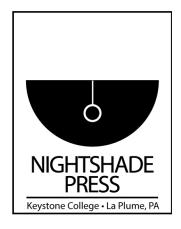
# **Transient**

# **Gail Carson Levine**



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# I Raise My Cup

I breathe in the scent of mint tea, brewed in my well water, which tastes the way New York City water used to. Pewter sleet is slanting down here, sixty miles north. The crow on its branch doesn't know the seasons. I wish a wish for spring internal, and the copper teakettle says, Let it be so.

Next year at this time I'll go to Amsterdam to visit Rembrandt's self-portrait when he was old and broken, his face a flickering lantern, his eyebrows arched in shock. What did Rembrandt see?

I raise my cup, sample, sip, and swallow. I used to be a city person, but I could be anything now. I was a coffee drinker and a striver. A moth flutters above my fingers.

### **Despite**

A girl gets anything—anything!—through youth but there's no appealing fate. Years go by.

Despite her wishes she ages, though she improves.

A girl gets anything—anything!—through youth yet no one confides the honest truth:

At sixty-five she'll beg and beg and be denied.

A girl gets anything—anything!—through youth but there's no appealing fate. Years go by.

Despite her wishes she's grown old and lost her looks
—an unappealing fate: Girls age and then they die,
remembered rarely. The men choose younger stock.
Despite her wishes she's grown old and lost her looks.
A girl gets anything, as if there were no clock,
but at sixty-five she begs and begs and is denied.
She's grown old, and lost her looks
—an unappealing fate. Girls age and then they die.

#### **Prior Constraint**

The apartment is dark, as if we're in a shoe box for a small animal with holes punched for air and light.

The drapes, which must weigh as much as an elephant, are drawn. It's hot. The radiators sound like me when I try to whistle. The heat smells of iron and paint.

Grandma once told me that Judy Garland on TV wasn't wearing underwear.

My aunts made up the couch for me last night. The chairs are covered with plastic that crackles when I sit. I'm dressing myself. I can tie my shoes. I hear my grandmother say my mother her daughter feeds me garbage and she will give me a good breakfast for once.

Grandma called her daughter-in-law's my aunt's red hair, shiksa hair.

Grandma is babysitting me and I ask her to play with me or tell me stories about when she was little, which is what I want most, and she says she'll play a game of both of us going to sleep. I sit quietly, a good child, and listen to her and the hissing heat, wondering if someday I'll look that large in bed, like a gigantic loaf of bread, and if I'll snore and fart softly.

But who's baking cookies? I just smell vinegar and burnt onions.

# For Stand-Up

Not much trauma in my past, which is bad, but luckily, last month I was diagnosed with a lot of artery plaque, which is good. My heart attack risk is higher than before I knew. Unluckily, my lifespan may not be shortened, so this is funny only if I'm dead and you're ghosts.

Onstage, I'll do pushups. You'll laugh. You, too, could do pushups. With my nose an inch from the floor I'll relate how my MD once said I'd never have heart disease, because my HDL's were that high.

We'll split our sides.
We'll pee our ghost sheets,
who were hanged not as sheep,
but lambs.