

Which Seeds Will Grow?

poems

Andrew J. Calis



PARACLETE PRESS
BREWSTER, MASSACHUSETTS

For Stephanie

and for Aaron, Lily, Siena, and Jude

2024 First Printing

Which Seeds Will Grow: poems

978-1-64060-953-2

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Calis, Andrew J., 1987- author.

Title: Which seeds will grow? : poems / Andrew J. Calis.

Description: Brewster, Massachusetts : Paraclete Press, 2024. | Summary:

“Calis’s profound poetry has the intensity of Hopkins, while layering light on light in the hope of helping us to see”-- Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024018614 (print) | LCCN 2024018615 (ebook) |

ISBN 9781640609532 (trade paperback) | ISBN 9781640609549 (epub)

Subjects: BISAC: POETRY / Subjects & Themes / Inspirational & Religious |

POETRY / Subjects & Themes / Places | LCGFT: Poetry.

Classification: LCC PS3603.A43895 W48 2024 (print) | LCC PS3603.

A43895

(ebook) | DDC 811/.6--dc23/eng/20240508

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2024018614>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2024018615>

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Cover design: Paraclete Design

Cover art: Paraclete Design

Published by Paraclete Press

Brewster, Massachusetts

www.paracletepress.com

Printed in the United States of America

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I.

After All Danger of Frost



AN EAR TO THE GROUND

We see before we hear the thunder, and cannot
taste the rumble of tectonic plates
until too late, when stones are brought like teeth
from dead earth. On what large infinity
we live. Earth sinks into the wider
plane. A raindrop dropped into the sea.
Listen closely, with just your heels, and
you might hear the unforgotten start:
the sun that rose after days of rain,
how it made the almost cloudless sky
grow over the Shenandoah mountains;
and then more than ever feel how small
we are, and how large.

COLLECTING RAIN SAMPLES IN A STORM

I. The Start

Robert warned me
when he saw the sudden skunk
on the roadside, *Roll*

up your window, what are you doing?

But I'd never seen one. When it lifted its tail, Robert
sped away, relieved and laughing.

And now, invincible, we climbed
a mountain in an old car
together.

II. The Storm

Then the thunder raged. The night
brightened when it was hit
by white lightning

and rain
flooded our eyes
(we were outside the car), blind,

and when we could see, lightning
flashed into trees and
Robert said, *Get your head low —*

But where
could I hide on this plateau?
Like Jonah, I knew

I was no match.
How could I not stare at the sky
which heaved itself at us, and tore the trees

down to roots?
And so we ran, and laughed, giddy
and afraid; the plateau's high grass

slowed us, our feet slipped, webs
of rain slick as sleet beneath our boots;
and we outran rain,

crouched, ducking
the lowering sky which touched the mountainside
like God;

and in this way we made it to the trees;
their soaked leaves limp
with too much water.

And there, too young,
we took the rain and left,
clothes sagging and sad

at the end, forgetting to praise
the world, its wonder
and its long-forgotten places.

TO KNOW THE EARTH BY TOUCH

The nothingness of dark first turned to light:
the earliest uncertainty. The pain
of the eclipse, the searing blindness — bright
cannot describe it. Nothing can. Contained
in light is every color. Rays that shatter
rods; waves that widen cones until
their edges are like lakes, scattering
their width as waterdrops on land, aching to spill
over the basin of the mind —
fragile and self-satisfied, that only sees
the shape. That plots a path. That finds
itself among the world's first trees
and wants too much more than peace. No; rest
at last. Lie on the Earth — on the dirt, and the dust.

WITH STARS STINGING THE SKY

The woods were like a sea, thick and loud
with green, we nearly drowned—the five of us,
at night in Catoctin's summer, camping because
here we could be this close
to the dark which was a part of everything:
seeping into the tents and between trees, and being breathed like
life in our lungs.

Remember the stars?

Remember how sharp-edged they were, glittering and stinging the sky
out of need like a bee. Stinging because they were alive
that night, as we were — all of us, one mass, the Earth
swirling in its black sea, radiating back against the sun,
quietly absorbed into the night which, then, was everything.

YOU ARE

the wind and its first gasp
across the sea,
too dark and not yet filled with life
you will nourish over slow
moving centuries,
will form as clay with hands and air
and with soft light, will breathe into
that we might breathe you out.

WHEN I READ ABOUT ASTEROIDS HEADED TO EARTH, I TRY TO THINK ABOUT ANYTHING ELSE

Science like a funhouse Babel —
glassbent, stretched toward the sky, our eyes
curved like planets, their great gravities
pulling sight from heaven. But who are we
when streaking meteors drift like leaves
through space and — oh — are moving toward us, spiral-
ing like angels?

HISTORY SPEAKS IN ITS DRY VOICE

Pick any thirty years. See the pain
that colors them faintly. Flat landscapes where
once buildings stood, should stand, stood when planes
as loud as thunder flattened houses. There,
my uncle lived, a Middle Eastern man
whose house
was taken and standing
in the Palestinian streets, his family without
anything, he thought, *I have to earn*
it back, somehow. He didn't. My dad
escaped and says he will never return.

I am American. I cannot speak
in Arabic because my father said
I would have an accent. He keeps
a part of his past on his tongue. The dead
to him still live and so
I cannot know him like I wish I could.
My dad has choked, swallowing
suffering; he has warmed it in his blood.

Jerusalem that stones its prophets, had
its chance and cast it away like dice.
It glows eternal, dead land, history —

how much you look like any other place
when I think of what I cannot see,
your people who do not all look alike
but do to me. I haven't seen their eyes
at home, only in unnatural light:
wide-painted with thick brushes, generalized
Arabs, poor, abused

and Dad says,

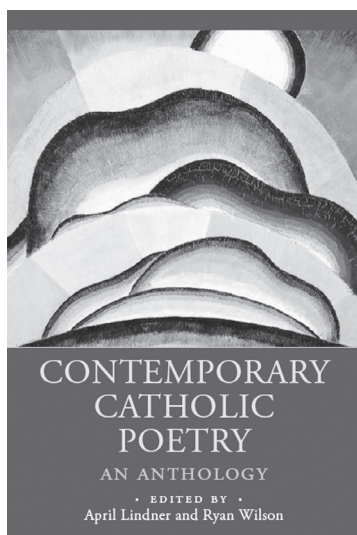
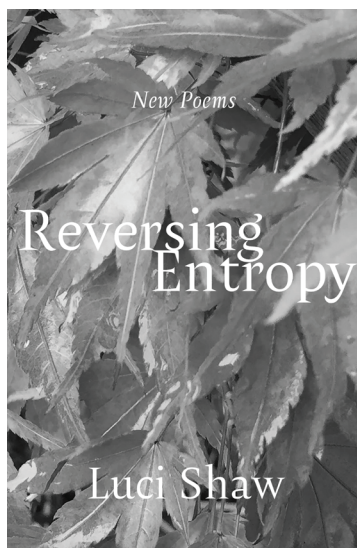
yes we were poor but

there are no

*words for what we lost. and we were raised
to be strong. we are strong.*

But my father's past he keeps
inside his chest. It sits there like dust,
like dead skin; or it seeps
like sores and then I get a hushed
glimpse of some richness before it fades
to the colors of the desert, a yellow
that anyone can paint: a yellow grayed
as pages of a book kept closed.

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