

# **One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest Book Notes**

**One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest by Ken Kesey**

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## Author/Context

Ken Kesey was born on September 17, 1935, to Fred A. and Generva Kesey. He was lived in Oregon with his father's parents while his father served in the Navy during the war, and this was where he spent the majority of his youth. Kesey referred to his father as a big, rebellious man, cast in the mold of John Wayne and the American cowboy. It is possible to see Kesey's interest in the myth of the hero at a young age, as well as hints of the *Cuckoo's Nest's* central character in his father's bold nature. Kesey's experience with his father on the river and in the woods influenced both *Cuckoo's Nest*, and Kesey's other major novel, *Sometimes a Great Notion*. He was raised Baptist, and his mother's family was staunchly religious.

Kesey went to college at the University of Oregon, and graduated in 1957. In college, he participated in nearly every activity available, including wrestling, drama, and writing. After graduating, he got a job writing for television and radion

A great deal of Kesey's inspiration for *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* was taken from Kesey's work at the Veteran's Hospital in Menlo Park. He was at first a paid participant in government testing of various drugs. His natural intelligence, and interest in new experiences, made him ideally suited for the task. After the testing was completed, Kesey stayed on at the hospital as an aide. His creation of the character Randle Patrick McMurphy was inspired by the longing he found in a great number of the men there. Kesey also drew on his drug experiences in order to create the vivid hallucinations Chief Bromden, the novel's narrator, experiences over the course of the novel.

When *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* was published in 1963, it was an instant critical and popular success. College students especially enjoyed the novel, with its rebellious and subversive themes and humorous objections to the ideas of conformity. Critics responded with a wide variety of interpretations, seeing McMurphy as a representation of the Fisher King, or the basic structure of the novel itself akin to that of dramatic tragedy. Some faulted it for it's over the top bravadoism and the crudity of its central character. For the most part, however, reactions were positive. *Lex et Scientia*, a magazine of the International Academy of Law and Science, devoted an entire 100-page double issue to the book, describing it as "a cornucopia of source material from disciplines so numerous and varied as to challenge the mind and imagination." (Tanner, p.19) The novel was adapted into a stage play, and eventually a screen version, which won five Academy Awards and gave Jack Nicholson one of his most memorable roles as McMurphy.. The novel remains popular today, with its theme of the individual versus society, and the need to remain in touch with one's self. The two central characters, McMurphy and the Big Nurse, have entered into the mythology of American culture.

### Bibliography

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# Plot Summary

Set in a mental hospital in the 1960's, the novel is the story of Randle Patrick McMurphy, and his attempt to thwart the head of the ward into which he is transferred. The head of the ward is Nurse Ratched, referred to by the patients as the Big Nurse. The story is told in first-person narration through the eyes of Chief Bromden, a six foot two Indian who has pretended for the past thirty years to be deaf and dumb.

When McMurphy arrives at the ward, he immediately sets things on edge, mocking the staff policies and joking with the patients. He reveals himself to be a master gambler, who conned his way into the hospital in an attempt to get an easier sentence. Things are not exactly as he expected, however; the men are shy, frightened mice who can hardly chuckle, and who live in constant terror of the Big Nurse and her indirect attacks. McMurphy makes a bet with them: in one week, he can break down her defenses.

It takes him the whole week, but he manages it; by making fun of her every chance he gets, and going behind her back to get changes made in ward policy. He convinces the men to vote to change the TV viewing time so they can watch the World Series. At first the men are too frightened to go along with it, but he drags them along. When the Big Nurse refuses to accept the vote, he and the rest of the men sit and watch the television anyway, even if it's just a blank screen.

McMurphy holds back on his fights when he learns that the Big Nurse controls when he is released from the hospital. However, he is pulled back in by the suicide of a patient and the needs of the other men. He smashes a fist through the window in the Nurse's station to get at a pack of cigarettes, and when the window is replaced, he smashes it again.

Bromden and McMurphy become friends, and Bromden starts to talk again, almost by accident. McMurphy takes him and a number of the men on a fishing trip, giving them a chance to do things most men take for granted, and their fear starts to go away. However, the Big Nurse tries to chip away at McMurphy's reputation every chance she gets. McMurphy and Bromden are forced into shock therapy after getting into a fight with the black aides.

The men plan an escape for McMurphy, but he sticks around to meet a girl from the outside, who he arranged to meet one of the men, Billy Bibbit. Billy and the girl spend the night together, and when the Big Nurse comes in that morning, she finds the two of them in bed. When she threatens to tell Billy's mother, Billy cuts his throat. McMurphy attacks the Big Nurse, ripping open her shirt and nearly strangling her. He is taken away, and when he returns, he has been lobotomized. He no longer speaks or moves but just lies in bed. Bromden suffocates him with a pillow, then breaks out of the ward, free at last to return to his life.



## Major Characters

**Chief Bromden:** The novel's narrator, a large Indian who pretends to be deaf and dumb. He's done it so well that no one suspects it's an act until McMurphy arrives on the ward. Bromden comes from a reservation in Canada, which was headed by his father. This is why he's called chief. The government eventually bought out the reservation so it could install a hydroelectric dam. The Chief played football in high school, and was in the army for a period of time. His exact type of mental illness is never diagnosed (possibly paranoid schizophrenia), but he tends to see things in terms of literal metaphors. For example, when someone gets mad or does something strong, their size increases. When he sinks into a mental stupor in order to escape from the real world, he sees it as being lost in a fog that the Big Nurse creates with a machine in the nurses' station. By the end of the novel, however, McMurphy has brought him back to himself, and taught him how to be strong. He stops pretending to be deaf and starts speaking; he even fights alongside McMurphy. When McMurphy is brought back lobotomized, Bromden suffocates him, because the real McMurphy is no longer alive. He then escapes the ward and goes to back to visit the reservation.

**The Black Aides:** Their names are Washington, Warren, and Williams, but they are hardly ever referred to in the text as individuals. In describing them, the author implies that they were all taken from the same mold. The Big Nurse picks them for her ward because of how much they hate, and she trains them to use this hate in keeping the ward running smoothly. They make fun of the men whenever they can, especially Bromden because he is deaf and dumb and can't hear what they're saying.

**The Big Nurse:** Also known as Nurse Ratched. She runs the ward, as has been doing so longer than anyone can remember, even before Chief Bromden came, and she is obsessed with keeping things as neat and efficient as possible. She is a doll-faced woman, prim and proper on the outside. Her only distinguishing quality is a pair of large breasts, a badge of femininity that seems out of place on her. The Big Nurse is close to the head of the hospital. As a result, it is virtually impossible to get her fired. She uses guilt, manipulation, and disapproval to keep the men in line. When they turn violent, she sends them for shock treatment, and occasional lobotomies.

**Randle Patrick McMurphy:** The hero of the novel, a rowdy, lusty, powerful man. He fakes insanity in order to be committed to the ward, to have an easier time of things. McMurphy is an accomplished gambler and con man who has been in and out of jails all his life. Once in the ward, he takes to playing practical jokes and trying to upset the routine. At first he does this to win bets with the men, but gradually he gets drawn into fighting for them; mainly because they don't have the strength to fight for themselves. His fight is directed at the Big Nurse, and in the end he attacks her physically. The Nurse sends him away and they lobotomize him before bringing him back to the ward, in effect killing him.

