

Audition script excerpts

Chief Bomden

Setting: Nighttime on the ward. McMurphy has just offered Chief a stick of gum. Chief has spent years being a "mountain" that no one hears.

Character Note: Start with extreme hesitation. Your voice should sound "rusty," like an engine that hasn't been turned on in a decade. You are looking at McMurphy with a mix of awe and terror.

(Chief takes the gum. He stares at the wrapper. He looks at McMurphy, and for the first time, his eyes aren't glazed over. He speaks—the sound is low, gravelly, and slow.)

"Thank you..."

(He stops, startled by the sound of his own voice. He looks around to see if the 'Combine' or the Aides heard him.)

It's been... a long time. They think I don't hear. They think I'm a big machine that just moves the broom. But I hear. I hear the walls hum. I hear the shadows talking in the Nurse's office.

(He looks at his hands—they are huge, shaking slightly)

You're so... big. No, I don't mean like me. I'm big, but I'm small inside. My father... he was a real Big Man. He was a Chief. He

was like a mountain. But the Combine... they started on him. They didn't use knives. They used... *everything*. They used the Town. They used the Government. They used my mother.

Every day, they took a little piece of him. They worked on him until he was thin. Until the wind could blow right through him. I saw it happen. And I figured... if they could do that to a mountain... what would they do to me?

So I went small. I went so small I became like the air. You can't hurt the air.

(He looks at McMurphy with a sudden, desperate intensity)

But you... you're trying to lift that concrete. You're trying to pull the world off its hinges. They'll see you soon. The Big Nurse... she's already turning the dials. She's making the fog come in. Don't let her... don't let her make you small, Mac.

(A pause, as he realizes he has said too much. He grips the broom handle tight.)

I used to be big. I remember... what it felt like to be big."

Randal P, McMurphy

Setting: The Day Room. The patients are cowed after a meeting where Ratched denied them the right to watch the World Series. McMurphy is trying to rally them, using a mix of a carnival barker's charm and a soldier's grit.

Character Note: You should be moving. Use the space. You're trying to "sell" them on their own manhood.

(McMurphy is leaning against a "column," tossing a deck of cards or an imaginary coin. He looks around at the "group," a half-smirk on his face.)

"You know, I've been in some tight spots. P.O.W. camps in Korea where the rice was mostly gravel and the guards had teeth like rusted saws. I've been in work farms where the sun hits you like a ball-peen hammer from six in the morning 'til dusk. But I tell ya... I have never seen a bunch of fellas so satisfied with being whipped.

(He pushes off the column, stepping into the center of the 'room')

She says 'No' to the ball game, and you all just... wilt. Like a bunch of dandelions in a stiff breeze. 'Oh, the Big Nurse says it's bad for our schedule. The Big Nurse says it'll upset the balance.'

(He laughs, a loud, genuine sound that echoes)

The balance! Fellas, you're in a nut-house! The balance was gone the second they locked that front door! You think you're 'sick' because you want to sit down with a beer and watch a man hit a ball with a stick? That ain't sickness, Harding. That's being alive!

(His tone shifts—the charm drops, replaced by a challenge)

I put five dollars down that I could break her. Five dollars says I could make that woman lose her cool before the week is out. But I'm starting to think I was wrong. Not about her—about you. She hasn't just got you following rules; she's got you believing you *need* 'em. You're sitting here waiting for a permission slip to breathe.

(He walks right up to an imaginary patient, lowering his voice)

Now, I'm gonna watch that game. Even if the screen is dark, I'm gonna see every play. And I'm gonna enjoy it. Because she can lock the cabinets, and she can lock the doors, but she hasn't figured out how to lock the inside of a man's head yet.

Who's with me? Or are you all too busy making sure your beds are tucked in straight?"

Nurse Ratched

(She waits. She lets the silence stretch until the room is uncomfortably quiet. She smooths her skirt with one hand—a precise, mechanical movement.)

“I’m disappointed, Billy. Not angry. Just... deeply disappointed.

(She leans in slightly, her voice dropping to a confidential, motherly tone)

You speak about these ‘rules’ as if they were walls built to keep you in. You think the locked doors and the schedule and the medication are... what was your word? *Cruel?* *(A small, thin smile that doesn't reach her eyes)*

Let’s look at the alternative, shall we? Outside those doors is a world that has no use for you. A world that moves very fast, and very loudly, and doesn't stop to check if you’ve had your breakfast or if your bed is made. It is a world of chaos. And you know, as well as I do, that chaos is what brought you here.

We provide the one thing you cannot provide for yourself: **Order.** When Mr. McMurphy arrived, I saw the way you looked at him. You see a man who ignores the clock. You think that’s ‘freedom.’ But look at him, Billy. Really look. He is a man who cannot control his impulses. He is a man driven by a fever. Is that what you want? To be a slave to your own skin?

(She stands up slowly, adjusting a file on her desk)

The routine isn't a cage. It’s a floor. It is the only thing standing between you and the abyss. And if you choose to kick at that floor... if you choose to break the very things we use to keep you safe... then you aren't just hurting me. You are choosing to fail. And I won't have you failing on my ward.

(She looks him directly in the eye, her voice becoming icy)

Now. Take your seat. It’s time for your medication. And I expect a ‘thank you’ for the effort we’ve made to keep this room... quiet.”

Billy Bibbit

Setting: Group Therapy. Nurse Ratched has just mentioned Billy's mother. Billy has been trying to act "cool" like McMurphy, but the mere mention of his mother pulls him back into childhood.

Character Note: The stutter is a physical manifestation of his fear. It shouldn't just be a sound; it should be a struggle in his throat and chest.

