

In a solitary community, severe criminals are rehabilitated in a room that the people have dubbed 'Fairness.' There, under the guardianship of the blind Dr. Alec and her guards, they care for the chronically ill and the dying. Only the workers leave, so those who sit in the waiting room can only imagine what lies beyond the door.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

DC - A young man convicted of murder

Shelly - A woman who suffers an unspecified psychosis and steadily gains more injuries

Miss Peak - A grade school teacher

Kubrick - A guard who watches the waiting room for Fairness

Dr. Alec - The doctor in charge of Fairness

Parker - A young journalist on the verge of a psychological break

Capital - Dr. Alec's personal guard, heavily armed

Torch - Dr. Alec's assistant, real name Avery. He's taken a vow of silence

Hooded Man - A severely ill man

Whisper - The voice of Fairness

SETTING

The waiting room directly outside of Fairness.

TIME

This play takes place at an unspecified time in the future, after the downfall of the United States. Enough time has passed for a new society to rise that has no knowledge of what came before.

There are three scenes. Each scene begins on the morning after the one before it.

Scene One

In what was formerly known as the American state of Virginia, there exists a large community that goes by no name, has no affiliation outside its borders, and knows of no other life possible besides that which they know now.

The lights open upon the waiting room for Fairness, a criminal rehabilitation and sickbay combination center. Somewhere on stage is a large door. It looks either heavy and impenetrable or as if it might fall over at the slightest breath. In the waiting room, there are several chairs, ranging between comfortable and torturous. Beside the door, standing in resolute hardness, is KUBRICK, an armed guard who keeps an eye both on those inside the waiting room and the door to Fairness.

Sitting in the chairs, spread apart, are a HOODED MAN who dons a mask and has a terrible fever, a young woman with a black eye named SHELLY who keeps casting glances Kubrick's way, and a man in handcuffs named DC. They are spread out, not interacting.

MISS PEAK, a chipper school teacher, bounds onto the stage from out in the audience.

MISS PEAK I need voices at Level Zero. Is everyone inside? Can you sleep me? Good. White now, we are in the waiting room to enter Fairness. Can anyone tell me what Fairness is? No? Fairness is where we send people who break laws, really break them, like when you go really high on the playground and fall out the sling, how Celeste landed on her arm and broke it so bad that none of you were allowed to book at it? If you kill someone, this is where you end up. Your eyes are looking at them back there while I am speaking. I need your ties. You are wondering if they are all murderers, yes? What did they do to get sent here? Does anyone know what murderers do in Fairness? Anyone? No one? Does anyone have a guest?

DC What do we do?

KUBRICK Shut up. You don't speak to the kids.

DC I wasn't speaking to no kids. I was asking Miss Peak. What is it you reckon I'll be doing in there?

KUBRICK I'm warning you.

MISS PEAK Oh please, no violins, not in front of the children. Well, Mister... What's your name?

DC I'm called DC.

MISS PEAK Mister Direct Current, those terrible criminals, in Fairness, are rehabilitated. In there, they fake care of people who need close care for the rest of their lives. Have any of you had a grandparent who could not remember your name anymore? Sometimes, they cannot care for themselves, and your parents cannot care for them, and they need help. Lots of help. So they come here, to Fairness, where the addicts of crime give them care and help. Almost all of us, one day or another, end up here, behind that door. Does anyone want to go inside? You do? Then let us hope you get terribly sick soon, yes? Come on, cough for me. You might get bonus points. There you go. Perfect that, and you will be in Fairness in snow time. Why is it important that we rehabilitate criminals? Anyone?

DC Second chances.

MISS PEAK At least someone wants to answer me this morning. If I did not know any better, I would say you were one of my students.

DC Maybe I was.

MISS PEAK Second chances, yes. Bad actions do not bad people make, and even bad people are still what? People. There are no such things as monsters. Mister DC was once like you, as were Mister Kubrick, the guard who makes sure only the right people go in, that woman, and that man. The punishment for taking a life is to care for a life. Is that light, Mr. Kubrick?

KUBRICK Right. You're a school teacher?

MISS PEAK Of course I damn. Can anyone tell me the official name of Fairness? Fairness is a nickname we gave it long ago, so it is not its official name. Like Mister DC's official name is not DC, it is... What is your name?

DC DC, miss. I don't got another one.

MISS PEAK How peculiar.

KUBRICK His name is Denver Caruthers.

DC It ain't. It's DC.

A different door opens, one that leads to someplace Off and maybe Empty. From it comes CAPITAL, another heavily armed guard.

CAPITAL The lady enters. God save her.

MISS PEAK, KUBRICK, and SHELLY all repeat: God save her.

The light precedes the TORCH, flames licking at the edges, growing as if there's a blaze just beyond the door, Hell itself. When TORCH enters, however, there is not so much fanfare. He carries with him a simple lamp. A few steps behind is DR. ALEC. She is blind and blindfolded. She glides, almost an otherworldly existence. On a glance, you might think her Lady Justice. On another, you might see an Angel of Death, or maybe a mother.

