



the Short Story of **Baby Carrot's** Life and Death

The tiny carrot could feel the hot breath of the beast on his spindly green leaves. Being eaten by this creature held no glory, only shame. The Gardener had sown the carrot there and whether it was big or small, orange or blue it would do whatever it could to be lifted triumphantly into The Gardener's harvest basket.

This was not the time to stand out.

**MARK
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stories and illustrations

To baby carrots everywhere.



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Baby Carrot's
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Written and Illustrated by Mark Todd



The looming creature cast its long shadow over the leafy carrot tops. Its menacing claws anchored into the dirt as its eyes nervously darted along the rows of carefully planted vegetables, searching for any danger. The beast moved carefully, halting and reacting to every sound no matter how slight. Experience had taught it that the garden could be dangerous, but the lure of the vegetables were worth every risk. The muscles tensed along its flank as it rose up to sniff the air. Only smelling the sweet spring breeze filled with the intoxicating aroma of the garden, it carefully hunched low and started to move along the row sniffing the vegetables as it passed.

The carrots on the right side shifted nervously, and the tomatoes across the row quivered on their vines. As the creature continued, his slow careful movements took him directly past a tiny carrot. The carrot helplessly quivered as it looked up at the passing mass of fur.

Not that any sized carrot was safe from the beast, but this carrot was particularly helpless looking, the smallest of any in the row. Somehow it hadn't managed to grow at the pace of the others in this crop. Possibly it was because a different seed had been mixed in with the other carrot seeds during planting. Perhaps the tomato plants, which seemed to grow so quickly, had cast afternoon shadows stunting its growth. Whatever the reason, The Gardener had sown the carrot there and whether it was big or small, orange or blue it

would do whatever it could to be lifted triumphantly into the harvest basket.

But this was not the time to stand out. The carrot sank down into the earth to appear even smaller than it actually was to avoid the creature. The whole row of carrots followed suit, trying not to be seen.

This was in vain. The white woolen creature hopped a couple of times, leaned over and ripped a larger carrot from the ground. He turned the carrot over in his hulking paws and buried his teeth into the orange fleshy root. The others could not bear to watch.

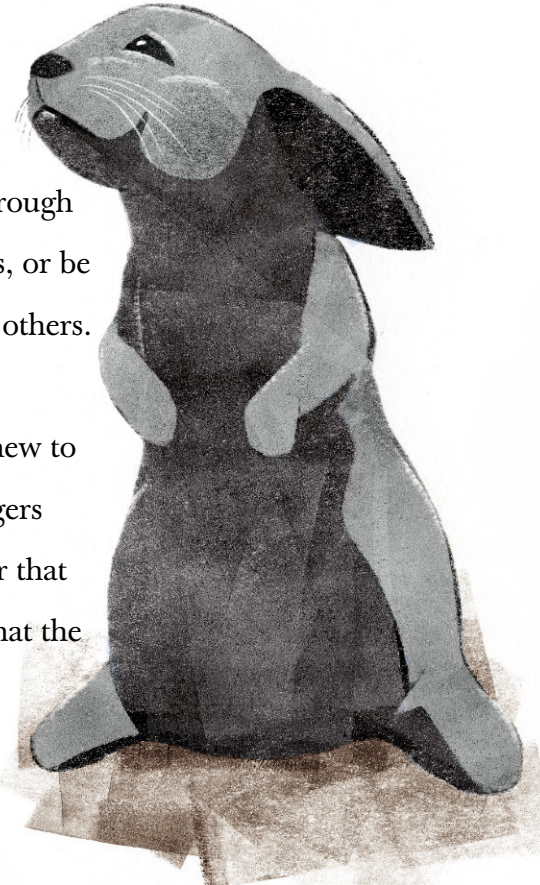


They closed their eyes and thought of The Gardener, hoping that She would appear and save them.

Above the carrots, the beans tightened their grip on their support poles. The radishes dug themselves deeper into the ground and the cucumbers and eggplants hid themselves behind their large leaves. The lettuce which had been victimized earlier remained in tight balls trying to cover what was left of their tender inner leaves. The tomatoes reddened and swelled on their vines in rage, but quickly thought better of it realizing that they were suddenly becoming more attractive to the beast.

