

Robert Grunst

HIGH PITCHES

A little brown bat was waiting for dark,
looking down from the dark space
provided by the last louver slat in the roof
peak louver. The day before I'd known
there'd probably be wasps, and I saw
three paper nests; I routed them
with a paint stick, backing down the ladder
fast and feeling lucky after what I did
for the wind that blew the builders off
far enough for my escape, but the bat surprised
me. I'd been confident that I could paint
without distractions and get down from
that height. Our roof is pitched to an extreme
for Minnesota winters—so the west
winds sweep it. Snow cannot accumulate.
I had climbed with paint and brush—no room
that high between the house and ladder
to use a can hook; I don't like high climbs
anyhow, utter fear mixing with some
wild desire to fall, and there was the bat,
my left thumb hooked around the can wire,
fingers holding the bottom rim, right
hand holding the paint-loaded brush.
We stared at one another, warm
blooded to warm blooded. I thought
it was a mouse at first, out of its
mind at the highest point of the house.
I knew even though I knew it was
a bat, even the *little brown bat* (*myotis
lucifugus*), that if the bat flew in my face
I'd lose my balance. I looked into
the can of white latex, left arm wrapped

around one sidepiece. I looked
down, understanding what a mess
I'd make breaking my neck and knowing
too it wouldn't be the bat's fault:
no fault in the world in fact. I have
a field guide which says bats are *crepuscular*,
which is a lovely word, and maybe
the word saved me; maybe all along
the bat was telling me not to worry,
that it was going to stay put,
that it was curious to see my baseball cap
and full of the past night's acrobatics
and every flying insect that it loved.