

Metaphors at Low Tide

The tide bows out like an obsequious servant
till sand flats stretch, vast as the floor
of a janitor's nightmare. Clumps of green fleece
are wet mops gone clammy—again, his bad dream.

Careful as a Jain with no one to sweep for him,
I tiptoe among the periwinkles.
Hermit crabs scurry like tow trucks
around the snails' stalled traffic.

In the world of their puddle it is all
so purposeful! Gulls, which earlier dropped clam-bombs
on the beachhead, are calm now—Victorian women
wading, or penguins on their tundra.

What am I to them, I wonder? Cumulus?
Colossus? Or are they less curious
than I am, examining these razor clams
ditched by hoodlums when they heard the foghorn's siren?

Straw surf—dried eel grass—breaks along the beach.
Miles of sand marcelled by wind pantomime
the waves which brought that silent surf here.
No undertow is safer. Drained, the bay's

a closet opened up to show a child
no monster lurks there; filled, the darkness irks her still
with fears she can't explain. To calm her, then,
the tide—a patient mother—goes out yet again.