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"YOU FEEL THIS BOOK ALONG YOUR SPINE ..."

- *Kansas City Star*

Tired of weeding peas at a penal farm, the tough, freewheeling McMurphy feigns insanity for a chance at the softer life of a mental institution. But he gets more than he's bargained for, much more. He is committed to the care of Big Nurse - a full-breasted, stiff-gaited tyrant who rules over her charges with chilling authority.

Her ward is a citadel of discipline. Strong-arm orderlies stand ready to quell even the feeblest insurrection. *Her patients long ago gave up the struggle to assert themselves. Cowed, docile, they have surrendered completely to her unbridled authority.*

Now, into their ranks charges McMurphy. The gambling Irishman sees at once what Big Nurse's game is. Appalled by the timidity of his fellow patients, he begins his one man campaign to render her powerless. First in fun, and then in dire earnestness, he sets out to create havoc on her well-run ward ... to make the gray halls ring with laughter, and anger, and life.

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One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest

Ken Kesey

To Vik Lovell

Who told me dragons did not exist,
then led me to their lairs

... one flew east, one flew west,
One flew over the cuckoo's nest.
Children's folk rhyme

Part 1

1

They're out there.

Black boys in white suits up before me to commit sex acts in the hall and get it mopped up before I can catch them.

They're mopping when I come out the dorm, all three of them sulky and hating everything, the time of day, the place they're at here, the people they got to work around. When they hate like this, better if they don't see me. I creep along the wall quiet as dust in my canvas shoes, but they got special sensitive equipment detects my fear and they all look up, all three at once, eyes glittering out of the black faces like the hard glitter of radio tubes out of the back of an old radio.

"Here's the Chief. The soo-pah Chief, fellas. Ol' Chief Broom. Here you go, Chief Broom ..."

Stick a mop in my hand and motion to the spot they aim for me to clean today, and I go. One swats the backs of my legs with a broom handle to hurry me past.

"Haw, you look at 'im shag it? Big enough to eat apples off my head an' he mine me like a baby."

They laugh and then I hear them mumbling behind me, heads close together. Hum of black machinery, humming hate and death and other hospital secrets. They don't bother not talking out loud about their hate secrets when I'm nearby because they think I'm deaf and dumb. Everybody thinks so. I'm cagey enough to fool them that much. If my being half Indian ever helped me in any way in this dirty life, it helped me being cagey, helped me all these years.

I'm mopping near the ward door when a key hits it from the other side and I know it's the Big Nurse by the way the lockworks cleave to the key, soft and swift and familiar she been around locks so long. She slides through the door with a gust of cold and locks the door behind her and I see her fingers trail across the polished steel - tip of each finger the same color as her lips. Funny orange. Like the tip of a soldering iron. Color so hot or so cold if she touches you with it you can't tell which.

She's carrying her woven wicker bag like the ones the Umpqua tribe sells out along the hot August highway, a bag shape of a tool box with a hemp handle. She's had it all the years I been here. It's a loose weave and I can see inside it; there's no compact or lipstick or woman stuff, she's got that bag full of thousand parts she aims to use in her duties today - wheels and gears, cogs polished to a hard glitter, tiny pills that gleam like porcelain, needles, forceps, watchmakers' pliers,

rolls of copper wire ...

She dips a nod at me as she goes past. I let the mop push me back to the wall and smile and try to foul her equipment up as much as possible by not letting her see my eyes - they can't tell so much about you if you got your eyes closed.

In my dark I hear her rubber heels hit the tile and the stuff in her wicker bag clash with the jar of her walking as she passes me in the hall. She walks stiff. When I open my eyes she's down the hall about to turn into the glass Nurses' Station where she'll spend the day sitting at her desk and looking out her window and making notes on what goes on out in front of her in the day room during the next eight hours. Her face looks pleased and peaceful with the thought.

Then ... she sights those black boys. They're still down there together, mumbling to one another. They didn't hear her come on the ward. They sense she's glaring down at them now, but it's too late. They should of knew better'n to group up and mumble together when she was due on the ward. Their faces bob apart, confused. She goes into a crouch and advances on where they're trapped in a huddle at the end of the corridor. She knows what they been saying, and I can see she's furious clean out of control. She's going to tear the black bastards limb from limb, she's so furious. She's swelling up, swells till her back's splitting out the white uniform and she's let her arms section out long enough to wrap around the three of them five, six times. She looks around her with a swivel of her huge head. Nobody up to see, just old Broom Bromden the half-breed Indian back there hiding behind his mop and can't talk to call for help. So she really lets herself go and her painted smile twists, stretches to an open snarl, and she blows up bigger and bigger, big as a tractor, so big I can smell the machinery inside the way you smell a motor pulling too big a load. I hold my breath and figure, My God this time they're gonna do it! This time they let the hate build up too high and overloaded and they're gonna tear one another to pieces before they realize what they're doing!

But just as she starts crooking those sectioned arms around the black boys and they go to ripping at her underside with the mop handles, all the patients start coming out of the dorms to check on what's the hullabaloo, and she has to change back before she's caught in the shape of her hideous real self. By the time the patients get their eyes rubbed to where they can halfway see what the racket's about, all they see is the head nurse, smiling and calm and cold as usual, telling the black boys they'd best not stand in a group gossiping when it *is* Monday morning and there *is* such a lot to get done on the first morning of the week ...

"... mean old Monday morning, you know, boys ..."

"Yeah, Miz Ratched ..."

"... and we have quite a number of appointments this morning, so perhaps, if your standing here in a group talking isn't *too urgent* ..."

"Yeah, Miz Ratched ..."

She stops and nods at some of the patients come to stand around and stare out of eyes all red and puffy with sleep. She nods once to each. Precise, automatic gesture. Her face is smooth, calculated, and precision-made, like an expensive baby doll, skin like flesh-colored enamel, blend of white and cream and baby-blue eyes, small nose, pink little nostrils - everything working together except the color on her lips and fingernails, and the size of her bosom. A mistake was made somehow in manufacturing, putting those big, womanly breasts on what would of otherwise been a perfect work, and you can see how bitter she is about it.

The men are still standing and waiting to see what she was onto the black boys about, so she remembers seeing me and says, "And since it *is* Monday, boys, why don't we get a good head start on the week by shaving poor Mr. Bromden first this morning, before the after-breakfast rush on the shaving room, and see if we can't avoid some of the - ah - disturbance he tends to cause, don't you think?"

Before anybody can turn to look for me I duck back in the mop closet, jerk the door shut dark after me, hold my breath. Shaving before you get breakfast is the worst time. When you got something under your belt you're stronger and more wide awake, and the bastards who work for the Combine aren't so apt to slip one of their machines in on you in place of an electric shaver. But when you shave *before* breakfast like she has me do some mornings - six-thirty in the morning in a room all white walls and white basins, and long-tube-lights in the ceiling making sure there aren't any shadows, and faces all round you trapped screaming behind the mirrors - then what chance you got against one of their machines?

I hide in the mop closet and listen, my heart beating in the dark, and I try to keep from getting scared, try to get my thoughts off someplace else - try to think back and remember things about the village and the big Columbia River, think about ah one time Papa and me were hunting birds in a stand of cedar trees near The Dalles ... But like always when I try to place my thoughts in the past and hide there, the fear close at hand seeps in through the memory. I can feel that least black boy out there coming up the hall, smelling out for my fear. He opens out his nostrils like black funnels, his outsized head bobbing this way and that as he sniffs, and he sucks in fear from all over the ward. He's smelling me now, I can hear him snort. He don't know where I'm hid, but he's smelling and he's hunting around. I try to keep

still ...

