

DIAGRAM OF SENTENCES (and sentence fragments) of “GEESE”¹

There is no cure for temperament

It's how we recognize ourselves

But sometimes within it a narrowing imprisons or is opened
such as when my mother
in her last illness snarled and spat

and how this lifted my dour father into a patient tenderness
thereby astounding everyone

But mostly it hardens who we always were

If you've been let's say a glass-half-empty kind of girl you wake
to the chorus of geese overhead
forlorn that something has softened their nasal voices their ugly aggression.

On the ground they're worse than chickens but flying,
one leader falling back, another moving up to pierce the wind, no one in charge or every one in charge

In flight, each limited goose adjusts its part in the cluster
just under the clouds;

Do they mean together to duplicate the cloud

they are like the pelicans on the pond
rearranging their shadows
to fool the fish
another collective that constantly recalibrates,
but fish don't need to reinvent themselves the way geese do
when they negotiate the sky.

On the fixed, unyielding ground there is no end to hierarchy
—the flock, the pack, the family—you know it's true.

If you're a take-charge kind of girl, I recommend house plants
in the windows facing south;
the cacti, the cyclamen are blooming
on the brink of winter;
all it took was a little enforced deprivation,
a little premature and structured dark.

¹ Diagram by RJF with apologies to Ellen Brant Voigt and also to Ginger Murchison for any errors, original of “Geese” by Ellen Bryant Voigt from *Headwaters* (Norton 2013), p. 42.