

The Fifth Wall

By Christopher Shiner

CHARACTERS

AUTHOR

CLAY

BELL

THE SCENE

Split set: Stage right has a desk with a lamp, stack of papers, a laptop computer for the AUTHOR, and a chair. Stage left will have two prison beds set apart by a metal door that is part of the wall behind them. The door doesn't have any openings, only a sliding slot at the bottom where food and other articles can be slid through. The wall is about twelve feet long and eight feet high, with partial wall extensions that protrude about two feet out on either side. These represent both sides of the prison cell. BELL and CLAY, the two inmates, are dressed in simple prison pajamas, which are without names or prison numbers.

The AUTHOR'S side has two main lighting changes. When he is the focus of the scene, a spotlight or stage light will give him full illumination. When the focus is on CLAY and BELL the AUTHOR'S light will dim to black, leaving him motionless with only the glow of the laptop illuminating his face.

Initially the scene consists only of the desk, chair, lamp, stack of papers, and laptop. As the AUTHOR types the scene elements of CLAY and BELL'S cell onto the laptop, they are put into place by stage hands dressed in black.

AUTHOR: *(announcing while he types)* Okay, split set! Stage right consists of a chair, the AUTHOR'S desk, scattered books and papers, and the AUTHOR'S laptop. Stage left *(Thinks for a second)* ...two characters *(Lights come up on CLAY and BELL who are standing side by side, face forward, motionless and expressionless in the middle of where the cell will be)*...CLAY and BELL...both wearing simple prison pajamas that are without names or prison numbers. Stage left consists of a wall with a metal door in the middle. The door doesn't have any openings, only a sliding slot at the bottom where food and other articles can be slid through. The wall has partial wall extensions that protrude about two feet out on either side. These represent both sides of the prison cell. The cell contains two prison beds, with BELL'S bed being the one closest to the AUTHOR'S side. CLAY, a solidly built man in his late twenties, is attempting to pick the lock of the cell door with a makeshift tool. *(CLAY comes to life and performs the described actions)* BELL, a meek man in his early thirties, lies on his bed, with his knees pulled up to his chest and his head in his hands. *(BELL comes to life and performs his described actions)* While CLAY is busy at the door, BELL begins to rant... *(The AUTHOR'S light slowly fades to black)*

BELL: It's started again Clay.

CLAY: Oh, *Jesus*, not this shit again.

BELL: I can't shake it this time. Something's just...wrong. I feel like...like I'm being controlled...something's controlling me.

CLAY: Shut up, Bell!

BELL: It's like my actions are not my own, the words I'm saying are what someone wants me to say. Right now! Right now the words I'm saying are being force fed to me like a baby! I can't explain how I know, I just *know*. Something's just not right!

CLAY: Christ, will you shut up for five seconds? All you do is yammer on about meaningless crap!

BELL: I'm not yammering! This is *real* crap! And it's happening to me!

CLAY: The only thing that's happening to you is that you've been locked up in this hole for too damn long and it's affecting your brain. Now if you'd quit yackin', I'm trying to get us both out of here. And when I do, you can blather on about nothing with me over a couple of Corona's in Mexico. Enough liquor and who knows? I might start to give a shit.

(Pause)

BELL: Clay?

CLAY: *(impatiently)* What?!

BELL: Do you...do you believe in God?

CLAY: Ah, Jesus Christ!

BELL: Him too.

(CLAY stops picking the lock, puts the tool under his mattress, and lies down on it.)

CLAY: Get some sleep.

BELL: Don't do that!

CLAY: Do what?

BELL: *(Anxiously)* You always do that! You always change the subject whenever I ask you about God or anything else important.

CLAY: What the hell do you want from me?

BELL: An answer. I just want you to answer me.

(CLAY doesn't respond)

BELL (Cont'd): Why won't you just answer me?

CLAY: Because it won't do anything but start you yacking about useless crap, and then I'll never sleep.

BELL: Come on, Clay, please, I think I'm startin' to lose it.

CLAY: No shit.

BELL: It just helps if I talk about something, try to reason things out. I'll start, ok? Me, I believe in God. Catholic born and raised.

CLAY: I know all of this already!

BELL: But, you never have a real discussion with me, about *anything*. I mean, do you think that the universe just *burped* itself into existence by accident? That we're nothing more than cosmic indigestion? No, Clay, there *has* to be a reason for things, a plan for it all. There's an order in the universe which can't be explained away by chance. Have you ever heard the teleological theory of the watch and the watchmaker? Okay, say you're walking along the beach and find this watch in the sand. Now, there's no one around. So how did it get there? You know that such a complex device couldn't naturally occur in nature. There *had* to be someone who created-

CLAY: *(cutting him off)* There is no God.

BELL: What?

CLAY: *(pronouncing each word slowly as he looks directly at BELL)* There...is...no...God. Okay? *Now*, I've finally answered one of your stupid questions.

BELL: An answer, but not an explanation. What do you mean? How can you explain all of this?

