

LISA LEWIS

Regretful of Error 2

Stamp collecting demands tweezers and a lens,
Ring binders, plastic envelopes, a corneal transplant, and taste
For etchings of queens' faces, and tigers',
Pandas, sailboats, flags rippling in poisoned wind.

Times have changed. A friend who outswam me from channel
To channel begs to be seated for the sake of her trick knee.
The city of Dubuque recruits young women with baccalaureate
Degrees to occupy stone towers above the river,

From which they declare they profit teaching anatomy
Of centipedes to former prisoners of war who mature
To believe no one's efforts to comprehend the universe
Equal the iconic. The rings of Saturn circle their necks and elbows.

Middle-aged men experience gout at higher rates than their piscine
Counterparts. Acorns crunch beneath cane tips on the avenue.
We dreamed of fame for jockeys besides us, yet here we are on the front
Page licking ice cream cones—strawberry swirl, thanks!

Would you take it back for a loan? Your automobile's vast tires
Dashed a signature. You crawled between the thighs of library statuary,
The shape of its calves amusing you, pleasingly altered,
As if you had consorted with the enemy or consumed the blood

Of goats with their permission. The pain, the pain. Oh, ceaselessly secreted
Away for lack of interest and now perceptible as a carbon scar.
A young man in a black t-shirt imprinted Small Town
Gay Bar seats himself at a table piled with Lego palm trees

And seconds your self-pity. After you regale him with information
He'd prefer to ignore, royal pupae burst forth moths.
It happens. There's more later. And no turning back
On what turns out to be everything but a glass avenue. The stamps

For mailing packages are as flat as a fistula. They sally forth,
Depicting journey. Children are awfully grown-up these days,
But they still talk too much about what they're planning to become—
Butlers or rubber masks or pontoon boats or a bellyache.

Ouch, it hurts. One minute they're toppling from the hands
Of their ancestors and the next they're real as coral snakes.
Old age, I mean. Your companions' faces seemingly radiant
In nests of white fluff, not high-grade styrofoam but biological waste.

You remove the cap from the well and peer down the crooked shaft.
It's moving, whatever it is. Its legs and belly gleam in a strand of dusk.
If you don't stop screaming you'll never make it out alive,
To spend the rest of eternity deformed on the corners

Of envelopes whirling through machines and arriving right on time.
But on the other hand the longer your voice challenges perfume
And reason, the more certain powerful forces will take a shine
To your last throes. That's what they mean when they shake your mitt

And congratulate you on how you were worth every minute.
Not like a giant but what you couldn't help—"being yourself,"
Someone optimistically offered, and someone else complained
That such comments wasted a perfectly adequate existence.