**Billy Bibbit:** A young man with a stutter who lives in fear of his mother. He looks just like a little kid, but he's somewhere in his thirties. He's shy around women, and loses his



virginity to Candy, a friend of McMurphy's. His mother and Nurse Ratched are close, and she keeps tabs on him through the nurse. Billy lives in terror of disappointing her, and she treats him like a five-year-old. He slashes his throat at the end of the book in order to avoid her disapproval of him.

**Harding:** An effeminate man with beautiful, dancing hands. He speaks eloquently and sarcastically, and is hounded in group sessions for his feelings of inadequacy with his wife. The other men look up to him because he has a college degree. He hints near the end of the novel that the reason he was driven to the mental hospital was that he indulged in certain activities on which society frowns. When one takes into account his manner and his worries of sexual incompetence with his beautiful wife, it seems as if the author is implying that Harding is homosexual.

### Minor Characters

**Taber:** Taber is a foreshadowing of McMurphy. He, too, raised a fuss when he was in the ward, going so far as to ask what medication he was taking. His eventual fate also foreshadows McMurphy's: he is lobotomized.

**Pete Bancini:** When he was born, the doctor used a pair of forceps to remove him from his mother. The forceps were pressed too hard into his temples, leaving him permanently brain-damaged. He has difficulty with tasks that a five-year-old could perform easily, and spends most of his life working at a railway station throwing a switch.

**Doctor Spivey:** The doctor who works at the ward. He is just as afraid of Nurse Ratched as the rest of the patients, and takes almost all of his cues from her. It takes McMurphy's influence to give him a little backbone.

**Charles Cheswick:** One of the Acutes, who is always looking for someone to back up his ideas. He is one of the first patients to fall in behind McMurphy, and he always supports him. When McMurphy stops fighting for a while, Cheswick commits suicide.

**Mr. Turkel:** The night aide, and the only sympathetic black character in the novel. He is bribed near the end of the book into letting McMurphy's female friends into the ward.

**Sefelt:** An epileptic. He gives his medication to Fredrickson because he doesn't want the side effect (it makes your teeth fall out), and he thinks it also does something to your hair. He is especially conscious about his looks.

**Fredrickson:** Another epileptic. He takes two doses of medication, his and Sefelt's, because he is extremely terrified of seizures.

**George:** An Acute with a neatness compulsion. He goes on the boat trip because he used to sail boats before he hospitalized. When the black aides attack him in the shower room, McMurphy comes to his defense.



**Candy:** One of McMurphy's female friends, a whore from Portland. She visits the ward twice, once on the boat trip and once for a date with Billy. Billy loses his virginity to her.

**The Japanese Nurse:** She runs the Disturbed Ward, and is the only likable female character in the novel who is not a whore. She disapproves of the way the Big Nurse runs things downstairs, but is helpless to do anything about it.



## Objects/Places

**The Acutes:** The name used to describe the patients that the staff still feels have a hope of being cured. The Acutes are ambulatory for the most part, and can handle normal functions. This includes Harding and Billy Bibbit, as well as most of the major characters of the novel; Chief Bromden is one exception.

**The Chronics:** The name used for patients for which there is no hope. A large number of these are Vegetables, men who are so far gone they are almost brain dead. Chief Bromden is considered a Chronic, because he has been on the ward so long and everyone thinks he is deaf and dumb. Peter Bancini is a Chronic because he is incapable of doing anything except yelling that he's tired.

**The Ward:** The home of the patients, and the place in the hospital where the Big Nurse rules supreme. It houses all the characters in the novel, and is run by the Big Nurse, her three black aides, Doctor Spivey, and an undisclosed number of other men and women. The ward is low security. If patients act out violently, they are sent to Disturbed.

**The Disturbed ward:** The threatened destination of any patient that causes too much trouble. The little we see of it is frightening. The patients are all much further gone than the ones down below, although the nurse who runs the place, a small Japanese woman, is kind and intelligent.

**The Control Panel:** Kept in the hydrotherapy room, it is huge and formerly used to control the water directed at the patients. McMurphy tries to lift it and is unable. Bromden lifts it three times: first to see if he can do it, then to win a bet for McMurphy, and lastly to throw it through a window and escape the ward.

**Shock Shop:** Where patients are sent to receive electro-shock therapy. Supposedly a form of treatment, but used in the novel by the Big Nurse as a form of punishment to anyone who gets too far out of line.



## Quotes

Quote 1: "It's still hard for me to have a clear mind thinking on it. But it's the truth even if it didn't happen." Chapter 1, pg. 13

Quote 2: "Yes. This is what I know. The ward is a factory for the Combine. It's for fixing up mistakes made in the neighborhoods and in the schools and in the churches, the hospital is. When a completed product goes back out into society, all fixed up good as new, better than new sometimes, it brings joy to the Big Nurse's heart...." Chapter 4, pg. 40

Quote 3: "'I can't help it. I was born a miscarriage. I had so many insults I died. I was born dead. I can't help it.... I'm tired.'" Chapter 5, pg. 52

Quote 4: "But if they don't exist, how can a man see them?" Chapter 7, pg. 82

Quote 5: "I thought for a minute there I saw her whipped. Maybe I did. But I see now that it don't make any difference.... To beat her you don't have to whip her two out of three or three out of five, but every time you meet. As soon as you let down your guard, as soon as you lose *once*, she's won for good. And eventually we all got to lose. Nobody can help that." Chapter 9, pg. 101

Quote 6: "'But I tried though,' he says. 'Goddammit, I sure as hell did that much, now, didn't I?'" Chapter 11, pg. 111

Quote 7: "And later, hiding in the latrine from the black boys, I'd take a look at my own self in the mirror and wonder how it was possible that anybody could manage such an enormous thing as being what he was." Chapter 17, pg. 140

Quote 8: "But just as soon as we got to the pool he said he did wish *something* mighta been done, though, and dove into the water." Chapter 18, pg. 151

Quote 9: "'Well, screw you and 'what do you think?' I've got worries of my own without getting hooked with yours. So just quit!' He glares around the library at the other patients. 'Alla you! Quit *bugging* me, goddammit!'" Chapter 21, pg. 160

Quote 10: "'You think I wuh-wuh-wuh-*want* to stay in here? You think I wouldn't like a con-con-vertible and a guh-guh-girl friend? But did you ever have people l-l-laughing at you? No, because you're so b-big and so *tough*! Well, I'm not big and tough.'" Chapter 22, pg. 168

Quote 11: "While McMurphy laughs. Rocking farther and farther backward against the cabin top, spreading his laugh out across the water- laughing at the girl, at the guys, at George, at me sucking my bleeding thumb, at the captain back at the pier... and the Big Nurse and all of it. Because he knows you have to laugh at the things that hurt you just to keep yourself in balance, just to keep the world from running you plumb crazy. He knows there's a painful side; he knows my thumb smarts and his girlfriend has a bruised



breast and the doctor is losing his glasses, but he won't let the pain blot out the humor no more'n he'll let the humor blot out the pain." Chapter 25, pp. 211-12

Quote 12: "an expression that was allowed only because he figured it'd be too dark for anybody in the car to see, dreadfully tired and strained and *frantic*, like there wasn't enough time left for something he had to do...." Chapter 25, pg. 218

Quote 13: "And he'd swell up, aware that every one of those faces on Disturbed had turned toward him and was waiting, and he'd tell the nurse he regretted that he had but one life to give for his country and she could kiss his rosy red ass before he'd give up the goddam ship. *Yeh!*" Chapter 28, pg. 242

Quote 14: "'Yeah? Not that I'm admitting I'm down that road, but what is this something else?'"

