

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 paean
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.