

Chapter Outlines for *Children of the Resolution.*

Prologue –

Scene-setting. From pov of Marisa Donne (32). She is interviewing Carl Grantham (41) for her dissertation on "educational reform". Mature student. Description of him and his surroundings. In hospital after a bout of pneumonia. Depressed. Carl is not uncommunicative. He is polite, quick to smile but, also, somehow "removed". His smile sometimes suggests he knows things no one else does.

Opening paragraph: "During those daily visits to Carl Grantham I learnt more about humanity than I ever thought possible – not in any way so well-formed that I might readily articulate it. No. My time with him was more subtle than that. Nonetheless, between his lines and sometimes on them, I found an understanding of what it was to be apart, to be within and absorbed... to be included and yet, as we all are, I suppose, ineffably alone."

Chapter One: In the Place of Old Times –

From Carl's pov. Carl tells of his arrival at Sunnyvale School. His parents take him in and, after being shown around, leave him with a young teacher called Miss Porter in a classroom of red-, blue- and green-painted tables and strange-looking children. A sense of abandonment, but not by his parents. It was more profound than that, and nothing he could have articulated at the time. He didn't like the place.

Spends most of the morning crying. Miss Porter is kind and patient, however, telling him that he'll be going home soon. "Forever?" he asks. "No, not forever, Carl," she tells him. "You're a big boy, now, and big boys go to school during the day time." He asks her if he'll be coming to school *every* day and Miss Porter gets the calendar from the wall and shows him the days he will and won't be at school. "Not so bad, hey?" Miss Porter says. Carl starts crying again.

Lunch time is a battle of wills. He eats a little mashed potato, but that's all.

Journey home on bus. Cigarette smoke, making a friend called Tommy Blackbird. Tommy has a useless, malformed left hand and a weak left leg which gives him a "bouncy" limp when he walks. Tommy likes school because "it's warm."

Present Day Interlude –

From Marisa Donne's pov. Carl fills in, tells her how he settled. Came to an autumn fete at the school with his parents, which he hated. "A coming together of two separate worlds" is how the adult Carl describes it.

He is tired. He asks for a drink and she helps him, before leaving to let him rest.

Continuation of Carl's narrative –

Christmas is approaching. Carl and Tommy are excited. Tommy wants a duffel coat for Christmas (because they are warm) and some marbles, Carl wants some clackers and a spud gun.

Whilst on a make-believe “adventure” at playtime, they encounter the able-bodied kids from the school next door. There is a childish argument about not being “normal”. Carl feels more displaced than ever. The conversation almost spoils the Christmas party for him.

Chapter Two: The Ghost of Emiline Brown –

Present Day Interlude –

The following day. Marisa listens as he tells her about Christmas of that year (1973), the family parties, his teenage aunt playing T-Rex records for him, watching [*A Stocking Full of Stars, the banal Black and White Minstrel Show and the wonderful Morecambe and Wise Christmas Show*](#) – all so perfect, in his opinion, when compared to school. Marisa pretends to make notes, but really she's thinking about Carl. He seems so intelligent. Has treated her politely from day one. He seems to care that she gets all the information she needs to do a good job. Gentle and, today, at least, heartbreakingly sad.

“But you had to go back after Christmas,” she says. Carl nods.

Continuation of Carl's narrative –

School assembly. Carl and Tommy sit at the back, whispering. Tommy is talking about Christmas – didn't get his duffel coat, just a “poxy powder blue bomber jacket” that makes him look like a girl. Carl feels “funny”. Something's wrong. The headmaster (Mr. Dixon) is subdued, uncertain of himself. He welcomes them back, they sing *Give Me Oil in My Lamp*, say a prayer, teachers looking at one another furtively, and then return in the frosty January morning to their classrooms.

Miss Porter is uncharacteristically sullen as they go to their places. She smiles and says hello to the children, but it's an obvious struggle. Carl notices that one of the school nurses, Mrs. Wallace, has joined them and worries that they all might have to have an injection or something. Tommy looks at her and mouths “uh oh” at Carl.

Miss Porter eventually tells them that their classmate, Emiline Brown has died over Christmas. Carl looks round at where Emiline normally sat. He hadn't even noticed she was missing – because she'd always seemed to be missing. She'd been such a quiet girl.

A few girls cry. Mrs. Wallace comforts them whilst Miss Porter briefly turns her back on the class and dabs at her eyes with paper tissue.

Playtime. Tommy is talking about ghosts. He reckons Emiline's ghost is already

haunting the school. “I saw this shadowy thing in the window.” They discuss what they should do and arrive at a suitable conclusion; *tell the girls*.

Present Day Interlude –

“A bit cruel,” Marisa says, smiling.

“We were six.”

Continuation of Carl’s narrative –

We find Carl and Tommy sitting utterly dumbfounded, watching as one of the girls, Jenny Jennings, runs around the playground in hysterics. Miss Porter grabs her, kneeling down and doing her best to calm the hyperventilating girl. Finally, Jenny hiccups an explanation and points at Carl and Tommy.

Carl and Tommy sit/stand before Miss Porter’s desk. They are the only ones in the classroom apart from the ghost of Emiline Brown, who seems more present than ever before. They get a telling off, but it’s a gentle one. Miss Porter seems to understand how difficult a situation this is for them to grasp. She tells them not to do it again, and makes them say sorry to Jenny.

Tommy to Carl: “I still saw her.”

Chapter Three: Leaving, but Not On a Jet Plane –

Present Day Interlude –

Marisa wants to move things along a bit. Her main area of interest is Resolution School, to where Carl ultimately moved, and its cutting-edge, quasi-experimental policy of “integration”. She’s wary of rushing him, however, aware of the way in which he seems to be benefiting from talking to her (looks pleased to see her when she arrives, smiles more readily etc.) Nevertheless, she asks him when he first found out that he was going to be moving to a new school.

“It must have been early seventy-six...”

Continuation of Carl’s narrative –

Carl is in another classroom with Tommy. Mrs. Aspel, his current teacher, is telling them that in a few minutes, they’ll be getting some visitors and that she wants them all to be on their best, most polite behaviour. “As you all know, Carl is leaving us at the end of term and starting a new school in September...” First he’s heard of it. Looks at Tommy and shrugs. Carl’s new teachers visiting.

They arrive. Carl is introduced to Mrs. Shires. Tells him all about Resolution. Asks about his interests etc. Carl likes her.

At playtime, Tommy is annoyed. “You didn’t tell me.” “I didn’t know.” They argue,

Tommy calling Carl a liar etc. Tommy wants to go with Carl but he can't. Carl is sorry for him, but is nevertheless pleased that he's the one going rather than staying.

Last day at Sunnyvale School. Tommy has just about forgiven him. It is a bright, warm day. Mrs. Aspel has arranged for them to have a picnic on the school field. Tommy is eating a fistful of cake. Carl isn't hungry; he is afraid and excited, looking forward to the summer holidays but also worried about what is to follow. Tommy tells he's going to Butlins for two weeks in August. It's always cold, but he doesn't mind. Carl doesn't answer so Tommy gives him a nudge.