(Papa tells me to keep still, tells me that the dog senses a bird somewheres right close. We borrowed a pointer dog from a man in The Dalles. All the village dogs are no-count mongrels, Papa says, fish-gut eaters and no class a-tall; this here dog, he got *insteek!* I don't say anything, but I already see the bird up in a scrub cedar, hunched in a gray knot of feathers. Dog running in circles underneath, too much smell around for him to point for sure. The bird safe as long as he keeps still. He's holding out pretty good, but the dog keeps sniffing and circling, louder and closer. Then the bird breaks, feathers springing, jumps out of the cedar into the birdshot from Papa's gun.)

The least black boy and one of the bigger ones catch me before I get ten steps out of the mop closet, and drag me back to the shaving room. I don't fight or make any noise. If you yell it's just tougher on you. I hold back the yelling. I hold back till they get to my temples. I'm not sure it's one of those substitute machines and not a shaver till it gets to my temples; then I can't hold back. It's not a will-power thing any more when they get to my temples. It's a ... *button*, pushed, says Air Raid Air Raid, turns me on so loud it's like no sound, everybody yelling at me, hands over their ears from behind a glass wall, faces working around in talk circles but no sound from the mouths. My sound soaks up all other sound. They start the fog machine again and it's snowing down cold and white all over me like skim milk, so thick I might even be able to hide in it if they didn't have a hold on me. I can't see six inches in front of me through the fog and the only thing I can hear over the wail I'm making is the Big Nurse whoop and charge up the hall while she crashes patients outta her way with that wicker bag. I hear her coming but I still can't hush my hollering. I holler till she gets there. They hold me down while she jams wicker bag and all into my mouth and shoves it down with a mop handle.

(A bluetick hound bays out there in the fog, running scared and lost because he can't see. No tracks on the ground but the ones he's making, and he sniffs in every direction with his cold red-rubber nose and picks up no scent but his own fear, fear burning down into him like steam.) It's gonna burn me just that way, finally telling about all this, about the hospital, and her, and the guys - and about McMurphy. I been silent so long now it's gonna roar out of me like floodwaters and you think the guy telling this is ranting and raving my *God*; you think this is too horrible to have really happened, this is too awful to be the truth! But, please. 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.

2

When the fog clears to where I can see, I'm sitting in the day room. They didn't take me to the Shock Shop this time. I remember they took me out of the shaving room and locked me in Seclusion. I don't remember if I got breakfast or not. Probably not. I can call to mind some mornings locked in Seclusion the black boys keep bringing seconds of everything - supposed to be for me, but they eat it instead - till all three of them get breakfast while I lie there on that pee-stinking mattress, watching them wipe up egg with toast. I can smell the grease and hear them chew the toast. Other mornings they bring me cold mush and force me to eat it without it even being salted.

This morning I plain don't remember. They got enough of those things they call pills down me so I don't know a thing till I hear the ward door open. That ward door opening means it's at least eight o'clock, means there's been maybe an hour and a half I was out cold in that Seclusion Room when the technicians could of come in and installed anything the Big Nurse ordered and I wouldn't have the slightest notion what.

I hear noise at the ward door, off up the hall out of my sight. That ward door starts opening at eight and opens and closes a thousand times a day, *kashash, click*. Every morning we sit lined up on each side of the day room, mixing jigsaw puzzles after breakfast, listen for a key to hit the lock, and wait to see what's coming in. There's not a whole lot else to do. Sometimes, at the door, it's a young resident in early so he can watch what we're like Before Medication. BM, they call it. Sometimes it's a wife visiting there on high heels with her purse held tight over her belly. Sometimes it's a clutch of grade-school teachers being led on a tour by that fool Public Relation man who's always clapping his wet hands together and saying how overjoyed he is that mental hospitals have eliminated all the old-fashioned cruelty. "What a *cheery* atmosphere, don't you agree?" He'll bustle around the schoolteachers, who are bunched together for safety, clapping his hands together. "Oh, when I think back on the old days, on the filth, the bad food, even, yes, brutality, oh, I realize, ladies, that we have come a long way in our campaign!" Whoever comes in the door is usually somebody disappointing, but there's always a chance otherwise, and when a key hits the lock all the heads come up like there's strings on them.

This morning the lockworks rattle strange; it's not a regular visitor at the door. An Escort Man's voice calls down, edgy and impatient, "Admission, come sign for him," and the black boys go.

Admission. Everybody stops playing cards and Monopoly, turns toward the day-room door. Most days I'd be out sweeping the hall and see who they're signing in, but this morning, like I explain to you, the Big Nurse put a thousand pounds down me and I can't budge out of the chair. Most days I'm the first one to see the Admission, watch him creep in the door and slide along the wall and stand scared till the black boys come sign for him and take him into the shower room, where they strip him and leave him shivering with the door open while they all three run grinning up and down the halls looking for the Vaseline. "We need that Vaseline," they'll tell the Big Nurse, "for the thermometer." She looks from one to the other: "I'm sure you do," and hands them a jar holds at least a gallon, "but mind you boys don't group up in there." Then I see two, maybe all three of them in there, in that shower room with the Admission, running that thermometer around in the grease till it's coated the size of your finger, crooning, "Tha's right, mothah, that's right," and then shut the door and turn all the showers up to where you can't hear anything but the vicious hiss of water on the green tile. I'm out there most days, and I see it like that.

But this morning I have to sit in the chair and only listen to them bring him in. Still, even though I can't see him, I know he's no ordinary Admission. I don't hear him slide scared along the wall, and when they tell him about the shower he don't just submit with a weak little yes, he tells them right back in a loud, brassy voice that he's already plenty damn clean, thank you.

"They showered me this morning at the courthouse and last night at the jail. And I swear I believe they'd of washed my ears for me on the taxi ride over if they coulda found the vacilities. Hoo boy, seems like everytime they ship me someplace I gotta get scrubbed down before, after, and during the operation. I'm gettin' so the sound of water makes me start gathering up my belongings. And get back away from me with that thermometer, Sam, and give me a minute to look my new home over; I never been in a Institute of Psychology before."

The patients look at one another's puzzled faces, then back to the door, where his voice is still coming in. Talking louder'n you'd think he needed to if the black boys were anywhere near him. He sounds like he's way above them, talking down, like he's sailing fifty yards overhead, hollering at those below on the ground. He sounds big. I hear him coming down the hall, and he sounds big in the way he walks, and he sure don't slide; he's got iron on his heels and he rings it on the floor like horseshoes. He shows up in the door and stops and hitches his thumbs in his pockets, boots wide apart, and stands there with the guys looking at him.

"Good mornin', buddies."

There's a paper Halloween bat hanging on a string above his head; he reaches up and flicks it so it spins around.

"Mighty nice fall day."

He talks a little the way Papa used to, voice loud and full of hell, but he doesn't look like Papa; Papa was a full-blood Columbia Indian - a chief - and hard and shiny as a gunstock. This guy is redheaded with long red sideburns and a tangle of curls out from under his cap, been needing cut a long time, and he's broad as Papa was tall, broad across the jaw and shoulders and chest, a broad white devilish grin, and he's hard in a different kind of way from Papa, kind of the way a baseball is hard under the scuffed leather. A seam runs across his nose and one cheekbone where somebody laid him a good one in a fight, and the stitches are still in the seam. He stands there waiting, and when nobody makes a move to say anything to him he commences to laugh. Nobody can tell exactly why he laughs; there's nothing funny going on. But it's not the way that Public Relation laughs, it's free and loud and it comes out of his wide grinning mouth and spreads in rings bigger and bigger till it's lapping against the walls all over the ward. Not like that fat Public Relation laugh. This sounds real. I realize all of a sudden it's the first laugh I've heard in years.

He stands looking at us, rocking back in his boots, and he laughs and laughs. He laces his fingers over his belly without taking his thumbs out of his pockets. I see how big and beat up his hands are. Everybody on the ward, patients, staff, and all, is stunned dumb by him and his laughing. There's no move to stop him, no move to say anything. He laughs till he's finished for a time, and he walks on into the day room. Even when he isn't laughing, that laughing sound hovers around him, the way the sound hovers around a big bell just quit ringing - it's in his eyes, in the way he smiles and swaggers, in the way he talks.

