

White Leaves

(Molly enters, holding a six pack of seedlings. Their leaves are white.)

MOLLY

I first notice it in the hoop house. It's been a cool spring, so I've been holding back on planting the peppers and tomatoes. They've been itching to get in the ground, but I can't afford to lose them. The seedlings have that early season verdant green, shouting their freshness to the world. The entire farm is full of this brilliant green light, so lively it puts out its own frequency. If light could sing, this color would be a song about life and spring, at a fever pitch.

But this morning their color is off. Soil moisture isn't excessive. Greenhouse temps have been steady. I hope it isn't a virus.

I don't panic. Maybe they're just overeager to get in the ground, a little root bound.

Nearest to the west side door, some of the leaves are turning white. Was it cool last night? I call an all hands alert--tell Jane we're planting tomatoes and peppers today. I text Callie to see if she has time to drive up, but she's busy. Don't bother calling Jamal, I don't even want to hear his excuses. I've got two local college kids I'm hiring for the season and they will be here to help.

We get them all planted. The weather is perfect. They should come around. They don't. The color gets worse. They're white. And they start to die.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

Jane brings me one of the house plants. The leaves are turning white, just like the greenhouse seedlings. And they're dying.

(Buzzing sound rises.)

MOLLY (CONT'D)

Around this point, I notice a ringing in my ears. A buzzing. Jane has it, too. Callie comes up for the weekend, to help.

She doesn't hear anything. Jane isn't feeling so great. Maybe it's just a bad cold. Or the flu. Or allergies. She loves flowers more than any of us, but they make her sneeze and wheeze.

(MORE)

MOLLY (CONT'D)

Callie makes her tea, from the medicinals that the two of them grow. Strong, healing stuff.

(Buzzing grows louder.)

MOLLY (CONT'D)

I go back to the hoop house, and this time when I walk out the door at the far end, I see it: the grass and weeds are spotted and streaked with white.

I walk along the west field. The hedgerows all have it. The spots on the leaves reach twenty feet up into the trees. I follow the path all the way to the edge of John Davidson's pumpkin field, harrowed and prepped, ready to be planted. Every plant along the edges is white as bone.

Chickens

(Jamal enters, perhaps with a dead chicken in each hand.)

JAMAL

Henrietta and Harriet. Mom didn't want us to name them, since they'd end up as stew someday, but we never listen to her about stuff like that.

I liked the chickens better than just about everything else on the farm. There's an odd thrill that comes from scooting a hen off her roost and picking up a still warm egg. Even if it did just come out of a chicken's ass.

I'm not much of a cook, despite my sister's attempts to civilize me, but anyone can seem like a chef when he cooks an omelet from farm fresh eggs.

I came out for the eggs, but both hens were dead, sprawled on the ground. Not resting peacefully like they'd just drifted off in their sleep--this was not how they wanted to go.

Clomazone

(Callie enters.)

CALLIE

Clomazone. Chemical formula: $C_{12}H_{14}ClNO_2$. The technical name for it is Chloro-phenyl-methyl-4-4-dimethyl-3-iso-oxa-zoladinone.

Quite a mouthful. It is not something you want to get in your mouth, or on your skin, or in your lungs.

It is a chlorophyll inhibitor and is used as a pre-emergent herbicide. It kills the weeds before they even get started. It's commonly known as "Command." The label says it is for: "Control of weeds on Snap Beans, Cabbage, Cucumbers, Cotton, Melons, Peas, Peppermint, Peppers, Rice, Soybeans, Spearmint, Squash, Sugarcane, Sweet Potatoes, Tobacco, and Tuberous and Corn Vegetables. Do not apply within 1,200 feet of the following areas: Towns and Housing developments, commercial fruit or vegetable production, commercial greenhouses, or nurseries (with the exception of the above crops). Do not apply in winds above 10 miles per hour. Special precaution: Off-site movement of spray drift or vapors of Command can cause foliar whitening or yellowing of some plants."

"Prior to making applications, read and strictly follow all precautions."

She loved me best

(Molly with a gorgeous tomato.)

(Callie with a bouquet of flowers.)

(Jamal with a video camera.)

MOLLY

She had a lot of love in her.

CALLIE

She smiled with her whole face.

JAMAL

She knew how to listen.

MOLLY

She appreciated a good tomato.

CALLIE

She didn't just plant flowers, it was like she became friends with them.

JAMAL

If I wrote a story or a poem, she read it, and she didn't have this question on her face, like, "why are you doing this?"

MOLLY

So I got really good at growing tomatoes. I tried so many different varieties, and she was always my most important taster.

JAMAL

She watched every little film I made. Sometimes, just out of the blue, something would happen, in real life, and she'd say, "oh, that's just like in your story."

CALLIE

We planted the whole front in medicinals--calendula, sweet alyssum, cone flowers, yarrow, chamomile. Big beds of lavender. And we left blank spots in the beds for ourselves, so we could sit out there and soak in the colors, the fragrance, the goodness. Just the two of us.

MOLLY

She loved Callie and Jamal with all her heart. Like any good mother. But she knew they would grow up and leave her someday. That's how you know you did a good job as a parent. But she and I chose each other. She knew I'd never leave her.