CLAY: You want to know what? You're right. There is a God. You want to know who God is? He's that mysterious asshole *(points to the door)* who keeps us locked up in this cage for our sins, slides our food underneath that door, and occasionally, if we're real lucky, he'll slide a magazine or something for us to read under it as well. That's who God is! God is what controls us. And I'll tell you Bell, I do NOT like being controlled. And one of these days I'm gonna get

that door open, and me and *God* are gonna have a little one on one talk about what I think of this little universe he's created for us.

BELL: That's a pretty narrow view.

CLAY: Narrow view? You people and your religion, that's the narrow view! You think you're the only ones that have it right. You're the only one's that can worship *God* in the right way. Catholics, Christians, Muslims, Mormons, whatever, all thinkin' they and they alone have the ticket. Did it ever occur to you that if *God* really *did* exist, and he really was this all powerful, all knowing, all seeing being, one religion probably wouldn't be enough to encompass who and what He is? Maybe you all have it right; maybe each and every religion on the planet is able to worship *God* in just *one* of the many *right* ways.

BELL: So according to you, you were meant to be an atheist, and *that* fits into *God*'s plan?

CLAY: If *God* *did* exist? Sure, why not? Even the grand design would need a few skeptics around to keep everyone else on their toes. Watch and the watchmaker...just another attempt to rationalize stupidity. Someone's pathetic attempt to create a nice snuggly thought blanket to comfort them against the big bad world.

BELL: Everyone needs a little hope, Clay. Hope is a powerful thing. That snuggly thought blanket can see you through some pretty awful stuff.

CLAY: Whatever.

BELL: So what if, after all of this, you turn out to be wrong? You die, you find out that there *is* a *God* after all, but it's too late. You never repented, never cleansed your soul of all your sins, and you're sent straight to hell for all eternity. What do you say *then*?

CLAY: Fuck 'em if they can't take a *joke*?

BELL: Well...even if you don't believe in Him, He believes in you.

CLAY: Isn't that sweet. Tell Him thanks next time you two have a personal chat.

BELL: But, that's just it! I think He's trying to tell me something, reveal something to me. Last night, I swear, I was staring at the ceiling, and it was like...how do I describe it...it was like it wasn't real, like none of this was real.

CLAY: In that case, there's no point in continuing this conversation.

BELL: But, what if we don't have a choice? This conversation, being here in this cell, you constantly trying to escape it and constantly failing.

(CLAY sighs in embarrassment)

BELL: *(tiredly)* I feel like I have strings attached to me.

(Lights up on the AUTHOR)

AUTHOR: *(typing)* With these words, BELL lies on his back, his thoughts consuming him as the layers of his reality begin to peel away. *(Brainstorming without typing)* Okay, what now? *(AUTHOR could get up and pace around a little at this point)* Um, ok uh.... God, reality, control issues. *Control issues.* Who's controlling them? Yeah, who *is* controlling them? They've never seen the warden. Why not? What does that mean? Why have they never seen the warden? *(After thinking a couple of seconds, makes a decision and goes on typing)* *(All the following actions that the AUTHOR describes are performed in time to his descriptions)* As CLAY and BELL are lying back on their beds, two plates of food are slid through the slot in the door. BELL slowly rises and goes to his plate of food. CLAY doesn't move. BELL motions to CLAY'S plate and says "Don't you want yours? It's going to-

BELL: *(completing the AUTHOR'S sentence)* –get cold if you just let it sit there.

(Pause)

(Light's slowly fade on the AUTHOR as CLAY and BELL'S scene continues)

BELL (Cont'd): Well, don't you want it?

CLAY: What am I, a dog? Am I supposed to eat on command whenever whoever it is out there deems that I should? I'm not ready to eat yet.

BELL: Well, by the time your done making your political statement it's probably going to be cold and nasty.

CLAY: *(sarcastically)* How do you know if *it's* real?

BELL: *(Looks at the plate)* That's a good point.

CLAY: Give me the plate *(grabs the plate)* ...before it disappears!

(BELL takes his own plate and stares at it for a second)

BELL: Clay, don't you think that's weird? That we've never even seen him?

CLAY: (*mouth full of food*) Never seen who?

BELL: The guard or warden or whoever that is on the other side of that door?

CLAY: (*indifferently*) What about him?

BELL: Don't you think it's weird that we've never seen him? I mean, I've been in this cell for God knows how long, and I've never seen him. I don't even remember being brought to this cell. It's kinda like I've always been here. And for that matter, I don't ever remember being let outside to go take a walk, or allowed to play basketball or somethin' in the prison yard. I don't even know if there *is* a prison yard. I remember what I did to get here, sure, I remember my life before that, but I don't remember how I actually got here.

CLAY: What's this got to do with anything?

BELL: Well, don't you think that's weird?

CLAY: Like you said, you've been here for a long time; it's probably been so long you just forgot.

BELL: Well, you've only been here with me for eight months. Do you remember how you got here?

CLAY: Who cares? I'm here, you're here, who cares?

BELL: You don't remember how you got here do you!

CLAY: Of course I do. I...I, uh... (*Pausing trying to remember*)...I'm tired...I can't think clearly right now.

BELL: (*excited*) Aha! You don't remember!

CLAY: So what if I don't?