The imposing creature grazed the tiny carrot with his stumpy white tail as he finished his appetizer, sending a new jolt of fear through the carrot's little body. Then the creature lifted off its haunches and continued down the row sniffing the air and shifting it's huge ears.

The carrots desperately clung to the soil with their hairlike roots. Interestingly, the goal of all the vegetables in the garden was to be eaten, but not by this thief. The creature was an abomination. It raided their sanctuary and stole from them their ability to please The Gardener, who's approval they depended on. It was The Gardener who planted them and cared for them. It was only through Her that they could pass, or be gifted by Her charity to others. It was also through Her disapproval that they knew to fear the ruthless scavengers who visited them. A fear that was only dwarfed by what the



scavengers must feel when faced with the all-powerful Gardener.

Being eaten by this creature held no glory, only shame. Nor was there any glory in being eaten by the black winged creatures that visited with their horrible crowing. Nor the fuzzy tailed creatures who perpetually smelled like nuts. And curse the small blind creatures that tunneled and attacked them from below.

But alas, The Gardener was elsewhere, so the creature reached down again and grabbed yet another unwilling carrot. It ate with quick gnawing bites punctuated by nervous darting glances down the row. The carrot was consumed down to its rounded top and discarded as the huge furry creature searched for a third victim.

The beans and cucumbers who occupied the opposite side of the garden shook in anger at the return of the animal. They watched the desecration and cried for the carrots, but also felt a slight sense of relief that it seemed to be staying on the other side of the plot.

The tiny carrot tried to look out over the tops of the other carrots. It hoped to see The Gardener appear with a stick in Her hand enraged at what the creature had done.

Suddenly a loud crack sounded. A hole appeared in one of the eggplants leaves as something ripped through it. Another crack quickly followed and sent a spray of dirt up into the faces of the ripening tomatoes.



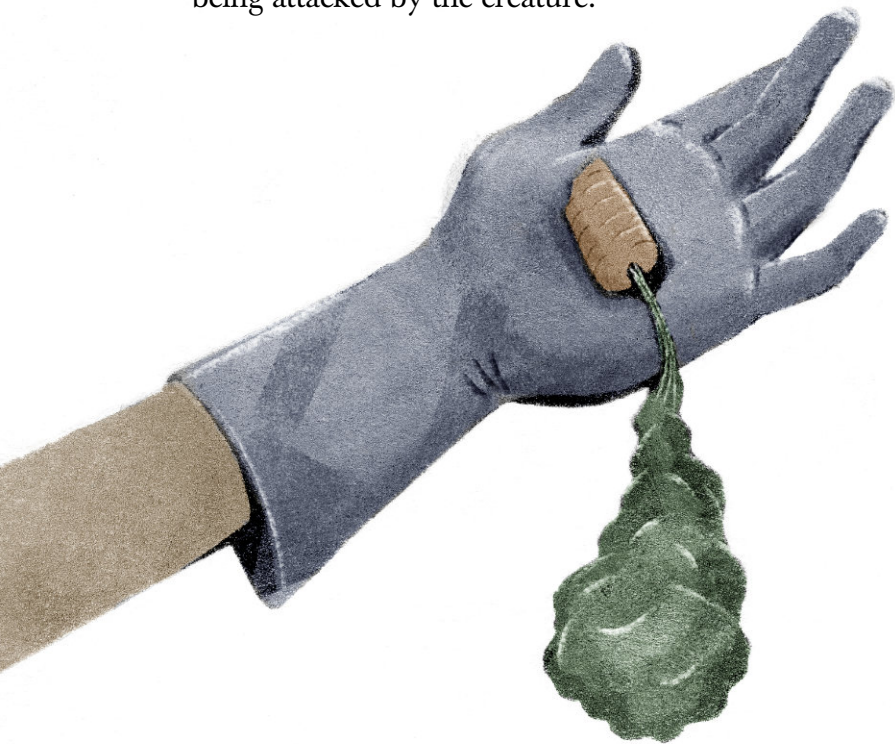
The creature dropped the half eaten carrot that it had been gnawing on, ducked its head and raced back through the row as fast as it could. When it reached the edge of the row it paused momentarily to check that nothing was blocking its path then took off like a flash with its long ears tucked and its tail bobbing behind it. Another loud crack sounded and there was another spray of dirt just as it reached a bush and its white tail disappeared out of sight.

Thank you Gardener, most gracious of protectors!

The tiny carrot watched the creature run off in fear. It was quite satisfying to see something as horrible as that cruel thief banished. After terrorizing the vegetables it was only fair that they should get to witness this emboldened creature shamefully disappear. At least the tiny carrot hoped it was shame that the horrible beast felt.

Footsteps crunched down the row and the tiny carrot spun its attention to what must surely be the coming of The Gardener. Everyone turned toward Her, reached up and stretched to show how big and proud they were. The tiny carrot reached as high as it could. It wanted The Gardener to be pleased as She passed.

The Gardener reached down tenderly and lifted up the remains of the carrots that had been eaten. Collecting them in Her gloved hand She inspected their remains then carried them unmercifully over to the compost pile where they would now wither and rot. This was the shame in being attacked by the creature.



The compost pile was a burying ground of sorts for the vegetables. A less-than-glorious fate. The pile's rotten smell of decomposing plant matter often wafted through the garden as a constant reminder of its presence.

The other dirty reality of the compost pile was that The Gardener would often spread the decomposed remains of their dead friends and relatives around them in the form of deep, dark, rich soil. This was a taboo subject to discuss. They didn't like to feel as if they were gaining anything from the horrible deaths that they witnessed. But when the soil was spread around their bases the sudden rush of nutrients surging into their growing bodies made them giddy. It was as if they were absorbing the very life force that they had seen drain from their unfortunate comrades.

The vegetables were now calmed by the vision of The Gardener. They felt safe when She was around. She watered them and pulled the weeds that stole their nutrients. She carefully picked off and smashed the bugs that nibbled holes in their leaves. The Gardener did so much, allowing them to grow big and strong. Big and strong was exactly what they wanted to be. If they became big and strong enough The Gardener would come and select them. She would personally hand pick and carry them away to Her house. There She would plunge them into the cleansing waters of the garden sink and wash away all of their dirt that they had collected throughout their life. They would be

lovingly scrubbed, rinsed and dried. Then they could fulfill their ultimate goal of being a part of Her or her chosen few.

The Gardener grabbed the water hose and turned it on, sending a graceful rainbow of spray over the garden. She always seemed to know when they needed consoling. The relaxing gentle spray softened the ground and let them drink deeply. That's why they all worked so hard for The Gardener, because She cared so much for them. She planted them and protected them. She was the grandest Gardener, indeed.



The garden beamed with joy as their Gardener walked down the rows running Her hands over the plants that surrounded Her, talking to them as She glided by. She felt the purple eggplants. She tugged on the elongated beans. She inspected the tomatoes. Everyone was excited with the expectation that She might pick them. Finally The Gardener grabbed three lucky beans and popped them into Her mouth. The other beans quivered with envy and joy. It might be their turn next.

The Gardener then retrieved a basket and began to gather several vegetables. There would be a harvest today! How their fortunes had changed in just a few short minutes. One moment they were being assaulted by a vile creature and the next they were saved with the chance to finally be properly harvested. Some of



the carrots mourned those who had been pulled from their ranks prematurely, but deep down they also hoped that the newly opened spaces around them might increase their chances of being noticed.

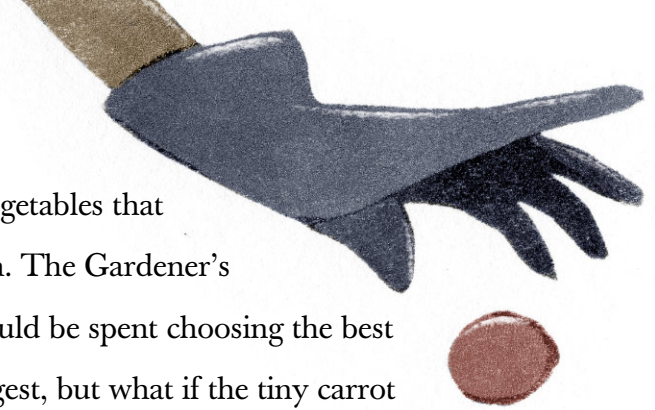
One head of lettuce, two cucumbers, four tomatoes, 5 carrots, and at least 50 beans were chosen to be taken into the house that afternoon.

The garden was atwitter with excitement. The bees, who had done so much work to help fertilize the plants, took a moment from visiting with the flower garden to have a celebratory buzz with the vegetables.

The tiny carrot was happy, but not overjoyed. All of the vegetables that were chosen were big, bright and ripe. The tiny carrot was happy for them but it was not even close to being the size of

the other vegetables that were chosen. The Gardener's summer would be spent choosing the best and the biggest, but what if the tiny carrot never grew big enough to be chosen? Would it be plowed under as a few unnoticed were every year or, even worse, be allowed to be taken by the horrible furry creature? The carrot tried the best it could to keep faith in The Gardener.

The tiny carrot watched the larger plants around it celebrate with the expectation that they might be chosen next. They showed off their big green leaves to each other. They compared colors. The tiny carrot sat at the end of the row as the smell of the compost pile wafted across the garden, and silently watched.





Several days later the tiny carrot lay napping in the sun. The warm rays fell upon its leaves as it slept deeply in the soft dirt. As the carrot dreamed, it envisioned that its roots had absorbed such a huge amount of nutrients that it grew to proportions never before seen on a carrot. The tiny carrot was now a nice ripe carrot fit for harvesting and eating. Then it imagined the creature again. Its large ears appeared from the other end of the row

as it made its way back into the garden. But this time was different for the carrot. It wasn't afraid. Standing at attention it sensed the carrot beside it start to shiver. "Don't worry," the once tiny carrot told it's neighbor. "I have a plan."

"Psst," the carrot hissed at the tomatoes across the row. They were busy watching the movement of the creature and too distracted to notice the carrot. The carrot waved its leaves which were now much bigger and more grand than the other carrots on the row and called out again. "Tomatoes, I need your help to save us."

The closest tomato heard its call and yanked on the vine where it hung. The yank caught the attention of the next tomato and it gave a yank as well. Soon the whole plant was shaking as the message was passed on.



“What do you think you can do,” they asked. “Granted, you are a fine looking carrot, but you’re still just a carrot.”

“Extend one of your tendrils down to me and help lift me out of the ground,” said the carrot. “If you can get me all the way up to the bean stalk behind you I should be able to stop that horrible creature from doing any more harm to us.”

The plant extended one of its vines that was less laden with tomatoes across the row and gently began twisting the carrot out of the ground.

“Good,” said the carrot as it was dragged free of the dirt. “Now carry me up to the top and pass me along the row of tomatoes until we reach the beans.”

The tomatoes on the vine helped grab the carrot and kept it secure as the plant strained and lifted the carrot over to the next plant in the row. The next plant then accepted the carrot and passed it to the next and then again to the next.

As the carrot finally reached the beans who were the highest plant in the garden, it looked down and saw the creature below. The creature had seen the carrot and become very interested in all the movement. As the carrot was placed high on the rope trellis that supported the stalk, the rabbit followed and now stood directly below the beans.

The beans that hung from the trellis were terrified and angry that the carrot had attracted the creature over to them. They loudly protested at the carrot being there and several of them even tried to push it off the trellis. The carrot hung tightly and



ignored the beans who were all much smaller than it was now.

The creature sniffed the air and began to investigate the beans who hung lower on the trellis. The carrot waited for it to look away and when it did the carrot turned itself into an orange missile.

It launched itself from amongst the beans slamming straight onto the creature's head. The creature was so dazed that it staggered around the row.

The carrot now lay exposed on the ground. The garden had gone quiet as the creature fumbled around, bumping into tomato stakes. Then suddenly the eggplants started swatting

