

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.