

WILSON DIEHL

*Summer With Ms. Stein*

*You are brilliant and subtle if you come from Iowa and really strange and you live as you live and you are always very well taken care of if you come from Iowa,* Gertrude hypothesized after she'd told me about the rose.

Corn, corn everywhere, but not an ear to eat? I replied. We were sitting on a combine. She'd just gotten in from Chicago. The stalks were very tall.

Gertrude pointed to an opening, and we hopped down and followed her finger, walking between the rows, our bodies sliced open by paper-thick leaves, drops of blood falling like ripe berries.

After a long silence, she pointed out how the leaves rustle together like skirts at a wedding. I handed her a cup of wine and explained how zebras are made—work done entirely in winter, furrows and snow creating animals out of thin, cold air.

Gertrude nodded.

Back on the combine, we witnessed the land's bending contours, soft arching shoulders, hips, breasts. I pulled her closer and whispered the alphabet into her ear. a. b. c. d. e. f. g.

After some time, Gertrude called the weatherman and told him to go ahead and ring the bell, start the harvest. The moon said *full*. She said *ready*.

We hopped off our perch and watched the corn fall under, witnessed the sky expand.

The whole world tasted like brown paper.