



Summer Lake: New and Selected Poems

David Huddle

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Summer Lake is a wonderful overview of twenty years of Huddle's writing, from his first book in 1979 to the final new poems. What will delight readers is how this collection not only exhibits some of his best and most ambitious work, but also how the collection reveals his development from a young poet to one of mature craft and theme. Though his work has changed over the years, some things remain constant, this characteristic unifies his work and makes this collection a special delight.

Huddle never drifts far from family, or from the vernacular tone of his work. Always, from the early poems to the new and more recent poems, he reveals a solid sense of rural brevity, accessible imagery and down-to-earth diction—even as he works with such dramatic subjects as the death of his father or a tour duty in Vietnam. His early work is laced with gentle country-isms even when he's describing environmental disaster. "Then peoples wells/started drying up just like/somebody?d shut off a faucet, /and holes commenced to falling..."

Readers who appreciate formal poetry will enjoy selections from his second book, Stopping By Home. One of his most challenging pieces from this section, "Tour of Duty" consists of a series of open-form sonnets. Formal progression of the sonnets juxtaposed with the chaos of war resonates with energy in these descriptions of base camps, haircuts and the words of young Vietnamese prostitutes.

His later work, laced with tragedy of his mother's Alzheimer's, revisits his skill with the short line, often shaped into tight unrhymed quatrains or triplets. In this final selection, he exhibits his acute understanding of the inner workings of a family coping with the disintegration of its matriarch. With great dignity, Huddle describes the changes wrought by his mother's illness and his simple clarity is a comfort. "Wishing is for/babies, I guess. /Blowing candles/out only works/for kids. Daylight/is what grown-ups/get." Lest one think this is too much resignation, read the last walloping poem where Huddle finally takes on God for all the deaths and explores the awe-filled and terrible duality of human existence.

This is an exceptional collection, one that will be popular with a general audience as well as avid readers of poetry.

ANNE-MARIE OOMEN (September / October 1999)

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