"'It is us.' He swept his hand about him in a soft white circle and repeated, 'Us.'" Chapter 28, pg. 258

Quote 15: "'What worries me, Billy,' she said- I could hear the change in her voice- 'is how your mother is going to take this.'" Chapter 29, pg. 264

Quote 16: "'First Charles Cheswick and now William Bibbit! I hope you're finally satisfied. Playing with human lives- gambling with human lives- as if you thought yourself to be a *God!*'" Chapter 29, pg. 266

Quote 17: "A sound of cornered-animal fear and hate and surrender and defiance, that if you ever trailed coon or cougar or lynx is like the last sound the treed and shot and falling animal makes as the dogs get him, when he finally doesn't care any more about anything but himself and his dying." Chapter 29, pg. 267

Quote 18: "I been away a long time." Chapter 29, pg. 272



# Topic Tracking: Humor

## Chapters 1 - 15

Humor 1: When McMurphy first enters the ward, the thing that immediately distinguishes him, aside from his lack of fear, are his jokes. He laughs out loud at everything, and makes fun of everyone. Laughter is very rarely heard in the ward, and by not taking anything too seriously, McMurphy is able to exert power over it. He manages to avoid any sort of insult or invasion by making a joke of it.

Humor 2: McMurphy, having bet the rest of the men that he can get the Big Nurse to crack within a week, makes his first step in that direction by the use of a long joke. The Big Nurse is unable to fight back because it takes her by surprise. By making fun of her, he subverts her authority, and eliminates any power she might have over him.

## Chapters 16 - 23

Humor 3: McMurphy tells the other men jokes in an attempt to get them to laugh, but such an act smacks of rebellion, and the other men are unable to accomplish it. Laughter is equated with strength and an ability to not take everything seriously. It also means having an emotional reaction to something that isn't fear, an idea of which the men of the ward are terrified.

Humor 4: McMurphy's act of smashing through the window could have gotten him moved to the Disturbed ward. But because he pretends he didn't see the glass, the Big Nurse is unable to remove him. Everyone understands that he really *did* see the glass, and the act of vandalism takes on the added power of being a joke at her expense. If she gets angry with him, she lets him win.

## Chapters 24 - 25

Humor 5: A repeat of the previous action, but with even more humiliation for the Big Nurse. The joke is even funnier because he uses the same excuse, and starts to blame the glass itself as the cause of the disturbance. It also allows him to vent his frustration at not being granted a day pass in a way that can't really be punished.

Humor 6: For the first time, the men take part in the joke, pretending to be dangerous mental patients. Not only does this serve to frighten the people around them into treating them with respect; it gives the men a feeling of power. They become a team against the world, which they always were, but a team with an ability to actively fight back. For the first time, the joke is at the expense of the society that has terrorized them.

Humor 7: McMurphy laughs at seeing the men the way they are, both laughing at them and with them. He is able to survive for so long against the world that has destroyed the rest of them because he can laugh at it. He takes everything seriously by taking nothing



seriously. He doesn't deny that there is pain and hardship, but he refuses to let that define and ruin him.

### **Chapters 26 - 29**

Humor 8: His defense is starting to wear down, but he continues to make jokes out of every attempt the Big Nurse makes to break him.

Humor 9: McMurphy slips up here, and shows the danger of constant jokes. The Big Nurse warns him of the possibility of a lobotomy, but instead of taking it seriously, he turns it into a joke about his testicles. McMurphy has no intention of backing down at this point, but by turning the warning into the joke, he increases the chances of it being acted upon.

Humor 10: All the men are finally able to laugh at the Big Nurse. She wants them to be ashamed of the mess they've made, and at the beginning of the novel, they would have been. But now McMurphy has helped them enough that they can take his point of view, and laugh at their hijinks, as well as the Big Nurse's reaction to them, which is what finally drives her to destroy Billy.



# Topic Tracking: Power and Control

## Chapters 1 - 15

Power and Control 1: Chief Bromden sees power in terms of literal size. The Big Nurse, when she gets angry, swells up so large that she towers over everyone. Even her name, "Big" Nurse, has to do with size. Although he's over six feet tall, Bromden considers himself small because he doesn't have the courage to do anything; not to speak or take action or leave the ward.

Power and Control 2: The Big Nurse's ultimate aim throughout the book is to keep everything running smoothly. To Bromden, she has designed the ward to churn out people who conform to society. To do that, she must have absolute control over everything at all times. Things have to work efficiently, and exactly the way she wants them too, and she keeps everyone in line in order to do that. McMurphy represents an immediate threat to this need for control.

Power and Control 3: The Big Nurse's control over the men is so exquisite that she can get them to abase themselves by mere silence. She runs group meetings almost like medieval torture sessions, where men are broken down by the constant barrage of questioning from their peers. Everyone does what she wants most of the time, because they're too afraid of her not to comply.

Power and Control 4: Bromden is so convinced of the Big Nurse's authority that he attributes the passage of time to her, as well as the actions and conversations of most of the men. She takes on mythic proportions in his mind, as someone so powerful that she can run anything she wants to.

Power and Control 5: McMurphy tries to lift the control panel, which is clearly too big for him. He makes an attempt, though, and as he does, his arms swell up from the effort. Once again, the bigger you are, the more powerful - and vice-versa. Even though McMurphy fails to lift the panel, he is not intimidated by it's size into not trying; which makes him stronger than the rest of the men.

## Chapters 16 - 23

Power and Control 6: Essentially, the Big Nurse does , have absolute power in the ward because she gets to decide how long McMurphy stays there. Thus, he has to get her permission to get his freedom. Her control is generally indirect. McMurphy can still choose to wage war against her, but she gets to decide the consequences.

Power and Control 7: One of the Big Nurse's most powerful tools is to treat men like little children: with pity and condescension. This is humiliating, and it is also nearly impossible to fight against, because it seems like all her comments are deserving. She makes Sefelt's natural fear of medication side effects like the fear of a child of the boogeyman.



Power and Control 8: Now that things have calmed down, and McMurphy has apparently given up, the Big Nurse is free to punish the men back-handedly for something that she was too afraid to stop before. Like the Chief thinks earlier, the only way to beat the Big Nurse is to beat her every time, because the minute you let your guard down, she's back on top.

### **Chapters 24 - 25**

Power and Control 9: The Big Nurse uses the men's fear to try and thwart McMurphy's plans. She never says anything directly (which is the essence of her power), instead she leaves newsclippings on the bulletin board that talk about sunken ships and hostile seas. No one can accuse her of sabotage, because she can merely say that she was looking out for the men's safety.

Power and Control 10: As soon as Bromden speaks, he admits to McMurphy that he's not as big as he is. He's been staying silent not to fool people, but to avoid the world. He describes his mother as huge, although not in physical size; she towered over his father near the end, and drove the man to drink. McMurphy makes a deal to make Bromden "big" again, which Bromden accepts.

### **Chapters 26 - 29**

Power and Control 11: Nurse Ratched's final gambit is to show the men how much money McMurphy has made from his supposedly philanthropic schemes. She does this behind his back, and once again, never accuses anyone of anything. Her control of the men is based on a well-honed knowledge of their suspicions and fears.

