

The Box  
(Six Characters in Search of an Exit)

By

J. E. Clarke

FADE IN ON:

INT. CONTAINMENT ROOM

A dark, cramped space. Metallic walls. Five bodies sprawled out on the ground. All sleeping... if not dead.

One SHADOWY FORM is on its feet. It runs large hands along the walls, in search of an exit. Somewhere.

Nails SCRABBLE against cold steel. Light SPUTTERS from a track along the floorboards. Highlighting an odd assortment of figures:

- SARAH (30s): slim in a frilly dress and corset.
- JOHN (20s): Simple farm clothes. Blue-black African skin. A broken manacle on one wrist.
- PATRICK (40s): Rouge and powder streak his face. He wears a fancy jacket and wig.
- HENRY (50s): Long hair and buccaneer clothes. Neither's been washed in decades.
- DANIEL (30s) - a Hugo Boss suit on his athletic frame. A gold iWatch on his wrist.

And the one that's awake: NEANDERTHAL. An enormous brute with tiny eyes - naked and covered with hair.

It SCRABBLES at a glass-covered panel mindlessly.

A spotlight shoots down from the ceiling. Everyone GROANS, and covers their eyes. The Neanderthal HOWLS and BANGS a hairy palm against the wall.

SARAH

Oh Dear God. What is that?

She jumps to her feet and looks around at the others.

SARAH

And... who are you?

The Neanderthal ROARS. Sarah stumbles into Henry's arms.

HENRY

(leers)

Pleased to make your acquaintance, dear.

Sarah darts away from Henry's face and breath - ducking between Daniel and Patrick. Both men gawk at the creature. Then each other.

DANIEL

What fucked-up costume party's this?

(beat)

I knew it! That ginger I hit on drugged my drink! I *thought* it tasted funny...

He punches buttons on his iWatch. No signal.

DANIEL

Goddamned Apple Care. This thing cost me five grand.

PATRICK

What manner of witchcraft do you have there?

The glowing screen lights the room. John flinches away. He makes the sign of the cross with his hands.

JOHN

Jesus protect us. The Devil!

HENRY

(laughs)

Good luck running, my boy. Looks like we're already in Hell!

Daniel stares around at shocked faces.

DANIEL

You guys actually... buy into this?

The Neanderthal watches the others, BREATHING hard. It slides down the wall, and sprawls out on the floor - genitals on full display. Sarah GASPS and hides her eyes.

HENRY

(chuckles)

Impressive!

DANIEL

Yeah. Nice FX. Got in every detail.

Skepticism runs wild on his face.

DANIEL

Which of my fuck-wad friends put you up to this?

No response.

DANIEL

Okay. That's alright. I'll play. Guess it's up to me to lead this game. Everyone: state your name. Including career and origin.

Sarah's hand flutters at her face.

SARAH

My name's Sarah. I'm a... lady writer.

HENRY

A woman who writes? Now there's a laugh. Any woman worth her keep makes her money on her back!

He winks at Patrick, who frowns and turns away.

DANIEL

(to Sarah)

And in what *time* did you live?

Sarah stares at him, not understanding the question.

DANIEL

What was the year? The last time you were awake?

SARAH

...1836.

DANIEL

Okay. Victorian.

SARAH

Sir, I have no idea what you mean.

Daniel types up an iMemo. Nods towards Patrick next.

PATRICK

I'm from Boston. 1774. Guess you could call me a Whig.

He points at Henry, disgust on his face.

PATRICK

I am certain *this* one has no job.

Henry puffs up his chest.

HENRY

Henry Rains at your service. I'm a trading man, if you please.

The year: 1566. And I own my own ship.  
 "The Salty Dog" is its name.

PATRICK  
 (sarcastic)  
 A dignified vessel, I'm sure.

HENRY  
 Blast dignity. It pays me cash!

Sarah approaches John gently.

SARAH  
 And you, Sir. What is your name?

JOHN  
 ...John. 1850. I live in Tennessee.

SARAH  
 Ah! A contemporary to me! And what did  
 you do in your time?

JOHN  
 I... worked for a family. In the fields.

Sarah stares at his manacle. Understands, and politely  
 averts her eyes. Daniel rubs hands together impatiently.

DANIEL  
 Fine. Introduction's over. Let's get this  
 shit-show on the road!