"My name is McMurphy, buddies, R. P. McMurphy, and I'm a gambling fool." He winks and sings a little piece of a song: "... and whenever I meet with a deck a cards I lays ... my money ... down," and laughs again.

He walks to one of the card games, tips an Acute's cards up with a thick, heavy finger, and squints at the hand and shakes his head.

"Yessir, that's what I came to this establishment for, to bring you birds fun an' entertainment around the gamin' table. Nobody left in that Pendleton Work Farm to make my days interesting any more, so I requested a *transfer*, ya see. Needed some new blood. Hooee, look at the way this bird holds his cards, showin' to everybody in a block; man! I'll trim you babies like little lambs."

Cheswick gathers his cards together. The redheaded man sticks his

hand out for Cheswick to shake.

"Hello, buddy; what's that you're playin'? Pinochle? Jesus, no wonder you don't care nothin' about showing your hand. Don't you have a straight deck around here? Well say, here we go, I brought along my own deck, just in case, has something in it other than face cards - and check the pictures, huh? Every one different. Fifty-two positions."

Cheswick is pop-eyed already, and what he sees on those cards don't help his condition.

"Easy now, don't smudge 'em; we got lots of time, lots of games ahead of us. I like to use my deck here because it takes at least a week for the other players to get to where they can even see the *suit* ..."

He's got on work-farm pants and shirt, sunned out till they're the color of watered milk. His face and neck and arms are the color of oxblood leather from working long in the fields. He's got a primer-black motorcycle cap stuck in his hair and a leather jacket over one arm, and he's got on boots gray and dusty and heavy enough to kick a man half in two. He walks away from Cheswick and takes off the cap and goes to beating a dust storm out of his thigh. One of the black boys circles him with the thermometer, but he's too quick for them; he slips in among the Acutes and starts moving around shaking hands before the black boy can take good aim. The way he talks, his wink, his loud talk, his swagger all remind me of a car salesman or a stock auctioneer - or one of those pitchmen you see on a sideshow stage, out in front of his flapping banners, standing there in a striped shirt with yellow buttons, drawing the faces off the sawdust like a magnet.

"What happened, you see, was I got in a couple of hassles at the work farm, to tell the pure truth, and the court ruled that I'm a psychopath. And do you think I'm gonna argue with the court? Shoo, you can bet your bottom dollar I don't. If it gets me outta those damned pea fields I'll be whatever their little heart desires, be it psychopath or mad dog or werewolf, because I don't care if I never see another weedin' hoe to my dying day. Now they tell me a psychopath's a guy fights too much and fucks too much, but they ain't wholly right, do you think? I mean, whoever heard tell of a man gettin' too much poozle? Hello, buddy, what do they call you? My name's McMurphy and I'll bet you two dollars here and now that you can't tell me how many spots are in that pinochle hand you're holding *don't* look. Two dollars; what d'ya say? God *damn*, Sam! can't you wait half a minute to prod me with that damn thermometer of yours?"

The new man stands looking a minute, to get the set-up of the day room.

One side of the room younger patients, known as Acutes because the doctors figure them still sick enough to be fixed, practice arm wrestling and card tricks where you add and subtract and count down so many and it's a certain card. Billy Bibbit tries to learn to roll a tailor-made cigarette, and Martini walks around, discovering things under the tables and chairs. The Acutes move around a lot. They tell jokes to each other and snicker in their fists (nobody ever dares let loose and laugh, the whole staff'd be in with notebooks and a lot of questions) and they write letters with yellow, runty, chewed pencils.

They spy on each other. Sometimes one man says something about himself that he didn't aim to let slip, and one of his buddies at the table where he said it yawns and gets up and sidles over to the big log book by the Nurses' Station and writes down the piece of information he heard - of therapeutic interest to the whole ward, is what the Big Nurse says the book is for, but I know she's just waiting to get enough evidence to have some guy reconditioned at the Main Building, overhauled in the head to straighten out the trouble.

The guy that wrote the piece of information in the log book, he gets a star by his name on the roll and gets to sleep late the next day.

Across the room from the Acutes are the culls of the Combine's product, the Chronics. Not in the hospital, these, to get fixed, but just to keep them from walking around the streets giving the product a bad name. Chronics are in for good, the staff concedes. Chronics are divided into Walkers like me, can still get around if you keep them fed, and Wheelers and Vegetables. What the Chronics are - or most of us - are machines with flaws inside that can't be repaired, flaws born in, or flaws beat in over so many years of the guy running head-on into solid things that by the time the hospital found him he was bleeding rust in some vacant lot.

But there are some of us Chronics that the staff made a couple of mistakes on years back, some of us who were Acutes when we came in, and got changed over. Ellis is a Chronic came in an Acute and got fouled up bad when they overloaded him in that filthy brain-murdering room that the black boys call the "Shock Shop." Now he's nailed against the wall in the same condition they lifted him off the table for the last time, in the same shape, arms out, palms cupped, with the same horror on his face. He's nailed like that on the wall, like a stuffed

trophy. They pull the nails when it's time to eat or time to drive him in to bed when they want him to move so's I can mop the puddle where he stands. At the old place he stood so long in one spot the piss ate the floor and beams away under him and he kept falling through to the ward below, giving them all kinds of census headaches down there when roll check came around.

Ruckly is another Chronic came in a few years back as an Acute, but him they overloaded in a different way: they made a mistake in one of their head installations. He was being a holy nuisance all over the place, kicking the black boys and biting the student nurses on the legs, so they took him away to be fixed. They strapped him to that table, and the last anybody saw of him for a while was just before they shut the door on him; he winked, just before the door closed, and told the black boys as they backed away from him, "You'll pay for this, you damn tarbabies."

And they brought him back to the ward two weeks later, bald and the front of his face an oily purple bruise and two little button-sized plugs stitched one above each eye. You can see by his eyes how they burned him out over there; his eyes are all smoked up and gray and deserted inside like blown fuses. All day now he won't do a thing but hold an old photograph up in front of that burned-out face, turning it over and over in his cold fingers, and the picture wore gray as his eyes on both sides with all his handling till you can't tell any more what it used to be.

The staff, now, they consider Ruckly one of their failures, but I'm not sure but what he's better off than if the installation had been perfect. The installations they do nowadays are generally successful. The technicians got more skill and experience. No more of the button holes in the forehead, no cutting at all - they go in through the eye sockets. Sometimes a guy goes over for an installation, leaves the ward mean and mad and snapping at the whole world and comes back a few weeks later with black-and-blue eyes like he'd been in a fist-fight, and he's the sweetest, nicest, best-behaved thing you ever saw. He'll maybe even go home in a month or two, a hat pulled low over the face of a sleepwalker wandering round in a simple, happy dream. A success, they say, but I say he's just another robot for the Combine and might be better off as a failure, like Ruckly sitting there fumbling and drooling over his picture. He never does much else. The dwarf black boy gets a rise out of him from time to time by leaning close and asking, "Say, Ruckly, what you figure your little wife is doing in town tonight?" Ruckly's head comes up. Memory whispers someplace in that jumbled machinery. He turns red and his veins clog up at one end. This puffs him up so he can just barely make a little whistling sound in his throat. Bubbles squeeze out the corner of his mouth, he's working

his jaw so hard to say something. When he finally does get to where he can say his few words it's a low, choking noise to make your skin crawl - "Fffffffuck da wife! Fffffffuck da wife!" and passes out on the spot from the effort.

Ellis and Ruckly are the youngest Chronics. Colonel Matterson is the oldest, an old, petrified cavalry soldier from the First War who is given to lifting the skirts of passing nurses with his cane, or teaching some kind of history out of the text of his left hand to anybody that'll listen. He's the oldest on the ward, but not the one's been here longest - his wife brought him in only a few years back, when she got to where she wasn't up to tending him any longer.

I'm the one been here on the ward the longest, since the Second World War. I been here on the ward longer'n anybody. Longer'n any of the other patients. The Big Nurse has been here longer'n me.

The Chronics and the Acutes don't generally mingle. Each stays on his own side of the day room the way the black boys want it. The black boys say it's more orderly that way and let everybody know that's the way they'd like it to stay. They move us in after breakfast and look at the grouping and nod. "That's right, gennulmen, that's the way. Now you keep it that way."

Actually there isn't much need for them to say anything, because, other than me, the Chronics don't move around much, and the Acutes say they'd just as leave stay over on their own side, give reasons like the Chronic side smells worse than a dirty diaper. But I know it isn't the stink that keeps them away from the Chronic side so much as they don't like to be reminded that here's what could happen to *them* someday. The Big Nurse recognizes this fear and knows how to put it to use; she'll point out to an Acute, whenever he goes into a sulk, that you boys be good boys and cooperate with the staff policy which is engineered for your *cure*, or you'll end up over on *that* side.

(Everybody on the ward is proud of the way the patients cooperate. We got a little brass tablet tacked to a piece of maple wood that has printed on it: CONGRATULATIONS FOR GETTING ALONG WITH THE SMALLEST NUMBER OF PERSONNEL OF ANY WARD IN THE HOSPITAL. It's a prize for cooperation. It's hung on the wall right above the log book, right square in the middle between the Chronics and Acutes.)

This new redheaded Admission, McMurphy, knows right away he's not a Chronic. After he checks the day room over a minute, he sees he's meant for the Acute side and goes right for it, grinning and shaking hands with everybody he comes to. At first I see that he's making everybody over there feel uneasy, with all his kidding and joking and with the brassy way he hollers at that black boy who's still after him with a thermometer, and especially with that big wide-open

laugh of his. Dials twitch in the control panel at the sound of it. The Acutes look spooked and uneasy when he laughs, the way kids look in a schoolroom when one ornery kid is raising too much hell with the teacher out of the room and they're all scared the teacher might pop back in and take it into her head to make them all stay after. They're fidgeting and twitching, responding to the dials in the control panel; I see McMurphy notices he's making them uneasy, but he don't let it slow him down.

"Damn, what a sorry-looking outfit. You boys don't look so crazy to me." He's trying to get them to loosen up, the way you see an auctioneer spinning jokes to loosen up the crowd before the bidding starts. "Which one of you claims to be the craziest? Which one is the biggest loony? Who runs these card games? It's my first day, and what I like to do is make a good impression straight off on the right man if he can prove to me he *is* the right man. Who's the bull goose loony here?"

He's saying this directly to Billy Bibbit. He leans down and glares so hard at Billy that Billy feels compelled to stutter out that he isn't the buh-buh-buh-bull goose loony yet, though he's next in luh-luh-line for the job.

McMurphy sticks a big hand down in front of Billy, and Billy can't do a thing but shake it. "Well, buddy," he says to Billy, "I'm truly glad you're next in luh-line for the job, but since I'm thinking about taking over this whole show myself, lock, stock, and barrel, maybe I better talk with the top man." He looks round to where some of the Acutes have stopped their card-playing, covers one of his hands with the other, and cracks all his knuckles at the sight. "I figure, you see, buddy, to be sort of the gambling baron on this ward, deal a wicked game of blackjack. So you better take me to your leader and we'll get it straightened out who's gonna be boss around here."

Nobody's sure if this barrel-chested man with the, scar and the wild grin is play-acting or if he's crazy enough to be just like he talks, or both, but they are all beginning to get a big kick out of going along with him. They watch as he puts that big red hand on Billy's thin arm, waiting to see what Billy will say. Billy sees how it's up to him to break the silence, so he looks around and picks out one of the pinochle-players: "Harding," Billy says, "I guess it would b-b-be you. You're p-president of Pay-Pay-Patient's Council. This m-man wants to talk to you."

The Acutes are grinning now, not so uneasy any more, and glad that something out of the ordinary's going on. They all razz Harding, ask him if he's bull goose loony. He lays down his cards.

Harding is a flat, nervous man with a face that sometimes makes

you think you seen him in the movies, like it's a face too pretty to just be a guy on the street. He's got wide, thin shoulders and he curves them in around his chest when he's trying to hide inside himself. He's got hands so long and white and dainty I think they carved each other out of soap, and sometimes they get loose and glide around in front of him free as two white birds until he notices them and traps them between his knees; it bothers him that he's got pretty hands.

He's president of the Patient's Council on account of he has a paper that says he graduated from college. The paper's framed and sits on his nightstand next to a picture of a woman in a bathing suit who also looks like you've seen her in the moving pictures - she's got very big breasts and she's holding the top of the bathing suit up over them with her fingers and looking sideways at the camera. You can see Harding sitting on a towel behind her, looking skinny in his bathing suit, like he's waiting for some big guy to kick sand on him. Harding brags a lot about having such a woman for a wife, says she's the sexiest woman in the world and she can't get enough of him nights.

When Billy points him out Harding leans back in his chair and assumes an important look, speaks up at the ceiling without looking at Billy or McMurphy. "Does this ... gentleman have an appointment, Mr. Bibbit?"

"Do you have an appointment, Mr. McM-m-murphy? Mr. Harding is a busy man, nobody sees him without an ap-appointment."

"This busy man Mr. Harding, is he the bull goose loony?" He looks at Billy with one eye, and Billy nods his head up and down real fast; Billy's tickled with all the attention he's getting.

"Then you tell Bull Goose Loony Harding that R. P. McMurphy is waiting to see him and that this hospital ain't big enough for the two of us. I'm accustomed to being top man. I been a bull goose catskiner for every gyppo logging operation in the Northwest and bull goose gambler all the way from Korea, was even bull goose pea weeder on that pea farm at Pendleton - so I figure if I'm bound to be a loony, then I'm bound to be a stompdown dadgum good one. Tell this Harding that he either meets me man to man or he's a yaller skunk and better be outta town by sunset."

Harding leans farther back, hooks his thumbs in his lapels. "Bibbit, you tell this young upstart McMurphy that I'll meet him in the main hall at high noon and we'll settle this affair once and for all, libidos a-blazin'." Harding tries to drawl like McMurphy; it sounds funny with his high, breathy voice. "You might also warn him, just to be fair, that I have been bull goose loony on this ward for nigh onto two years, and that I'm crazier than any man alive."

"Mr. Bibbit, you might warn this Mr. Harding that I'm so crazy I

admit to voting for Eisenhower."

"Bibbit! You tell Mr. McMurphy I'm so crazy I voted for Eisenhower twice!"

"And you tell Mr. Harding right back" - he puts both hands on the table and leans down, his voice getting low - "that I'm so crazy I plan to vote for Eisenhower again this *November*."

"I take off my hat," Harding says, bows his head, and shakes hands with McMurphy. There's no doubt in my mind that McMurphy's won, but I'm not sure just what.

All the other Acutes leave what they've been doing and ease up close to see what new sort this fellow is. Nobody like him's ever been on the ward before. They're asking him where he's from and what his business is in a way I've never seen them do before. He says he's a dedicated man. He says he was just a wanderer and logging bum before the Army took him and taught him what his natural bent was; just like they taught some men to goldbrick and some men to goof off, he says, they taught him to play poker. Since then he's settled down and devoted himself to gambling on all levels. Just play poker and stay single and live where and how he wants to, if people would let him, he says, "but you know how society persecutes a dedicated man. Ever since I found my callin' I done time in so many small-town jails I could write a brochure. They say I'm a habitual hassler. Like I fight some. Sheeut. They didn't mind so much when I was a dumb logger and got into a hassle; that's *excusable*, they say, that's a hard-workin' feller blowing off steam, they say. But if you're a gambler, if they know you to get up a back-room game now and then, all you have to do is spit slantwise and you're a goddamned criminal. Hooee, it was breaking up the budget drivin' me to and from the pokey for a while there."