Power and Control 12: She uses shock treatment as a form of torture, in an attempt to get McMurphy to admit she's right. Once again, she's completely impeccable in her actions, and it's impossible to directly accuse her of anything.

Power and Control 13: In one of the few examples of non-Big Nurse handled control, McMurphy attacks her because of the need of the men. They can control him through their weakness: one strong personality to step in and defend a thousand weaker ones. McMurphy's final undoing of the Big Nurse is to rip open her shirt and expose her too large breasts. He also tries to strangle her, but it's the humiliation that destroys her power more than anything else. She has tried to hide her breasts from the very beginning; their size is an embarrassment, which makes them even more difficult to conceal. By showing that even she has something that she is ashamed of, McMurphy removes the last of her power.



# Topic Tracking: Women

## Chapters 1 - 15

Women 1: The Big Nurse is the first appearance by a woman in the novel. She is also the only major female presence on the ward. All of the patients are men, and the nurses who help the Big Nurse are not especially prominent characters. She is described by Chief Bromden as being doll-faced, and severe looking. The only thing about her that approaches humanity are her overly large breasts. She is machine-like, and proper; the representation of society and conformity, the negative aspects of the controlling woman.

Women 2: The second reference to women is during Harding's group therapy session. He feels inadequate compared to his wife, and believes she may be sleeping around. His wife is immediately caricatured during the meeting: extremely attractive; flirtatious; and possibly cheating. Women are designed to pull men down, to cut away their strength; they manipulate and humiliate without obviously attacking.

Women 3: The third strong reference to women is Billy Bibbit's overbearing mother. His mother, through over-protection and condescension, has managed to make Billy incapable of dealing with the real world. He says the first word he ever stuttered was the first word he spoke: mama. One role of a woman in a man's life is to be his mother and tend to him. Billy, however, is a victim of female oppression through his mother.

## Chapters 16 - 23

Women 4: Harding's wife finally appears and she's an almost sympathetic character. Harding treats her sarcastically because it is the only way he knows how to deal with his feelings of inadequacy. In response, she flirts with McMurphy. While this presentation is slightly more positive than that of Harding's wife from earlier in the novel, it is still not wholly enthusiastic; instead of reacting to Harding's sarcasm, or stalking off, she starts to undercut him by flirting with another man in her husband's presence.

## Chapters 24 - 25

Women 5: The Big Nurse is disapproving of McMurphy's idea of a chaperon, saying that the woman he has chosen doesn't sound entirely "responsible." Women are neatly divided into two categories: the older ones, like the Big Nurse and Bibbit's mother, who believe in suppression and shame, and McMurphy's friends, whores who are content to be mere representations of men's needs.

Women 6: Bromden's mother is another one from the Big Nurse's crowd. She cuts his father down to size with nagging, and grows huge herself. She's not a large woman physically, but like the Big Nurse, she towers over the men around her spiritually, but not in a wholesome way. She exemplifies women as the enemy.



Women 7: By her name alone, Candy, it is easy to discern what she represents: the idealization of men's sexual desires. Her personality consists of responding to McMurphy's jokes, and being flattered when the men on the ward flirt with her. Women as sexual beings are merely extensions of men's fantasies. Nothing is really learned of Candy's character. She serves as a symbol of what the men could be having, if they were willing to take it.

Women 8: McMurphy lost his virginity to a girl of 9 when he was only 10. This echoes the earlier story of McMurphy's charge of statutory rape (a girl who, according to McMurphy, lies about her age and nearly attacks him to get him into bed). McMurphy was naïve and thought the sexual experience was important, and wanted to announce it; the girl left behind her dress and walked home in her underwear. According to McMurphy, if a woman exhibits sexuality, she's a whore; otherwise, she must suppress it completely.

### **Chapters 26 - 29**

Women 9: The little Japanese nurse who runs the Disturbed Ward is the only truly adult, decent woman in the entire novel. She treats Bromden and McMurphy sympathetically when they are brought up to her ward, and expresses disapproval of the Big Nurse's methods for running her ward. She appears briefly again near the end of the novel, to run the ward while the Big Nurse is being treated for her injuries.

Women 10: The final weapon the Big Nurse has against Billy is shame, and the only way she can get him to feel it is to mention his mother. Immediately, Billy is reduced to a cowardly wreck, denying responsibility for his actions like a five year-old, blaming everyone else in the room for forcing him to sleep with Candy. When he is left alone in the doctor's office, he cuts his throat in order to avoid having to see his mother again.



## Chapters 1 - 2

Chief Bromden, the story's narrator, is a patient in a mental ward. At the start of the novel, he is mopping the floors early in the morning. The only other people on the ward who are awake are the three black orderlies. They taunt and mock Bromden, because they think he is deaf and dumb.

The Big Nurse, a stern woman in her fifties, enters the ward.

Topic Tracking: Women 1

She sees the black orderlies standing around gossiping, and her rage makes her swell with gigantic power -- Bromden actually visualizes power as a person's size. The Big Nurse is this biggest person in the ward.

Topic Tracking: Power and Control 1

Before she can attack the men, though, the rest of the patients wake up, and she shrinks back down. She tells the orderlies to take Bromden aside and shave him, which he tries to avoid. The orderlies find him, and force him to take medication to calm him down. It's upsetting to Bromden to tell his story, but he figures he has to. "It's still hard for me to have a clear mind thinking on it. But it's the truth even if it didn't happen."

Chapter 1, pg. 13

Later that morning, Randle Patrick McMurphy is brought into the ward. He is a boisterous, loud, energetic man, completely at odds with the surroundings. Unlike most new admissions, he refuses to come in quietly, talking at the top of his lungs, and cracking jokes and laughing.

Topic Tracking: Humor 1

## Chapter 3 - 4

There are two different kinds of patients in the ward, the Acutes, who have a chance of being cured, and the Chronics, for whom there is no hope. McMurphy introduces himself to all the Acutes first, including Billy Bibbit, a young man with a restrictive stutter, and Harding, an older gentleman with effeminate hands. Harding introduces himself as the "bull-goose loony" (McMurphy's term), and he and McMurphy have a mock contest to determine who is nuttier. McMurphy wins. He then introduces himself to the Chronics, shaking hands with all of them who are willing, until he finally comes around to Bromden. He stares at the Chief for a moment, and Harding and Bibbit explain Bromden's state. McMurphy offers him a hand to shake, and Bromden takes it.

The Big Nurse is obsessed with having everything in the ward exactly as she likes it, running smoothly. She's been there longer than anyone else, even Bromden. Over the years Bromden has watched as she's manipulated things into getting the right doctor for the ward and three black aides who are perfect for her needs. The ward itself is operated on a strict, specific schedule of medication, meals, and sleep. Some time in the past, a patient named Taber had the temerity to ask what sort of medication he was getting. The Big Nurse treated him like a child, and later he was lobotomized in order to keep calm on the ward.