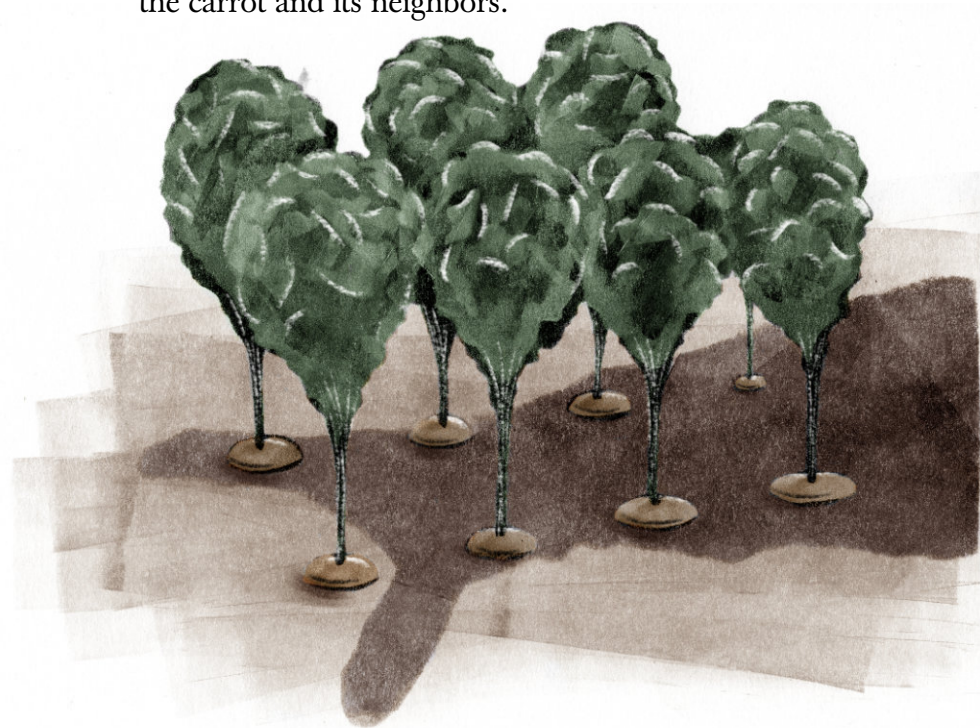


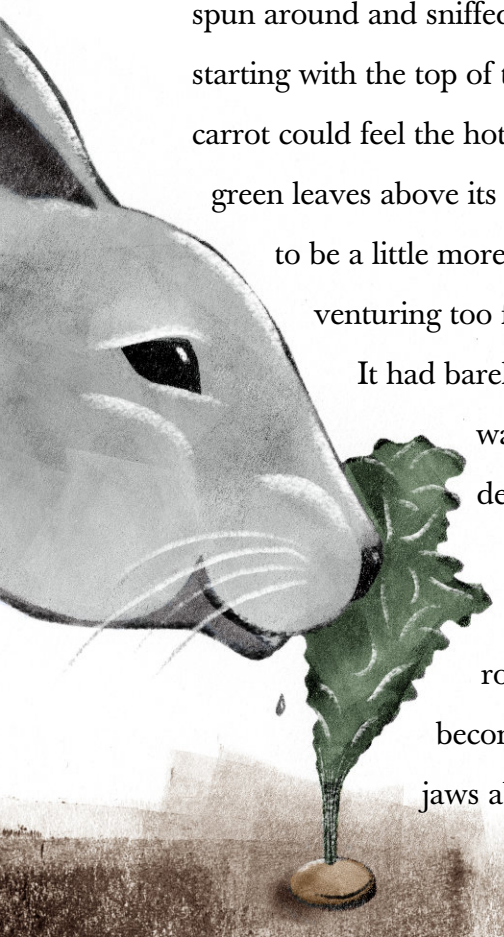
their large leaves, which are coated with small spikes, escorting it down the row away from the carrot. Then the squash leaves joined in. The cucumbers bumped and jostled the creature as it became more and more agitated and eventually left the garden leaving the vegetables intact.

A big cheer went up from the garden. The closest tomato plant reached down and the tomatoes embraced the carrot as they lifted it back across the garden. As it returned to its plot the hot peppers gave the carrot a few spicy high fives. The cabbages fluttered their leaves as it passed over and the carrots excitedly awaited its return.

As it was placed back into its hole the carrot was patted, tickled and embraced by the leaves of the carrots surrounding it.

The cheers faded into the background as the tiny carrot awakened from its dream with a start. The warm sun on its leaves had suddenly been covered by shadow. The embracing that it imagined now felt more like shoving. The large carrot next to it leaned over and was almost completely covering the tiny carrot. It was trying to avoid the creature which now sat inches from the carrot and its neighbors.





The tiny carrot, still groggy from its nap, looked at the huge haunches and fluffy tail as the creature almost sat on top of it. The creature's muscles rippled under the layer of fur. Quickly it spun around and sniffed at the row of carrots starting with the top of the tiny carrot's leaves. The carrot could feel the hot breath on its spindly green leaves above its head. The creature seemed to be a little more skittish than usual about venturing too far into the garden today.