He shakes his head and puffs out his cheeks.

"But that was just for a period of time. I learned the ropes. To tell the truth, this 'sault and battery I was doing in Pendleton was the first hitch in close to a year. That's why I got busted. I was outa practice; this guy was able to get up off the floor and get to the cops before I left town. A very tough individual ..."

He laughs again and shakes hands and sits down to arm wrestle every time that black boy gets too near him with the thermometer, till he's met everybody on the Acute side. And when he finishes shaking hands with the last Acute he comes right on over to the Chronics, like we aren't no different. You can't tell if he's really this friendly or if he's got some gambler's reason for trying to get acquainted with guys so far gone a lot of them don't even know their names.

He's there pulling Ellis's hand off the wall and shaking it just like he was a politician running for something and Ellis's vote was good as

anybody's. "Buddy," he says to Ellis in a solemn voice, "my name is R. P. McMurphy and I don't like to see a full-grown man sloshin' around in his own water. Whyn't you go get dried up?"

Ellis looks down at the puddle around his feet in pure surprise. "Why, I thank you," he says and even moves off a few steps toward the latrine before the nails pull his hands back to the wall.

McMurphy comes down the line of Chronics, shakes hands with Colonel Matterson and with Ruckly and with Old Pete. He shakes the hands of Wheelers and Walkers and Vegetables, shakes hands that he has to pick up out of laps like picking up dead birds, mechanical birds, wonders of tiny bones and wires that have run down and fallen. Shakes hands with everybody he comes to except Big George the water freak, who grins and shies back from that unsanitary hand, so McMurphy just salutes him and says to his own right hand as he walks away, "Hand, how do you suppose that old fellow knew all the evil you been into?"

Nobody can make out what he's driving at, or why he's making such a fuss with meeting everybody, but it's better'n mixing jigsaw puzzles. He keeps saying it's a necessary thing to get around and meet the men he'll be dealing with, part of a gambler's job. But he must know he ain't going to be dealing with no eighty-year-old organic who couldn't do any more with a playing card than put it in his mouth and gum it awhile. Yet he looks like he's enjoying himself, like he's the sort of guy that gets a laugh out of people.

I'm the last one. Still strapped in the chair in the corner. McMurphy stops when he gets to me and hooks his thumbs in his pockets again and leans back to laugh, like he sees something funnier about me than about anybody else. All of a sudden I was scared he was laughing because he knew the way I was sitting there with my knees pulled up and my arms wrapped around them, staring straight ahead as though I couldn't hear a thing, was all an act.

"Hooeee," he said, "look what we got here."

I remember all this part real clear. I remember the way he closed one eye and tipped his head back and looked down across that healing wine-colored scar on his nose, laughing at me. I thought at first that he was laughing because of how funny it looked, an Indian's face and black, oily Indian's hair on somebody like me. I thought maybe he was laughing at how weak I looked. But then's when I remember thinking that he was laughing because he wasn't fooled for one minute by my deaf-and-dumb act; it didn't make any difference *how* cagey the act was, he was onto me and was laughing and winking to let me know it.

"What's your story, Big Chief? You look like Sittin' Bull on a sitdown strike." He looked over to the Acutes to see if they might laugh about

his joke; when they just sniggered he looked back to me and winked again. "What's your name, Chief?"

Billy Bibbit called across the room. "His n-n-name is Bromden. Chief Bromden. Everybody calls him Chief Buh-Broom, though, because the aides have him sweeping a l-large part of the time. There's not m-much else he can do, I guess. He's deaf." Billy put his chin in hands. "If I was d-d-deaf" - he sighed - "I would kill myself."

McMurphy kept looking at me. "He gets his growth, he'll be pretty good-sized, won't he? I wonder how tall he is."

"I think somebody m-m-measured him once at s-six feet seven; but even if he is big, he's scared of his own sh-sh-shadow. Just a bi-big deaf Indian."

"When I saw him sittin' here I *thought* he looked some Indian. But Bromden ain't an Indian name. What tribe is he?"

"I don't know," Billy said. "He was here wh-when I c-came."

"I have information from the doctor," Harding said, "that he is only half Indian, a Columbia Indian, I believe. That's a defunct Columbia Gorge tribe. The doctor said his father was the tribal leader, hence this fellow's title, 'Chief.' As to the 'Bromden' part of the name, I'm afraid my knowledge in Indian lore doesn't cover that."

McMurphy leaned his head down near mine where I had to look at him. "Is that right? You deaf, Chief?"

"He's de-de-deef and dumb."

McMurphy puckered his lips and looked at my face a long time. Then he straightened back up and stuck his hand out. "Well, what the hell, he can shake hands can't he? Deef or whatever. By God, Chief, you may be big, but you shake my hand or I'll consider it an insult. And it's not a good idea to insult the new bull goose loony of the hospital."

When he said that he looked back over to Harding and Billy and made a face, but he left that hand in front of me, big as a dinner plate.

I remember real clear the way that hand looked: there was carbon under the fingernails where he'd worked once in a garage; there was an anchor tattooed back from the knuckles; there was a dirty Band-Aid on the middle knuckle, peeling up at the edge. All the rest of the knuckles were covered with scars and cuts, old and new. I remember the palm was smooth and hard as bone from hefting the wooden handles of axes and hoes, not the hand you'd think could deal cards. The palm was callused, and the calluses were cracked, and dirt was worked in the cracks. A road map of his travels up and down the West. That palm made a scuffing sound against my hand. I remember the fingers were thick and strong closing over mine, and my hand commenced to feel peculiar and went to swelling up out there on my

stick of an arm, like he was transmitting his own blood into it. It rang with blood and power: It blowed up near as big as his, I remember ...

"Mr. McMurry."

It's the Big Nurse.

"Mr. McMurry, could you come here please?"

It's the Big Nurse. That black boy with the thermometer has gone and got her. She stands there tapping that thermometer against her wrist watch, eyes whirring while she tries to gauge this new man. Her lips are in that triangle shape, like a doll's lips ready for a fake nipple.

"Aide Williams tells me, Mr. McMurry, that you've been somewhat difficult about your admission shower. Is this true? Please understand, I appreciate the way you've taken it upon yourself to orient with the other patients on the ward, but everything in its own good time, Mr. McMurry. I'm sorry to interrupt you and Mr. Bromden, but you do understand: *everyone* ... must follow the rules."

He tips his head back and gives that wink that she isn't fooling him any more than I did, that he's onto her. He looks up at her with one eye for a minute.

"Ya know, ma'am," he says, "ya know - that is the *ex-act* thing somebody *always* tells me about the rules ..."

He grins. They both smile back and forth at each other, sizing each other up.

"... just when they figure I'm about to do the dead opposite."

Then he lets go my hand.

In the glass Station the Big Nurse has opened a package from a foreign address and is sucking into hypodermic needles the grass-and-milk liquid that came in vial in the package. One of the little nurses, a girl with one wandering eye that always keeps looking worried over her shoulder while the other one goes about its usual business, picks up the little tray of filled needles but doesn't carry them away just yet.

"What, Miss Ratched, is your opinion of this new patient? I mean, gee, he's good-looking and friendly and everything, but in my humble opinion he certainly takes *over*."

The Big Nurse tests a needle against her fingertip. "I'm afraid" - she stabs the needle down in the rubber-capped vial and lifts the plunger - "that is exactly what the new patient is planning: to take over. He is what we call a 'manipulator,' Miss Flinn, a man who will use everyone and everything to his own ends."

"Oh. But. I mean, in a mental hospital? What could his ends be?"