PATRICK  
 Language, Sir! A lady's present!

Patrick squints into Daniel's face.

PATRICK  
 On the contrary - the introductions are  
 not complete. You haven't said a word  
 about yourself. Or that fascinating  
 bracelet on your wrist.

Henry grabs for the iWatch. Daniel yanks his hand away.

DANIEL  
 Don't touch that!

HENRY  
 Why? Is that what keeps us here?

DANIEL  
 It's Apple. You wouldn't understand.

JOHN

I understand. It's magic. Just like this prison!

Patrick and Henry inch closer. Daniel's backed against the wall.

HENRY

Don't look like no Apple to me.

PATRICK

Enough with the questions. It's time for answers.

Henry digs into his pants, and pulls out a blood-stained knife. Daniel glances frantically from face to face.

DANIEL

My name's Danny, okay? I work at Morgan Stanley. Fifty Second Street!

SARAH

In what year?

DANIEL

2015!

PATRICK

2015? That's preposterous!

SARAH

Sounds like one of my stories...

Daniel's eyes bug out. That's it. He's done.

DANIEL

Fuck it. No more.

He stares up at the spotlight in the ceiling.

DANIEL

Alright, game over. Shut off the cameras, assholes. This reality game show really sucks!

He PUNCHES the wall. STEEL RINGS in everyone's ears. The Neanderthal leaps on Daniel, ROARING.

Daniel claws at the creature's face. There's no latex. Only fur, skin and blood.

Henry drags the caveman back by its hair.

The creature SWINGS; KNOCKS the knife from Henry's hand. Huge muscles tense to leap on the pirate next. Then...

...suddenly, the creature turns its back. The Neanderthal lumbers into a corner and sits down. It stares at the metal walls, in a daze.

Daniel examines the blood on his hand.

DANIEL

Holy shit. This *is* real!

His eyes roll towards the ceiling. It seems so far away.

DANIEL

Great. Trapped in a tiny cage. The smartest man in the room. Same shit. Different day.

PATRICK

I beg your pardon?

Daniel sighs.

DANIEL

No offense meant, my friend. But we got Johnny Depp over there.

(points at Henry)

And Simple John from the fields. We're not talkin' Harvard here.

PATRICK

I'm educated. I can read.

DANIEL

You can read?!? Well fuckin' excuse me. Problem solved. But, what use is that for getting out of here? This place is maximum high tech. You've never used electricity. Let alone modern plumbing!

PATRICK

Elec...?

DANIEL

See? Exactly what I mean.

SARAH

No need to be insulting.

DANIEL

*Insulting?*

He looks Sarah over, head to toe.

DANIEL

No offense - but in this situation, what we need is muscle and scientific brains. You gonna Louisa Atkinson your way out of this room? And as for solving our problem as a team...

The panic rises in Daniel's voice. He spins around, pointing.

DANIEL

Patrick over here probably *owns* John's relatives. And you can guess what Henry thinks you're good for! You're a bunch of outdated primitives. I'm never getting outta here!

He races to the electrical panel, and claws at it. Henry leaps on Daniel's back and tears him away.

Daniel snatches the knife off the floor, and holds the pirate at bay.

DANIEL

Don't touch me!

HENRY

That instrument on his wrist. That must be his secret!

John rushes Daniel, KNOCKING the knife from his hand. Sarah SCREAMS. Patrick grabs Daniel's arms, and pins them behind his back.

Henry scoops up the knife. Advances.

HENRY

Hand the pretty jewelry over, lad. Or I'll have to cut off the whole arm...

Something BUBBLES WETLY in the corner.

Everyone turns and stares. The Neanderthal is changing. Bones CRACK. Flesh reforms. Into something human... but evolved and strange. Translucent skin. Almond eyes.

Henry's knife CLATTERS to the floor.

DANIEL

Holy fuck. This makes sense! You're our captor, aren't you? This is some sorta sick experiment. You've been watching us - the whole time!

The humanoid's face twitches in his direction. The voice sounds like syrup. A mutated form of English.

NEANDERTHAL/HUMANOID

Watching, yes. Captor no. Just a prisoner. Like the rest of you.

It looks around the room and HISSES softly to itself.

NEANDERTHAL/HUMANOID

Trapped with a bunch of primitives. I'll have to find a way out myself...

FINAL FADE OUT: