

Slave Pedigree

Eduardo (Echo)
Martinez

we're all pets chained like Pandora charms
circling God's righteous wrist
i remember she said this
as she dangled around with her head down
like a pay phone off the hook in an empty
booth
i made the mistake of picking it up one night
and saying "hello" more than once
the voice, her eyes
dinner plates full of surprises
boxes of chocolate mints, licorice dishes
she insisted
the only karma that genuinely exists . . .
is God's
and maybe . . .
all this we're forced to endure, isn't really
our fault
how conceivable, to believe that our designer
makes no mistakes
we make them for him
there was freedom in her words . . .
the hardest kind
like a prisoner

accepting the reality of a sentence without a period
she said we're all linked . . . connected.
and i remember this scene vividly in the movie *Misery*
the writer chained to his own script
survival trying to outwit death
and his reward for trying to get back on his feet and breathe
what followed after,
the sledgehammer across the ankle
maybe, that wasn't the intended metaphor
then a tear scrolls to the edges of her chin
where it trembled like a frightened drop from a leaky faucet
we dropped deep
and stayed there anchored
answering questions that have no answers
you know?
it's sad for fish, their ocean is their graveyard
they're born to swim over their graves
seashell skeletons with stories
how the reef grows like hair
and nails after you're buried
when we resurfaced profound seems shallow
you know?
we spend our lives walking over our graves
then in the end
pour ourselves back into the beginning
are fingernails shovels that still carry our old dirt?
she chirped,
the soil will evaporate before the chains oxidate
potential radiates from my skin
tattoos and taboos
they killed another one on CNN
and he won't be convicted
she said it with conviction
God's karma starting to come back
her words were seasoned in feelings
the cottonmouth, not from the screaming
but from keeping quiet for too long
dealing with too many fortunes
too many palms holding onto chains
a tug-of-war of handshake links . . .connected

she asked me if i had learned to control my hopes yet?
and i felt she sensed the shame in my truth
hey!

they can't cage your imagination

they can't cage your imagination

they can't cage your imagination

like they cage the youth

like they cage animals

and i wanted to tell her
that maybe in theory
we're all animals
not to say God didn't create us
but we might just be his pets
because being animals comes natural
as natural as being chained to a tree
on the wrong side of the fence
but i don't speak
and my thoughts scatter
like roaches when the lights come on
i understand her connection
i misunderstand my link
so i let her rattle the chain
 knowing . . .
 it won't break.

Eduardo Martinez was telling tall tales even when he was little. He wrote his first poem from a jail cell. He's been published in *Cuban Counterpoints*, *Scalawag*, *Don't Shake the Spoon: A Journal of Prison Writing*, *Be Kindr* (an anthology) and in *The Miami Herald*. He can be heard on PBS and NPR and seen on CBS. His most poetic moment, though, was telling his wife "I do."