

MARK LEIDNER

*Gossip*

These are just these random thoughts,  
incoherently arranged, or rather,  
arranged in chronological order  
of when I thought of them  
while watching a movie (*The Age  
of Innocence*, it's a Scorsese  
picture) with a relatively mundane  
refrain—like gossip.

I don't even know you  
very well; you are already my memory.  
You are the capitol building  
somehow. You are the air  
above the cold capitol steps.  
You are strong as gossip.

You remind me of that time  
I was a painter in Paris  
the day before the Great Depression.  
I'm sorry, I want to say *your tits*  
in this poem. Your public hello  
lilts like the sound of someone squeezing  
a rubber songbird. It makes me  
wince, and feel sick and thin,  
but your look is thick like water  
and you pour it out across the room  
to me, every time we part  
as I am leaving  
and I feel strong again, like gossip.

In public your eyes shine  
and your face seems smaller and smaller  
but when we are together it fills  
out, and darkens like a lamp

and your eyes are fruits.  
I like looking at famous art.  
I cannot imagine having a closet full  
of worthless junk and not  
spending an eternity  
throwing it at you  
as you fail to dodge it  
and fall over laughing  
like gossip.

Yesterday I wept because I forgot  
to get us tickets to the opera  
because what tickets?  
What opera?

Poem as a paeon  
to Victorian mores.

One day I will write a beautiful poem  
that will go: I am a pale  
beautiful woman  
transmuting slowly into  
a tarantula  
on the surface of a still, white lake  
as a dark, fibrous smile  
spreads across my lips  
like gossip.

Gossip is the sound air makes  
as it escapes a room  
as that room's only door  
closes, or opens,  
or is completely still.  
It is the thinnest, and thickest  
thing in the room.  
It is the only exhibit in the museum,

really, if anyone was honest.  
But honesty is a gold-colored farce,  
at best. Gossip moves around and through  
its branches like fall air,  
or spring soil, still all around its roots.

This tree is in that museum  
and so are you, a leopard climbing in it.  
The museum, if it weren't a museum,  
would be a zoo. I would be a zebra,  
but the zoo is not a zoo  
because it is a museum, where I am  
just a recovering junkie, barely awake  
working the night shift, waving a flashlight's  
beam haphazardly across your shape,  
in the branches, illuminating the spots  
of your coat, the fangs  
and eyes of your face, like gossip.

Listen, I don't even know you.  
I don't even like you! O,  
the annoying lilt of your public hello!  
Just smile at me like that, though.  
Listen, how close does every poem come  
to containing cows, without?  
This poem could have contained them.  
We want to pretend things couldn't have been  
any other way, when they could've, easily,  
been any other way, and we know it?  
Fireflies, feces, snow; poems are worthless,  
the world is too rich. How about a gangbang?  
How about sharks? Armbands? Dice?  
Shovels leaning up against trellises?  
Through the ivy on the earth  
trying to climb them  
crawl mice? Four of them, gray, in a line,

eyes downward, or staring straight ahead—  
no one can tell from this angle—(like gossip)

except your poems. They are perfect,  
and precise. Because I love you  
though. For no better reason.  
O, talent! Forgive me,  
the grand finale is going to be  
a final, grand simile:

Talent is to honesty what love  
is to gossip, if we are poetry.  
Or is it, talent is to honesty in poetry  
what gossip in poetry is to love in life?  
I don't even care. Okay, really,  
this is going to be over soon. I want a million dollars,  
and you, but I would take either.  
But I would rather have you,  
and if gossip moves through love  
like money through time, I basically do.

I am leaving, but like the leopard on the branch,  
and a daunting number of other things,  
you are looking at me again,  
and so the poem will continue, like gossip.