

## MANNA

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*Ben Doyle*

What first strikes us as so impressive is the utter lack.  
It really is nothing, and we have traveled so far to see it,  
to put our tongues inside it, to smell its non-scent  
& to preach nonsense to each other, the already converted.

It really is something, though, the way you step into it  
and become all the more beautiful. It has a place in a pop song,  
but the song is only one word long, repeated until the time between  
the skreers of the police sirens get shorter. Until it is a steady howl,

& even the singer can no longer hear his word. He cannot hear  
himself singing "refrain, refrain, ..."

But it is somewhere in the mind.

At first it was a wiseass statement on song structure, but soon  
it became a plea: Refrain from you strange perfection,  
it is placing the coin 'us' recklessly on the railroad track.  
I can feel it vibrating, soon we will be stretched long & paper thin;  
Abraham Lincoln as painted by a third-grader with a good eye for detail  
but lousy with perspective.

And now the only  
sound is the slapping of a loose shingle on Mrs. Donaldson's rooftop.  
She is ninety-eight & a political activist. A widow. A child of a child  
of the civil war. Yesterday she sent her first E-mail. She is in love with me  
& what I could do with her lawn. In here there are forces that jig  
in mockery of the laws of physics & that ridicule my infatuation  
with cruelty, which I rarely mention

but the only television program on right now is the mini-series  
that seems to be about three owls trying to save the forest from  
a rapidly rising black dough. Jeez, they look tired.  
They spent yesterday pecking the pumpernickel  
until it looked like a seabottom sponge. Then they took it in their talons  
and therefore more fearsome because it is night. The owls become an  
ingredient.

Inside they are still whirring their heads around  
in the swelling warmth of the yeast ferment.  
The trees & the drink & the little hills become ingredients,  
they refrain infinitely.

This is a really good show. Tommorrow, says the trailer, tune in.  
It is the series finale where all the ends are unloosened,  
where everything you thought your life was is swallowed into the bookends  
of someone's enormous sandwich.