"We can be pen pals," Tommy says, and Carl nods.

On the bus home, driving out of the school gates, his mood lifts. He remembers Mrs. Shires telling him on her visit that Resolution had a swimming pool and was named after a famous explorer. It was an adventure, she had told him. They were sailing into "uncharted waters" together. Doesn't sound so bad. Sounds good, in fact *dead good*.

And he will write to Tommy.

Present Day Interlude –

"Did you?" Marisa asks. Yes. Once or twice. Tells her that he saw Tommy a few years later at a county sports event. He seemed to be doing well. Sunnyvale had moved to another location by this time. Tommy was being integrated, too. Carl had asked him if his new school was warm. Tommy didn't get the joke.

Chapter Four: Poppies –

September, 1976. Arrives at Resolution. Brand new wheelchair with his name on waiting for him. A friendly nursing auxiliary (plain-clothes, no uniforms) called Mrs. Alexander shows Carl around. Hundreds of poppies in the grounds.

Assembly. His first look at Mr. Johnson – his new headmaster. A scruffy little man, nothing like Mr. Dixon. Mr. Johnson stands a little too erect. He likes people looking at him. Gives a welcome speech, then assigns individual pupils to their respective teachers. Carl is finally with Mrs. Shires. "Ready for that adventure?" she asks him.

The classroom is recessed from an open plan area. No doors on the classrooms. It is bright outside, but it's cool over this side of the school (north-facing windows.) Mrs. Shires takes the register. Belinda is missing. Anyone seen her? Johnny Jameson speaks up for the first time. "Sher-she's snuffed it."

Johnny is G. Describe in detail. Also other classmates: Andrew [Allen] (partially sighted), Louisa Kent [Louise Clark] (partially sighted), Patrick Bond [Peter Fleming] (very bad eczema/asthma), Ananda [a perpetually cheerful Asian girl who's name escapes me], Jim Edwards [John Elwood], Peter Holmes [Paul Watson] (brain-damaged as a result of being hit by a car), and Kelly Karn [Karen Kelly] (cerebral palsy?)

Mrs. Shires explains to them what Resolution is all about. Integration etc. Tells them about Cook's ship, HMS Resolution. She began her career as the North Sea collier *Marquis of Granby*, launched at Whitby in 1770. Cook said of her that she was "the fittest for service of any I have seen." Explains the meaning of the word: being determined. "That's what we are going to be," she says. "Determined to make this new way work, for each and every one of you."

Carl is excited by this. It *is* going to be an adventure. Just like Captain Cook's. Johnny sniffs derisively.

At break, Carl is stunned by all the kids on the playground – kids in uniforms from the Almsby Comprehensive and younger kids from Overfields, the primary school. Everyone is curious about everyone else and Carl is soon surrounded by girls from the two adjacent schools. Mrs. Shires, on duty, gives him a wink.

Present Day Interlude –

"You were popular with the girls," Marisa says. Carl shrugs. For a while. It was all part of the "new frontier optimism". We – some of us, at least – thought anything really *was* possible.

Carl becomes introspective. Marisa realises that she knows hardly anything about him. Introduced by a mutual friend who had believed that, as well as helping Marisa out, the whole process might benefit Carl, she explicitly avoided asking for background info, wanting to hear of Carl's experiences firsthand and draw her own conclusions.

"The optimism was misplaced?"

"Isn't it always?"

Chapter Five: Johnny on the East Cliff –

Carl is writing a composition about "what it would be like to have been Captain Cook". He is physically struggling because the desk height and positioning isn't quite right for him. He writes a couple of lines and then repositions his book, writes a couple more and then repositions it again. He feels Mrs. Shires watching him and feels self-conscious.

Johnny is telling Patrick in a whisper that Evel Knievel can jer-jump just about er-anything. What about the Wembley crash last May, Patrick says. He might have crashed, Johnny insists, but he ster-still cleared the buses. He crashed *after* the jer-jump.

Carl tries to concentrate on writing less conspicuously, but it's difficult, and soon Mrs. Shires comes over and kneels by his table. "You're not comfortable, are you? She says. Carl shakes head. Mrs. Shires asks him what will help and they try a few things. Ultimately, she goes to see Mr. Johnson and brings him back to the classroom to show him the problem.

Mr. Johnson arrives with Mrs. Shires, listens to the problem with an evident lack of patience and, when Mrs. Shires is done, turns one of the grey storage trays over on the table top and says, "That will do." He walks away while Mrs. Shires is still talking. She follows.

While she is away, Johnny talks to Carl about an upcoming school-trip to Staithes and Whitby. Johnny is looking forward to it, not because of the Cook connections but because of the "Draclia" Whitby connection.

Ultimately, Mrs. Shires returns looking angry and frustrated. She says something to Mrs. Alexander, the auxiliary, but Carl doesn't quite catch it. When she's calmed down, she puts the storage tray away and tells Carl she's getting him a new table.

Present Day Interlude –

Marisa is wondering if it all really did start going wrong as early as Carl is suggesting, or if Carl is mixing up his dates. Carl senses her doubt and smiles, telling her to go ahead and say it. She does, and he nods, telling her the cracks did indeed start to show very early on.

"I spoke to her a few years ago and we discussed it in great detail," he says.

Major points of his conversation with Mrs. Shires:

- One of the original 8 teachers recruited to set up the school.
- Teachers would be provided with what was needed for each child so that they could then say – no excuses – get on with it and treat the children the same as they would be in mainstream education.
- The furniture for the children was issued using the same criteria as that for able-bodied children in mainstream schools. The table heights had no reference to the needs of many of the children.
- All the cupboards were fitted floor to ceiling - out of Mrs. Shires' reach so the children had no chance of reaching them. She decided to bring down some of the top cupboards and use them for low storage the children could reach and use the tops for low level displays and access to equipment. Almost caused a strike when the council joiners saw what I had done – not in the union – job demarcation.
- Angry and disillusioned. Just the start of this new concept school.

Continuation of Carl's narrative –

School trip. Carl, Peter Holmes, Patrick Bond and Johnny at the back of the bus – Carl and Johnny in their wheelchairs. Mrs. Alexander driving, Mrs. Shires a few seats ahead of Carl et al. Johnny, his stammer minimal today, is telling Carl, Peter and Patrick all about vampires and Captain Cook. He talks in hushed tones, mixing history and myth shamelessly – as only a 10-year-old boy can. Cook was a vampire. That's why he acted "funny" on his last voyage. He was drinking too much of William Bligh's blood and it was "fer-fucking his head up." Patrick asks how come, then, Cook could survive in daylight. Because *real* vampires can, Johnny insists. Even the

real “Draclia” could, but Ber-Bram Stoker had to give him weaknesses for the story to work. “Worst ther-thing they ever did was name our school after his ship. We’re the fucking ler-living dead. Trust me.”

After a brief stay in Staithes, Johnny unimpressed (“An apprentice *shopkeeper*?”), they arrive at Whitby and head straight for the Abbey and St. Mary’s church, where the majority eat their packed lunches on the bus – it’s raining lightly. Mrs. Shires, Carl, Patrick and Johnny have a look around the graveyard, however, feeling adventurous. Headstones in the path. They take their lunches with them and eat them on a bench behind St. Mary’s, overlooking the harbour. Rain stops. Sun comes out.

Patrick tells Mrs. Shires about Johnny’s theory re Cook being a vampire, and the school being a ship of the living dead. Mrs. Shires admits it wasn’t the best ship to name the school after. She’d have preferred *Endeavour*. But she adds, a little unconvincingly to Carl’s ears, that the school being a ship of the living dead is a bit far-fetched.

Johnny shrugs. And sniffs. Mr. Johnson is Cook on his last voyage. “If he starts kidnapping natives, I’m going ber-back to my old school.” Even Mrs. Shires smiles at this.

Chapter Six: New Horizons, Number One –

The following year, it is explained to Carl that an admin error has seen him put a year ahead of where he should have been (in effect, he had been in Mrs. S’s 4th year junior class instead of the 3rd year class.) This means he has a year to kill before going into the Almsby Comprehensive. Mrs. Shires, who worked in the neighbouring primary before working in the Resolution, has therefore arranged for him to be integrated into Overfields.

First day. Two boys who will be his classmates – Sean Stevens and Graham Crag – come over to collect him. Tell him their teacher, Mr. Page, is very strict. Insists on silence in lessons etc. Carl is as nervous as hell, but makes light of it.

First meeting with Mr. Page – a tall, uncomfortable looking gent, all elbows and knees. He isn’t the fearsome creature Sean and Graham have described. He introduces Carl to the class. Some of the kids ask questions. “Do you sleep at the Resolution?” is one of the more amusing ones.

Mr. Page shows him his desk; an easel-type affair has been made for him. Carl finds it just as difficult to write at, but says nothing.

At break, Carl is the centre of attention. More questions, friendly girls – and then one boy, David Barrows, asks “What’s it like being an ugly spaz, then?” There is silence. Carl knows he has to say something quick. All he can come with is a pseudo-Johnny shrug and “You tell me.” It does the trick, for now, and the laughter is at David’s expense.

Present Day Interlude –

Marisa says that this was something she'd been wondering about. Bullying. There must have been a lot of it, the three schools being so close.

Not as much as you might expect. There's an assumption that disabled kids will get bullied more. Not so? No. It's more complicated than that. That old thing about some people having a victim mentality and attracting trouble, Carl doesn't like that – it puts the onus too much on the one suffering the attacks. But there is a grain of truth to it. “The likes of Johnny and even me,” Carl says. “We had enemies, but we weren't bullied because we learned to be mouthy little sods. Not sure it would work today, but bravado got you a long way in the late-seventies, early-eighties.”

“Today it'd most probably get you stabbed.”

Carl smiles. Marisa likes that smile. “Quite,” he says.

Chapter Seven: Suspicion –

Continuation of Carl's narrative –

Shortly before Christmas 1977, a series of thefts occur in the Resolution. The finger of suspicion falls on someone from Almsby or Overfields – since the two schools still intermingle quite freely (open-door policy.) Mrs. Shires tells Carl about the thefts, and asks if he's heard/seen anything in Overfields. He gets the feeling she doesn't want to ask him, but somehow has to. He answers truthfully. He knows nothing.

What about Sean and Graham? They wouldn't do anything like that. Mrs. Shires seems satisfied.

New rules are introduced. The pupils must stay in their own schools unless they have a good reason for being in the Resolution.

The thefts continue, however, and Johnny and Carl decide during a physiotherapy session that they will have to do some undercover work of their own. (Introduce physiotherapist, Mrs. Christine Redfern.) They determine that they must focus on the most likely suspect – a boy who is diabetic (possibly more wrong with but they don't know what) called Terence Coleman. Terence Coleman is a nasty piece of work. Thinks he's ever so *cool*. Johnny's fed up of him poncing around like he “owns the fer-fucking place.”

Classroom scene in Overfields. Mr. Page is teaching a lesson on [reading map coordinates](#) – lining up the point on the map using rulers. Carl is only half listening. He can do this stuff with his eyes closed. He is thinking about ways in which he and Johnny can ensnare Terence Coleman. Kelly, who pushes herself backward, has had the wing-mirror that Mr. Shires had adapted to fit to her wheelchair stolen and he is livid.

Mr. Page spots that he isn't using his ruler to line up and work out the grid reference. He asks Carl for the answer. Carl glances at the map and gives the six figure reference

(206519). The class is still on four figure references. They laugh, thinking he's got it wrong. Mr. Page, impressed, corrects the class's assumption, holding Carl up as an example of what they should aspire to be like.

Carl wants to disappear.

Carl, Johnny, Sean and Graham are on the Resolution playground by the "cage", where ball games are (rarely) played, watching Terence Coleman and filling Sean and Graham, who have been co-opted to help, in on the details. Sean and Graham don't like the idea of a physical fight, but Johnny assures them it won't come to that and they agree to help.

There's nothing subtle about Johnny. They approach Terence Coleman and Johnny says, "Now then, yer-you fucking theif." Carl, Sean and Graham groan. Accusations and denials. Johnny tells Terence Coleman to return Kelly's wing-mirror and "ster-ster-stop nicking stuff" and he won't "sprag" on him.

Terence Coleman thanks Johnny for this kindness by breaking his arm.

Carl later tells Mrs. Shires what had prompted the assault. She and Mr. Johnson search Terence Coleman's belonging's but find nothing. The thefts, however, stop.

Chapter Eight: New Horizons, Number Two –

Present Day Interlude –

Marisa sits quietly, her notebook forgotten on her lap. Carl has drifted off, staring into space dreamily. She is content to leave him like that for now, watching him and thinking about all the things he's told her. His story, the research for her dissertation aside, fascinates her – and she realises that she feels something for him. A friendship is growing between them. This bothers her a little. She had intended to remain detached. This is just one man's interpretation and she has to allow for bias.

Carl is watching her now. It's late. "You look tired," he says. "Or bored."

"Never bored," she says, but admits to being tired.

Carl: "I'll be here tomorrow."

Marisa: "You better be."

She looks back at him as she's leaving. He's staring into space. She wonders what he's thinking. Wants to know.

Continuation of Carl's narrative –

A bright September morn (1978). Carl, tanned after a good summer of day-trips to Whitby, Scarborough etc, feels too conspicuous in the Resolution wearing his school uniform. His form room is beside the glass corridor that leads over to the Almsby

Comp. Not at this stage fully-integrated, he still has to register in the Resolution. He knows most of those with him only a little, but isn't worried; he won't be seeing them during the rest of the day, as they'll all most probably be in different classes.

