

SARAH J. SLOAT

MIST

Overnight, when the supermarket is closed, a few lights are left on inside. One hangs above the produce, where the all-night mist machine keeps the deep greens and cabbage damp. The mist rolls thin for its scheduled minute, then the machine shuts off, and moisture flutes along the leaves.

Because the mister is timed, the observer, like the produce, is caught in a cycle of predictable suspense. And it's a question of time before everything loses its bloom, though it's long been assumed that lassitude and apathy can be reanimated by ardor.

Maybe that's why there's comfort in this contraption of great care, its airy irrigation, the bulb burning in an automatic Florida. The mist suffuses. The leaves respond with a sheen that fades a little with each suspended sigh.

In the middle of winter one can't help but stop to watch the fine mist fume and fall on the vegetables that have stopped growing, lined up in their last, noble poses.