

12. Monkey Pants

In "Monkey Pants," the chapter introduces Dodo, who finds himself in the Pennhurst State Hospital for the Insane and Feeble-Minded recovering from serious injuries sustained from a fall off Miss Chona's roof. As he lies immobilized in a steel crib, he meets a boy dubbed Monkey Pants, a painfully thin child contorted into an awkward position that resembles a monkey. Dodo feels an immediate connection and empathy, naming him after his appearance, though he never learns Monkey Pants' real name.

Dodo's traumatic memories of the accident and feelings of disorientation are compounded by the sights, sounds, and smells of the hospital. His experience involves terrifying handcuffs, confusion upon arrival, and a sense of isolation when he realizes no one is coming for him. The atmosphere of the hospital is oppressive, filled with a suffocating smell that makes him feel claustrophobic and nauseous, culminating in him vomiting on an attendant, which leads to being restrained with a straitjacket.

Upon awakening, he finds himself alone with Monkey Pants. They share a moment of connection despite Dodo feeling overwhelmed by grief and longing for home. Dodo's interactions with Monkey Pants reveal a fierce desire to communicate, even as the latter struggles with his own limitations. What follows is a profound exploration of their friendship, marked by the recognition of their shared plight and the challenges they face within the brutal confines of the mental institution.

Monkey Pants' efforts to communicate become a dance of frustration and perseverance, illuminating their respective struggles. Despite the inadequacies of their physical forms, a bond is formed—Dodo recognizing the wisdom in Monkey Pants' gestures, which appears to convey the importance of silence and survival in a world that seems indifferent to their existence. The chapter illustrates a poignant moment of solidarity as Monkey Pants intentionally soils himself to redirect the attention of others away from Dodo, exemplifying a touching act of friendship amidst adversity.