One girl, Anna Hart (spina bifida), he knows from Sunnyvale School. The chat and find that they, at least, will be in the same class, 1B. Carl is relieved that he'll know someone, but also a little pissed off; in Overfields, he was the only disabled kid in the school, and he liked it that way. His status seems somehow diminished.

Almsby. English in the library with Mr. Lance – a young-ish teacher who always has his shirt sleeves rolled. Carl sits, reluctantly, with Anna and two Almsby girls, Carrie Dunn and Dawn Ross. Carl feels all the more conspicuous because he's sitting with three girls.

Mr. Lance chats with him about what he likes to read. Carl tells him he likes horror fiction. Mr. Lance finds him a lousy sci-fi novel. Apparently, Mr. Lance doesn't think there's much difference; Carl knows there is.

At break, he returns to the Resolution to see Johnny, who isn't "clever enough ter-to be integrated". They hang out near the cage (which is now damaged, with gaping holes in it), with Johnny's new friend, Owen Alderman, who has Duchenne MD like Johnny. Johnny also uses an electric wheelchair now, like Carl, but Johnny is noticeably weaker than when they first met two years earlier, and more hunched and bear-like.

Carl is quiet. Johnny asks what's up. Nothing. "Is it the sher-sher-shits?" No, just not what he was expecting. He remembers feeling out of place wearing his uniform in the Resolution earlier that morning. He'd thought it would be better once he got over Almsby. It wasn't.

Chapter Nine: Divided Loyalties –

Slowly, Carl finds a place for himself in Almsby. He doesn't even mind being around Carrie Dunn, who he quite likes. He especially likes watching her on the trampoline. In her leotard.

Mr. Roberson, his maths teacher, seems keen to involve Carl. Asks him if he plays chess, which he does.

At Mr. Roberson's invitation, he joins the Chess Club, where he meets Matt Stokes and Allen Barnaby.

Carl's chess skills are erratic. His mind drifts and he loses focus. He is beaten time and again by Matt, simply because he rushes moves. During one game, he dominates throughout but stupidly loses his queen in royal fork. Matt comes back to win.

Carl attends physiotherapy three lunchtimes a week. He arrives one particular Wednesday to find Johnny and Owen already there, waiting for Mrs. Redfern. He greets them and they blank him. Asks what is wrong and gets no response. Tries

again, getting annoyed, and Johnny finally looks at him. “Thought you w-were too fucking good for us,” Johnny says. Apparently, Carl is a “sly”. They argue and when Mrs. Redfern arrives, things still aren’t resolved.

“Lover’s tiff?” Mrs. Redfern quips.

In R.E. that afternoon, he tells Matt about his dilemma. Matt suggests inviting Johnny to Chess club. “Mr. Roberson won’t mind.” Carl doesn’t want that. Doesn’t even know if Johnny can play chess. Matt tells him that he, Carl, is ashamed of Johnny. Carl vehemently objects. “It’s just... I can’t be in both schools at once.” Then invite him over.

Present Day Interlude –

Marisa wonders about Carl’s objection. Was it possible that he was ashamed of Johnny? She very carefully broaches the subject. Carl smiles. He’s sitting up in his wheelchair today, dressed, and the two of them are seated in a small garden at the back of the hospital. Sunny, pleasant day.

“I’ve considered that many times,” he says. “I was always happy to be seen with Johnny.” Johnny was no wishy-washy, namby-pamby cripple. He was a bruiser. There was nothing *to* be ashamed of.

Marisa lets the subject drop, still not wholly convinced. She asks him, not sure if it’s an imposition, concerned that he might tell her to mind her own business, how his recovery’s coming along, how he’s feeling. Carl replies positively. This is helping, he admits. Was directionless. Got himself in a bit of a “funk” after being ill. “I could see how good my life was – *is* – but it just didn’t help. Apparently, it’s reactive.”

“The trick is not to get ill again, then.”

“Or learn to react more positively.”

“Easier said than done, though.” Marisa has been there. Was bullied in her teens. Hit her hard. They talk about her for a while.

“I’d have watched out for you,” he tells her. She knows he would have, too.

Continuation of Carl’s narrative –

He finally plucks up courage to invite Johnny to Chess Club. Johnny is alone by the cage, blowing his nose on a tartan handkerchief. Carl approaches cautiously. Johnny looks at him. Smiles. “Ner-now then, stranger.”

Carl apologises. Johnny tells him to forget it, saying, “I was a prat.” Carl says it was wrong of him, Carl, not to come over more. “You’ve got to have other mer-mer-mates,” Johnny insists. Johnny doesn’t say as much, but they both know why; Johnny will be dead within the next five to ten years, Carl, all things being equal, has a comparatively long life ahead of him.

“Wanna come to Chess Club with me? Mr. Roberson said it would be all right.”

“Nah. I’d only humiliate them all with my mer-mating skills.”

Chapter Ten: Sweet Rock Musical –

Autumn, 1980. Early in his third year in Almsby. He spends his time between the two schools, even though he is now “fully integrated” and on the Almsby register. Carl now sports an earring. He still doesn’t feel cool enough.

His obsession with Carrie persists. Watches her at break, Johnny saying, “Ask her, you fucking mong.” He doesn’t, though. Not yet.

Carl, Johnny and Owen are in physio when Mrs. Patricia Green passes through on her way to the hydrotherapy pool. She is an old-school hippy, bohemian. Montessori trained. Teaches music in the Resolution. Plays the sitar. She asks if Carl, Johnny and Owen would like to go and see a sweet rock musical that her brother had written and produced. They’ll need parental permission to stay out late. It’s a long drive. They all jump at the chance.

After physio, Carl makes the push and approaches Carrie, who is sitting on a low wall by herself. They chat about some English lit homework they’ve been set for *Of Mice and Men* (*How does Steinbeck present loneliness and isolation in the novel?*), and then fall silent. Finally, he asks her and she says yes.

Night of the musical. Carl is disappointed to discover that it’s a “sweet rock” retelling of Solomon and Sheba – entertaining, but not sufficiently so to prevent him from thinking of Carrie and wishing she was with them. It feels odd being out with a bunch of other disabled kids. Carrie would have made him feel more like himself.

On the way home on the bus – 11:30 p.m. – Mrs. Green tells him that she is planning on putting on one of her brother’s other pieces at the Resolution. A (predictably) “sweet rock” version of *A Christmas Carol*. Carl is enthusiastic. Yes, he would like to audition. Mrs. Green gives him a script there and then.

Present Day Interlude –

“I spent the weekend learning every part, word perfect, over the weekend,” he tells Marisa. “I was so excited, although I never would have admitted it. It was something I’d always secretly wanted to do.”

“A closet drama queen?” Marisa teases.

“A male Judy Garland – without all the gay overtones, of course.”

“Naturally.”