BELL: But don't you think that's freaky? Don't remember what the outside of this cell looks like, never seen our jailer, it's like our lives never really, truly existed outside of this cell. Like nothing was ever really real except for what we're doing and saying right now. I have all these memories of my life. I remember my childhood, the house I grew up in... (*A little ominously*)...my mother. (*Pause*) But it's like I remember those things only because I'm supposed to remember them. They feel like they've been stored in my brain because I'm supposed to know them. But I don't feel like I ever did any of it. (*Again in a softer, spooky kind of voice*) Not even what I got put in here for. I feel like I

haven't truly done anything except for what's been happening lately in this cell, and even that feels like I'm being controlled.

CLAY: (*dryly*) Well, when you're a fuckin' whack job, I'm sure things can seem like that. *Look*, I may not remember what the outside of this cell looks like or how I was brought here, but I sure as hell remember my life before it and what I did to get here. And I don't remember it like it was some stupid dream. I remember it because I did it. (*Pause*) You ever marvel at how life can fuck you just when you least expect it? I mean really! Have you ever just sat back in *awe* at how quickly things can turn into a big stinking pile of *shit*? I do! It's not like I was planning to knock over a bank, sell drugs to kids, be a telemarketer or something horrible like that. I just wanted a pack of *smokes*! That's it! Nothing big! Pack of sweet delicious smokes to curb *my* need for nicotine! So *that's* where I was. *Dairy Mart*, at the counter, buying my smokes. And if I had come in five minutes earlier, or ten minutes later, I would have had a chance to enjoy them. BECAUSE I WOULD HAVE MISSED THE JERK-OFF WHO CAME IN AND TRIED TO ROB THE STORE! So he's all nervous and jittery and shaky, demanding the cashier for money. And if that's all he had done, I would have let him. Fuck Dairy Mart. What do I care if Dairy Mart gets robbed?! But *nooooo*! He had to be Captain *Dumbass*. He had to turn around and point a shotgun in my face! Yellin' "Get down! Get down on the floor! Didn't you hear me? I said get down, or I swear I'll fuckin' kill you!" He stuck that gun in my *FACE*! And before that *dolt* knew what was happening, I tore it out of his hands and beat him with it until his head was cracked open on the floor tile.

BELL: But...you did that in self-defense, what are you in prison for?

CLAY: No Bell, self-defense would have been taking that gun and telling the guy to put his hands up and wait for the cops to come. I bludgeoned the bastard to death. It stopped being self-defense when he quit breathing. (*Pause*) Anyways, why are *you* here? I don't think you ever told me.

BELL: (*quietly with a strange demeanor to his voice*) Oh, that. (*Pause*) I can't talk about that.

CLAY: What do you mean you can't talk about it? Why the hell not?

BELL: It's...it's just so horrible. I deserve to be here for what I did.

CLAY: Bell, I took the butt of a steel shotgun and crushed a man's skull with it. *Believe* me, that at least rates on par with whatever *you* did, so *just* spill. If there really *is* a hell, your name's probably already on the list to be some demon's little *bitch*, so I'm thinkin' things can't get any worse. Just go ahead and-

BELL: (*agitated, defensive*) You don't know me! You don't know what I did! What I had to do! I had to do it! She was never going to...I had to get out! Why do you want to know?! What's it to you?!

CLAY: Just makin' polite conversation for fuck's sake. I don't really give a shit what you did! So don't tell me. Lock it away fruitcake.

BELL: (*calmer*) I...I shouldn't have yell-...it's just that....some things just shouldn't be talked about. Not ever.

CLAY: Ok ok, you got some deep psychological mojo goin' on. I get that. Just don't worry about it. It's a dead subject, ok?

BELL: What do you mean?

CLAY: Huh? Mean about what?

BELL: You said it was a *dead* subject. What did you mean by that?

CLAY: I didn't mean shit by it. I just meant I was gonna drop it.

BELL: No, you were trying to taunt me again. It doesn't matter, though. See, unlike you, *my* soul is *clean*. I've *confessed* my sin. Right after I did it I went to our church across the street and told the father. I *confessed*!

CLAY: Wait, wait. You did whatever you did, which I'm assumin' is bumpin' someone off since you're in here with me, (*Barely containing his laughter*) and *right* after you did it, you waltzed over to the local parish and confessed?

BELL: Don't laugh at me. I was ready to pay the consequences. My soul is clean. That's all that matters.

CLAY: (*Starting to giggle*) Forgive me father for I have sinned. I've been a complete *dumbass* all my life and there's *no cure*.

BELL: You don't understand *anything*.

CLAY: (*Still giggling*) This is a grave matter, my son, but I'm afraid I can't offer absolution to such an *extreme* dumbass until you turn yourself in to the proper authorities.

(*BELL looks at CLAY in astonishment because CLAY'S teasing has inadvertently hit close to how the story really happened*)

CLAY: Holy shit! That's what *did* happen. Priest told you to turn yourself in and you *did*? (*CLAY busts out in laughter*)

BELL: (*Furious*) He held it over my head! He said he couldn't absolve me until I turned myself in! What was I to do? My soul was on the line!

