

Beauty

i.

Look, you were a bright kid but maybe
not as bright as they thought. All you know
is that the day they showed the class
the Golden Rectangle and said
it represented what was beautiful,
you were confused. You couldn't believe
in the architecture unit after that,
and that night you held your fingers
in a rectangle – pointer, thumb,
pointer, thumb – and stared through
them at a sunset.

ii.

To the man going blind, it was the color of the flowers he had planted twenty years ago.
To the factory worker, it was quiet.
To the woman riding the city bus at five o'clock in the morning, uniform clutched under her arm, it was
the peace in her son's sleeping face.
To the pair of teenagers in the parking lot, it was the touch of taut and fevered skin.
To the veteran, it was the scar that did not reach his heart.
To the English teacher spending her evening grading papers, it was the imprint of her name on an
unwritten novel, the heft of its pages.
To the homeless man in the subway station, it was forgetting.
To the widower in his two-room apartment, it was the fountain in the park where he had met her.
To the wedding guests, it was the bride's face below the veil.
To the mother whose children did not speak the language, it was the music of the other country.
To the boy spraying graffiti on the building, it was the art that he had only ever glimpsed in
advertisements.
To the businessman packing his suitcase once again, it was the families in the restaurants.
To the girl who had never seen the ocean, it was the taste of salt.

iii.

The poets called it truth; the philosophers, a lie.
The Greeks fought a war for it, and all the stories
promise that any curse upon it can be sloughed off
with a kiss. In the magazines on the shelves
of the supermarket checkout line, you can read the ten
top secrets to have it: the convenience of today's world.
And in school again the counselor told you
it mattered only on the inside, and you wondered
whether the heart – so much more precise,
after all, than the brain's twisted circuits –
could speak its name.