

*“Opposites Attract”*

*By Levanah Cohen*



The drawing presented above is a visual representation of the moment from pages 186 to 192, when Chief Bromden and McMurphy are speaking to each other in the middle of the night.

The two of them are shown tucked into their beds, parallel to one another, surrounded by darkness except for the light coming in from the one window. Lines are coming out from where their mouths would be, indicating their spoken interaction. You might notice the scribbles and sparks surrounding one of them, and you might be able to easily guess that it is Chief Bromden. Who knows how long it's been since he's spoken to another person, or even talked. Bromden describes the way that his "throat was a little rusty and [his] tongue creaked", and McMurphy piped in with saying that he "sounded a little out of practice" (186). Despite Bromden's difficulty of trying to get his words out, McMurphy further encourages him by starting the conversation himself, and telling one of his fun stories. This jumpstart to their conversing quickly got Bromden talking, *really* talking.

Even though Bromden's the narrator and we know his thoughts, feelings, and hallucinations, it's still not often that he elaborates on these things. He tries to tell McMurphy that he isn't tough enough, expressing, "No, I'm way too little. I used to be big, but not no more. You're twice the size of me" (187). This sad notion of his gives us more information than he can. He feels as though he's not big enough, that he lacks confidence, as well as the words. He may tower over McMurphy, but to him, McMurphy reaches high up into the clouds. They're essentially exact opposites. It's why McMurphy knew there was something different about Bromden from the very beginning, and it's the reason why McMurphy is the first person Bromden has spoken to in years.

The more they talk, the more Bromden opens up to McMurphy. Bromden tells him about his family and life at the Columbia Gorge, and the troubles that came with that. But what comes out of his mouth next shows the more *cuckoo* side of him, "They put things in! They *install* things... and go to working and installing their filthy machinery when you're little, and keep on

and on and on until you're *fixed!*". This is the sketched part which shows Bromden speaking through sparks and squiggles. McMurphy's reaction to Bromden's delusions about machinery is as one might expect, telling him to "Take 'er easy, buddy; shhhh" (189). But Bromden still goes rambling on, and McMurphy, again, tells him to chill out. Bromden may have been talking crazy, but McMurphy didn't appear to be disturbed by it. They are, of course, in a psych ward.

Their conversation comes to a pause, and Bromden uses this time to think. He tells us information about himself, that he's "one of these queers", but he then takes it back because "that's one fear hiding behind another". He lies both to himself and to us as readers, but finally gives us the clarification that he just wants "to touch him because he's who he is" (190).

Bromden would like to know what a person like McMurphy feels like to the touch, how it could be possible for a human like him to exist.

Many questions of mine resulted from the whole of this interaction. How did no one else hear them? Were they talking loudly or quietly? Were they separate from the others? Regardless of these inquiries, I still imagine the scene between Bromden and McMurphy as how I drew it out up above. Just the two of them, the dark taking over the rest of the room, covering the presence of the other objects or people. The moonlight seeps into the room through the window, revealing McMurphy and Bromden across each other in their beds, sharing the secret that is Bromden's real ability to speak and hear. It's in this intimate moment of the night that McMurphy learns of Bromden's past and his true insanity. But the night's still calm, even for a psych ward, because all of this is no surprise. Not to us, and not to McMurphy.