(*At this, CLAY'S laughter continues even harder*)

BELL (Cont'd): Stop *laughing* at me!

CLAY: (*His laughter slowly dying away*) Okay, okay. Just havin' some fun. Come on, you have to admit, that's pretty fuckin' funny. Huh?

(*BELL is trying to stay mad*)

CLAY: *Huuuhhhh??*

BELL: (*Finally cracking a little smile*) Well, I was just doing what I was taught. (*They both start to break into a fit of laughter on the word "taught"*) You commit a sin, you go confess it. That's how it works. (*At this, their laughter becomes uncontrollable. After several moments, they start to get control of themselves*)

CLAY: Well, you may have been a dumbass, but at least you were original about it.

BELL: (*With lightheartedness*) Yeah, how was I supposed to know he was going to hold my soul hostage?

(*As they settle down, CLAY begins to slowly pace around the cell, hap-hazardly, sort of in and out of thought. After a time he begins to kick at a spot on the floor in the middle of the cell*)

CLAY (Cont'd): Hey. How hard do you think it would be to tunnel out of here? You know, like those guys did in *The Count of Monte Cristo*. One of *those* guys ended up escaping.

BELL: Yeah, but didn't that take them like ten years to do? And the old guy ended up dying in a cave-in.

CLAY: Well he was *old*, probably wouldn't have lived very long if he *had* escaped. We're both still in our prime. I bet we could dig out of here in half the time.

BELL: That's still five years. And we don't even know which direction to dig in.

CLAY: Why do you always have to be so *damn* pessimistic?! It's just an idea. Rot in here if you want to. *I'm* gettin' out.

BELL: I'm not being pessimistic. I just think it would be kinda hard to do. It would probably be safer if you kept tryin' to pick that lock.

CLAY: Well, if you're not going to help me dig outta here I guess I don't have a choice do I?

BELL: Clay? *(Pause)* Why didn't you stop yourself when you were killing that guy? I mean, if he was already down on the ground unconscious, why didn't you just stop then?

CLAY: I don't know why. *(Searching himself to try and explain it)* I just get into these circumstances where someone is threatening me...controlling me...or pushing me to the edge of my senses, and I just...snap. I just kept hittin' the guy, and I knew that I should stop, that I was killing him, but I just couldn't...stop that is. I couldn't stop myself. I'M IN CONTROL OF MY LIFE! Me! I control it! And when he shoved that gun in my face, he was trying to take that away from me! I...don't you understand, it's like the pressure just starts to build-up in your brain, just growing and growing, and pretty soon there's no room left. No room for rational thought, no room for morality, no more room for...for humanity. They all get forced aside by that pressure. *(softer)* That pressure. *(Pause)* And now I'm stuck in this box...and there's no gun in my face, and no one is threatening me, and yet I have less control over my *life* than ever before.

(CLAY goes back over to his bed and lies down. BELL, affected by CLAY'S story, gets up and goes over to the spot on the floor where CLAY had thought to dig.)

BELL: You know, I bet, if we took shifts, like 5 hour shifts, we *could* dig our selves out of here. Who knows, it might not take five years.

CLAY: No, you were right. It was a stupid idea. Probably tunnel right into the middle of the security guards playing poker or somethin'. Better off stickin' to the lock.

BELL: I just thought that... *(something catches BELL'S attention as he was kicking his shoe around the tunneling spot)* Hey! Did you see that?

CLAY: What now?

(BELL gets down on his knees and starts examining the spot closely, tapping it with his knuckles, etc...)

BELL: It just happened again! It was like this spot in the floor rippled, blinked in and out of existence, or...I don't know, it just shifted somehow.

CLAY: God, Bell, just when I start to think you might have half a brain left, you start goin' flippy on me.

BELL: No no, listen to me. It's like, if we concentrate on one bit of reality for too long...I don't know...bring it into focus for too long, we start to see it for what it truly is. Like this reality can't take that kind of scrutiny for too long and it just starts to buckle under the strain.

CLAY: Yeah, that *must* be it. Just let me know when the green Japanese symbols start to scroll down the wall ok? *Then* maybe I'll have a look.

BELL: (*awed and excited*) You've seen green Japanese symbols scrolling down the wall? Maybe that's another sign. Like some sort of code for the universe!

CLAY: No! Bell, you quack! It's called sarcasm. I was being sarcastic. Green Japanese code? The Matrix? Get it?

BELL: The Matrix? What is the Matrix?

CLAY: What is the...IT'S A MOVIE! Jesus, how long *have* you been in here?