*"Yes. This is what I know. The ward is a factory for the Combine. It's for fixing up mistakes made in the neighborhoods and in the schools and in the churches, the hospital is. When a completed product goes back out into society, all fixed up good as new, better than new sometimes, it brings joy to the Big Nurse's heart...."* Chapter 4, pg. 40

Topic Tracking: Power and Control 2



## Chapter 5

As the day progresses, Bromden sees the ward as filled with a thick fog, which makes it difficult to move and see anyone else. Just before one o'clock, the fog disappears, and the patients sit down for a group therapy session. One of the Chronics, Pete Bancini, starts saying how tired he is, and Big Nurse sends Billy over to calm him down. She tries to start the meeting, but McMurphy interrupts her with a joke, and she turns her attention to him. She reads part of his file out loud, which includes a charge of Rape, at which Doctor Spivey, a small, rabbit man, perks up. McMurphy explains it was statutory, and that the girl lied about her age, and that she was plenty willing.

The two have a brief conversation, during which McMurphy charms the doctor. Then Big Nurse (who the doctor names Nurse Ratched) takes over again. She invites the other men to start criticizing and questioning Harding; he is insecure about his relationship with his wife, and believes she might be sleeping with someone. McMurphy sits and watches, puzzled, without saying anything else.

Topic Tracking: Women 2

The theory behind group therapy is in order for a patient in the ward to be successfully reintroduced to society, he must learn how to cope with a group. However, the sessions are only excuses for Big Nurse to encourage the men to tear each other apart. There is a book by the nurses' station where patients can write down secrets they hear about each other, for discussion in group. Any man who does this gets a gold star, and permission to sleep late one morning.

Bromden remembers a meeting where no one spoke for the first twenty minutes, but when they were prompted, all of them started confessing sins.

Topic Tracking: Power and Control 3

While this is happening, Pete comes over and yells, "'I'm *tired*,'" (pg. 49) but he does it in a way that's stronger than before. Big Nurse sends the aides over to take care of him, but when one of them comes near him, his arms swell up, and he hits the aide into a wall. The other two keep their distance. Bancini tries to explain about why he's tired. "'I can't help it. I was born a miscarriage. I had so many insults I died. I was born dead. I can't help it.... I'm tired.'" Chapter 5, pg. 52 Eventually, Big Nurse is able to inject him with a tranquilizer, and he is taken away.

After the meeting is over, McMurphy talks to Harding. He tells Harding that the session reminded him of a pecking party, where a group of hens, seeing a spot of blood on one of their number, will peck that hen to death. Harding tries to argue at first, but eventually gives in and admits that Big Nurse is doing it to break them down. McMurphy asks why they don't try and fight back; Cheswick, who is always looking for someone to follow, agrees with him. Harding explains that they are all, essentially, cowards, rabbits who

don't have the strength of will to show resistance. McMurphy offers a bet: he will get the best of the Nurse by the end of the week.

## Chapters 6 - 7

To Bromden, time moves slowly for the rest of the day; the Big Nurse adjusts it in her office.

Topic Tracking: Power and Control 4

McMurphy runs card games with the Acutes. Music plays overhead, fairly loud, and it bothers him. The other men don't hear it; they're so used to it. McMurphy wants to go threaten someone to get them to turn it off, but Harding warns him that this is a good way to get branded dangerous, and sent up to the Disturbed ward. That night, when receiving medication, McMurphy's presence makes a nurse with a strawberry birthmark extremely uncomfortable. He is able to dodge his medication, and helps Bromden do the same. Later, when the two men are getting into bed, McMurphy warns Bromden that one of the aides is approaching. When Bromden jumps, McMurphy knows that he's not really deaf.

That night, Bromden sees the ward sinking into a giant factory where men are taken apart and re-examined. One of the patients, Blastic, is taken up and sliced open, to reveal rusted wires and mechanical parts. The next morning, Mr. Turkel, the night aide, tells him he just had a bad dream. Bromden watches as they take the dead body of Blastic away. "But if they don't exist, how can a man see them?" Chapter 7, pg. 82



## Chapter 8

That morning, McMurphy is up before every other patient on the ward, even Bromden, who is usually awake the earliest. McMurphy is singing in the bathroom. He comes out and asks one of the aides for toothpaste. The aide tells him the cabinet with the toothpaste in it isn't opened until 6:45. McMurphy makes fun of him for a little about this, then swirls his toothbrush in the can of soap powder that the aide is using to clean the walls, and brushes his teeth with that. Bromden remembers his father making fun of the men who came to the reserve when he was younger.

The Big Nurse arrives, and finds McMurphy wearing only a bath towel. He says his clothes were taken in the night, and that he wasn't issued a replacement uniform. Nurse Ratched calls for an aide to get him a replacement. McMurphy lets his towel drop, and he's wearing boxer shorts underneath. The Nurse is frazzled, but she quickly regains control as the other patients get out of bed.

Topic Tracking: Humor 2



## Chapters 9 - 10

At breakfast that morning, McMurphy tells a joke about how he and Billy picked up some women one time, based on a rumor about the size of Billy's penis. After everyone is finished eating, they have to wait in the cafeteria until 7:30.

Back in the day room, McMurphy asks the Big Nurse if it is possible to turn down the overhead music, and she refuses, on the grounds that some of the older patients will no longer be able to hear it. He asks if they could maybe move into another room to play cards, and she refuses, saying that there is not adequate coverage for two rooms.

Later, Doctor Spivey comes and takes McMurphy into his office for an introductory interview. The two come back to the group therapy session talking and joking up a storm. At the start of the meeting, Dr. Spivey proposes the idea of having a carnival in the ward, run by the men, as suggested by McMurphy. The men are enthusiastic, but the Big Nurse says such an idea needs to be brought up at a staff meeting, which everyone knows is the end of it. Dr. Spivey, once again prompted by McMurphy, brings up McMurphy's suggestion of using another room. When the Nurse raises her previous objection, Spivey argues it away and the proposal is accepted.

When the session begins, before anyone can start picking anyone apart, McMurphy starts talking about a dream he had, which reminds him of an anecdote. Chief Bromden observes:

*"I thought for a minute there I saw her whipped. Maybe I did. But I see now that it don't make any difference.... To beat her you don't have to whip her two out of three or three out of five, but every time you meet. As soon as you let down your guard, as soon as you lose once, she's won for good. And eventually we all got to lose. Nobody can help that."* Chapter 9, pg. 101

## Chapters 11 - 15

At the next group meeting, McMurphy proposes changing the TV time to the afternoon so they can watch the World Series. The Big Nurse calls for a vote, but only Cheswick and McMurphy raise their hands. Later, McMurphy accosts the men for not voting, and they can't explain why they didn't- fear of the Big Nurse, and what she can do to them. They are all in the new room while they discuss it. The new room used to be the hydrotherapy room. Over to one side is a large control panel used to direct the water. McMurphy looks at the windows, and wonders if it's possible to break through them. The only thing that could take out the glass and the wire mesh is the control panel. The thing is huge, but McMurphy bets the men he can lift it. He tries, his arms swelling up huge, but he is unable to lift it. "'But I tried though,' he says. 'Goddammit, I sure as hell did that much, now, didn't I?'" Chapter 11, pg. 111

Topic Tracking: Power and Control 5

During the next group meeting, Bromden is sunk deep into the fog. He hears occasional things from the men. They are discussing Billy today, and why he stutters, which might have something to do with his over-bearing mother.

