

Children of the Resolution.  
A Novel by Gary William Murning

**Prologue.**

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 subtler 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.

I had been told by my friend, Andrea, that he might not be up to talking to me. He was still fairly weak and if he was feeling as down as he on occasion had been, the interview might well be over before it had even started. It had been a bad and unexpected bout of pneumonia, and this on top of his existing condition had apparently highlighted a vulnerability he'd thought he'd succeeded in side-stepping. I was therefore anxious about the welcome I might receive, hoping for the best but, as my mother had always taught me, expecting the worst.

It was a bright day in late April when I walked tentatively onto Ward Seventeen of the James Cook Memorial Hospital, the watery but welcome sunlight filtering through the filthy fourth floor windows and lending a dubious cheer to the otherwise dreary surroundings. Andrea had told me that Carl Grantham could be found at the far end of the ward's main corridor, in a six-bedder with "a beautiful view of nothing worth mentioning", and so I strode purposefully past the nurses station, crowded with gossiping nurses, as I would have expected, wondering if I would be able to recognise him from the description Andrea had given me.

*Thin and long, hair cropped short and greying. Handsome as a dying poet.*

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Carl Grantham sat in his bed, dressed in pyjamas and dressing gown (which didn't seem to come naturally to him, judging by the way he constantly fidgeted and rearranged them), staring out of the window at the sky, a forgotten book in his lap. I knew him immediately. It could have been no one else. Not usually so precise, Andrea had been bang on the button. He was the only one in that room of coughing and farting men, most of them much older than Carl's forty-one years, that fit that description—fit it perfectly, if I'm honest.

I stood unnoticed in the doorway for a moment, composing myself. I was still worried about how this would go (knowing that the strength and validity of my dissertation depended on it) but not as worried as I had been. He didn't look the type to turn round and tell me to bugger off. Granted, he might ask me to leave, but he would do so politely, I was sure.

He turned and looked over at me as I approached, and I felt my shoulders drop—a soft sigh escaping as he smiled rather sadly at me, any worries I might have had quickly dissipating.

Holding out his hand as best he could, he said, with Stanley-like formality, “Marisa Donne, I presume. Andrea told me I should expect you. Please, sit down.”

“‘Educational reform’,” he said, holding the words in his mouth like a boiled sweet.

He spoke softly, his voice raspy and at times rather weak. “That covers a multitude of sins.” That smile, again. Tired and somehow lost. “You have a particular area of interest?”

I nodded, glad of the opportunity to explain further. “I'm concerned more with the lessons that can be learned from looking back at past examples of educational reform, specifically reform as it applies to the integration of children with physical

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disabilities into mainstream schools.”

Carl nodded. “Andrea mentioned that. And you think my childhood experiences might help you get a better picture of what worked and what didn’t?”

It was difficult to be sure, but I thought he might be testing me. “I don’t know,” I said, truthfully. “I’d like to think it would—but for all I know, you might have sailed through school without taking anything relating to my area of interest away with you. I doubt that, of course, but it’s possible.”

He seemed to like my answer. He closed the book in his lap—*H.L. Mencken on Religion*—and looked out of the window, again. “I’m not sure how much help it’ll be to you, but I’ll be happy to share everything I know.” He pointed at the thin notebook I’d brought with me. “That might not be enough.”