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A Legacy Through Carnations

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Notes:

Tara Pulaski won the second place in the Humanities: Creative category.

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A Legacy Through Carnations
By Tara Pulaski

The barren trees of Salem’s Gallows Hill still sway in the same ethereal wind, innocuous witnesses to the transgressions of man. The smooth, gray boulders, partially covered with decaying leaves and filth, no longer hold the residue of human corpses, long washed by three-hundred years of cleansing rain. No trace can be found of the shallow wooden supports or hempen rope nor the ruts in the wet earth as victims were dragged over the ridge, just as the sun rose and gave false promises of another tomorrow. Though all the tangible reminders have scattered the ground in ash, if one still listens closely, they can hear the eternal shrieks of the fallen in the whirling vortex that whistles and dances along those same rocks. The women have perished to ignorance and hatred and fanaticism, but their legacies still live on. While the rages of injustice continue to ever boil over, scalding new generations with the diseases of their forefathers, some strong women still find hope in the pale, yellow carnations that grow near those same cursed boulders, offering that tomorrow in honor of those who had the shroud of night clasp over them prematurely.

Lillian’s finger traced the grooves in the ashen memorial stone, wondering if her physical touch could urge the experience of the dead into her own consciousness. The delicate pads stumbled over the engraving: *Hanged, August 19, 1692*. She extracted a singular tangerine-colored carnation from a bouquet in her messenger bag and placed it on Martha Carrier’s stone at the Salem Witch Trials Memorial in Salem, Massachusetts. “I’m sorry, Martha,” she whispered before pressing her chapped lips to her fingers and then to the stone that protruded out of the masoned wall like a rough-hewn bench levitating above the frozen earth. Lillian continued around the perimeter of the memorial, brushing her black hair out of her eyes and pulling her scarf tighter, before moving to Rebecca Nurse, *Hanged*. She knelt into the gravel pathway and pressed her forehead against the cool stone and closed her eyes. Why did this have to happen to you, she thought; you didn’t have to die. She pulled out another carnation; Lillian Carrier had brought one for each of the victims, twenty in all—nineteen were hanged, one was pressed.

A man—early thirties, aviator sunglasses, with a forest green sweater—crunched the gravel under his combat boots as he strolled around the maroon seventeenth century cottage that adorned the memorial property, ignoring the sign that stated: *No Smoking*. He stopped short of Lillian, kicking up gravel into a cloud of particles that settled around her like a veil. His Bic lighter clicked as he shielded the cigarette from the wind and exhaled the smoke; the ash was flicked onto the memorial’s somber walkway.

“Must we do this same shit every year?” Asher said.

“Open up, Goodwife Carrier!” said Benjamin as he banged on the weathered plank door of the teal Colonial timber-framed home. Benjamin, dressed all in black minus his white collar and cuffs, waited and then shrugged to an equally dressed Samuel, who was standing at the bottom of the stone steps with his arms crossed. He shielded his eyes and peered through the paneled window and noticed a flickering candle in the parlor, tallow dripping down the side. The flame illuminated an older woman that treaded heavily and held her lower back as she made her way to the door, black petticoat and white apron swaying with every thud.

“Afternoon, gentleman. What can I do you for?” Martha said, wheezing while clutching the door frame.

“Goody Carrier, I pray you’re well. It unfortunately seems that your fence near our pasture has fallen once more. Was not your son, Richard, going to mend it?” said Benjamin.

“Oh, good Heavens! He left with my husband just this morning for business in Dracut,” said Martha. “I didn’t think to mention it before they left; they’ve been so busy.”

Benjamin sighed, recalling a conversation he had with the woman just last week, where she promised to have her son repair the fence that ran between the Carriers’ property and his cattle pasture. He regretted that he didn’t ask Mr. Carrier himself about the fence, questioning the competency of the woman that stood before him, if she was incapable of remembering a simple favor to a neighbor. She was a good cook, though, and her cornbread was known throughout Andover, so he reckoned that was why Mr. Carrier, Thomas, kept her around.