Topic Tracking: Women 3

Bromden also passes by other patients, like Bancini, as he goes further and further down. Before he can go all the way, though, McMurphy's voice pulls him back. He calls for another vote. This time, all the Acutes put their hands up. The Big Nurse, however, says it fails because the Acutes are only half the ward and none of the Chronics have raised their hands. McMurphy goes among the Chronics, trying to get one to vote, but none will, until he comes at last to Bromden. Bromden raises his hand, but the Big Nurse claims the meeting was over, and the vote was closed.

That afternoon, at the time of the World Series, McMurphy stops working and turns the TV on. Big Nurse turns off the television from the Nurses' Station, but McMurphy continues to sit there. She yells at him, but he won't move. Harding joins him after a time, then Cheswick, then Billy Bibbit, until finally all the Acutes, as well as Bromden, are over by the blank television screen, with Nurse Ratched yelling at all of them to get back to work.



## Chapter 16

It's time for the staff meeting. Because of his deafness Bromden is responsible for cleaning the staff room during the meeting, because of his deafness. But he is worried that someone will suspect him because he raised his hand for McMurphy. One of the aides comes over and gets him, and things seem fine. Inside the room, no one notices Bromden as he starts to clean the corner. Big Nurse stares at him when she first comes in, but does nothing.

Doctor Spivey and the residents try and figure out how the Big Nurse wants them to respond to McMurphy's rebellion. They hit upon considering him dangerous and sending him to Disturbed. When Nurse Ratched finally speaks, however, she disagrees. In order for things on the ward to go back to normal, McMurphy should be kept where he is. Eventually, his actions will change, and the men will lose interest.



## Chapter 17

McMurphy keeps up his tricks, however. The Big Nurse assigns him to cleaning the latrine, and he does a miserable job at it, even going so far as to leave messages for the Nurse stuck in the toilet bowls. The men continue their strike of watching the TV during the afternoons, when it's turned off, and McMurphy regales them with jokes and stories, still trying to get them to laugh.

Topic Tracking: Humor 3

Bromden is amazed that McMurphy can be so strong; he doesn't let anyone else's opinion of him define who he is. There are times when Bromden sees him painting a picture or writing letters to people.

*"And later, hiding in the latrine from the black boys, I'd take a look at my own self in the mirror and wonder how it was possible that anybody could manage such an enormous thing as being what he was."* Chapter 17, pg. 140

One night Bromden dodges his medication, and gets out of bed. He goes over to a window, and watches a dog run past, on the prowl for something. One of the aides comes over, along with the nurse with the strawberry-colored birthmark, to put him back in bed. Bromden imagines the nurse at home, trying to get rid of the mark by praying, and scrubbing at it with a wire brush, but it stays there in the end just the same.



## Chapter 18

At the group meetings, the patients start complaining about all sorts of things that they had long been quiet about. Some ask for their cigarettes back, but the Big Nurse refuses, stating health reasons. McMurphy is pleased with all the problems he's causing, but puzzled as to why he isn't getting more pressure from the staff to ease off. He finds out the next day, during time in the swimming pool. Bromden hears McMurphy talking to the lifeguard, who tells McMurphy that he, McMurphy, is stuck in the ward till the Big Nurse and the doctor decide he's sane enough to be released back into the world.

Topic Tracking: Power and Control 6

The next day at the group session, Cheswick raises up a fuss about cigarettes again, and McMurphy doesn't back him up. Eventually, Cheswick is pulled away by the aides and brought up to Disturbed. McMurphy stops sticking up for everyone, and they figure out what's going on and accept it. No one blames him for being cagey, because they know it's the only way he has a chance of getting released. Chief Bromden observes that even Cheswick, when he comes back from Disturbed, is understanding. "But just as soon as we got to the pool he said he did wish *something* mighta been done, though, and dove into the water." Chapter 18, pg. 151 Cheswick jams his fingers into the grate at the bottom of the pool, and drowns himself.



## Chapter 19

In the lunch line one day, an Acute named Sefelt starts having convulsions. One of the aides crams a stick into his mouth keep him from biting off his tongue and gets the Big Nurse to come over. She immediately reprimands the unconscious man and the rest of the men that the reason this happened is that Sefelt has been dodging his medication. Fredrickson steps forward to defend Sefelt. He tells her that he's been taking Sefelt's medication along with his own, because he's terrified of having a fit. The Big Nurse cuts him down by treating him like a little boy.

Topic Tracking: Power and Control 7

After they've gone, McMurphy asks why Sefelt doesn't take his pills. Fredrickson explains that it rots his gums. McMurphy is starting to get a haggard, haunted look on his face.



## Chapters 20 - 22

The Acutes go to the library, and Bromden comes along. While they're in the library, Harding's wife comes to visit him. Harding calls McMurphy over to sit with them. Harding is his typical self-deprecating self, even to the point of insulting his wife, who begins to flirt with McMurphy.

Topic Tracking: Women 4

After she leaves, Harding asks McMurphy what he thought of her, and McMurphy blows up at him.

*"Well, screw you and 'what do you think?' I've got worries of my own without getting hooked with yours. So just quit!" He glares around the library at the other patients. 'Alla you! Quit bugging me, goddammit!'" Chapter 21, pg. 160*

On Friday, the men go to the X-Ray room to get checked up. While they wait, McMurphy notices another door and asks where it leads. Harding tells him that it goes to the Shock Shop, and explains the theory behind electro-shock therapy. Once again, it is revealed that the Big Nurse has the power to order such treatment as well as lobotomies. McMurphy realizes that it's the system that's behind everything, and tries to explain this to the rest of them; how even if they got rid of the Big Nurse, things wouldn't change, really. The men don't understand, and Harding finally admits that they've noticed that he's stopped fighting against the Nurse. McMurphy fully agrees, and tells them he realized he had as much to lose as the rest of them. Harding tells him no, McMurphy has more to lose, since all the Acutes are there voluntarily. McMurphy can't believe this, and he starts accosting all of them, until Billy Bibbit breaks down.

*"You think I wuh-wuh-wuh-want to stay in here? You think I wouldn't like a con-con-vertible and a guh-guh-girl friend? But did you ever have people l-l-laughing at you? No, because you're so b-big and so tough! Well, I'm not big and tough." Chapter 22, pg. 168*

The conversation ends, with McMurphy just sitting there staring at the door to the Shock Shop.

## Chapter 23

On the way back to the ward, McMurphy looks like he's mulling something over. Bromden starts hearing a ringing in his ears, like the kind he'd get before a football game when he was young. In the canteen, McMurphy buys three cartons of cigarettes.

Back in the ward, the group meeting starts and this time attention is directed at Sefelt in an attempt to get him to start taking his medication again. Bromden can barely hear them talking over the ringing in his ears. Near the end of the meeting, the Big Nurse announces that, because the men so blatantly disregarded the rules by sitting in front of the television during the afternoon, they will be punished with the withdrawal of a privilege; namely, the use of the tub room to play cards.

Topic Tracking: Power and Control 8

No one objects. She starts to end the meeting, but before she can, McMurphy gets up and crosses the room to her. He says that he'd like one of his cigarettes for a smoke, then runs and smashes his hand through the window and gets a carton. He apologizes, swears that he didn't see the glass there at all, and walks back to his seat smoking a cigarette. The ringing in Bromden's ears stops

Topic Tracking: Humor 4



## Chapter 24

Once again McMurphy is back to his old tricks, as if nothing had changed. The Big Nurse holds off on trying to stop him until she can come up with something new. McMurphy gets together enough of the guys to start a basketball team, and talks Doctor Spivey into letting them bring a ball back to the ward. When Nurse Ratched objects, the doctor holds his ground. McMurphy and the Big Nurse are extremely polite to each other now. He signs up on the bulletin board for an Accompanied Guest Pass. Nurse Ratched refuses to allow it, on the grounds that the person he put as his chaperon, a "twit" he knew, didn't sound like a responsible woman.