"Any number of things." She's calm, smiling, lost in the work of loading the needles. "Comfort and an easy life, for instance; the feeling of power and respect, perhaps; monetary gain - perhaps all of these things. Sometimes a manipulator's own ends are simply the actual *disruption* of the ward for the sake of disruption. There are such people in our society. A manipulator can influence the other patients and disrupt them to such an extent that it may take months to get everything running smooth once more. With the present permissive philosophy in mental hospitals, it's easy for them to get away with it. Some years back it was quite different. I recall some years back we had a man, a Mr. Taber, on the ward, and he was an *intolerable* Ward Manipulator. For a while." She looks up from her work, needle half filled in front of her face like a little wand. Her eyes get far-off and pleased with the memory. "Mistur Tay-bur," she says.

"But, gee," the other nurse says, "what on earth would *make* a man want to do something like disrupt the ward for, Miss Ratched? What possible motive ...?"

She cuts the little nurse off by jabbing the needle back into the vial's rubber top, fills it, jerks it out, and lays it on the tray. I watch her hand reach for another empty needle, watch it dart out, hinge over it, drop.

"You seem to forget, *Miss Flinn*, that this is an institution for the insane."

The Big Nurse tends to get real put out if something keeps her outfit from running like a smooth, accurate, precision-made machine. The slightest thing messy or out of kilter or in the way ties her into a little white knot of tight-smiled fury. She walks around with that same doll smile crimped between her chin and her nose and that same calm whir coming from her eyes, but down inside of her she's tense as steel. I know, I can feel it. And she don't relax a hair till she gets the nuisance attended to - what she calls "adjusted to surroundings."

Under her rule the ward Inside is almost completely adjusted to surroundings. But the thing is she can't be on the ward all the time. She's got to spend some time Outside. So she works with an eye to adjusting the Outside world too. Working alongside others like her who I call the "Combine," which is a huge organization that aims to adjust the Outside as well as she has the Inside, has made her a real veteran at adjusting things. She was already the Big Nurse in the old place when I came in from the Outside so long back, and she'd been dedicating herself to adjustment for God knows how long.

And I've watched her get more and more skillful over the years. Practice has steadied and strengthened her until now she wields a sure power that extends in all directions on hairlike wires too small for anybody's eye but mine; I see her sit in the center of this web of wires like a watchful robot, tend her network with mechanical insect skill, know every second which wire runs where and just what current to send up to get the results she wants. I was an electrician's assistant in training camp before the Army shipped me to Germany and I had some electronics in my year in college is how I learned about the way these things can be rigged.

What she dreams of there in the center of those wires is a world of precision efficiency and tidiness like a pocket watch with a glass back, a place where the schedule is unbreakable and all the patients who aren't Outside, obedient under her beam, are wheelchair Chronicles with catheter tubes run direct from every pantleg to the sewer under the floor. Year by year she accumulates her ideal staff: doctors, all ages and types, come and rise up in front of her with ideas of their own about the way a ward should be run, some with backbone enough to stand behind their ideas, and she fixes these doctors with dry-ice eyes day in, day out, until they retreat with unnatural chills. "I tell you I don't know *what* it is," they tell the guy in charge of personnel. "Since I started on that ward with that woman I feel like my veins are running ammonia. I shiver all the time, my kids won't sit in my lap, my wife won't sleep with me. I *insist* on a transfer - neurology bin, the alky tank, pediatrics, I just don't *care!*"

She keeps this up for years. The doctors last three weeks, three months. Until she finally settles for a little man with a big wide

forehead and wide jewly cheeks and squeezed narrow across his tiny eyes like he once wore glasses that were way too small, wore them for so long they crimped his face in the middle, so now he has glasses on a string to his collar button; they teeter on the purple bridge of his little nose and they are always slipping one side or the other so he'll tip his head when he talks just to keep his glasses level. That's her doctor.

Her three daytime black boys she acquires after more years of testing and rejecting thousands. They come at her in a long black row of sulky, big-nosed masks, hating her and her chalk doll whiteness from the first look they get. She appraises them and their hate for a month or so, then lets them go because they don't hate enough. When she finally gets the three she wants - gets them one at a time over a number of years, weaving them into her plan and her network - she's damn positive they hate enough to be capable.

The first one she gets five years after I been on the ward, a twisted sinewy dwarf the color of cold asphalt. His mother was raped in Georgia while his papa stood by tied to the hot iron stove with plow traces, blood streaming into his shoes. The boy watched from a closet, five years old and squinting his eye to peep out the crack between the door and the jamb, and he never grew an inch after. Now his eyelids hang loose and thin from his brow like he's got a bat perched on the bridge of his nose. Eyelids like thin gray leather, he lifts them up just a bit whenever a new white man comes on the ward, peeks out from under them and studies the man up and down and nods just once like he's oh yes made positive certain of something he was already sure of. He wanted to carry a sock full of birdshot when he first came on the job, to work the patients into shape, but she told him they didn't do it that way anymore, made him leave the sap at home and taught him her own technique; taught him not to show his hate and to be calm and wait, wait for a little advantage, a little slack, then twist the rope and keep the pressure steady. All the time. That's the way you get them into shape, she taught him.

The other two black boys come two years later, coming to work only about a month apart and both looking so much alike I think she had a replica made of the one who came first. They are tall and sharp and bony and their faces are chipped into expressions that never change, like flint arrowheads. Their eyes come to points. If you brush against their hair it rasps the hide right off you.

All of them black as telephones. The blacker they are, she learned from that long dark row that came before them, the more time they are likely to devote to cleaning and scrubbing and keeping the ward in order. For instance, all three of these boys' uniforms are always spotless as snow. White and cold and stiff as her own.

All three wear starched snow-white pants and white shirts with

metal snaps down one side and white shoes polished like ice, and the shoes have red rubber soles silent as mice up and down the hall. They never make any noise when they move. They materialize in different parts of the ward every time a patient figures to check himself in private or whisper some secret to another guy. A patient'll be in a corner all by himself, when all of a sudden there's a squeak and frost forms along his cheek, and he turns in that direction and there's a cold stone mask floating above him against the wall. He just sees the black face. No body. The walls are white as the white suits, polished clean as a refrigerator door, and the black face and hands seem to float against it like a ghost.

Years of training, and all three black boys tune in closer and closer with the Big Nurse's frequency. One by one they are able to disconnect the direct wires and operate on beams. She never gives orders out loud or leaves written instructions that might be found by a visiting wife or schoolteacher. Doesn't need to any more. They are in contact on a high-voltage wave length of hate, and the black boys are out there performing her bidding before she even thinks it.

So after the nurse gets her staff, efficiency locks the ward like a watchman's clock. Everything the guys think and say and do is all worked out months in advance, based on the little notes the nurse makes during the day. This is typed and fed into the machine I hear humming behind the steel door in the rear of the Nurses' Station. A number of Order Daily Cards are returned, punched with a pattern of little square holes. At the beginning of each day the properly dated OD card is inserted in a slot in the steel door and the walls hum up: Lights flash on in the dorm at six-thirty: the Acutes up out of bed quick as the black boys can prod them out, get them to work buffing the floor, emptying ash trays, polishing the scratch marks off the wall where one old fellow shorted out a day ago, went down in an awful twist of smoke and smell of burned rubber. The Wheelers swing dead log legs out on the floor and wait like seated statues for somebody to roll chairs in to them. The Vegetables piss the bed, activating an electric shock and buzzer, rolls them off on the tile where the black boys can hose them down and get them in clean greens ...

Six-forty-five the shavers buzz and the Acutes line up in alphabetical order at the mirrors, A, B, C, D ... The walking Chronicles like me walk in when the Acutes are done, then the Wheelers are wheeled in. The three old guys left, a film of yellow mold on the loose hide under their chins, they get shaved in their lounge chairs in the day room, a leather strap across the forehead to keep them from flopping around under the shaver.