“I see,” said Benjamin, turning towards Samuel as a scowl washed across his face.

“I reckon we could mend it for now,” said Samuel. “Just so the cattle don’t roam free while Thomas is away.”

“No, no, that won’t do. Thomas is particular about his fencing; it’ll have to wait until he returns. Good day, gentleman,” said Martha.

“No, but—” started Benjamin, just as Martha closed the door in his face. “Oh, that infernal woman!” He began to pound on the door once more, this time without his Puritan politeness. Samuel looked away and kicked up some dirt that had settled on the home’s stone landing.

“Mrs. Carrier! Goody Carrier! The cattle—” said Benjamin, still banging on the door.

“Curses to you and your cattle!” said Martha from inside her home, growing more aggravated that she was awoken from her nap for this. Benjamin, peering again through the window, watched the woman retreat to the interior of the house. He turned around to see that Samuel was already a good distance down the dirt road.

Lillian slowly looked up to Asher and said, “What do you mean by ‘this shit?’”

“This fucking witchy shit,” said Asher. “I’m hungry and you’ve been at this forever.”

“Well, no one is stopping you,” said Lillian, staring into the Charter Street Cemetery beyond the memorial; she remembered reading the tombstones with her mother, seeing who could find the one with the oldest death-date. Lillian had been deemed the winner after finding a man who died in 1717, Judge John Hathorne. Sadly, her mother didn’t have the chance for a rematch, dying shortly after. It was her family’s tradition to bring the carnations to those that perished in the trials, as the blood of the long-deceased Martha Carrier flowed through her and Lillian’s veins alike. Lillian could still remember hearing the story as a young girl, of how after Martha was hanged, her son, Richard, and his own young daughter would bring yellow carnations to the site where their dear relative was forcibly relieved of her life. The gently placed carnations would wilt and release their precious seeds into the earth, ensuring that a new generation of flowers replaced those that had perished. Despite her mother’s premature passing a few years prior, Lillian was honored to carry on their family legacy. Though many brought flowers to the memorial for one reason or another, she was sure that most did not have her personal connection.

“Come on, Lil! Who cares about this? You didn’t know these people,” said Asher.

“I care about this!” said Lillian, standing up and tossing her hands into the air. “You know that my mom cared about this, too, and my grandmother and my great-grandmother and so on!”

“Yeah, well, they are all dead,” said Asher, looking over Lillian’s head into the cemetery beyond as he fiddled with his still lit cigarette.

“Asher, I cannot believe you right now,” said Lillian. She thought back to when she first met Asher, her boss when she still worked at the Dairy Witch over on Boston Street for a summer. He seemed kind and understanding, someone more worldly and mature than herself that could twist the unraveled threads of her life back onto the spindle of fate. It was Asher that held her hand and stroked her hair the night her own dear mother passed, and it was Asher that cooked her dinner and brought her take-out for the months of depression and grief that followed. After only four months of dating, Asher asked Lillian to move in with him, which she gladly accepted, believing she was lucky enough to find her soulmate at nineteen. They started to bicker, which Lillian thought was normal at this stage of any relationship, so she began to overlook the ways he seemed to change.

The homemade chicken alfredo and “I love you” texts turned into demands as to why she was late and scowls whenever she was on the phone with her Aunt Cora too long. He would pace back and forth in their tiny apartment, taking drag after drag off his cigarette until she would hang up the call. There were other times, however, where he would surprise her with an impromptu beach day complete with packed sandwiches and a bottle of merlot. When Lillian would ask if she could invite her cousins that lived in Dedham, he always said, “I thought this would be a romantic date, you know. Just you and me?” Lillian would agree, touching his sandy hair and snuggling her chin into his shoulder, wondering how she could have survived the turmoil that was her life without her Asher.

Despite Martha’s refusal on the subject, Benjamin and Samuel proceeded to mend the fence between the property lines. About a month went by without incident, and Benjamin was satisfied that the lingering problem was finally resolved; he’d not heard from the woman nor her allegedly particular husband. He’d always had positive dealings with Thomas, so he assumed that it was only Martha that was unhinged. She had a reputation throughout Andover for being quite the eccentric, after all. There was one Sunday, with his own ears, that he heard her take the Lord’s name in vain! Another time, his own wife had asked to borrow some cornmeal and was turned away, with the excuse that Martha was almost out herself—what kind of Christian charity was that, Benjamin thought. If that wasn’t bad enough, coupled with the fence incident, he had heard rumors that she involved herself in revelries such as dancing and singing songs in her youth; a May Pole was even once mentioned, of all the lascivious activities. Samuel even said he’d swear on the Bible that he saw her answer a question from a fellow merchant that was directly addressed to Thomas. No, that woman was no good, Benjamin thought; good food and childbearing can only go so far. If Thomas wanted to put his own providence in jeopardy, that was his God-given choice, but I would have no part in it, thought Benjamin.

It was summer now, and Lillian was reclining on the couch in their shared apartment on Essex Street, an old home that missed being on the National Register of Historic Places due to the owner piecing it out into tiny apartments. “Blasphemy!” her mother would have said, always the lover of Salem history, even beyond the Witch Trials. However, it was what they could afford with Asher’s assistant manager salary and Lillian waitressing at Mercy Tavern; plus, it

was downtown and within walking distance of work, Derby Wharf, and all the sights of Salem. Whenever Lillian was feeling down, which was sadly more and more these days with every new spat, she would breathe in the salty air at the wharf and take a stroll by The House of Seven Gables, her and her mother's favorite historical home in the area, both being Hawthorne fans. There was something about the pitch black on black gabled building that spoke to Lillian's soul.

Their second-floor door opened, and Asher appeared, wearing his Dairy Witch polo. "Happy Birthday, baby!" he said, holding a pizza and a bouquet of twenty black carnations. "I'm sorry I had to work so late, but I thought we could go and visit your friends?"

"Oh Asher, that would be wonderful!" said Lillian.

"No problem; I know that today is always bittersweet," said Asher, walking over and kissing the top of her head, then giving her a one-armed hug from behind the couch.

"Yeah, no one could have predicted it; she'd been getting better," said Lillian.

Asher nodded and then swung himself over the back of the couch, so he was sitting next to Lillian. He bopped her on the nose and said, "So, what's first, birthday girl? Pizza or friends?"

"Friends, of course!" Lillian said.

Despite the sign stating that it closed at 8pm, Lillian and Asher ducked under the ropes for the memorial, which was a few short blocks from their apartment. Lillian flipped up the hood on her sweatshirt and smirked. "They can't catch me now, can they?" she said as she leapt over the chain that held the sign that read "*Closed*," causing it to sway back and forth. Her heart began to fill again and the elated feeling in the pit of her stomach boiled up to her throat, producing a stream of giggles. She skipped over to Martha and placed a singular black carnation on her stone. Asher leaned against the stone fence, smoking a Marlboro; the glow of the embers illuminated his face, a pinpoint in the darkness that danced shadows in his verdant eyes.

Martha sat in her rocking chair, swaying back and forth in front of the fire as she knit a small blankie of snow-white wool. A young woman with the rounded belly of her first child sat next to the hearth, reading Ecclesiastes aloud from the Geneva Bible.

"Cast thy bread upon the waters: for after many days thou shalt find it. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight: for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth," recited Clara, Richard's young wife.

"Very true," said Martha. "Very true, my dear."

Before Clara could continue, Thomas and Richard entered the home, sweat pouring down their brows from diligent labor in the field.

"I still cannot believe that presumptuous Benjamin mended my fence without my consent," said Thomas.

"I attempted to inform him," replied Martha, not looking up from her knitting. "I told him that you were particular about that fence."

"It's just those good for nothing Abbots, never minding their own business. Heaven forbid you let a man take care of his own property!" said Thomas, shucking off his leather boots by the door.

"I know, Papa," said Richard. "But it was a kind act of Christian charity, nonetheless. It wasn't the best mending, but they did use their own supplies."

"It's the whole family, though," said Martha. "One time his wife, Sarah, asked to borrow some cornmeal and I was all but out. I wanted deeply to give, but it was Clara's birthday and I know how much you enjoy cornbread, don't you, Clara?"

“Yes, Mother!” said Clara. “Thank you kindly for that, ma’am. I hope it didn’t cause you much trouble.”

“Well, the next week I went over to give Sarah some cornmeal, finally having replenished from town, and she wouldn’t have it. Ungrateful woman. She refused,” said Martha.

“Mother, that talk won’t do any good,” said Richard. “Let us all pray on it and perhaps our relationship between our Brother and Sister Abbott will begin to heal.”

“You’re right, son,” said Thomas.

“Yes, very wise,” said Martha. “Perhaps next week I’ll visit Sarah again and try to mend that metaphorical fence.”

The family laughed and then gathered together before the fire to listen to Clara continue her Bible passage; they said an extra prayer for the Abbotts, wishing them good fortune. Richard sat next to Clara and rubbed and kissed her protruding belly while Thomas put his arm around his wife as she continued to work on the blanket for their first grandchild.

Lillian was finally off a long shift at Mercy Tavern and trudged the block home to Essex Street. She looked forward to having a beer and relaxing on the couch, especially since the Tavern was busy with tourists as Halloween approached. She enjoyed the extra money, but boy was she beat, she thought. Upon entering their apartment, the first thing she saw was a scowl on Asher’s face.

“You’re late,” said Asher, tapping his fingers on the arm of the sofa.

“Yeah, it was crazy busy! I made three-hundred dollars, though,” she said, setting her messenger bag down on their kitchenette’s counter.

“Okay. And, where’s my chicken quesadilla?” said Asher. “I did all that shit for you on your birthday and you can’t even bring me a goddamn quesadilla?”

“Quesadilla?”

“I texted you at least an hour ago to bring me one home from work. Or maybe you didn’t because you weren’t actually there?” said Asher, getting up from the couch and approaching Lillian. “Let me see your phone.”

“No! I was at work, that’s why I didn’t see your message,” said Lillian. She pulled out her phone from the bag and showed him the text message still on the screen. “I rushed home as soon as I got off.”

“Let me see,” said Asher as he took the phone and leaned his body against Lillian, pushing her into the counter as he scrolled through her phone. She sighed and rested her chin on his clavicle; she loved Asher, but this was an inopportune time for one of his jealous fits. Lillian knew that she didn’t deserve someone that took care of her like Asher did, he’d been there through the worst night of her life, and she knew that she was lucky to have him; he told her all the time. He was right, she thought, she should have double checked her phone before she left work, just in case he needed something. She should have been more considerate to his feelings and texted him saying she’d be home later than expected. Ultimately, she was grateful that he put up with her shit.

“I guess you’re off the hook this time,” Asher said. “However, since you forgot that quesadilla, you’re going to have to do something else for me.” His hands trailed down to her hips and he leaned forward to kiss her neck.

“No, I’m really tired,” she said.

“I don’t make the rules,” he said, then unzipped his jeans and forced Lillian to her knees in front of him.

“Benjamin, I just heard,” said Samuel. “How are you feeling, brother?”

“It was her.”

“I know, stay still.”

“She did this to me,” said Benjamin. “You heard what she said to us.” He was lying on his bed, clammy with fever, with a large linen bandage wrapped around his abdomen. For weeks, he’d suffered from several large pustules that had to be frequently drained by the town’s doctor. No matter how many times the boils were seeped, they would grow back even greater than before. He was convinced without a shadow of a doubt that Martha Carrier had cursed him. She went into the woods and fornicated with the devil and used her dark magic and corrupted soul to enact evils against the Godly people of Massachusetts, he imagined. Since then, Benjamin even had it on good authority that she had lain with Thomas before their wedding night; it was no wonder that the product of their sin, Richard, was always such a lazy boy that grew into an equally insolent man within the community. Benjamin assumed that it was laziness that prevented Richard from having his own farm opposed to caring for his aging parents.

“Only God can help me now,” said Benjamin, as he rolled more squarely onto his back and groaned. “And, the cattle?”

“All dead! Mysteriously in the night. They were fine in the afternoon and when I visited this morning—” said Samuel.

“Surely not yours and mine both?” said Benjamin.

“Extraordinary and unaccountable calamities befell them all! I could find no natural reason for it,” said Samuel.

“It’s that rampant hag! God help us all.”

Asher stood over Lillian as she crouched in ball on their worn maroon sofa. Her eyes were bloodshot, and she latched on to a throw pillow like a barnacle, holding it tightly between her chest and knees.

“I fucking told you not to disrespect me like that!” said Asher, leaning closer.

“I’m sorry, Asher. I’m sorry!”

“I was going to take you out on a nice date, show how much I love you, but you had to go and ruin it by wasting our time together by being on the phone with someone—” said Asher.

“It was just my aunt, I swear. I promise it was just my aunt, Asher. It wasn’t anyone but her,” said Lillian.

“How dare you lie to me!”

Time stood still for Lillian as Asher swung his arm back and brought his open hand down across her face, leaving a warm, red mark that stung when she touched it. Her heart raced in her chest from the shock and bewilderment of what had just transpired. She buried her face into the pillow and sobbed while rocking back and forth. She didn’t understand how she was this much of a failure; why couldn’t she just do better to make him happy. He was her entire world. His yells danced abstractly in their run-down apartment, the words slipping away from her conscious and melding into a sad tune within her soul. She felt him shaking her, his voice getting louder with each second; all she could make out was, “You need to apologize for making me do this.”

Benjamin was awoken by the sound of a faint knock on his home’s front door. His pillow was soaked in sweat as his feverish state persisted; the pustules had multiplied, leaving remnants of a yellowish-green crust on his soiled bandages from the frequent lancing; a Bible was open at

his side. His wife, Sarah, answered the door and lead a young constable into their modest bedroom.

“Benjamin, dear, Constable Avery is here to see you,” said Sarah, giving the two gentleman the room.

“I was very sorry to hear about your affliction, Mr. Abbott. You are certainly in our continued prayers,” said the constable.

“Thank you, sir,” said Benjamin. “As I will soon join our divine creator, my only remaining task in this earthly realm is ensuring no one else suffers at the hands of this malefactor.” He began to shiver under his blankets and clutched his chest, “Her soul possesses me yet.”

“Please, tell me everything. We will certainly bring this she-devil to justice.”

Benjamin then recalled the horrible tale and the cursing he endured at the hands of Martha Carrier. He told of her unhospitable behavior, her manly brashness, and her usage of dark magic to curse him and Samuel, all because they wanted to do her the kindness of mending her fence. He recalled the *exact* words she used, “I curse you, Benjamin Abbott. I curse your livelihood and your family. I curse you to Hell with me, to serve my master, Satan.” In tears, Benjamin convulsed in the bed and shared how Reverend Mather had told Sarah that he heard from some young girls of Salem that Martha had asked them to join her in witchcraft. Reliable sources stated that she had flown to Salem from Andover in the night and tried to tempt them from their beds and into the ghostly forest to make a pact with the devil. Sarah heard this from the Reverend directly when she traveled the fifteen miles to Salem to seek out their experienced doctor. He also shared how he had a vision that Richard, her bastard son conceived before the eve of their wedding, was involved as her minion in serving Lucifer. Benjamin saw him vividly in his mind; he was kneeling in front of his mother and taking a drink from a chalice filled with a crimson liquid.

