



Only the One Sky

Mr Dabney Stuart

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Dabney Stuart's 20th book of poetry guides us to a timeless imaginative world created through dialogs between the poet (Stuart) and an old poet, which heighten our awareness of the arts of contemplation, conversation, and friendship. We see the old poet as he muses in forests, along the river, or as a poet come through time, perhaps from the Tang Dynasty of eighth-century China, where friendship was a key of poetry. In "Just the Poems," Stuart begins: "It was spring again, as usual, though early. / The old poet and I walked the trail," echoing Wang Wei (699-759) who wrote in a letter to his friend, P'ei Ti, "I think much of old days: how hand in hand, composing poems as we went, we walked down twisting paths to the banks of clear streams." These conversations are gentle, profound meditations on family, memory, and awe, set in an ideal nature: "The old poet watched sun fleck the hemlock's needles, / his morning vision, time out of mind," echoing Li Po (701-762): "My friend is lodging high in the Eastern Range, / ... / At green spring he lies in the empty woods." Yet all is not gentle in our land; in "Sower," "A gunman stands on the Lincoln Memorial steps, / surveying the American Domain." In "Skipper's Run," "When we go back, we will find the jangle / of the world waiting to snare us again." Still, Stuart balances serious concerns with knowing, wit, and humor. In an untitled poem, "Time will tell, but time is speechless." And in "High and Low," "I have looked high and low for nothing at all." These poems take us somewhere new, and we know when we've been there that we've spent our time wisely, as in "Breath-Borne," "When we look up, surprised by how far we've come, / there's still only the one sky, but it's everywhere." "Dabney Stuart's Only The One Sky offers the wisdom and images of a lifetime's observation: the convergence of physical with metaphorical, nature's forms with memory, words with breath. He presents the world's ceaseless flux meditatively, without judgment, in startling and lovely equivalences. Tracing time in wind, wingbeat, traveling cloud; longing in shadow and a bird's cry. Stuart is the master poet of the invisible."-Lisa Sandlin, author of *You Who Make the Sky Bend*

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