



Apprentice to the Flower Poet Z.: A Novel

Debra Weinstein

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Apprentice to the Flower Poet Z. is about two women: Annabelle, an aspiring young poet from the suburbs, and Z., the celebrated mentor who tries to hold her back. It's no accident that their initials span the alphabet, as this hilarious book is about language, writing, and the appropriation of ideas. It is also about the high-wire relations between older and younger women, between reputation and aspiration.

"There is so much I wanted to learn from Z.," Annabelle confesses in the opening chapter. Obsessed with the question "What is poetry?" Annabelle thinks her new job with the distinguished Flower Poet Z. will help her penetrate the answer. What is revealed to Annabelle instead are the secrets of Z.'s personal life—not least, her dysfunctional family, adulterous behavior, and professional tyranny. Meanwhile, Annabelle is charged with finding Z.'s favorite ink ("jet black, not midnight black, not shoeshine black"), buying prescription cat food for a cranky literary critic, and illegally beheading flowers in the New York Botanical Gardens—anything to preserve Z.'s "psychic space."

As for what Annabelle learns about the literary world, much of it occurs in spite of Z.—in writing seminars where one-line poems are toiled over for years; in bed with her James Joyce–fixated lover, Harry Banks; at a confessional-poetry retreat at the home of Z.'s glamorous nemesis, Braun Brown. Still, Annabelle remains loyal to Z., until Z. egregiously crosses the line.

From Annabelle and Z. to the painfully obscure Miss Jane Elliot, Emily Dickinson, and Sylvia Plath, Debra Weinstein's *Apprentice to the Flower Poet Z.* amounts to a joy ride through the world of poetry and the emergence of a great new comic voice.

From the Hardcover edition.

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