(*BELL has gone back to examining the spot on the floor, only now he is touching his face to it trying to gain a different perspective*)

BELL: I'm not sure anymore. The years have all bled together. But that's not important anymore, don't you see? I'm telling you Clay, it's like reality is starting to come apart at the seams. When you were at the lock before, I didn't tell you, but I got so fixated on the spot you were working on that it looked like the lock was sort of melting away, just...blurring away. And that got me to thinking about how things just-

(*BELL goes on examining the floor while the lights come back up on the AUTHOR*)

AUTHOR: (*Finishes BELL'S sentence as he types*) -felt wrong. That my thoughts and actions felt like they were being manipulated ...like I was some sort of puppet. (*AUTHOR stops typing and reclines back thinking about the scene. When the author isn't typing, while the lights remain at full illumination in CLAY AND BELL'S cell, everything in the scene becomes static, the characters freeze.*)

Okay, focus. BELL'S on the ground, CLAY'S looking at him like he's an idiot. Things are starting to progress faster for BELL now. So, uh... (*AUTHOR gets a sudden tangent thought*) Do I need to explain how Clay made this "makeshift" tool he's been using on the door? What would he have access to that he could have made it out of? A fork? Knife? Mattress springs? A part of the metal prison beds themselves? That depends on if we can get metal prison beds for the scene or not. Might end up being just a couple of mats on the floor. Or should I just leave that up to the audience to figure out? Are they even gonna care? Shit, *focus*. Okay...

(The AUTHOR goes on typing and CLAY and BELL'S scene starts to move again as they perform the following actions)

AUTHOR (Cont'd): BELL continues to search the floor for signs that reality, or whatever it is that he is in, is coming apart. He starts to get hysterical, shouting-

BELL: I SEE IT! MY GOD, I CAN SEE IT! IT'S RIPPING APART RIGHT IN FRONT OF ME!

CLAY: What are you doing? Get off the floor!

BELL: TIME AND SPACE ARE LOSING COHESION, FALLING AWAY!

AUTHOR: *(Still typing)* CLAY finally can't stand it anymore and grabs BELL by the collar and pulls him to his feet.

(Lights fade on the AUTHOR as CLAY and BELL'S scene resumes)

CLAY: Will you get up off the floor?! You look like a moron! There's nothing down there! *(Stamps the floor with his foot)* See? It's solid. *Reality* is solid! *(Hands on both sides of BELL'S collar, shaking him, looking directly in his eyes)* Things are just as you see them. We're in a prison cell for crimes *we* committed! Outside that door there are guards, a warden, and other inmates in other rooms, just like ours! Four walls, two beds, *(points to himself)* one soon to escape inmate, *(points to BELL)* and one jackass fruitcake! I don't know how long I'm gonna be stuck in this box with you, but if you don't stop yackin' on about this reality bending shit, I'm going to *snap*! And if you just *have* to talk about it, do it calmly. We'll discuss it, debate it if you want to, just don't freak out about it. Okay? *(Taps his knuckles on BELL'S head)* Mars station zero....do you copy?

BELL: Yeah...yes! *(Looks back down at the floor)* It's gone now anyways.

CLAY: See? What did I tell you? Your mind's just fuckin' with you. It's just a regular concrete floor. *(Pointing to the door)* That's just a regular door lock.

BELL: *(Calming himself down, trying to speak in a more rational voice)* No, no, don't you see? I wasn't focused on it anymore. My concentration, my *scrutiny* of that part of reality was broken, so it went back to normal.

CLAY: That's because I snapped you back to your senses.

BELL: No, it's because I lost my focus.

CLAY: You mean your mind.

BELL: Maybe...maybe. But what I saw was real.

CLAY: For you ...*I* haven't seen anything.

BELL: That's because your mind is closed to it...to the *possibility* of it. You won't open yourself up to the *possibility* that there's something going on here that can't be rationally explained away. Unlike you, I choose to open myself up to it, to be a receptacle for it. Haven't you ever picked up the Bible? Clay, there's so much in it that supports this! (*Thinks for a second*) Mark 11:23, Jesus said, "For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith."

CLAY: Scripture! How did I *know*? How did I know I wasn't gettin' outta this cell without you quotin' somethin'? You people! You...you just love to store these little *gems* in your head don't ya, just waitin' for the perfect time to *spit 'em back out!*

BELL: (*Still caught up in his own thought process*) "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." Don't you see? It's all about faith! It's all about belief! Anything is possible if you're willing to believe in it! Belief alone can bring things into existence, make them possible. Belief *alone* can reveal things that would otherwise remain hidden to the closed mind. I pray, I'm willing to believe, and the universe is responding. God himself if you like, is revealing something to me because I'm willing to believe in it. To believe in *Him*.

CLAY: Bell, I don't know about movin' mountains, but I've been wishin' and prayin' that this stupid door would open up, and as you can see, it's still one hundred percent fucking locked!

BELL: That's because deep down, you still have doubt in your heart! You don't truly believe you can do it.

CLAY: (*Getting agitated, looms over BELL*) I don't believe I can...I'VE BEEN TRYING TO OPEN THAT STUPID DOOR FOR MONTHS! How much more determined can I get?

BELL: (*Standing his ground*) Determination, yes. Belief? No.

CLAY: Okay, Bible boy, you want to toss out quotes, how's this one for ya. Let's see...*"There is no reality, only perception. To change your reality, change your perception."*

BELL: You *do* get it! That's *just* what I'm talking about! That's *brilliant*! What is that? Genesis? Revelations?

CLAY: (*Deadpan*) Dr. Phil.

BELL: Now you're just mocking me.

CLAY: Caught that did ya?