Topic Tracking: Women 5

McMurphy agrees, then goes over and puts his hand right through the newly replaced window in the nurse's station.

Topic Tracking: Humor 5

The Acutes play a basketball game against the aides. They lose by twenty points, but over the course of the game, McMurphy manages to provoke one of the black aides into trying to attack him, which it makes it feel like a victory. A new window gets up put up, this time with a large X painted across it so that McMurphy can't miss it. A basketball gets thrown through the window during a practice session, destroying the ball, and ending the season.

At a group meeting, McMurphy proposes a pass to go fishing with some of the men, accompanied by his two elderly aunts. The pass is granted for next weekend, and Nurse Ratched takes out a newsclipping about how rough and dangerous the sea is this year. She puts it up on the bulletin board right next to the sign up sheet for the trip. As the week goes by, the Nurse brings in more and more articles about wrecks, and McMurphy has a tough time getting men who are willing to go.

Topic Tracking: Power and Control 9

Bromden wants to go, but he doesn't have the money; besides, signing his name would be as good as admitting he could hear. He wonders if after the years of pretending he was deaf and dumb, if he could own up to it. But then he remembers it was other people who started treating him like he couldn't speak or understand what was going on around him. He just started playing along. He remembers one time when he was a child that some white folks came to visit his house, discussing how they were going to reach a settlement with the Indians. Bromden speaks to them, and they treat him as if he weren't even there. While he listens, the woman of the group decides that it would be best for them to send the details of their arrangement to Bromden's white wife; it would make their jobs easier.



Back in the present, Bromden sees that an orderly has found his secret stash of chewing gum, and is taking it away. McMurphy accosts him, and the aide tells McMurphy that for years he's been wondering where the Chief gets his gum. He leaves, and McMurphy gives Bromden a stick of gum. Before he can think to stop, Bromden says "Thank you."

McMurphy wonders why the Chief hasn't talked in so long. Has he been saving up for something? Bromden says no he hasn't, he's too small. McMurphy laughs at this, telling him he (Bromden) is the biggest man on the ward, but Bromden disagrees. He talks about how his father was big when he was young, but how his mother grew to be twice his size. He tells how the Combine overworked his father, till he wound up drinking himself to death.

Topic Tracking: Women 6

McMurphy asks him why he didn't sign up to go on the fishing trip tomorrow, and Bromden tells him he's broke. McMurphy makes a deal with him: if Bromden will let McMurphy bring him back up to size, so that he can lift the control panel in the day room, he'll pay Bromden's way. Bromden agrees.

Topic Tracking: Power and Control 10



## Chapter 25

The next morning, Bromden sees his name up on the sign-up sheet, at the bottom. The black aides make fun of him about it, but he ignores them, and walks off when they try to get him to start sweeping. McMurphy gets everyone out of bed. He needs to find one more man for the trip. During breakfast, George, a patient with a neatness fetish, comes over to McMurphy to tell him to use red worms on the trip. McMurphy convinces him to come along with them, and act as Captain of the boat. The women who are to chaperon the trip are late. And by this time everyone's figured out they aren't McMurphy's elderly aunts, but whores. One of them finally shows up, a woman named Candy. Everyone in the ward is amazed at the sight of her Billy Bibbit lets out a long whistle, which makes her blush.

Topic Tracking: Women 7

There's a problem, though, because the other woman isn't coming, and there isn't room for all the men in only one car, and the Big Nurse won't let them go unless there's another chaperon. McMurphy sees how Doctor Spivey is eyeing Candy, and convinces him to come along with them. On the way to the boats, the cars stop at a gas station to get filled up. While they're there, the attendants make some comments about the whole lot of them being dressed in green hospital uniforms. McMurphy starts pretending that they're all exceedingly dangerous lunatics, on leave, and the men play along, telling anyone who will listen.

Topic Tracking: Humor 6

At the boat dock, there's a bit of a problem with the rental, and McMurphy leaves the men to go talk to the head of the marina. While he's gone, some strangers at the dock make lewd sounds at Candy, and none of the men can stand up for her. Eventually, McMurphy comes back out and has everyone pile on board and head out to sea. He gave the owner a false number as a reference, and they need to leave quickly. Out on the sea, McMurphy and Candy go below deck, and George takes over. He drives them out a ways, and then the men take turns fishing. McMurphy and Candy come back on top, and Candy throws a line out. She and Billy have a hard time holding onto the reel, and her shirt comes open. Bromden cuts himself trying to hook a fish.

*"While McMurphy laughs. Rocking farther and farther backward against the cabin top, spreading his laugh out across the water- laughing at the girl, at the guys, at George, at me sucking my bleeding thumb, at the captain back at the pier... and the Big Nurse and all of it. Because he knows you have to laugh at the things that hurt you just to keep yourself in balance, just to keep the world from running you plumb crazy. He knows there's a painful side; he knows my thumb smarts and his girlfriend has a bruised breast and the doctor is losing his glasses, but he won't let the pain blot out the humor no more'n he'll let the humor blot out the pain."* Chapter 25, pp. 211-12

Topic Tracking: Humor 7



When the men bring the boat back into the dock, the captain is there with some police, but Dr. Spivey soon sends them away. The loafers on the dock who made remarks at Candy before now compliment the men on the size of the fish they brought back, and how neatly George docked the boat.

Back at the hospital, McMurphy goes immediately to bed. He looked exhausted while all the other men are excited after the trip. Harding explains this by reminding everyone that McMurphy was below deck for a large portion of the trip with Candy, but Bromden wonders about it. On the drive back, they pass by McMurphy's old house, and he tells a story about he lost his virginity to a 9 year-old girl when he was ten.

Topic Tracking: Women 8

Bromden sees his expression in the light of a passing car:

*"an expression that was allowed only because he figured it'd be too dark for anybody in the car to see, dreadfully tired and strained and frantic, like there wasn't enough time left for something he had to do...."* Chapter 25, pg. 218

## Chapter 26

Because the Big Nurse believes that people will always suspect that someone who is being overly charitable is most likely doing it for selfish reasons, she arranges for the finances of the patients to be known. It is clear that while everyone else is getting poorer, McMurphy is getting richer. The Acutes kid him about this, and he doesn't deny it. But they begin to wonder why he's been bringing about so many reforms lately. She brings it up again at a group session, when McMurphy is conveniently downstairs waiting for a telephone call, and proceeds to patiently explain how McMurphy has managed to make money off each and every one of his philanthropic actions.

Topic Tracking: Power and Control 11

The men get together afterwards to discuss it. Harding tells them they're all taking things too seriously; so what if McMurphy is trying to earn a few bucks? This is his right, and he'd probably be embarrassed if he heard the honorable motives the men were ascribing to him. Billy doesn't agree at first, but when McMurphy asks him for some money to send Candy, for her trip to the hospital that Saturday night, he swings to Harding's point of view.

