

Intelligence Test

I finished the joke I was telling,
and walked out of the party,
past the Navajo wall hangings and the African masks

past the furniture made of steel and glass
like some kind of conceptual furniture

down to the weedy, rock strewn beach
to watch a wave licking at the dirty sand —
the faint stink of drying kelp

helping me to think how all that jazzed-up talk must finally
build up in the blood and poison you inside,

turning the veins into a chilly trickle,
turning the heart into a small, dried-up
highly-intelligent, inedible hors d'oeuvre —.

In school my teachers led me to believe
that cleverness was precious,
but how smart was I for listening?

when all I learned about the influence of
Henry James on Flemish art
never taught me how to cross the bridge

of someone's else's arms to me,
never taught me how to make
myself a home.

So maybe this is my intelligence test —
whether I can love whatever's left
what's left right here in front of me —

— this dingy sand, this drab-green, washed-up tentacle of weed,

split and feasted on by bugs
— these unimportant lives.

and how often I have come to this, and stood
as if at the edge of my own grave,
making a crisis out of nothing,
and looking down in at my dumb feet,

which never ask me questions
and take me everywhere.