Some mornings - Mondays especially - I hide and try to buck the schedule. Other mornings I figure it's cagier to step right into place

between A and C in the alphabet and move the route like everybody else, without lifting my feet - powerful magnets in the floor maneuver personnel through the ward like arcade puppets ...

Seven o'clock the mess hall opens and the order of line-up reverses: the Wheelers first, then the Walkers, then the Acutes pick up trays, corn flakes, bacon and eggs, toast - and this morning a canned peach on a piece of green, torn lettuce. Some of the Acutes bring trays to the Wheelers. Most Wheelers are just Chronics with bad legs, they feed themselves, but there's these three of them got no action from the neck down whatsoever, not much from the neck up. These are called Vegetables. The black boys push them in after everybody else is sat down, wheel them against a wall, and bring them identical trays of muddy-looking food with little white diet cards attached to the trays. Mechanical Soft, reads the diet cards for these toothless three: eggs, ham, toast, bacon, all chewed thirty-two times apiece by the stainless-steel machine in the kitchen. I see it purse sectioned lips, like a vacuum-cleaner hose, and spurt a clot of chewed-up ham onto a plate with a barnyard sound.

The black boys stoke the sucking pink mouths of the Vegetables a shade too fast for swallowing, and the Mechanical Soft squeezes out down their little knobs of chins onto the greens. The black boys cuss the Vegetables and ream the mouths bigger with a twisting motion of the spoon, like coring a rotten apple: "This ol' fart Blastic, he's comin' to pieces befo' my very eyes. I can't tell no more if I'm feeding him bacon puree or chunks of his own fuckin' tongue." ...

Seven-thirty back to the day room. The Big Nurse looks out through her special glass, always polished till you can't tell it's there, and nods at what she sees, reaches up and tears a sheet off her calendar one day closer to the goal. She pushes a button for things to start. I hear the wharrup of a big sheet of tin being shook someplace. Everybody come to order. Acutes: sit on your side of the day room and wait for cards and Monopoly games to be brought out. Chronics: sit on your side and wait for puzzles from the Red Cross box. Ellis: go to your place at the wall, hands up to receive the nails and pee running down your leg. Pete: wag your head like a puppet. Scanlon: work your knobby hands on the table in front of you, constructing a make-believe bomb to blow up a make-believe world. Harding: begin talking, waving your dove hands in the air, then trap them under your armpits because grown men aren't supposed to wave their pretty hands that way. Sefelt: begin moaning about your teeth hurting and your hair falling out. Everybody: breath in ... and out ... in perfect order; hearts all beating at the rate the OD cards have ordered. Sound of matched cylinders.

Like a cartoon world, where the figures are flat and outlined in

black, jerking through some kind of goofy story that might be real funny if it weren't for the cartoon figures being real guys ...

Seven-forty-five the black boys move down the line of Chronicles taping catheters on the ones that will hold still for it. Catheters are second-hand condoms the ends clipped off and rubber-banded to tubes that run down pantlegs to a plastic sack marked DISPOSABLE NOT TO BE RE-USED, which it is my job to wash out at the end of each day. The black boys anchor the condom by taping it to the hairs; old Catheter Chronicles are hairless as babies from tape removal ...

Eight o'clock the walls whirr and hum into full swing. The speaker in the ceiling says, "Medications," using the Big Nurse's voice. We look in the glass case where she sits, but she's nowhere near the microphone; in fact, she's ten feet away from the microphone, tutoring one of the little nurses how to prepare a neat drug tray with pills arranged orderly. The Acutes line up at the glass door, A, B, C, D, then the Chronicles, then the Wheelers (the Vegetables get theirs later, mixed in a spoon of applesauce). The guys file by and get a capsule in a paper cup - throw it to the back of the throat and get the cup filled with water by the little nurse and wash the capsule down. On rare occasions some fool might ask what he's being required to swallow.

"Wait just a shake, honey; what are these two little red capsules in here with my vitamin?"

I know him. He's a big, griping Acute, already getting the reputation of being a troublemaker.

"It's just medication, Mr. Taber, good for you. Down it goes, now."

"But I mean what *kind* of medication. Christ, I can see that they're pills -"

"Just swallow it all, shall we, Mr. Taber - just for me?" She takes a quick look at the Big Nurse to see how the little flirting technique she is using is accepted, then looks back at the Acute. He still isn't ready to swallow something he don't know what is, not even just for her.

"Miss, I don't like to create trouble. But I don't like to swallow something without knowing what it is, neither. How do I know this isn't one of those funny pills that makes me something I'm not?"

"Don't get upset, Mr. Taber -"

"Upset? All I want to *know*, for the lova Jesus -"

But the Big Nurse has come up quietly, locked her hand on his arm, paralyzes him all the way to the shoulder. "That's all right, Miss Flinn," she says. "If Mr. Taber chooses to act like a child, he may have to be treated as such. We've tried to be kind and considerate with him. Obviously, that's not the answer. Hostility, hostility, that's the thanks we get. You can go, Mr. Taber, if you don't wish to take your medication orally."

"All I wanted to *know*, for the -"

"You can go."

He goes off, grumbling, when she frees his arm, and spends the morning moping around the latrine, wondering about those capsules. I got away once holding one of those same red capsules under my tongue, played like I'd swallowed it, and crushed it open later in the broom closet. For a tick of time, before it all turned into white dust, I saw it was a miniature electronic element like the ones I helped the Radar Corps work with in the Army, microscopic wires and grids and transistors, this one designed to dissolve on contact with air ...

Eight-twenty the cards and puzzles go out ...

Eight-twenty-five some Acute mentions he used to watch his sister taking her bath; the three guys at the table with him fall all over each other to see who gets to write it in the log book ...

Eight-thirty the ward door opens and two technicians trot in, smelling like grape wine; technicians always move at a fast walk or a trot because they're always leaning so far forward they have to move fast to keep standing. They always lean forward and they always smell like they sterilized their instruments in wine. They pull the lab door to behind them, and I sweep up close and can snake out voices over the vicious zzzth-zzzth-zzzth of steel on whetstone.

"What we got already at this ungodly hour of the morning?"

"We got to install an Indwelling Curiosity Cutout in some nosy booger. Hurry-up job, she says, and I'm not even sure we got one of the gizmos in stock."

"We might have to call IBM to rush one out for us; let me check back in Supply -"

"Hey; bring out a bottle of that pure grain while you're back there: it's getting so I can't install the simplest frigging component but what I need a bracer. Well, what the hell, it's better'n garage work ..."

Their voices are forced and too quick on the comeback to be real talk - more like cartoon comedy speech. I sweep away before I'm caught eavesdropping.

The two big black boys catch Taber in the latrine and drag him. to the mattress room. He gets one a good kick in the shins. He's yelling bloody murder. I'm surprised how helpless he looks when they hold him, like he was wrapped with bands of black iron.

They push him face down on the mattress. One sits on his head, and the other rips his pants open in back and peels the cloth until Taber's peach-colored rear is framed by the ragged lettuce-green. He's smothering curses into the mattress and the black boy sitting on his head saying, "Tha's right, Mistuh Taber, tha's right ..." The nurse comes down the hall, smearing Vaseline on a long needle, pulls the

door shut so they're out of sight for a second, then comes right back out, wiping the needle on a shred of Taber's pants. She's left the Vaseline jar in the room. Before the black boy can close the door after her I see the one still sitting on Taber's head, dabbing at him with a Kleenex. They're in there a long time before the door opens up again and they come out, carrying him across the hall to the lab. His greens are ripped clear off now and he's wrapped up in a damp sheet ...

Nine o'clock young residents wearing leather elbows talk to Acutes for fifty minutes about what they did when they were little boys. The Big Nurse is suspicious of the crew-cut looks of these residents, and that fifty minutes they are on the ward is a tough time for her. While they are around, the machinery goes to fumbling and she is scowling and making notes to check the records of these boys for old traffic violations and the like ...