It had barely escaped last time and was acting much more deliberate. Unfortunately with the tiny carrot being on the very edge of the row it was at a high risk of becoming a victim of the large jaws above him.

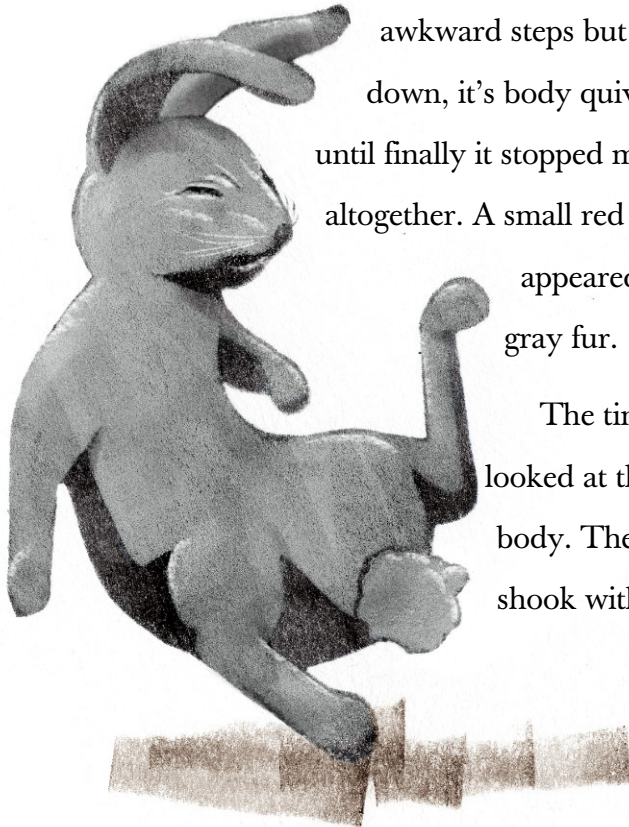
A spittle of drool spilled from the creature's mouth, ran down the length of its stem and settled on the carrot's orange top. The tiny carrot sat perfectly still and buried itself as far down as it could. But it would be no match for the creature. If it was chosen then it would be ripped up and devoured in front of everyone. The tiny carrot's heart sank at the thought.

Above, the carrot felt something else brush its leaves. It glanced up and noticed that the carrot next to it had spread its leaves to help cover the tiny carrot. The tiny carrot looked to the carrot next to it. The larger carrot glanced back and grimaced just as it was yanked from the earth and dangled over the other carrots. Luckily, its end came swiftly as the creature took quick bites and finished the carrot. Unluckily, it looked as if the creature might be very hungry today.

As it discarded the remains the creature looked down again and grabbed the next carrot in line. He was moving back though the row. As he raised the carrot to his mouth a crack sounded through the garden. The carrot flew through the air as the animal fell backwards. The creature started to scramble briefly and managed to move a few

awkward steps but fell back down, it's body quivering gently, until finally it stopped moving altogether. A small red streak appeared on its thick gray fur.

The tiny carrot looked at the motionless body. The carrot still shook with fear. It



wasn't sure what had happened to the creature but it seemed to have fallen asleep.

From across the plot The Gardener appeared with a metal stick in Her hand. The stick was smoking ever so gently from the end. When The Gardener finally reached the creature She bent down and picked it up. The creature had looked so huge when it came through the garden but with The Gardener now holding it, it looked small and frail. The Gardener lifted the creature up and silently carried it toward the house. Picking up the remains of the two carrots She discarded them into the compost pile.



The garden watched in amazement as The Gardener hung a rope and suspended the lifeless animal by its back legs. From Her pocket She produced a knife which She then used to pull the skin off of it downwards like She was removing Her own shirt over Her head. The garden vegetables looked on as The Gardener then removed the creature from the rope, bathed it in the sink and took it into the house.

Every vegetable in the garden was in shock. The creature had inflicted horrible traumas on the garden and instead of being unceremoniously thrown on the compost pile as each of its victims had, it had somehow earned a chance at being washed clean and received into the house to be with The Gardener. This was a reward that up until now had been offered solely to the vegetables in the garden.

The squash mumbled between themselves, “Could it even be considered much of a reward if even the worst are allowed to be honored this way.” Stunned, the tomatoes and radishes responded, “Quiet, don’t question The Gardener. She knows best.”

