

Transient

Gail Carson Levine



Nightshade Press is an imprint of Keystone College.

Nightshade Press
Keystone College
One College Green
La Plume, PA 18440

www.keystone.edu

Copyright © 2016 by Gail Carson Levine

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission of the author except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

First Edition

Set in Calibri

Layout and Design by Raymond P. Hammond

Cover Photograph: "Dahlia" © 2015 by David M. Levine | www.dmlevine.com

Author Photo by David M. Levine

Nightshade Press Logo by David W. Porter

Senior Intern / Assistant Editor: Christina Sinibaldi, BA '16

Work Study / Editorial Assistant: Aleigh Smith, Class of 2019

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016903780

ISBN: 978-1-879205-90-1

Contents

Do They Deduce We Had Lips / *xiii*

I Le Necrologue

It Mattered to Her / 17

God's Mercy / 18

Endings / 19

She Went Gentle / 20

Self Regard / 21

Early / 22

Le Necrologue / 24

Pluck / 25

Lesson / 26

Ethics / 27

I Didn't Even Wonder If Anyone Died / 28

Reunion / 29

Celebrate! / 30

Because / 31

Just Say You're Fine / 32

See / 33

I Raise My Cup / 34

Lunch at Monica's House / 35

Awake Shriek / 37

Thud / 38

Despite / 41

Deceit / 42

Dreaming Washington Irving / 44

I Would Have Loved That! / 45

I Discover Another Question / 46

Bliss / 47

Late Prophecy / 48

Pedestaled / 49

Deliverance / 50

Judges 11:34 / 51

Angels Weep / 52

Golden Fleece / 53

Unknown Unknown / 54

Playing Casino with My Father 482 Years Later / 55

Jughead Wrote This / 58

Prior Constraint / 59

Three Children's Stories / 60

Learning / 62

Fill in the Blank / 63

Walking on Peaceable Hill Road / 67

Ticking / 69

Even Two / 70

Consider the Chances / 71

Commuting / 72

Women's Movement, 2015 / 73

For Stand-Up / 75

Duplicity / 76

Transient / 77

The Finding Poet Could Be Me / 78

Filling My Chair / 80

Found and Lost / 81

Manufactured Rage / 82

Take the Bait / 83

Present-Tense Past-Confessional / 84

My office / 85

Not That It Matters / 86

This Is Just To Say / 87

L.E.D. R.I.P. / 88

Boxwood Bush / 89

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.