Continuation of Carl’s narrative –

Carl sees Carrie on Monday morning during break. He almost avoids her because Matt is with him and he knows he'll get a ribbing. He doesn't, though – talking to her about the play on Friday night, *almost* telling her that he'd wished she'd been there when Matt goes over to talk to Johnny, and then recounts the conversation on the bus with Mrs. Green, how he plans on auditioning. She is pleased for him, but the conversation is stilted and a little uncomfortable. Carl doesn't know if this – Carrie – is what he wants. He thought it would be different.

Returns to Matt and Johnny. They don't rib him. He wishes they would.

That afternoon, heading for the bus, Mrs. Green catches him. She is solemn and he knows right away that something is wrong. He can't be in the play. Mr. Johnson has pointed out to her that this is a Resolution production and Carl is no longer a Resolution pupil. She's ever so sorry, if it was up to her etc. Carl is gracious but disappointed.

His first big lesson in how the world works.

Present Day Interlude –

“Integration was just another form of exclusion.”

Chapter Eleven: The Show Must Go On –

Continuation of Carl's narrative –

Christmas, 1980.

Carl has “finished” with Carrie, fearing that she was going to “finish” with him first. He didn't actually want it to end, he just didn't want to be the one who was dumped.

Johnny is unwell. Matt wants Carl to attend Chess Club, but Carl explains that he thinks Johnny might be on his last legs. He's much weaker, more hunched and a lot quieter than usual. Matt is a little shocked. “He's dying?” Yes. “But you have the same disease, don't you?” No. Carl explains the difference. Matt doesn't attend Chess Club. Goes with Carl to see Johnny.

It's snowing. They find Johnny with Owen in the glass corridor that joins the two schools. Carrie is there with Anna Hart. Carl looks at her, fearing the worst; she only smiles at him, however. Relieved, he smiles back.

Johnny is coughing. Matt pats him on the shoulder. “How you doing, mate?” Jer-just fine ‘n’ fucking dandy. You? Matt says that he's okay – a little sheepishly, after Johnny's snarled reply.

Johnny has something planned. Revenge for an incident in which he has had 50 house points taken away, been named by Mr. Johnson in assembly and, at Mr. J's instigation, been sent to Coventry. This is why he's been quiet. Not dying (yet), simmering with rage. Carl had been with Johnny during the incident. Physio

cancelled.

Johnny had been in an Environmental Studies lesson. Carl had sat in. Auxiliary, Mrs. Cullum comes in. Small classroom. She asks if anyone needs the toilet. Johnny says “no” and she then proceeds to tell the teacher *why* Johnny said no. Suffers with constipation. Has to sit and strain for a while etc. The whole class can hear.

Johnny’s rage builds and he finally says, “Will you shut the fuck up?”

Back in the corridor, Carl asks him what he has planned – and if he thinks it wise to rock the boat any more. Doesn’t know what he’s going to do, yet, but what has he got to lose? “More house points?” Ler-like I’m gonna care. He wants to know if Carl will help. Get the fer-fuckers back for not letting you audition. Carl is wary, but daren’t say no.

The afternoon of the first performance of the sweet rock musical. Almost Christmas. The show is being put on on the Almsby stage, which *really* pisses Carl off. The schools are separate unless it suits *them* for them not to be.

He sits with Johnny, who still hasn’t come up with a plan. “We need to get something done before Christmas,” Carl says. Johnny agrees, but he’s stumped. Carl gets the feeling Johnny’s having second thoughts.

He isn’t. During the show, Johnny takes very ill. Vomits. Has trouble breathing. He is taken away in an ambulance. Carl and Owen watch him go in silence, Carl wondering if they’ll ever see him again.

Chapter Twelve: Entropy –

Present Day Interlude –

Marisa and Carl are outside in the garden again. Carl has been telling her about his own health problems during the early-eighties – spinal-fusion, rejection of the Harrington rods. She’s amazed that he could have endured all this and still returned to school so quickly. Carl tells her he’d wanted to, even though it was tough. “I was scared. Johnny recovered, but he was off school more and more – and when he was there...” he trails off. “I was scared I was going the same way.”

“But you weren’t.”

“No. But it felt like I was sometimes. It wasn’t a nice time. All that promise. It just... lost energy...”

They sit quietly together. Marisa knows that Carl’s story isn’t over, yet. There’s much more to come. But she knows that their time together will soon draw to a close – and she finally admits to herself that she can’t allow that to happen. She doesn’t know *what* she feels for Carl, but she knows she wants him to remain a part of her life, and she his.

She carefully broaches the subject. When this is all over, when he's finished telling her his story and he's back home, can she still come and see him?

Carl says he'd like that.

Continuation of Carl's narrative –

By the spring of '82, Carl feels like a very different person. Wearing a spinal brace 24/7, he seldom feels all that comfortable in his skin. Being fifteen doesn't help. Not as confident as he once was, though he hides it well. He struggles to make up the lost ground and largely succeeds, but he is almost continually exhausted. Not eating properly.

His tutor, Mr. Dixon, keeps him back one morning. Wants a chat. Carl is wary, even though Mr. Dixon is one of the "good guys", like Mrs. Shires was. Mr. Dixon has been hearing good things about Carl's progress and so far he's managed 100% attendance this term. He's impressed, but doesn't want Carl overdoing it. "Mam and Dad wouldn't let me." Mr. Dixon knows. Carl is lucky having the parents he has etc. "Just make sure they're equipped with the full facts. Don't hide how hard it is from them, Carl."

Carl says he won't, even though he knows that that's just what does and will keep doing.

"There's more than one way to crack an egg," Mr. Dixon tells him cryptically as he leaves.

In physio, Johnny is suffering some discomfort when he breathes. Mrs. Redfern, together with another physio, Mrs. Malvern, tries to figure out what's wrong. Carl recognises Johnny's problem from before he had his spinal fusion; his ribs are rubbing against his pelvis when he breathes – more noticeable to Johnny because he's lost a lot of weight. Mrs. Redfern and Mrs. Malvern try to pad him with foam. It doesn't help.

The room is cold.

While Mrs. Redfern is on the phone in her adjoining office and Mrs. Malvern is out of the room, Carl asks him how he's doing. Johnny tells him he feels like crap – and everyone's pretending. He can't stand that. Pretending what? Don't yer-you fucking start.

"Make sure they ner-know," he tells Carl, but doesn't get chance to ask what (and later forgets all about it.) Mrs. Redfern returns. She notices how cold the room is. Tries to close an open window. It's jammed solid. While she tries to unstick it, Carl looks about Johnny. The school now looks as exhausted as Johnny. Carl wonders what happened. Where did all that energy and promise go – his own, the school's and Johnny's?

Johnny is leaving at the end of the school year. Carl wonders if the three of them will make it that long.

Chapter Thirteen: Revolutions that Never Happened –

The end of the school year (1982) is approaching. The fifth formers have now finished their exams and left – leaving Carl’s year the oldest in the school.