BELL: Go ahead, brush it away with sarcasm. Just because you refuse to believe in a thing, doesn't make it any less real. Any less true. I could stand here and refuse to believe that *you* exist, and no matter how hard I tried, you would still be here.

CLAY: No shit. I refuse to believe I'm in here all the time, but every day I wake up, *I'm* still here, and I *still* have to listen to your crap. (*Pause*)(*Suddenly dawning on him*) Wait a second! You miss the Matrix reference, but Dr. Phil you catch? How do you know about Dr. Phil?

BELL: Everyone knows about Dr. Phil.

CLAY: (*Mocking in disbelief*) *Huh!* Everyone knows about Dr. Phil.

(*Just then, a Time magazine is shoved through the slot in the door towards them*)

CLAY (Cont'd): Thank God! Finally, something to take my mind off your incessant babbling.

(*CLAY picks up the magazine and starts to flip through it*)

BELL: (*Talks while CLAY goes for the magazine*) I'm telling you Clay, if you'd just try and pay attention, if you'd just try and *focus*, you'd see what I'm talking about! What can it hurt for you to at least *try*?

(*As CLAY flips through the magazine, he soon realizes that all the pages are blank*)

CLAY: What are they tryin' to pull here? *Assholes!*

BELL: What is it?

CLAY: All the damn pages are blank!

(*CLAY goes over to the door and starts to beat on it a couple times*)

CLAY (Cont'd) Real damn *funny!* We're just *rollin'* on the floor in here! Come on guys, give me something real to read. I'm going stir crazy.

BELL: Let me see that! (*Grabs the magazine out of CLAY'S hand*) My God, don't you see? The pages are blank!

CLAY: I just told you that.

BELL: No, they're blank! It's another sign! I told you somethin' was wrong with this place and here's proof! It's like, the information hasn't been put into the pages because it's not relevant. Not to us! Not to whatever's going on in this cell!

CLAY: Sure it's relevant. The guards are just having a couple of cackles at our expense. (*Yelling aside to the door*) *Assholes!*

BELL: But, it's just *like* the guards. We've never seen them because...because because...they're like the pages in the magazine! They aren't important to what's goin' on in this cell! I'm on to something, I know it! I'm seeing and discovering things I was never meant to know...or maybe I was meant to know them! (*Looks up at the ceiling*) I was *meant* to know them! And that's why I can see them! And why you can't! You weren't *meant* to see them.

CLAY: They been slidin' you a little somethin' with your food maybe I don't know about?

BELL: I...

(CLAY and BELL sort of stall out, there has suddenly become an absence of anything for them to say or do. During this void, they just kind of stare at each other, shuffle their feet around a little, just idle business, etc...This should appear deliberate so it doesn't appear that one of the actors has simply forgot his lines. This should last for about ten to fifteen seconds before the lights suddenly are thrust up on the author)

(AUTHOR has his hand to his forehead in frustration)

AUTHOR: AHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!! Stupid *brain!!* Work! Work, for God's sake! (*AUTHOR starts to wave his hands about, smack his hand against his forehead, and other attempts to jumpstart his brain and get his creative juices flowing.*) (*Whining a little*) Oh, come on! Give me somethin'! (*Pause*) I got nothin'! Come on, Bell, you emotional fuck-up, what would you do? (*After a couple more seconds of frustration the wheels in his brain start to turn again*) Yeah...yeah, why not?

(The AUTHOR starts to type again and the light on him slowly begins to fade)

BELL: What was that?

CLAY: What was what?

BELL: *Clay*...It felt like my existence just got put on hold. Don't tell me you didn't feel that. We milled around like zombies for the last minute. How do you explain *that*?

CLAY: Explain what? I just didn't have anything to say?

BELL: Exactly! We didn't have anything to say! We didn't have any direction or motivation...no words! Our lives were put on hold because the universe didn't have anything for us to *say*.

CLAY: The *universe* didn't...*fuck* the universe! Bell, I just didn't have anything to say. Not everyone is a psycho chatterbox like you. Not everyone has to endlessly run at the mouth about nothing. I didn't have anything important to say so I just decided to shut up. That's it!

BELL: No. No, I can see it in your eyes. You felt it too.

CLAY: (*Shaken, defensive*) I didn't feel nothin'.

BELL: No, you did. You *did*. I'm being given all these clues...like a puzzle...I just need to put all the pieces together. I think I'm meant to figure this out.

CLAY: There's nothing to figure out! Look, Bell, you're taking these simple tiny little things and blowing them up into something they're not. You're hallucinating, seeing things. The guards play a prank on us and you think the whole universe is a fraud? We have a couple of moments of uncomfortable silence and suddenly reality is a puzzle that wants you to unlock it? Are you listening to yourself?

BELL: But, what is reality? It's nothing but a collection of sensory experiences that our brains process into a point of view! How do we know what's real and what's not? By the information we're given? Clay, the information we're being given is incomplete! Full of gaps and holes. The guards, the magazine, how we even got here in the first place? What do you really remember of your life? Cause I've been thinking about it, and I can't remember anything beyond basic facts. I know my name, what I did to get here, and a few other basic background things, but nothing that comes together to make a complete life.

