

*ONE FLEW OVER THE
CUCKOO'S NEST*
BY KEN KESEY

CHAPTER 1

Theyre 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.

Theyre mopping when I come out the dorm, all three of them sulky and hating everything, the time of day, the place theyre at here, the people they got to work around. When they hate like this, better if they dont 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.

Heres 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 dont bother not talking out loud about their hate secrets when Im nearby because they think Im deaf and dumb. Everybody thinks so. Im 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.

Im mopping near the ward door when a key hits it from the other side and I know its 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 cant tell which.

Shes 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. Shes had it all the years I been here. Its a loose weave and I can see inside it; theres no compact or lipstick or woman stuff, shes 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 cant 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 shes down the hall about to turn into the glass Nurses Station where shell 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. Theyre still down there together, mumbling to one another. They didnt hear her come on the ward. They sense shes glaring down at them now, but its too late. They should of knew bettern 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 theyre trapped in a huddle at the end of the corridor. She knows what they been saying, and I can see shes furious clean out of control. Shes going to tear the black bastards limb from limb, shes so furious. Shes swelling up, swells till her backs splitting out the white uniform and shes 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 cant 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 theyre gonna do it! This time they let the hate build up too high and overloaded and theyre gonna tear one another to pieces before they realize what theyre 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 whats the hullabaloo, and she has to change back before shes 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 rackets about, all they see is the head nurse, smiling and calm and cold as usual, telling the black boys theyd 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 isnt *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 dont 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 cant avoid some of the ah disturbance he tends to cause, dont 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 youre stronger and more wide awake, and the bastards who work for the Combine arent 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 arent 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. Hes smelling me now, I can hear him snort. He dont know where Im hid, but hes smelling and hes 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 dont 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. Hes 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 Papas 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 dont fight or make any noise. If you yell its just tougher on you. I hold back the yelling. I hold back till they get to my temples. Im not sure its one of those substitute machines and not a shaver till it gets to my temples; then I cant hold back. Its not a will-power thing any more when they get to my temples. Its a *button*, pushed, says Air Raid Air Raid, turns me on so loud its 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 its snowing down cold and white all over me like skim milk, so thick I might even be able to hide in it if they didnt have a hold on me. I cant see six inches in front of me through the fog and the only thing I can hear over the wail Im 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 cant 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 cant see. No tracks on the ground but the ones hes 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.) Its 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 its 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. Its still hard for me to have a clear mind thinking on it. But its the truth even if it didnt happen.