“I understand the severity of this situation, Mr. Abbott,” said the constable. “I vow that we will take all the necessary steps to protect the people of Andover and all of the Massachusetts Bay Colony from this tormentor.”

A few months after the abuse escalated, Lillian sat on the edge of the bathtub staring at the two lines of the pregnancy test that confirmed her suspicions. Her stomach twisted as the dread of this realization flooded in; even though she had apologized to Asher as requested, his anger had not subsided. Lillian’s hand found the fresh bruises on her neck, the product of yet another outburst of Asher’s that she allegedly provoked, proving that he would never be a capable father. As she stood and regarded herself in the bathroom mirror, Lillian forced herself to look away from the yellow rings under her eyes and into the blue pupils themselves. She stared for a long while, until the faint dots in the blue turned into tiny boats navigating the milky water of the cape, as she searched for seashells with her mother as the surf lapped at their feet. It was her dear mother that always taught her to stand up for herself, even if that sometimes meant asking for help. Unfortunately, this advice came at the expense of her mother’s own horrific life experiences.

Tears formed in the corners of her eyes as she contemplated raising a child alone, without her mother or Asher. She saw herself living in a tiny one bedroom, working two jobs just to make ends meet, never getting to see her child who was always in daycare, while she toiled on. However, she saw the alternative even more clearly: the prospect of her child angering Asher as he raised back his palm to strike them across the face, just as her own father had done to her. She

remembered seeing her father hover over her mom, screaming obscenities before hitting her in the head as she cowered and attempted to cover her face in vain, blood streaming from the gashes onto her pale blue blouse. Her father, drunk with power and whiskey, reached down and grabbed her mother by the throat; he lifted her off the ground until her feet levitated as if she was dangling from a hempen noose. Even though she was a young child, Lillian remembered her mother waking her up in the middle of the night, shushing her and telling her that it was going to be okay, as they got into the car without any of their earthly possessions and stole into the night. She never saw her father again, but those memories have stayed with her for decades as did the words he always screamed at her: “You’re useless, you know? I wish you were never born.” Those words were eerily familiar to Asher’s.

Lillian still remembered lying awake at night as she heard her father stumble down the hall, throwing open the door of her bedroom with such force that the doorknob penetrated the plaster of the wall. He would cackle and then shake her metal bed back and forth as it creaked and clanked from shotty craftsmanship while she held on through the sobs. Lillian would then be too terrified to go back to sleep, as he was likely to come back every hour or so to rattle the bed once more; she would lay awake staring at the multi-colored balloons, illuminated by her nightlight, that her father painted on the walls for her as she giggled and clung to his leg during simpler times. While her father had always had a toxic relationship with alcohol, Asher had one with control.

Lillian knew that she could never do that to her own child. She didn’t blame her mother, but nonetheless those scars still linger with Lillian to this day. It was then, as she blinked away the tears and refocused her eyes on the bruises covering her face and neck that she knew she needed help. She touched her belly and pulled out the phone from her back pocket and dialed.

The phone rang and rang as Lillian’s heart began to sink once more before she heard someone say, “Hello?”

“Aunt Cora, is that you?” asked Lillian through sobs. “Yes, I know, it has been forever. Look, I hate to bother you, but I really need some help. Please. He’s at work right now and I don’t have a car, will you come and pick me up? Yes, that’s right, I’m still in Salem.”

After a few minutes on the phone, her Aunt Cora was on the way the forty-five minutes from Dedham to Salem. Lillian grabbed her messenger bag and stuffed some clothes and her family photos in before clasping it shut. She gave the apartment a once over, there was nothing left for me here, she thought, before opening the door and stepping out onto the concrete steps into the sparkling Salem sun. Her feet treaded the familiar path to the memorial where she would wait on her aunt, never to see Asher again.