“Was going into The Gardeners house a reward or a punishment,” a pea pod asked.

“Enough,” yelled a green pepper. “If She hears us we might all end up in the compost. Remember, we are here to feed and nourish Her. She is our Gardener.”

The tiny carrot looked over at the two empty holes beside it. It had been dangerously close to the creature and had it not have been for the compassion of the carrot next to it then the tiny carrots remains might very well have been laying on top of the compost pile right now. The feeling of relief and disgust made its head spin.

The carrot was smaller than the others but it wasn't younger. Everyone in the garden was the same age and had grown up together. They all knew from watching The Gardener day after day that She was their protector and friend. They had to have faith that The Gardener would continue in this role and that what had happened with the creature was part of Her bigger plan to protect the garden.

As the warm day continued, the talk around the garden was less about the fate of the horrible creature and more of the expectation that there would be another harvest.

As expected The Gardener made Her way out into the garden to the triumphant applause



and deepest admiration of all the vegetables. As She walked down the rows the lettuces fanned Her return. The tomatoes blushed as She looked at them and the cucumbers grew another inch in Her honor. She looked over Her adoring vegetables, inspecting them for damages and was pleased to see that the garden seemed to be happy and healthy.

The tiny carrot looked up to see a bouncing head of hair moving past the tomatoes towards The

Gardener. Through the plants it could see The Gardener's small son standing beside Her also inspecting the plants.

The tiny carrot felt a sudden kinship with the small child.

As The Gardener began carefully choosing vegetables for their basket, the small son attacked the garden with the savagery of the creature. He yanked off an undersized cucumber from the vine and dropped it to the ground. Then a small green tomato was pulled with such force that it caused several more ripened ones to fall off and roll under the bean plants. As the small child rounded the corner he saw the carrots and fell to his knees.

This was the same position the creature had crouched in not hours before. Once again spittle struck the tiny carrots leaves and rolled down the stem to the crown of its orange root.





The child then grabbed the tiny carrot by its meager stem and yanked it up.

Dirt fell from the carrot as it hung in the air inches away from the child's slobbering mouth. His few small teeth were framed by little red cherub lips that were coated with snot.

"This is it," thought the tiny carrot. "Everything that I've always wanted. I hope that the others in the garden can see me. Now just drop me in the basket."

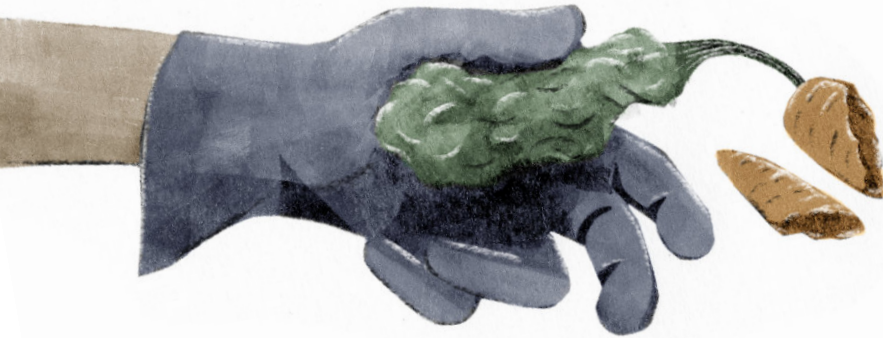
The others in the garden looked on in joyful amazement. What a lucky carrot it was indeed.

Suddenly the child chomped down on the tiny carrot and started gnawing and sucking. The spittle which was dripping off his chin mixed with the dirt and quickly turned to mud in his mouth.

He spat the carrot onto the ground, reached down and grabbed another.

The gnawed carrot lay in the dirt and watched as the child carefully placed the next carrot into the basket and quickly moved on.

The Gardener following behind, reached down and tossed the tiny carrot into the compost bin on the edge of the garden.



There would be no glory for the carrot. Staring up from the pile of decomposing refuse, the tiny carrot watched as the now filled basket was carried into the house as the child slammed the door behind.

The smell of rotting vegetables engulfed the remains of the tiny carrot as it lay among the debris of the victims that it had pitied only hours before. An intense heat pulsated up as the life cycle of the compost pile continued below.

“So close,” the tiny carrot thought.
“I was so close.”