CLAY: Or a complete brain.

BELL (Cont'd): Come on, humor me, what do you really remember of your life?

CLAY: Ok ok. Give me second... (*Tries to remember*). I remember my mom and dad. Dad was retired military. Yeah, used to beat the shit out of my mom. But, I put a stop to that once and for all. That's why I had to leave home.

BELL: What did they look like?

CLAY: What do you mean what did they look like?

BELL: You say you remember them, so...what did they look like?

CLAY: They...they... (*Takes a few more seconds, but still can't remember*) ah, this is stupid anyways.

BELL: See?! You can't remember what they look like because it isn't important. You only remember the things that were important in getting you to this cell. Your home life, what got you on the run, the murder at the gas station. Beyond that I bet you don't remember anything but a few basic facts. And what about those facts? Your name, my name? What are they but simple tools designed to give us some separation from each other, some sort of surface individualism so we know who's who. They're like fragile shells for us to hide in, as if to say because we have names we have souls; that we're real people with real lives.

CLAY: This is ridiculous. I've let you suck me into your insanity for long enough. Go stare at your floor again, fruitloop. I'm done listening.

BELL: You're just angry because I'm starting to make sense.

CLAY: You're one person I'll never accuse of making sense.

BELL: I'm starting to get to you. I can tell. It's ok...I denied it when it first started happening to me. But you can't escape the truth. We're part of some design. Something, somebody has put us in this cell for a reason. We're just playing out the parts that somebody has planned for us.

CLAY: I'm not playing out any part. I may be locked up in this box with a fruitcake, but my life is my own, my *mind* is my own. Nobody tells me what to say or do! I'm a *real* person, and when I find a way to open that door and get past the *real* guards that are out there, I'm going to go and have a *real* life. So just leave me alone! (*Puts his hands to his head*) I'm done playing this mind game of yours!

BELL: Ok. I'm sorry. Just calm down. I'll let it go for awhile, we won't talk about it. It's a lot to get used to, I know.

CLAY: I'm not going to calm down. I'm gettin' the hell outta here. (*CLAY goes back over to his mattress and retrieves the tool from underneath it.*) I'm not

staying in this boxed-up hell with you any longer. *(Starts to pick the door lock again, this time with increasing impatience)*

BELL: Good, that's good. Busy yourself. Get your mind off it for awhile.

(While CLAY is trying to pick the lock, BELL goes back to his bed and lies back. After a couple of seconds, BELL slowly sits up and gently puts his hand against the wall, or the place where the wall should be, that separates him from the AUTHOR. He starts to really examine it, concentrate on it, feeling around it, etc... CLAY soon starts to take notice)

CLAY: What in the hell are you doing?

BELL: Concentrating on this small segment of reality. See how long it can stand up against my scrutiny.

CLAY: Jesus, I thought you said you were going to give that stuff a rest.

BELL: No, I said I wouldn't talk about it for a while. You're the one who's bringing it up again.

CLAY: Knock it off! You're bugging the shit out of me.

BELL: I'm not doing anything. Go pick your lock.

(CLAY tries to concentrate on the lock again, but soon BELL starts to become increasingly excited, starts to rant again to himself)

BELL (Cont'd): Yes. Yes, it's doing it again, I can see it! Bending, blurring, becoming intangible!

CLAY: *(With increasing agitation)* I said knock it off! There's nothing there!

BELL: It's showing itself to me, it wants to be figured out!

CLAY: There's nothing there to figure out! It's just a stupid wall!

BELL: It's incredible! The wall's losing its shape, its form. My God, I bet I could put my hand right through it!

(BELL brings his hand up, and slowly begins to pass his hand through the barrier that separates him from the AUTHOR. As his hand slowly penetrates he starts to get hysterical, begins to rant in a crazed voice)

BELL: Yes! Yes! I knew it!

CLAY: Shut up!

BELL: I knew it wasn't real! None of it is! We've been puppets all along!

CLAY: *(Jumps up and looms over BELL, his rage brimming)* I'm nobody's puppet!

BELL: This reality *is* a fraud! A construct of some sort!

CLAY: Get away from that wall! You're crazy! You don't know what you're talking about!

BELL: I'm going to go through.

CLAY: There's nothing there!

BELL: See what's on the other side.

(CLAY puts his hands to his head)

CLAY: *(In a harsh desperate grunt)* Stop it! Stop it!

BELL: *(In a crazed voice)* I want to see the truth. See what's controlling us!

CLAY: *(Still holding his head)* GET AWAY FROM THAT WALL! THERE'S NOTHING CONTROLLING US!

BELL: *(Hysterically)* YOU JUST HAVE TO FOCUS!

(CLAY snaps and starts to repeatedly stab BELL in the side with the makeshift tool)

CLAY: STOP IT! STOP IT! STOP IT!

(CLAY regains his senses and drops the weapon, but it is too late. BELL'S been mortally wounded.)