Cue “June Week” – a week that aims to nourish organisational skills, independence etc. Also, it is meant to be fun. One afternoon of the week, Thursday, they are told in the year meeting in the hall, is set aside for them to do whatever they wish. The only snag is, they have to organise it themselves. Carl, Matt and Allen quickly decide what they want to do. In whispers, while the Head of the Upper School, Mr. Oswald, fills them in on the rest of the week – including an orienteering exercise out Barnard Castle way – they discuss the possibility of getting access to the computer room so that they can work on their course work projects for a bit and then play a few games. It’s agreed. The three of them will approach Mr. Xavier, the Computer Studies teacher, at break time and see what can be arranged.

This arranged during break, Mr. Xavier very impressed by the request, they settle down to a morning of Communication & Relationship-Building Activities. They play a variation of [Minefield](#) – Carl doing the calling out and excelling at it, Matt wearing the blindfold. Carl feels better than he has in a long while, tired but with his old self-confidence a little more in evidence. During a [NASA Survival Exercise: Survival on the Moon](#), Carl takes control and manages the inevitable conflicts.

After the session, the facilitator takes Carl aside and congratulates him on a job well done. “Your communication and mediation skills are impressive,” she tells him. “Thought of counselling as a career?” Not really. “Don’t rule it out.”

During lunch break, Carl sits with Johnny on the Resolution’s playground – looking out over the school field. Carl remembers what it was like that first autumn. The poppies (or did he just imagine them?), the girls – the sense of promise. The world had seemed a newer place, glam-rock on its way out, the soon-to-be punk movement heralding another revolution that never happened. There’s now talk of incorporating the senior section of the Resolution into a yet-to-be-built special unit within Almsby, and Carl wonders if that will really change anything. Special units still have walls.

It’s a hot day. Carl is in shirt sleeves, Johnny, in spite of the heat, his favourite blue polo neck jumper. Johnny seems a little brighter – telling Carl all about the new “college” he’s going to in September. They focus on crafts and “ster-stuff”. Johnny has decided that he wants to carve animals from wood for a “living”. This sounds very unlike Johnny, but Carl lets it pass. Johnny is excited and he’s glad.

“Will ya mer-miss me?” Johnny grins. Carl at first thinks that Johnny means when he, Johnny, dies. He means when he leaves, of course. The answer to both questions is, however, the same; yes.

Chapter Fourteen: The Duffel Coat He Never Got –

Present Day Interlude –

Marisa Donne sits by Carl's empty bed, alone. Carl is seeing his consultant. His final session before his parents come to pick him up and take him home. She is thinking about what Carl has most recently told her – the summer before his final year, glad to be away from Almsby and the Resolution. He speaks briefly about his parents, who she's hoping to meet today – about the ease of the summer holidays, their concern that he would do well in his exams, their almost complete lack of awareness (down to his playing his cards close to his chest) of how unlikely that is, the days at Whitby with family friends, only occasionally thinking of Johnny and how he was doing. She is more aware than ever just how completely Carl kept the two worlds of school and home apart. Home, she believed, was his refuge – and she wants to meet the two people who had made it so.

When Carl returns, he's surprised to find her still here. Thought I'd stick around a while longer. Finally meet these parents yours. She expects him to object – thinking, again, about how he always did his best to keep his “worlds” separate – but he doesn't. Instead, he merely tells her how glad he's going to be to get out of hospital.

His parents arrive. Carl introduces them. It is awkward, but they appear to be nice people. Marisa likes them. Carl's father, Bob, asks her about her dissertation while Sonia, Carl's mother, packs his things. “He been helpful?” Bob asks.

“Very. I would never have got information like this elsewhere.”

Bob looks at Carl with something like sadness, something like pride.

Continuation of Carl's narrative –

Early Winter 1982. Carl is once more feeling the strain. He feels the cold weather more than he once did, taking longer than usual to warm up in lessons. Sitting in T.D. one Monday morning, trying to get his hands warm enough to continue working on his drawing of a mortise lock, he thinks back to Tommy Blackbird and the duffel coat he never got. A lesson for life if ever there was one. Like Tommy, he now only yearns for warmth – the simplest of comforts.

Mr. Hitchens, his T.D. teacher and now acting headmaster. He reminds Carl of Jim Bowen. Smashing. Marvellous. Super.

When he sees that Carl hasn't progressed very far, Mr. Hitchens sits on the desk beside him and asks what the problem is. Carl explains and Mr. Hitchens leaps into action. He and Matt move Carl's large, adapted T.D. desk closer to the radiator. It helps, but only a little.

At break, he reluctantly goes outside. He wants to see Carrie, there's something on his mind – (*warmth*) – but he is distracted when he spots Johnny, who has by this point left, sitting by one of the doors to the Resolution. He looks terrible. More shrunken than ever – a human cave-in, pale and thin and irrevocably lost. Carl approaches him

enthusiastically and Johnny's face lights up... a little. Couldn't mer-manage at the college. Brought him back here until they find somewhere better for him. He seems depressed and Carl has to fight the urge to make his excuses and leave. They talk about the Resolution. Johnny says, "Is it getting worse, or did I 'magine it?" It's getting worse – though Carl wonders if it's just that their perspectives have changed, too.

Johnny has a coughing fit and goes in. Carl goes with him to the nurse when Johnny's cough gets worse. Mrs. Redfern is there. When the nurse takes Johnny into the M.I. room, saying that she thinks Johnny needs to be at home, Mrs. Redfern and Carl look at each other. They say nothing.

Shortly before Christmas, Carl finally talks to Carrie. (Johnny hasn't been back since his coughing fit. Mention.)

He finds her alone in the corridor between schools, on his way to physio. It's an icy but clear day. The light is unforgiving, but Carrie still looks pretty. She tells him about a Saturday job she's got, working in a children's respite centre. Carl knows the one she means – some of the younger, more severely disabled Resolution kids go there. He tells her he's sure she'll do a great job etc. She isn't quite so convinced. She wants to go into nursing but she doesn't think she's up to it academically. Carl has had a lot of experience of nurses over the past couple years and he knows she'll do just fine.

And then he asks her. She seems to have been expecting it. She shakes her head and quietly says no. He tells her that it won't be like before. She knows, but she can't. Why? I don't want to. Carl understands, or thinks he does. He looks borderline-ill most of the time, now. He's improved since having the rejected bars removed from his back, but still he isn't what he once was. One day, he thinks he will be. But today isn't that day.

He smiles to show there are no hard feelings and asks if she'd like to walk down to physio with him. She smiles and nods.

Mrs. Redfern is waiting for him. She looks subdued but is polite to Carrie, showing enthusiastic interest when Carl tells her that Carrie is working at the respite centre and wants to be a nurse.

When Carrie leaves, Mrs. Redfern grows more grave. Carl thinks he's done something wrong. No. She has some bad news. Johnny died. That morning. Wanted to be the first to tell him because she knew they were good friends. Carl is shocked, even though he'd pretty much expected it. He doesn't get emotional, though. Mrs. Redfern watches him carefully, expecting something he can't provide. They talk about Johnny, laughing at some of his escapades. Mention his "chicken" game down the school's front ramp.