Chief Bromden still thinks of McMurphy as some sort of storybook hero, but he also starts having doubts. McMurphy delivers as promised, and makes Bromden big again, big enough to lift the control panel. McMurphy cons the men into betting that no one can lift the thing, then has Bromden do it. He offers Bromden five dollars, as a token of appreciation, but Bromden won't take it. Instead, he accuses McMurphy of the thing that all the men now suspect: that he's only helping them and making them feel better in order to make money off them.

Later, all the men who went on the boat trip have to take a special shower, because the Nurse thinks they might have gotten some sort of bug on them. While they're in the shower, the black aides attack George, trying to get him to put on salve. George refuses, because of his neatness obsession and pathological fear of germs. McMurphy steps in to defend him, and he gets in a fight with the aides. Bromden helps throw them off, and the two of them get strapped down and sent up to Disturbed.



## Chapter 27

There, they meet the woman in charge, a young Japanese nurse, who is sympathetic to them, and criticizes the Big Nurse's policies downstairs. They spend the night in Disturbed.

Topic Tracking: Woman 9

The next morning they are brought to the Shock Shop. The Big Nurse tells McMurphy that he can go back to the regular ward if he'll just admit what he did was a mistake. McMurphy accuses her of acting like a torturer from the war, and refuses.

Topic Tracking: Power and Control 12

He is brought in for treatment. Bromden goes in next, and the shock inspires in him a long, semi-conscious hallucination.



## Chapter 28

When he received shock treatments previously, Bromden was stuck in the fog for at least a week, maybe longer, but this one he manages to pull out of in less than a day. It is the last shock treatment he is given. McMurphy continues to receive them because he refuses to confess what they want him to confess.

*"And he'd swell up, aware that every one of those faces on Disturbed had turned toward him and was waiting, and he'd tell the nurse he regretted that he had but one life to give for his country and she could kiss his rosy red ass before he'd give up the goddam ship. Yeh!"* Chapter 28, pg. 242

Bromden tries to get him to play along, but McMurphy just turns it into a joke.

Topic Tracking: Humor 8

Bromden is brought back to the ward, and the rest of the men greet him like a hero. They ask him all sorts of questions about what's going on with McMurphy, and when he responds, no one thinks it odd that he's talking now. The Big Nurse sees that McMurphy's legend is growing, and while he's away he's just getting bigger and bigger, so she starts making plans to bring him back down. The men anticipate this, and work out a plan to get McMurphy out of the ward that Saturday, forgetting it's the day that McMurphy has set up for Billy's date with Candy. McMurphy refuses to leave until after that night. He says to consider it his going away party. At the next group meeting, the Big Nurse brings up the idea of lobotomy to McMurphy for the first time, but he just laughs it off.

Topic Tracking: Humor 9

McMurphy bribes the night aide, Mr. Turkle, with the promise of booze and broads, in order to get him to open up a window that night. Candy's late again, but when she shows up, she's got a friend with her, the woman, Sandy, who was supposed to be with her earlier at the boat trip. The group hides from the night supervisor, and proceeds to get royally drunk on the liquor the women brought with them, along with whatever medication Harding can get out of the cabinet. Billy and Candy eventually sneak off for some privacy, and Harding tries to get McMurphy to leave. McMurphy asks why the others don't come with him, but all of them need a little more time. He asks Harding what made them so scared. Harding isn't able to say, exactly, just that they were beat down by the rest of the world for the things they did, and who they were, and that they didn't have the strength to fight back. McMurphy says that he's always had people bugging him, and it's never gotten him down that much. Harding admits that this is true, but that he's figured out who drives strong people like McMurphy to weakness.

*"Yeah? Not that I'm admitting I'm down that road, but what is this something else?' 'It is us.' He swept his hand about him in a soft white circle and repeated, 'Us.'"* Chapter 28, pg. 258

It's five am, and McMurphy decides to get a bit of shut eye before heading out. He says goodbye to Harding and Bromden, then settles into bed. All of them fall asleep and don't wake up till the black aides come on the ward at six-thirty.



## Chapter 29

What happens next is, in Bromden's mind, inevitable. The Big Nurse goes through the ward, discovering all the messes the men made, while they laugh their heads off at her.

Topic Tracking: Humor 10

Harding tries to get McMurphy to leave once more while everyone is distracted, but he claims that he's too drunk to move. When roll call shows that Billy is missing, the aides and the Big Nurse do a room check. They find him and Candy in bed in one of the rooms. Nurse Ratched is shocked, and keeps telling Billy how ashamed she is for him, but Billy doesn't seem to notice, just gets his clothes together and comes out into the hall. He responds to her questions without a stutter. However, the Big Nurse knows what buttons to push in the end. "'What worries me, Billy,' she said- I could hear the change in her voice- 'is how your mother is going to take this.'" Chapter 29, pg. 264 Billy immediately panics. He begs Nurse Ratched not to call his mother, and when the nurse refuses, he starts to blame the fact that he was in bed with a woman on everyone else in the room, saying they made him do it. He is taken away to wait alone in the doctor's office.

Topic Tracking: Women 10

All the men sit down in the day room, and they tell McMurphy that they don't blame him at all, they know it wasn't his fault. He just relaxes and looks like he's waiting for something. The doctor yells for the nurse from his office, and she and the aides go running. She comes back alone, and speaks directly to McMurphy. She tells him that Billy cut his throat with some instruments in the doctor's desk. "'First Charles Cheswick and now William Bibbit! I hope you're finally satisfied. Playing with human lives- gambling with human lives- as if you thought yourself to be a *God!*'" Chapter 29, pg. 266 She goes back into her office. Bromden knows that McMurphy is going to do something, and at first he thinks to try and stop it; but then he realizes that he can't stop it, because he and the rest of the men of the ward are forcing McMurphy to do it. They force him to get out of his chair and go over to nurses' station. He rips open the Big Nurse's shirt, revealing those too large breasts, and tries to strangle her.

Topic Tracking: Power and Control 13

When the doctors and aides rip him off her, he cries out. Chief Bromden describes it:

*"A sound of cornered-animal fear and hate and surrender and defiance, that if you ever trailed coon or cougar or lynx is like the last sound the treed and shot and falling animal makes as the dogs get him, when he finally doesn't care any more about anything but himself and his dying."* Chapter 29, pg. 267

Things in the ward start to change. A lot of the Acutes start leaving, some to the outside world, some to different wards. The Big Nurse is away in the Medical Ward for a week,



and while she's gone, the Japanese nurse from upstairs runs things. When the Big Nurse comes back, Harding asks her if McMurphy will return. She can't speak, but has to write her responses on pieces of paper. She tells him he will, and Harding tells her she's full of it and walks away. Eventually, McMurphy is brought back, but he's not the same. He just lies in bed all the time, and the men think he's a dummy. They lobotomized him. Harding signs out of the ward.

Bromden realizes that McMurphy wouldn't want to be left there as he is, a permanent sign to anyone of what happens when you try to buck the system. He muffles the lobotomized McMurphy under a pillow and suffocates him. One of the other patients tells him he needs to leave - the Big Nurse will know something's up. So Bromden goes over to the control panel, lifts it up, and throws it through a window, breaking through the glass and the screen. Before anyone can stop, he jumps out and runs to the highway. He hitches a ride with a trucker, and thinks about going back to the reservation, to see how things are: "I been away a long time." Chapter 29, pg. 272