

Dear Ken Kesey,

Saddened. Happy. Hopeful. By the last pages of your novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, I experienced all of these conflicting feelings. I was devastated when I discovered the irony to McMurphy's death; that he has to be killed in order to be saved. I was happy when I read that Chief Bromden was escaping a place of suppression to experience life. But most importantly, I was hopeful knowing that a person like McMurphy could actually exist.

Your novel showed me the power of words and fear. It taught me the strength of laughter and that a hero does not have to be a conventional man with superpowers. I never thought laughter could be so powerful. But I know now that as long as you can laugh, nothing can get you. Not even the Big Nurse. It was the one thing that McMurphy wanted the men of the ward to do most; so when they finally let go of their fears on the fishing boat, I smiled. I knew then how much one person could change those around him, how he could change them completely.

My favorite movies being Titanic and Pearl Harbor, I enjoyed your novel because it has an unconventional, heart wrenching end. I was shocked to find that Nurse Ratched induces Billy Bibbit's suicide to make McMurphy seem like the villain. Although it had to be done, I hated when Chief Bromden suffocated McMurphy. As I read the pages of your novel, I couldn't believe what I was reading. I stared at the pages incredulously. The hero who sacrifices himself numerous times and tries his best to not let his pain and exhaustion show, has to be killed. But McMurphy's spirit lives within the men. I knew then how much a person could sacrifice for the sake of others, how he could sacrifice all of himself. Your novel makes me rethink the definition of a hero because McMurphy is a gambler and drinker, but he risks his own life to protect the other men from Nurse Ratched.

When I discovered that the patients of the ward would rather suffer under Nurse Ratched's reign than live in the outside world where they would be criticized and humiliated, I realized how narrow minded our society is. We shun anyone who is different. We ridicule them. We humiliate them. We criticize what they wear, how they act, and who they're with. We drive them into mental institutions. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* made me reflect on how much we value and fear the thoughts of complete strangers. Like the patients of your novel, we go through our entire lives without really living one second of it because we're afraid. And I don't want to be afraid anymore.

As I was coming across how McMurphy shows his exhaustion only when he believes no one is looking, memories of my own hero flooded back. Coming into high school as a freshman, I met a junior who participated in every activity possible. She was a leader, and I believed she was perfect. I often told her that she was a real life superwoman; she was my version of McMurphy. But taking on the world was a full time job, and her body could keep up with all of things she wanted to do. Like McMurphy, she needed a break, and I broke down seeing my friend exhausted from life.

By the last pages of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, I couldn't help but to wonder, "What decisions would I make if I were placed in a ward where manipulation reigned?" I like to make myself believe that I would act like McMurphy, that I would be the person to stand up to the Big Nurse for the sake of the other patients. But in actuality, I know that I wouldn't be the hero that McMurphy is. I would be the rabbit that Nurse Ratched would devour ravenously. I wouldn't dare break the rules out of fear of receiving ElectroShock Therapy. I would hide in the fog, and I would be weak and afraid.

Lastly, Ken Kesey, I wanted to know, "Why did you write this novel?" By the end, it brought me to the verge of tears.

And I loved it.

Sincerely, your admiring, conflicted, feeling reader,

*Amy Phan*

P.S. My favorite part was when McMurphy and then the other men kept breaking the window of where the cigarettes were.