

Control: A Dangerous Weapon

When McMurphy first came into the ward, he brought with him a strong will to disrupt the power that all of the patients had long been submitted to. Before he came into the picture, it had been so long since anyone laughed. Upon hearing McMurphy laughing, Bromden had a concerning epiphany, saying: "I realize it's the first laugh I've heard in years." (pg.11) As the reader, this realization led me to believe that the ward was a place devoid of joy. Being one of my first impressions of the hospital's environment, this moment in the book has continued to impact the way I see the ward, and has revealed the harmful impact of Nurse Ratched's manipulative agenda. Outside of the book, I see a connection between my own life and this quote. I tend to get caught up in the monotony of daily life. The non-negotiable routines like going to school can start to feel repetitive, and just like Bromden realized he hadn't heard someone laugh in so long, I sometimes forget how long it's been since the last time I've taken the time to do things that bring me joy. Spending time with friends and getting outside are all things I usually dismiss in the name of school. Seeing McMurphy make room for his own unbridled joy is a reminder to me to not lose sight of what makes me happy amidst the unavoidable tasks of my life.

I have always had a fear of being yelled at. More specifically, being yelled at by an authority figure. Maybe it's the inherent power dynamic, or the knowledge that I did something wrong, but being reprimanded by someone with more say than me just makes me feel small. Bromden's description of Nurse Ratched's anger towards the aides is a fitting representation of what it feels like to be chided: "She blows up bigger and bigger, big as a tractor..." (pg.5) While Bromden's description is rather fantastical, it still feels like an accurate representation of what I see and feel when I am being yelled at. The quote makes it seem like Nurse Ratched is blowing up, which signifies the intensity of her anger. I recall feeling this same red-hot intensity in the tone that has been used in reprimanding me. Bromden's description is frightening, which is another emotion I feel in these uncomfortable situations. Not only that, but this quote serves as a visual representation of how small and insignificant getting yelled at makes me feel, especially in comparison to the large amount of power held by the person doing the reprimanding.

Throughout the book, McMurphy consistently revealed the true intentions behind Ms. Ratched's policies, once describing her to a group of Acutes as "...people who try to make you weak so they can get you to toe the line, to follow their rules, to live like they want you to." (pg.54) While I haven't experienced authority figures who act to this extreme in my own life, I can still see the rigid dynamic that I have had with teachers in the past reflected in this quote. In middle school, I was privy to the ways in which authority figures would exploit their position of power, and often use it as an intimidation tactic. It was easy for me to blame myself for the things I was reprimanded for when in reality, they were harmless mistakes. These experiences scattered throughout my time in middle school have made me realize how easy it is for teachers to abandon the role of empathizer in the classroom, and put the role of leader above all else. McMurphy's proactive behavior in calling out the flaws in Nurse

Ratched's rules has inspired me to recount my own experiences with controlling teachers, and acknowledge that in these situations, I may not have always been in the wrong, as much as these authority figures led me to believe.

Though McMurphy managed to have a positive attitude at the beginning of the book, other Acutes ultimately squandered that positivity with their anecdotal sense of resignation. Scanlon refuted McMurphy's optimism, as he mentioned the system, complaining: "You can't beat it."(pg.61) It is clear that Nurse Ratched has engineered a system where she always wins. This system is one that tears the patients down, and makes them feel powerless in an environment where they should be healing. Reading this excerpt, I completely understood Scanlon's frustration. In my own life, constantly following rules and obeying other people's orders can be draining. Even if the rules are for your benefit, it is easy to feel like a pawn in someone else's game. This helplessness is reflected in the behavior of the Acutes, and although he tried to stop it, ultimately led to the obedience of McMurphy.