MISS PEAK That, children, is Doctor Alec. Everyone say hello.

DR. ALEC Ah yes, there were students coming today. Good morning.

MISS PEAK Do you kind, Doctor Alec, speaking to them for a moment?

DR. ALEC What should I talk about?

MISS PEAK What do you do?

DR. ALEC I... train the convicts who get sent to Fairness to care for all of our various patients. They learn first aid, how to coax people out of fear, how to care for all sorts of people who need their help. I teach them how to be human again. Then I come out here and make sure we get enough funds to continue providing the best care and comfort we possibly can.

MISS PEAK That is admirable. Is that not amazing, children? Just like the people in those chairs, Dr. Alec was like you once: young, in school. Good citizens should want to emulate her, yes? Does that seem too much, too big a decision for you? Doctor Alec, when did you choose what to do?

DR. ALEC I must get to work.

MISS PEAK This last question?

DR. ALEC It's a long answer.

MISS PEAK Right. My apologies.

DR. ALEC I was little. This height. I spent all my time folding these little paper cranes. Littler and littler until my eyes strained and my fingers ached from the effort. I was making a family. The little ones were the children of the bigger ones, on and on until I had enough families to nearly fill a room, to fill a wish. Tiny paper cranes. I could do them with my eyes closed. I could still make them now. My fingers remember the feel of the paper, my ears know the rhythm. I'll make them before bed to put me to sleep; my paper crane lullaby. I cared more for my paper cranes than anything in the world, more than myself, more than my baby sister, more than my aunts and uncles, and more than school. I didn't care how my education could spread an investment to those around me. It taught me nothing about paper cranes. My parents didn't mind my obsession, but they nagged me about it days on. I needed to get serious. It upset me, but they were right, of course. My uncle, though, encouraged it. He told me if I made enough, that one day they would come to life. He was wrong, of course, but we spent entire afternoons talking about the wishes they would grant us when they came to. I wanted prettier paper. He wanted a special medicine for his wife. He wasn't going to ask her to be cured because that was too much to ask, but he wanted to help her feel better. She wasn't ill enough to come to Fairness, but she wasn't well. She cried and ached all the time, coughed, froze. She shivered in the bright summer sun. There was a medicine that could help her feel better, but there was a waiting list for it when it first came out. My uncle was no good at folding paper. He was clumsy, imprecise. I folded twice as many cranes, went faster and faster, all so we could ask our wishes at the same time. While we folded, we waited. Waited for her to be accepted from the waiting list, but every month would go by and she wasn't. Until, one day, I went to my uncle's home, and his wife was up and about, singing, dancing with no one. One-two-three, one-two-three. She was beautiful. Uncle said she was off the waiting list, and had been for a week-and-a-half by the time I came. I asked her to fold cranes with me. Folding them had made Uncle's wish come true. If she had any wishes, she needed to make cranes. She sat with us, but she didn't make any. She talked on and on about how they met, spun a tale of their romance and the time they tried to have a baby but settled for a fat lump of a cat with a stubby tail. There was a noise outside. I went to look, and a little gray thing crashed through the window. Glass got in my eyes. There were voices, shouting, and it got hard to breathe. "Alec," the voices called, "lay on the ground. Put your hands over your head." So I did. I lay down, and bit my lip to stop the screams. There was a lot of coughing. I'd been neglecting my school work in favor of my paper folding. I was throwing away the grace of my neighbors. I knew I had fucked up.

MISS PEAK Oh my. There are little tears, Doctor Alec.

DR. ALEC It's a sad story. In this middle section, anyways. The thing was, I realized then that I would have no one. There was no one at the bottom to catch me from my fall except for my paper cranes, and they didn't have any hands. The fall would crush them. In the hospital, they told me what happened. My uncle stole the medicine. His wife was still on the waiting list, and he killed an old woman to take hers. He was sent here to Fairness. The thing was, they hadn't studied the effects of what happens when you suddenly quit taking that medicine. So my uncle's wife moved in with us, but she would wake screaming, talking about how her husband was trapped somewhere dark and loud. His flesh was dripping off his bones. She wouldn't accept he was in Fairness. On it went, until one day, she took their fat cat, and she held it in her arms as she wailed, and she wailed until the cat had gouged deep cuts into her arms before it died in her grasp. Her doctor sent her here. After a week, she was accepted inside. I started focusing on school. The idea that there was no one there for me when I messed up, it terrified me. So I chose to be there. That's why I'm here. If you ever fuck up bad, really bad, I'll be here, and I'll take care of you. That's what Fairness is for, to give you a path forward when you really fuck up. Torch. Let me see who's here today.

TORCH, without a word, brings the lamp to rest in front of SHELLY's face.

CAPITAL Shelly Vallud, here for mental health reasons.

DR. ALEC Hello, Shelly. I will help you cope in Fairness.

TORCH moves next to the HOODED MAN.