When the conversation peters out, Mrs Redfern says, "So tell me about Carrie. She fancies you, you know."

Like, right. He tells Mrs. Redfern what has just happened. "Playing hard to get. Ask

her again. Promise me.” He promises.

Final day of goodbyes. Exams (a train-wreck) behind him. Visits his first classroom. Mrs. Shires long gone. Memories. Teachers. Visits Mr. Dixon who shakes his hand and wishes him well. “Don’t forget what I told you about that egg.” Finish with Carrie. She’s going to the same sixth form college as him. Tells himself he’ll ask her again then, but never does.

Chapter Fifteen: Acceptance and Its Not-So-Thinly-Veiled Counterpart –

East Park Sixth Form College. September 1983. First day. Carl feels at once liberated but also extremely alone. Of all his school experiences it reminds him most of his first day at Sunnyvale School. He feels cast adrift as, on the main concourse of the entrance area, he looks about for familiar faces. A sense of isolation, brief but intense, and then he sees someone he knows – Allen Barnaby, who wasn’t meant be coming here. He changed his mind. Carl has never been so pleased to see anyone in his life.

While they are talking a large (not fat) woman approaches. She introduces herself as Gail (32-ish), his assigned auxiliary. Carl had not expected this. Allen gives him an amused smile and says he’ll see him in the common room when he’s done.

Gail is amused. “Am I going to ruin your reputation?” Carl likes her immediately. “Clean slate,” he says. “I have no reputation to ruin.”

Present Day Interlude –

Carl and Marisa are in his parents living room. Sonia has just brought them tea and biscuits. “So you weren’t totally cast adrift?” Not quite – though Gail did only work half days. They discuss how preposterous this was and Carl outlines the college’s other failings. Stairs inside, having to go through the car park (in all weather) to get from the common room to the classrooms. Carl’s mood is light and he talks about his hair back then – its extravagant style and colour, the way going out in the wind ruined his “look”. Marisa likes hearing him talk like this. He catches her smiling to herself.

“What?”

“Poser... I want to see photos.” Etc.

“Don’t hold your breath. I hated cameras back then and avoided them like my life depended on it.” Why? He was a mess. Quotes Soft Cell’s song, *The Art of Falling Apart*. “My cigarette diet / means my throat hurts like hell / My friends say I’m dying / but I do it so well.” Wasn’t eating properly, pushing himself too hard – but he was popular, and that was what mattered most.

Continuation of Carl’s narrative –

Common room. A typical lunch time. Describe “our” corner. Chairs, settee, limbs – Marie Wales, sitting besides Carl, manages to spill drinking chocolate on Carl’s white Italian shoes. Amid much laughter and tongue-in-cheek complaints from Carl, Marie

and Sharon Warburton, get some paper towels and do their best to clean his shoes (white socks, too!)

Gail comes in halfway through. Suggestive comment concerning girls kneeling down in front of Carl, “again”. She’s come to tell him he has an appointment with the careers advisor on December 3rd. Carl thanks her and makes a note of it.

When she’s gone, talk turns to Christmas. Jack “Eddie” Masters [Pugsley] insists they must decorate their part of the common room. Nazrul Sahadev [Sunil] says he’s a devout Muslim and can’t sanction that. Eddie tells him not to be such a prick – they all know he’s a licentious atheist like the rest of them. Nazrul: “Good point. I’ll get the tree then, shall?”

Carl is in English, sitting beside Carrie. He’s telling he thinks preparations for Christmas are going to get out of hand. There’s talk of booze. Carrie reckons it sounds like fun and Carl agrees. An awkward moment. Carl considers asking her again, but doesn’t feel up to taking another knock-back. He feels like he’s getting a chest infection. He has a coughing fit – reminding himself of Johnny – and Mrs. Moore excuses him. Carrie is told to go with him, to make sure he’s all right.

Outside, in the car park, the icy air helps him recover. Carrie is concerned, but Carl laughs it off. If he asked her now, he knows she’d say yes – for all the wrong reasons, he foolishly believes. He’ll never ask her. He knows that now.

Appointment with new careers advisor. He doesn’t feel qualified to help with Carl “particular career requirements”. Carl insists they are much the same as anyone else’s, to no avail. The careers advisor says he will arrange an appointment for Carl with someone more specialised in “this area”.

“What area?”

He gets no direct reply.

Back in the common room with Allen and Nazrul, Carl is unusually quiet. The three of them should be in a Liberal Studies class (Current Affairs) but can’t be arsed going. Carl feels rough and pissed off. Naz asks him what’s wrong. Annoyed. He tells them why. Naz reckons it could be a good thing. Carl insists it’s not. It’s the thin end of the wedge. A fucking policy change and it gives him a bad feeling.

Chapter Sixteen: Wicker Baskets and Stuff –

Exams are approaching. Carl sits with Naz in Computer studies – the two of them sharing a prehistoric Z80a-based computer. Naz has pretty much completed his projects, but Carl is a little behind. The weather has warmed up a little, but still he feels cold. He’s also depressed, though he’s hiding it well. Everything seems pointless. He knows he has the mental ability to do anything he sets his mind on – but the world, and even the integrated education system, wasn’t built with him in mind. Attempts to level the playing field have been token and insufficient and he doesn’t know how much more he has left in him.

Carl has been trying to design a program that will allow people with limited mobility to type efficiently using only two keys/switches. He's not happy with it but Naz seems impressed. "You knew people who'd need something like this, right?" Thinks of Johnny. How much easier than using a pencil it would have been for him etc. "Yes."

"Makes you thank your lucky stars, eh?" Naz says. Carl realises something; Naz doesn't see him as one of the people who they are discussing. Carl's disability is a distant thing to Naz. Carl is no longer sure if this a good or bad thing.

Outside the M.I. room, where he is to meet his new careers advisor, Carl waits with Gail. "You look tired." He's fine – just been staring at a computer screen for too long.

Inside M.I. room. Alone with new careers advisor. She focuses very strongly on her area of expertise; An, as Carl sees it, antiquated and offensive view of "disability".

She makes a number of suggestions, without really seeming all that concerned about what he wants.

- Can get him a job tomorrow, working at something tedious like train station announcer etc. ("I would think the fact that I'm taking Computer Studies and Physics suggests I want something a bit more than that.")
- Could see that he's enrolled in a residential rehab scheme. ("I've been disabled all my life – why on earth would I need rehabilitating now?")
- There's a local employment centre where some from the Resolution have gone – "Do you know Colleen Berkshire?" ("I was integrated into Almsby. No.") They make craft products. ("Wicker baskets and stuff? I don't think so.")

He is being obstructive with good reason. Her suggestions are preposterous. She asks for his phone number so that she can discuss it with his parents. "These are my decisions, not theirs. They'll tell you that." Still wants his number. "We're in the process of moving and we'll be changing it. I'll let you know when I know what it is." An outright lie. Carl is happy to see that she seems to realise this.

