

LEONARD TRAWICK

Bats

Though now we never kiss, and scarcely touch,
We grew up close, sister and brother.
Remember the old Plymouth's prickly seats?
Our endless sagas of the deeds of Wunks?
And the bats that would get in on summer nights?—
"Perfectly harmless," Daddy said. Still,
The one we knocked down had needle teeth;
We knew they came from caves and haunted houses,
And turned up somehow in *Hansel and Gretel*,
Dark flaps among the cakes and frosting;
They never bumped, like birds or moths—
They saw when nothing else could see.
In a pitch black room you only sensed them swooping.

That was when, already ten and twelve,
We had to share one double bed because
The only place the family found to live
Was two rooms rented in the gingerbread
Cottage of Miss Victoria De Love,
Two-hundred-pound masseuse,
To whose house trailer in the back
We'd hear assorted visitors walking
Under our window late at night:
That left the front bedroom for daughter Geraldine,
Who spent her days in negligee with radio,
And every month shoved us a suicide note—
Mama would get the ipecac and phone Victoria.

Our guinea pigs, who squealed and mated furiously
(Mating I knew all about from school),
Victoria didn't mind, because, she said,
They scared off rats; maybe they did,
But we found pregnant Cleopatra
Under the house minus her head.
Once I heard Geraldine laugh, "So the boy
And girl sleep together, eh? La, la, la!"
And then at breakfast you kept yapping about a dream—
You said I chased and tried to kiss you naked,
And went on so till Mama said "Enough,"
And Daddy, "Maybe we should get bunk beds,"
And suddenly the air was full of bats.