

GEOFF LEMON

RUSTLING

Now there are bats in my father's house.
They come lost and wayward down the chimney,
small creatures, soft bodies rustling through the soot.

They are no danger—a flash of blackness
in periphery. Roosting in the vaulted roof.
But every passing week
there are bats in my father's house.

So here he is, flapping tea-towels
flicking lights. Here he is
with the long-handled net from the swimming pool
trying to coax black shadows to the door.

Sometimes he needs reminding, thinks the one
he chased out yesterday is still there, hiding.
Remember, Dad? You phoned me.
For the first time
he has had to write down my number.

He sits on the coarse hemp couch,
thumbing through his Rolodex
as though looking for answers.
He sits on the back tiles, ice in his glass
making Euclid shapes in shadowform.

There are bats in my father's house.
If they persist through night the daytime is a truce:
bats in high corners, smudged against the sleepers;
Dad in the lounge room, gin-warm in the sun.

As evening comes he mounts the charge again.
Doors and windows yawning, all lights out
the lure of the night's mammalian whisper.
Now there are bats in my father's house.
And here is my father.
And here is his gentle persistence

manoeuvring his net until
in that lottery of space and movement
the quick shape finds the doorway
the doorway breathes into the world
and the house is a sudden stillness.
There are no bats in my father's house.
And in that stillness he leaves the lights untouched
doors and windows breathing
net long across the floor like a shot gunslinger.

He climbs the stairs in darkness to his bed.
The air is wrapped around him, the house a bedsheet
the bed an afterthought. He feels his sweat coat his skin
feels his chest struggling to expand
and tries to coax black shadows to the door.

GEOFF LEMON is Poetry Editor of *harvest* magazine and convenor of Melbourne's monthly Wordplay readings. A six-time slam winner, his work is published in *Best Australian Stories*, *HEAT*, *Blue Dog*, *Cutwater* and *Going Down Swinging*, and he also writes music journalism for *MTV* and *Beat*. Try a visit to www.wordplay.org.au.