

# Wellspring: Poetry for the Journey

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A weekly poetry resource

from St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Richmond, Virginia



## *Happiness After Grief*

feels like such a betrayal: the hurt not denied, not pushed away, but gone entirely for that moment you can't help feeling good in, a moment of sudden, irrational joy over nothing of consequence, really, which makes it all somehow seem even worse. Shouldn't happiness be the result of some grand event, something adequate to counter that aching, gaping chasm that opened when...But, no: it's merely this: there goes our little neighbor, running barefoot, no pants, fox stole wrapped around her shoulders.

Kim Addonizio<sup>1</sup>

## ✧ Reflections

As I approach November—or, as recently-made-official, National Gratitude Month—I share a poem of joy. At once, it is a joy sweet and unbidden and also a joy complicated and illumined by pain. In the *now* of the poem, the sudden absence of grief is more than mere mercy but “sudden irrational joy.” What a moment it is to be a witness to this scene! And how desperately can I wish I had seen this girl myself if only for evidence of the gift incarnate.

One of the most compelling elements of this poem for me is its use of the ellipsis, those three dots suggesting omission. In this case, it is an omission that leaves for its readers the very “aching, gaping chasm” it refuses to name, a “chasm that opened when...” When what? When what happened? And to whom? We could insert any number of griefs here, an infinite list of tragedies, failures, betrayals, losses and aches. But the poet has decided that to name even one is superfluous if not beside the point entirely since, right now anyway, the point is a recognition of happiness.

The Truth of the poem, then, is greater than the information it includes or withholds. Of course we do not need to know this speaker's personal, specific pain in order to sympathize with suffering any more than we need to see for ourselves the barefooted, fox-stoled girl to know how it is to feel, even if briefly, consoled. This is the art and gift of compassion, after all.

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<sup>1</sup> “Happiness After Grief” by Kim Addonizio from *Lucifer at the Starlite: Poems*, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. Used by permission.

Perhaps this poem inspires a prayer we might pray for all who have known grief, that such moments of mercy come often or, if not frequently enough, then when they are needed the most. In my gratitude, I offer thanks for moments that seem “mere” but are instead magnificent—and thanks for the surprise of some balm I did not know I could hope to receive. I wish you, dear reader, sudden and irrational joy.

### ✧ About the poet

**Kim Addonizio** (b. 1954) is the author of numerous books—poetry collections, novels, and short-story collections—and she has written two books on craft: *The Poet’s Companion* (with Dorianne Laux) and *Ordinary Genius*. She has received fellowships from the NEA and the Guggenheim Foundation, two Pushcart Prizes, and she was a National Book Award Finalist. Addonizio once told *Contemporary Authors*: “Writing is an ongoing fascination and challenge, as well as being the only form of spirituality I can consistently practice. I started as a poet and will always return to poetry—both reading and writing it—for that sense of deep discovery and communion I find there.” Kim Addonizio was born in Washington, D.C., the daughter of a former tennis champion and a sports writer. She attended college in San Francisco, earning both her BA and MA from San Francisco State University, and has spent much of her adult life in the Bay Area. She currently lives in San Francisco.



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