

## New year's geese

by [Charles Hughes](#) in the [January 3, 2018](#) issue

El Niño winter. January. Geese  
Fly high above this still suburban street,  
So high I hear their cries, then have to strain  
To see them—not a V—dark flecks of ink  
Bunched on a gray construction paper sky.  
They're indistinct, seemingly in distress,  
Moving as bubbles move in boiling water,  
And getting nowhere. Honking wildly, they  
Appear to have encountered unawares  
Some mortal and invisible enemy.  
I can't help but admire their stamina.  
Minutes go by. The geese keep grappling with  
Whatever chaos holds them in its grip.  
I'm thinking, *Who does better most days?*—when  
Suddenly silence falls. For no clear reason,  
The nonstop caterwauling stops. One second  
And two and three . . . eternity . . . but brief:  
A single voice takes up its chant-like call.  
Others call back; and back and forth, the geese  
Soon antiphon themselves into formation—  
A fresh, clean V—in which they vanish. Me?  
There can be mercy deep in memory,  
I've found—unseen, piercing as parting sound.