

# Journey To Self-Destruction in Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

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## Journey To Self-Destruction in One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest

In *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*, the character of Randle P. McMurphy undergoes a gradual journey towards self-destruction. His actions go from the minuscule, such as changing minor ward policies, to the act of trying to strangle [Nurse](#) Ratched. All of his actions, minor and major, lead to his self-destruction. He continues this behavior even after he discovers he's only hurting himself with his actions.

McMurphy begins by protesting minor but significant defects of the [ward](#) policies. When he first arrives, he runs around in nothing but a towel and provokes shock and anger from the Big Nurse. His actions let the nurses and patients know that he won't simply sit back and take the staff's cruel treatment to get the patients to conform quietly and without protest. He begins to gamble with the patients, first for cigarettes and eventually for IOUs, despite the nurse's rule of no gambling on the ward for money (Kesey 102). He also convinces the spineless Dr. Spivey to allow the patients to open up a separate day room for their card games. He uses the doctor to implement these changes, which aggravates the nurse

because it takes away her power. The resentment between McMurphy and Nurse Ratched continues to build.

McMurphy brings about all these changes before he realizes one vital fact: Nurse Ratched is the sole determiner of how long he must stay in the ward. He's watching television while everyone else is completing their chores. The nurse says to him, "You're committed, you realize. You are ... under the [jurisdiction](#) of me...the staff...Under jurisdiction and control-" (138). The nurse also says, "Keep in mind that Mr. McMurphy is committed. The length of time he spends in this hospital is entirely up to us" (150).

McMurphy relaxes slightly; however, he eventually continues to harass the nurse, despite his knowledge that she dictates the length of his confinement (Waldmeir 425). He crosses the line and throws a party on the ward in the middle of the night, bringing in two prostitutes and intoxicating the patients with a mixture of cherry flavored alcohol and codeine cough syrup. He does so knowing that he will face consequences for this event. However, he feels he must continue this self-destruction in order for the other patients to find themselves and their sense of freedom ( 427).

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