Nine-fifty the residents leave and the machinery hums up smooth again. The nurse watches the day room from her glass case; the scene before her takes on that blue-steel clarity again, that clean orderly movement of a cartoon comedy.

Taber is wheeled out of the lab on a Gurney bed.

"We had to give him another shot when he started coming up during the spine tap," the technician tells her. "What do you say we take him right on over to Building One and buzz him with EST while we're at it - that way not waste the extra Seconal?"

"I think it is an excellent suggestion. Maybe after that take him to the electroencephalograph and check his head - we may find evidence of a need for brain work."

The technicians go trotting off, pushing the man on the Gurney, like cartoon men - or like puppets, mechanical puppets in one of those Punch and Judy acts where it's supposed to be funny to see the puppet beat up by the Devil and swallowed headfirst by a smiling alligator ...

Ten o'clock the mail comes up. Sometimes you get the torn envelope ...

Ten-thirty Public Relation comes in with a ladies' club following him. He claps his fat hands at the day-room door. "Oh, hello guys; stiff lip, stiff lip ... look around, girls; isn't it clean, so bright? This is Miss Ratched. I chose this ward because it's *her* ward. She's, girls, just like a mother. Not that I mean age, but you girls understand ..."

Public Relation's shirt collar is so tight it bloats his face up when he laughs, and he's laughing most of the time I don't ever know what at, laughing high and fast like he wishes he could stop but can't do it. And his face bloated up red and round as a balloon with a face painted on it. He got no hair on his face and none on his head to speak of; it looks like he glued some on once but it kept slipping off and getting in his

cuffs and his shirt pocket and down his collar. Maybe that's why he keeps his collar so tight, to keep the little pieces of hair from falling down in there.

Maybe that's why he laughs so much, because he isn't able to keep all the pieces out.

He conducts these tours - serious women in blazer jackets, nodding to him as he points out how much things have improved over the years. He points out the TV, the big leather chairs, the sanitary drinking fountains; then they all go have coffee in the Nurse's Station. Sometimes he'll be by himself and just stand in the middle of the day room and clap his hands (you can *hear* they are wet), clap them two or three times till they stick, then hold them prayer-like together under one of his chins and start spinning. Spin round and around there in the middle of the floor, looking wild and frantic at the TV, the new pictures on the walls, the sanitary drinking fountain. And laughing.

What he sees that's so funny he don't ever let us in on, and the only thing I can see funny is him spinning round and around out there like a rubber toy - if you push him over he's weighted on the bottom and straightaway rocks back upright, goes to spinning again. He never, never looks at the men's faces ...

Ten-forty, -forty-five, -fifty, patients shuttle in and out to appointments in ET or OT or PT, or in queer little rooms somewhere where the walls are never the same size and the floors aren't level. The machinery sounds about you reach a steady cruising speed.

The ward hums the way I heard a cotton mill hum once when the football team played a high school in California. After a good season one year the boosters in the town were so proud and carried away that they paid to fly us to California to play a championship high-school team down there. When we flew into the town we had to go visit some local industry. Our coach was one for convincing folks that athletics was educational because of the learning afforded by travel, and every trip we took he herded the team around to creameries and beet farms and canneries before the game. In California it was the cotton mill. When we went in the mill most of the team took a look and left to go sit in the bus over stud games on suitcases, but I stayed inside over in a corner out of the way of the Negro girls running up and down the aisles of machines. The mill put me in a kind of dream, all the humming and clicking and rattling of people and machinery, jerking around in a pattern. That's why I stayed when the others left, that, and because it reminded me somehow of the men in the tribe who'd left the village in the last days to do work on the gravel crusher for the dam. The frenzied pattern, the faces hypnotized by routine ... I wanted to go out in the bus with the team, but I couldn't.

It was morning in early winter and I still had on the jacket they'd given us when we took the championship - a red and green jacket with leather sleeves and a football-shaped emblem sewn on the back telling what we'd won - and it was making a lot of the Negro girls stare. I took it off, but they kept staring. I was a whole lot bigger in those days.

One of the girls left her machine and looked back and forth up the aisles to see if the foreman was around, then came over to where I was standing. She asked if we was going to play the high school that night and she told me she had a brother played tailback for them. We talked a piece about football and the like and I noticed how her face looked blurred, like there was a mist between me and her. It was the cotton fluff sifting from the air.

I told her about the fluff. She rolled her eyes and ducked her mouth to laugh in her fist when I told her how it was like looking at her face out on a misty morning duck-hunting. And she said, "Now what in the everlovin' world would you want with me out alone in a duck blind?" I told her she could take care of my gun, and the girls all over the mill went to giggling in their fists. I laughed a little myself, seeing how clever I'd been. We were still talking and laughing when she grabbed both my wrists and dug in. The features of her face snapped into brilliant focus; I saw she was terrified of something.

"Do," she said to me in a whisper, "do take me, big boy. Outa this here mill, outa this town, outa this life. Take me to some ol' duck blind someplace. Someplace *e/se*. Huh, big boy, huh?"

Her dark, pretty face glittered there in front of me. I stood with my mouth open, trying to think of some way to answer her. We were locked together this way for maybe a couple of seconds; then the sound of the mill jumped a hitch, and something commenced to draw her back away from me. A string somewhere I didn't see hooked on that flowered red skirt and was tugging her back. Her fingernails peeled down my hands and as soon as she broke contact with me her face switched out of focus again, became soft and runny like melting chocolate behind that blowing fog of cotton. She laughed and spun around and gave me a look of her yellow leg when the skirt billowed out. She threw me a wink over her shoulder as she ran back to her machine where a pile of fiber was spilling off the table to the floor; she grabbed it up and ran feather-footed down the aisle of machines to dump the fiber in a hopper; then she was out of sight around the corner.

All those spindles reeling and wheeling and shuttles jumping around and bobbins wringing the air with string, whitewashed walls and steel-gray machines and girls in flowered skirts skipping back and forth, and the whole thing webbed with flowing white lines stringing the factory

together - it all stuck with me and every once in a while something on the ward calls it to mind.

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; something that came in all twisted different is now a functioning, adjusted component, a credit to the whole outfit and a marvel to behold. Watch him sliding across the land with a welded grin, fitting into some nice little neighborhood where they're just now digging trenches along the street to lay pipes for city water. He's happy with it. He's adjusted to surroundings finally ...

"Why, I've never seen anything to beat the change in Maxwell Taber since he's got back from that hospital; a little black and blue around the eyes, a little weight lost, and, you know what? he's a *new man*. Gad, modern American science ..."

And the light is on in his basement window way past midnight every night as the Delayed Reaction Elements the technicians installed lend nimble skills to his fingers as he bends over the doped figure of his wife, his two little girls just four and six, the neighbor he goes bowling with Mondays; he adjusts them like he was adjusted. This is the way they spread it.

When he finally runs down after a pre-set number of years, the town loves him dearly and the paper prints his picture helping the Boy Scouts last year on Graveyard Cleaning Day, and his wife gets a letter from the principal of the high school how Maxwell Wilson Taber was an inspirational figure to the youth of our fine community.

Even the embalmers, usually a pair of penny-pinching tightwads, are swayed. "Yeah, look at him there: old Max Taber, he was a good sort. What do you say we use that expensive thirty-weight at no extra charge to his wife. No, what the dickens, let's make it on the house."

A successful Dismissal like this is a product brings joy to the Big Nurse's heart and speaks good of her craft and the whole industry in general. Everybody's happy with a Dismissal.

But an Admission is a different story. Even the best-behaved Admission is bound to need some work to swing into routine, and, also, you never can tell when just that *certain* one might come in who's free enough to foul things up right and left, really make a hell of a mess and constitute a threat to the whole smoothness of the outfit. And, like I explain, the Big Nurse gets real put out if anything keeps her outfit from running smooth.