(BELL begins to talk but it is no longer hysterical. He's still looking straight ahead, but the heightened emotional trauma caused by his wounds has opened up everything to him. He can now see the AUTHOR at his desk on the other side of the wall typing away at his laptop. The lights slowly come up on the AUTHOR as he is revealed to BELL)

BELL: *(There is pain and awe in his voice but it is surprisingly calm and measured)* My God, I can see him. I can see him!

(BELL starts to slide back onto his mattress while CLAY tries to hold him up. CLAY is near to tears, unable to bear what he has just done)

CLAY: I'm *sorry!* I'm sorry, Bell I...I didn't mean to. Oh, God, I didn't mean to.

(BELL suddenly grabs CLAY'S head with both hands, looking him straight in the eyes)

BELL: *(Hysterically)* CAN'T YOU SEE IT?! CAN'T YOU SEE HIM?!

(BELL releases CLAY'S head, slowly falls back onto his bed, and finally dies. With the final words of BELL, along with the trauma of the situation, when CLAY looks back up at the wall, everything is revealed to him. He can see the AUTHOR on the other side of the wall who is describing this very situation. As the following sequence is described by the AUTHOR, the very actions that he describes are carried out by CLAY just as the AUTHOR describes them.)

AUTHOR: *(Types/Talks)* The traumatic death of BELL has finally split open the barriers between story and reality for CLAY. He can now see through to the AUTHOR on the other side of his constructed reality. The AUTHOR is sitting at his desk and typing this very scene on his laptop. *(CLAY and the AUTHOR)* "Oh my God, I don't believe it" says CLAY. But he does believe it. He *has* to believe it. Slowly, he takes his first tentative steps around the bed and towards the wall. Cautiously, he puts his hand up to where the wall should be, and carefully passes his hand through the now intangible wall. Just like BELL before him, CLAY'S hand glides through to the reality of the AUTHOR. CLAY snaps his hand back in shock. Strengthening his resolve, he brings himself closer to the wall, puts his hand back up to it, and begins to pass his entire body through the barrier that separates story from reality until, slowly, steadily, he comes out through the other side. CLAY has broken the bonds of his fictional existence and has been made manifest, real. A living and breathing human being, who now finds himself directly behind the AUTHOR who is, as of yet, unaware that his creation has truly come to life and is, in fact, directly behind him. CLAY, numb with shock and disbelief, slowly approaches the AUTHOR as the AUTHOR describes this *very* action. CLAY bends down over the AUTHOR'S right shoulder and begins to scan what is being written on the screen of the laptop. Reading the words that flash on the screen, coupled with his passing through the wall of his cell, it doesn't take long for CLAY to come to the realization that BELL had it right all along! They *were* being controlled. Manipulated! Puppet characters whose very lives had been conceived, fleshed out, and set into motion by the whim of the AUTHOR. *Their* author. Their *creator*. The one being, who, for all practical purposes, could truly be considered their G...

(The AUTHOR ceases to type. He has now become keenly aware that there is something wrong – that there is someone behind him. Slowly, the AUTHOR turns

his head until CLAY finally comes into view. The AUTHOR jerks back from shock and fright.)

AUTHOR: *(In disbelief)* What the fuck?

(Exchanging a momentary look with the AUTHOR, CLAY grabs him violently by the neck, and with silent ferocity, begins to choke the AUTHOR to death. As the AUTHOR dies, CLAY lets him drop to the floor beside the desk. Staring at the AUTHOR'S body for a few more seconds as he catches his breath, CLAY seats himself at the AUTHOR'S desk. After a few seconds of contemplation, CLAY starts to type something on the AUTHOR'S laptop.)

CLAY: *(Speaking slowly as he types)* The door to CLAY and BELL'S cell mysteriously opens from the outside.

(As CLAY completes this sentence, the door to CLAY and BELL'S cell does in fact miraculously open from the outside. CLAY can still see over into the fictional world of his cell and sees that this has happened just as he described it on the laptop. As the realization hits him, he begins to chuckle softly and knowingly to himself out of amazement. CLAY slowly gets up out of the AUTHOR'S chair, closes the laptop's cover, and places it under his arm. Stepping over the AUTHOR, CLAY pauses for a moment before the barrier separating him from the wall of his cell. Slowly, carefully, he steps back through to the fictional world of his cell carrying with him the instrument of reality that helped to create it. CLAY takes a few moments to look around what was once the only reality that he knew. After a few seconds he strolls over to the now open and unobstructed doorway, and turns back around once he's in-between the door's threshold. With an ever increasing smile on his face, he turns his attention towards BELL'S lifeless body.)

CLAY: So you really were on to something, weren't you fruitcake. Probably not exactly what you were expecting, but, hey, who knows? There might be a lot more levels to this thing, and we just haven't *seen 'em* yet. I'll be back for you in a little while, don't you worry. *(Holds the laptop before him with both hands and looks down at it)* Just have a few mountains to move first. *(Puts the laptop back under his arm, takes in a deep, satisfied breath, and says with a boastful, reassured voice)* I bet it's a crisp, beautiful day outside, Bell! In fact, *(Pats the laptop)* I guarantee it! *(Looks back through the cell door)* Oh, warden!

(CLAY steps through the cell door and disappears. Lights slowly fade on the entire scene. BLACKOUT.)

THE END