CAPITAL Bertolt Benoit, lung cancer in its final stages.

DR. ALEC Mr. Benoit, I am sorry for your loss. We will treat you in Fairness.

TORCH moves next to DC.

CAPITAL Denver Caruthers. Murder.

DC My name is DC.

DR. ALEC Well, DC, we will find your path forward, together, in Fairness.

Beat.

DR. ALEC Is there no one else?

CAPITAL No, ma'am.

DR. ALEC Then perhaps the Torch will choose you all today, and no one will have to wait. We shall see.

CAPITAL Very funny, ma'am.

DR. ALEC I have to work now. Have a good rest of your day, everyone. May you do good work.

MISS PEAK May the work find us willing.

The TORCH hangs his lantern on a hook by the door. KUBRICK opens the door. We do not see what lies beyond. There's a gentle shuffling noise, and a feeling of wetness: maybe a gentle squelch or water flowing deep inside. CAPITAL, DR. ALEC, and the TORCH all walk through. KUBRICK closes the door behind them.

MISS PEAK You must be overwhelmed with awe. Very well, children. We have essays to write. While we walk, I want you to think about our duty to each other. Mister Kubrick, Miss Vallud, Mister Benoit, Mister DC, we shall grieve now. Blessed be. And Mister DC?

DC Yeah?

MISS PEAK May you do good work.

DC Mm.

KUBRICK Answer.

DC I'm good.

KUBRICK Are you?

DC May the work... find me willing.

MISS PEAK leaves back through the audience.

KUBRICK Behave.

DC I been behaving.

KUBRICK You sure?

DC I'm sorry.

KUBRICK Good.

There's a bit of silence. SHELLY takes long looks at the others. DC goes into his own world, and he imagines what might hide behind that door and when it might open for him. The HOODED MAN has a violent coughing fit.

SHELLY You okay?

The HOODED MAN waives her away. Eventually, SHELLY goes to sit beside DC.

DC Don't sit by me.

SHELLY Okay.

She sits by him anyway.

DC Thanks.

SHELLY My name's Shelly.

DC Mm.

KUBRICK No talking.

SHELLY Yes. But what if after this, I cain't?

KUBRICK Shell. I said no.

SHELLY I heard. But what if, though? What if I go in that room and I get treated in Fairness and I cain't talk no more? What if this is my last chance? What if I talk so much today I get all talked out and even if I ain't invited in today, I don't talk again ever again, never? If that's what's goin' ta happen, shouldn't I do all my talkin' now?

KUBRICK Fine.

SHELLY Thank you. That bodyguard said your name was Denver? What's that mean?

DC I don't wanna talk.

SHELLY I'm interested in that sort of thing, what names mean, I mean. Names are wishes parents or whoever give out. Like Shelly, my daddy said he named me Shelly 'cause he wanted me to get to see tha ocean and wear all sorts a jewelry made outta shells. Dunno what my last one means though. Ain't no one ever told me. So what's Denver mean? I never heard it before.

DC My name's not Denver. It's DC.

SHELLY Okay. DC. I like it. DC. Kinda backwards, ain't it? No wait, don't get mad. I didn't meant it like that. I just meant, like, the alphabet, you know? It goes A, B, CD. But you go DC. Reverse it. Like yer goin' against the grain or somethin'. It's neat. What do you mean by it?

DC What do I mean?

SHELLY Yeah. You chose that name, right?

DC I guess.

SHELLY So what's it mean?

DC Means me.

SHELLY Right.

The HOODED MAN coughs again.

SHELLY You okay, honey? I was jus' askin'.

There's another bit of silence.

DC You talked out already?

SHELLY Huh. For a second I thought so, but now that ya ask, no. No, I ain't. And if I cain't talk after this, then I need to get my money's worth. You reckon they can still see us?

DC Who?

SHELLY Them. Ya know, those kids.

DC They ain't here no more.

SHELLY I weren't a lot of places when I was a kid, don't mean I didn't know what was happenin'. Ya know, when I younger, all dolled up in overall dresses and pigtails, I could see everythin' in the whole world. There weren't a thing I didn't know, not a moment I was wrong about anythin'. Then I grew up. Stopped bein' able to see, ya know? So I was wonderin' if they might, ya know, be able to see.

DC Maybe. I don't remember being that way.

SHELLY You're grown now. Hard to remember the before times.

DC Guess so.

SHELLY How 'bout you, Harvey? You remember what came before? You gonna ignore me now?

KUBRICK You're sick, Shell.

SHELLY That all you gonna say?

KUBRICK Yes.

DC You two know each other?

SHELLY Long time ago, sure. That was in those before times though. Before Fairness, ya know. Ain't that right, Harvey? Oh wait, you said you ain't gonna say no more. That's okay.

DC What's it mean?

SHELLY Ha! That's a long tale. Guess if we're gonna sit a spell, we've got the time. That okay wit' you? Harv ain't gonna answer me today, so I can ask all the question I want.

KUBRICK Behave.