the doctor says,
her voice soft as milk,
there is no cure, so we will
just have to manage it.

Meantime, they think
they can save me,
these doctors, who smile
but sigh, hedging their bets,
managing hope
as they manage care
for the Medicaid patient
who pays, after all—at least
for a while.

They think they can save me
but are unsure, so press on,
block the door, as managers
on commission will do.
If the platinum plan fails,
the trick is to truck out
assorted bundles
of years, convenient
short-term models
of endurable, leasable life,
each package worth the price.

At the Cancer Mall,
they manage it all:
appointments, payments,
pain, anxiety, fear.

They know the score,
these managers of the store,
proprietors of my body,
consciousness, soul.

—*Rachel Jennings*

BIOS

*Bio for Rachel Jennings on page 6,
Bio for Emmy Pérez on page 8.*