

COLLECTED WORKS BY HECTOR RODRIGUEZ

HECTOR RODRIGUEZ[∞]

DRAMA NIGHT

Loud trumpets of thunder and silent, scary whips of lightning are taking over the Hudson valley.

A blanket of heavy clouds sprinkles its drops, piercing the dark puddle on the softball field.

Water hitting water creates an illusion of flashing lights, instantly transforming the puddle into a pool of raindrops to display their creativity. It's a theatrical show put on by Mother Nature, for my eyes to enjoy from the solitude of a prison cell. "Belle!" I yell as each drop out does the other. Awakened.

The prison guard walks angrily towards my cell. "What the Hell is all the fuss about?" He asks.

Joyfully, I reply, "sorry sir. I don't kiss and tell." Bemused by my response, he turns, walks towards the window and says, "Go to sleep, it's an ugly night out there."

As if God is offended, lightning rends the darkness, chasing the guard back to his post. The night and the show are all mines to enjoy.

[∞] Hector Rodriguez is a father, friend, and abolitionist who advocates for closing down as many prisons as possible. At the age of 21, Hector was sentenced to 28 years to life, of which he served 27 years and two months. The arts (acting, writing, visual arts) served as Hector's escape route from the loneliness, thick haze of stress and anxiety that accompanied him for most of the long, cold years in the cold, cement box that held his body captive. Through creative writing, Hector discovered a part of him that kept auditioning for its opportunity to perform on parchment.

FREEDOM

Freedom visits me
Once or twice a day
In the gentlest of ways,
She comes with a friend,
Maybe a lover,
Maybe a sibling
Her gender doesn't matter here,
Nor anywhere,
Freedom moves without such bounds,
Man has caged freedom
Since he first laid jealous eyes
On its capacity to roam.

Since then we have used privilege
To cage our imaginations
To keep us from daring to dream
But freedom slips through the bars
And dissolves their solid frame.
I bow to freedom
For stopping before my cage
Once or twice a day
In the form of sparrows.
I feed them grits because
It takes courage to visit a prisoner
And feed him humility

LAUGHING WALLS

When I first walked into prison I was full of youth, physically strong with an empty heart, clueless mind, and confused emotions. I began to notice the walls were laughing at me every time I walked by.

I don't know if it was the smell of the caustics used to mop the floor distorting my normal brain behavior, but I'm telling you—these walls were laughing. But I was not going to entertain them. Why should I pay attention to ignorant walls, whose only purpose is to limit the sunlight and the life that comes with it from shining in here? These walls keep all that goes on in here to themselves, binding our community in a state of doubt, ignoring to the reality of what is going on behind them.

It saddens me to admit that these walls and my heart had a few things in common. Just as the walls try to keep all that is good from coming, or going, my empty heart kept the warmth of that other side, the good side of me, from reaching my soul.

But I was rocked by the reality of the endless nights and sounds of prisoners who by day are as tough as the nasty biscuit we eat for lunch, but as soon as the gates close, and the gallery lights dim, they transform into real human beings, coming together in harmony. Like crickets chirping on their nightly stage, they all perform. A weeping orchestra.

I have secretly and quietly performed with them. I'm talking about me, on bent knees, with both arms stretched to the ebony sky, asking the gods to come together and strike the smile out of these laughing walls.

If someone snooping around happens to walk by and catch me in that position, I play it off, like I'm stretching or practicing yoga, but never ever weeping or pleading. I have a biscuit image to maintain. But buried alive is how I feel. Like a fish out of water, I'm gasping for another chance at the free world.

Like a pigeon caught in the talons of a hawk, these walls are holding me down, ripping every bit of youth from me. Like a winter breeze, the sight of these walls brings chills.

Tired of allowing these walls and their stench bully me, I've decided to give them a piece of my mind. Now every time I walk the hallways, I flip my middle finger up at these walls. Sometimes, I do it mentally. Other times, I just put my hands in my

pockets and secretly give them the finger. At times, I can't control my emotions so I go like this; here take this Laugh now!

Yes, you the green one, the beige one, and even you! All dressed in white like you're a freaking Saint. Who are you trying to kid? Come on guys, you can't blame me for losing control; these walls are some means sons of bitches. But who's laughing now?

TO LIVE IN PRISON

To live in prison is to be treated inhumanely

To be treated inhumanely is to eat where you shit, to shit where you sleep, to sleep where for centuries another person like you and me did a bid.

To do a bid is to take my family and friends on a stressful, costly and selfish journey
To go on that journey might not be so damn bad if only I could return from it a changed man.

To be a changed man would mean never forgetting the tears I shed inside a prison cell countless miles from home, as my family shed theirs in secret from me.

To live in prison is to not only know my actions lead me to this place, but to take full responsibility for them.

To live in prison is to force me to search within for the reasons I was so full of hate, and wipe it from my soul's core.

To live in prison is to be stigmatized a liar, a con artist, a rapist, a murderer, a low life, regardless of the reasons that lead me here or what I have done to rehabilitate myself.

To live in prison is to be a legitimate reason to rob the tax-payers off their money and have nothing to show for but a high recidivism rate.

To live in prison is to be forgotten and not want to come into terms with the reality of it.

To live in prison is to write poetry about my pain and struggles with the judicial system and hope my words will touch your heart.

To live in prison is to be housed behind a huge wall, barb wire fences in a rural town away from society's sight and mind.

To live in prison is to wonder if one of the pine boxes made in industry has my name and din number on them.

To live in prison is to entertain the thought of suicide as the only escape route.