

*Miriam Levine*

## **CANDLE TO THE FLAME**

*for Jim*

Clear skies when in the east the evening star is clean as ice,  
I would think that's where the sun will rise: east and east again,

sunlight floods our room, the tables blaze, the unnecessary  
candle leaves the smell of smoke, a trace on the candle stick.

"Why are we here?" my friend once asked. "Our species . . ."  
"To read each other's poems," I laughed. In his there are

swallows, swifts, doves, red-winged blackbirds, crows  
ancient seers would see as auguries and I dare to see as hope,

but aren't we also here to sacrifice the candle to the flame  
and see light fade?

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## **GERANIUM**

When frost was certain,  
I heaved a pot  
of geranium up  
by the rim, pushed  
it into the house, lifted it  
onto the bottom step,  
then to each higher step.  
The pot was too heavy  
to carry without stopping  
for a breath. I reached  
the second floor and shoved  
it to a southwest window.  
Poor thing left to languish?  
No! Fifteen months inside  
and it's blooming against cold  
glass, the flower-head made  
of smaller flowers, starry red  
explosions, scalloped leaves  
fed on nitrate, phosphate, potash  
in sludge ground from fish parts.  
The stems seem indifferent  
to gravity. And the buds, too.  
They cluster and swell  
on spindles. Rub a leaf  
against the nap—that scent  
lemon-red and slightly  
oily . . . I won't move it. Some  
plants prefer an inside room,  
a high ceiling for a sky.  
They don't miss the stars.  
I'd never put them on

a grave. Cut flowers  
are better there, a bolt  
of color like sudden  
memory, but one cold night  
and all the colors dull.  
Stones are even better.  
Headstones and smaller  
stones, those pebbles  
left to show someone came.