

# The Obligation to Be Happy

By Linda Pastan

It is more onerous  
than the rites of beauty  
or housework, harder than love.  
But you expect it of me casually,  
the way you expect the sun  
to come up, not in spite of rain  
or clouds but because of them.

And so I smile, as if my own fidelity  
to sadness were a hidden vice—  
that downward tug on my mouth,  
my old suspicion that health  
and love are brief irrelevancies,  
no more than laughter in the warm dark  
strangled at dawn.

Happiness. I try to hoist it  
on my narrow shoulders again—  
a knapsack heavy with gold coins.  
I stumble around the house,  
bump into things.  
Only Midas himself  
would understand.

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Linda Pastan put her promising literary career on hold when she got married, and focused instead on raising a family. Unsettled by her unfulfilled talent, Pastan returned to writing and published her first book, *A Perfect Circle of Sun* at age 39. Her themes, not surprisingly, often address domestic life, but she is also influenced by her childhood and growing up in a Jewish family living in the Bronx.

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