The constable and Judge Hathorne banged on the Carrier family’s front door. The papers had been drafted and Martha Carrier was officially accused of witchcraft, on the account of several reliable and Godly citizens of Andover and Salem. Thomas opened the door and was pushed aside as several men flooded into the home; they grabbed Martha from her bed in the wee hours of the night and dragged her through the bedroom. The elderly woman cried out in pain and held her back, slipping through their grasp and falling to the wooden floor with a thud. Two men grabbed her arms and continued to lug the woman across the floor, as her feet scrambled in vain to get a footing. Benjamin, clutching a wooden cane, with an arm around Samuel, spat in the woman’s face as she was removed from her home. Several towns people yelled and threw rocks as Martha was loaded into the carriage to be transported to trial in Salem. She looked in bewilderment to Thomas, who was restrained by several townsmen, and mouthed the words, “I

love you.” Thomas fell to his knees, breaking down into a series of sobs. Martha Carrier clutched the silver cross around her neck and turned her sights towards Heaven.

Lillian entered the familiar memorial hand in hand with a young girl, about five years old with light brown hair pulled back in pigtails. The mother had her messenger bag slung over her shoulder, a bouquet of twenty carnations protruding through the top.

“Mommy, tell me again why we bring the flowers to Great Grandma Martha!” said the girl, still clutching her mother’s hand.

“Well, it all started with our many-times-great grandfather Richard,” Lillian said. “Do you remember who Richard is?”

“Yeah! Her son,” said the girl.

“Good, that’s right. Well, after she passed, Richard would eventually have a daughter of his own, and he was deeply troubled that she never got to meet her grandmother. Since there wasn’t a grave or memorial for her at that time, they went and visited her where she was killed. It was in her honor that they brought the yellow carnations.”

“And?” asked the girl, squirming to pull a yellow carnation out of the bag.

“And, it didn’t just stop with Richard and his daughter, it continued with that daughter’s daughter, and many, many more, until it came to us,” said Lillian.

“And!” exclaimed the girl, jumping up and down.

“And,” laughed Lillian, “that’s why I named you Martha, also in honor of our Great Grandmother, a brave woman that was taken from the world too soon. She didn’t deserve that.”

“She didn’t,” said young Martha, as she placed the carnation on Martha Carrier’s stone. “I’ll make sure my daughter brings the flowers, too,” she nodded.

“And your granddaughter.”

“And my great-granddaughter.”

“And forever more,” said Lillian, hugging her daughter. “It’s what us Carrier women do, we take care of each other. The others, too, of course.”

On the occasional brisk morning, just as the tentacles of the sun’s first light lures the lingering darkness home, many residents of Salem claim to make out the faint wisps of a father and daughter, hand in hand, journeying over the gray boulders of Gallows Hill. The young one kneels and places a yellow carnation in front of the long-perished gallows, wood having decayed and slumped into oblivion, as the remains became part of the earth below. As for the remains of the murdered, they were unceremoniously tossed over Proctor’s Ledge, creating a make-shift charnel house in the ravine below; may the trees of the ages and the soft butterfly kisses of the summer ivy ever keep them warm during these cold New England eves. And may those judges, acting as executioners for a fabricated divinity, find no peace even though their bodies prominently rest mere feet from the memorial for our twenty victims. The celestial flower, however, catching the shine of our rising star, sparkles to reveal the bounds of the milky way itself before it fades with the gales that blow away any trace of this misty phenomenon.

What remains, though, for three-hundred years, is the field of yellow carnations. These carnations, product of that same son and granddaughter, become ever more expansive with each passing year, as the bulbs and roots project themselves forth with a new zeal for life every spring, overcoming the frosts and mayhem of our world. It is in this same fashion that we propel ourselves forth against the injustices of the world, tooth and nail, to ensure that a future might exist where the hatred of man has been extinguished in the cleansing waters of everlasting

change. Until then, we must remember them all. Not every woman is fortunate enough to live to tell the tale of the carnations, whatever that tale for her might be. Lillian lives; and, young Martha. But what of all the others?