"There are only so many doors open to you, Carl, and if you keep closing them it's going to make life very difficult for us."

"I understand that, but now that you mention it, there is a currently closed door that you help me with."

They both know which one he means.

Outside in the hallway, Gail is waiting for him. She looks amused when she sees Carl's face. "Any good?" "Complete waste of fucking time. Seven years of integrated, mainstream education for what? Wicker fucking baskets, that's what."

Gail ushers him through some double doors onto the main concourse, chuckling but

trying to shut him up. “You do realise she was still behind you when you were saying all that, don’t you?” Good. Will only confirm what she already knew, anyway. He tells Gail the full story. “Really? That’s ridiculous.”

Common room with Eddie, Naz, Allen and Carrie. Eddie: “You should’ve told the old bint to go fuck herself, mate.” Carrie: “It’s like they’ve spent seven years showing you what you can have only to try to take it away from you.” Naz: “*Wicker fucking baskets?* That’s for incontinent stroke victims, surely.” Eddie: “Where do they find these people?”

Carl appreciates their support but wonders if she was right. He’s struggling, after all.

Gail comes in. “Been talking to your new friend. Said she was worried about your unreasonable obstructiveness. I told her it sounded perfectly reasonable to me. – Oh, and she asked if you really were in the process of moving. I said ‘yes’.” Thanks.

Naz: “I didn’t know you were moving.”

Present Day Interlude –

Marisa: “Was she right?”

Carl: “No. I had problems, that’s true – but it was her job to realistically address my career needs. You can’t educate someone and then make half-arsed suggestions like that.”

They are outside in the garden together, sitting in the sun. Carl looks well – peaceful and happy with his place in the world. Marisa knows this can’t be the end, now. For all his problems, she has grown too close to him to just walk away when her work is done.

They sit quietly, listening to the trickle of water in the fountain. Marisa’s hand is on the arm of her chair, not far from Carl’s. While they both turn their faces up to the sun, he takes hold of her hand. She gladly lets him.

Chapter Seventeen: The Art of Falling Apart –

Winter, 1984. Carl has returned after failing – as the vast majority did – all his exams. Sitting in computer studies with Naz, he grows increasingly disillusioned. “No wonder we failed. We weren’t taught this stuff last year.” Whispered conversation regarding course differences.

Mrs. Portnoy – Computer Studies teacher and a huge, black American – hears them talking and asks Carl if there’s something he’d like to share. Carl doesn’t like Mrs. Portnoy, ever since she overheard and got pissed off about his Portnoy’s Complaint joke (“It’s got to be piles – I mean, just look at the face on it.”) He has ever since suffered her “Roth”. Another joke she doesn’t like.

He tells her that, no, there isn't something he'd like to share.

"Then please stop disturbing the rest of the class." Wasn't aware I was. Carl feels like shit and really doesn't need her attitude. They have an exchange of words. Carl is past caring about the consequences. When they reach an impasse, Carl gets back on with his flow chart.

Later that week, he is in the common room with Carrie. They hardly see each other now, and it's nice to talk to her for a while. She has a free period, Carl is meant to be in physics. Carrie tells him he should go, she'll walk up with him etc. Carl's had enough. He rants a little about how all their efforts are token (no ramps inside etc) and he just can't be bothered.

"That bad?"

Nods. "I'm exhausted, Carrie."

"Not school, is it?" That was bad enough but, no, it isn't. This is worse.

They talk about school. He tells her about Johnny, who she knew distantly. She doesn't know he died. He nods. Tells her the mixed-up story that Johnny told them on the trip to Whitby. Thought they were all the living-dead.

Carrie: "It was just a story."

"Was it?"

Carl opens up as he never before has to a friend. He's scared. He's not like Johnny, not dying – but he will if he continues this way. Exhausted. Doesn't care anymore. But what if he stops? What if he quits? It'll have all been pointless. It'll prove it didn't work for me. Should never have been integrated etc.

Carrie is sympathetic but firm. He can't do anything if he doesn't look after his health first. "You always were stubborn. Don't leave it too late, Carl – like you always do."

He knows Carrie is offering him a way back, but he has too much to think of. He doesn't even know if she's what he wants anymore – or, more to the point, if he has anything to offer her. If college is physically too demanding, which he is now admitting to himself it is, how will he ever hold down a job? He goes to the window, looks out as he remembers Johnny telling he that he, Johnny, couldn't "mer-manage at the college". It won't be like that for him. He'll find his own way. That's how it has to be. On his terms, he might succeed – on theirs he never will. He'll write books, teach himself everything he needs to know. He'll make sure *they know*, as Johnny had wanted – "The chronicling of forgotten mistakes..." Everything. He would get himself well and write it all down.

He turns to Carrie. "I'm leaving." Smiling.

"I know."

Present Day Interlude –

Marisa finds that she's incredibly relieved to have reached the end of this part of Carl's story – relieved that he lived when he might not have, had not made the decision to leave, relieved that he was now sitting beside her, still holding her hand.

“So did you write about Johnny?” Tried a few times, failed. Wrote other books, lots, which didn't sell.

“Try again. Write it now.”

Epilogue – They Knock Them Down, but We're Still There.

From Marisa's P.O.V.

Car journey. Marisa and Carl in the back, Bob and Sonia in the front. Visiting the sites of Carl's old schools.

Nothing left of Sunnyvale School. Once new council housing – the area as rough as it ever was, the school long gone but the memories as fresh as ever.

The four of them discuss:

- His first day from Sonia's perspective. Heartbreaking. It all seemed so *wrong* but no other options were available to them.
- Bob: “He wasn't disabled to us. He was bright and... just our Carl.” To Carl: “What's that quote you're fond of about human dignity?” Human dignity is a matter of social permission. “Aye, well there's a lot of truth to it.” Etc.

The Resolution, Overfields and Almsby are still standing – though radically remodelled, rebuilt, reassigned. It's the school holidays so they park in the carpark as Carl explains how the senior section of the Resolution became fully incorporated into Almsby after he left. He's unsure of the details, how successful this approach was, and he's not sure he really cares anymore. He's fought his battles. Now it's the turn of others.

Like Sunnyvale, East Park Sixth Form College has been demolished and replaced with private housing. Marisa: “Places to live, but fewer places to learn.”

Carl: “They can always build a new Peter Vardy faith school. My experience was far from perfect – but at least it wasn't as disabling as it could be today.”

The old haunts behind them, they finish the day at Whitby. Marisa and Carl sit in the car down by the harbour while Bob and Sonia go for a walk, looking up at the Abbey. Marisa has her arm linked through Carl's. She knows he's tired, and that he's remembering Johnny again. But he's happy and she's glad.

“Penny for them.”

“I was just thinking...” she looks at him expectantly... “maybe I’m finally ready for another adventure.”