High Pitches

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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.