(Billy is sitting on a hard, 1930s tubular steel chair. He's trying to hold a cigarette like McMurphy, but his hands are shaking too much. He looks at the "Nurse's Station" upstage center, then quickly looks away.)

"She... she didn't s-s-say that. You're... you're making that up, Miss Ratched. My m-m-mother, she... she wouldn't be 'disappointed.'

(He stands up, the chair scraping loudly against the concrete floor—a jarring, industrial sound)

She wants me to be... h-h-happy! She tells me every time she v-v-visits. 'Billy, you're just a b-boy,' she says. 'You take your t-t-time.' But I'm thirty-one years old! (A sudden, desperate burst of volume) I'm th-thirty-one!

(He looks at McMurphy, then back to the upstage shadows where Ratched sits)

You think it's f-funny? You think I l-l-like it here? I want to go d-down to the t-town. I want to... to have a g-girl. I want to walk in the r-rain without someone counting my p-p-pills!

(His voice cracks. He starts to shrink back into himself, the stutter becoming more erratic)

B-but every time I t-try to leave... the f-fog comes. And I think about her f-face. And I think about you t-t-telling her what I d-did. Please. (He is almost whispering now) Don't t-tell her. I'll be g-good. I'll sit st-still. Just... don't tell m-m-mama."

Patient or Aide (general audition)

Setting: Late night. A single hanging fluorescent light is flickering. The stage is open and vast.

Perspective A (Patient): You are terrified of the "machine" (the Combine)

Perspective B (Aide): You are part of the machine, cold and observant.

(The actor stands under an imaginary hanging light. They look up at it, squinting. The "hum" is loud in their mind.)

"Do you hear that?"

(A long pause. They look toward the upstage Nurse's Station, then back to the audience.)

Most people, they come in here and they see the peeling paint. They see the 1930s concrete and they think the place is dead. They think it's just a tomb where they put the 'broken' ones.

But it's not dead. It's breathing.

(If a **Patient**: You touch the "implied wall" with a shaking hand. If an **Aide**: You slap the column with a heavy hand, asserting ownership.)

Listen to the lights. That buzz... that's the sound of the power moving through the floor. It's the sound of the 'Big Nurse' turning the dials. Every time a Chronic stops screaming, it's because she turned the hum up. Every time a boy like Billy stops stuttering for a second, it's because she turned it down.

(The actor moves toward the 'climbable window' upstage left, looking out into the dark.)

McMurphy thinks he can just break a window and the hum will stop. He thinks he can just walk out into the 1960s and leave the 30s behind. But look at this glass. Look at the wire inside it. This place was built to hold. It was built to outlast us.

(A sudden, sharp look toward the Nurse's Station)

Quiet. She's watching. You can tell when she's watching because the hum gets higher. It gets so high you can taste the copper in your teeth.

(The actor slowly sits or stands perfectly still, becoming part of the 'infrastructure'.)

Don't move. If you don't move... maybe she'll forget which one of us is the machine, and which one is the man."

The Nurse (Generic)

Character: A night nurse or a junior assistant to Ratched. **The Vibe:** Exhausted, cold, and desensitized. She has become as much a part of the architecture as the concrete columns.

*(She is standing near the upstage **Nurse's Station**. She is holding a heavy clipboard. She doesn't look at the patients; she looks through them at the flickering hanging lights.)*

"You get used to the smell after the first month. The bleach doesn't quite cover it—it just sits on top of the rot, like a coat of fresh paint on a crumbling wall.

(She taps her pen against the metal clipboard—a sharp, rhythmic, industrial sound)

Shift starts at 8:00 PM. By 10:00, the building starts to talk. You hear the pipes clanging in the basement—leftovers from the '30s, I think. This place was built to be a fortress, but now it's just a sieve. Everything leaks. The plumbing, the roof... the men.

*(She looks toward the **large escape window**)*

They stare at that window like there's something out there for them. There's nothing out there but more wind and more noise. I told the Aide, Williams, I said: 'Don't bother scrubbing the floor in the Day Room.' Five minutes later, one of the Chronics will have a 'spell' and you're back to square one.

(She looks directly at the audition panel, her expression flat)

People ask me how I work here. How I can stand the hum of those lights and the way the shadows move in the corners. I tell them it's easy. You just have to realize that in this place, the only difference between the ones in the beds and the ones in the caps... is who holds the keys."

Character: Candy Starr

The Vibe: A flash of 1960s neon color against a gray, industrial tomb. She is out of her element, intimidated by the "bigness" of the institution, but trying to keep her "party girl" armour on.

*(She is standing at the **large window**, having just climbed through. She is fixing her hair, looking around the vast, dark, open stage with visible discomfort. She touches a rusted column and pulls her hand back, disgusted.)*

"Jesus, Mac... you didn't tell me it was gonna be like this. It's like a... a factory for ghosts. It's freezing in here! And what's with that buzzing? It's making my teeth ache.

(She takes a step into the center of the stage, her heels clicking loudly on the concrete. She stops, realizing how much noise she's making.)

I feel like the walls are watching me. Not even walls—just the dark. It's too big. How do you guys sleep with all this... this *nothing* around you? Back at my place, you can hear the cars and the music and the cats in the alley. It's tight, you know? It's cozy. But this...

*(She looks up at the **lighting truss/hanging fluorescents**)*

This looks like where they'd take you to forget your own name.

(She suddenly grabs a bottle from her bag—the 'Party' prop—and takes a swig, trying to reclaim her bravado)

Well. I didn't come here to look at the architecture. I came for a party. Come on, Billy... don't look at me like I'm a ghost. I'm real. I'm the only real thing in this whole 1930s nightmare. Turn on that radio, Mac. Let's drown out the sound of this place."