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Into the Gaslight

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Su: Into the Gaslight

INTO THE GASLIGHT

Wanling Su

For my birthday my friend brings me a fox pelt:
there it is, glistening on the floor of my flat.
At the embassy I speak into an apparatus:
all my words heave,
alight with darkness.

A language awakens during the night—
it is immense as a glacier. This is what
I remember: on the TV screen a president
who is not mine,
on the streets people saying I was

a spy. I sit on the pavement
with my laptop and tabulate, though I am
denied access to my workplace, I sit
so that they cannot fire me
for missing work. Where is my silver fox?

The president is giving a talk so casual
g's twist off the endings of his endin'.
My friend visited again yesterday,
her dark hair sleek as magnetic tape.
We are in a war—two, actually. My fox

tumbles out of my closet when I wake
in the morning, when I rise without prompting
in order to clothe myself for a day
that does not want me.
Advertisements adorn my world.

My journalist says he was beat,
that they poured hot water on him
until he came undone, bulging
like a baked brie.
“So that is why

I missed my appointment,” he says.
“What appointment?” I say.
Now the fox is draped on the edge
of my bathtub, half its fur heavy with water
in which I had wanted to immerse myself.

My laptop is new but no longer turns on.
Within its darkness there is only the billboard
behind me, a starburst galaxy of pixels.
“Citizens,” I say, “let me see your scars.”
I awake thinking:

I never even moved that fox. There are fossils
in the glacier, dialects stretch out their limbs:
their language, my tongue.
My friend’s hair is in corkscrews today,
shining seaweed, ribbons around the gift

of her brain—my friend is the one
who fires me. I leave work, get up from the pavement.
The fox is nowhere to be found.
Only the bath water remains, cold as the liver
of my journalist, now rotting

in open air—they told me that it was so.
Yet I am happy.
I cling to the churning of my moods

Su: Into the Gaslight

WANLING SU

as if to recall a dream upon waking,
as if to comprehend a mouthful of code.

This nation is bearable, reloaded again
onto the spine, which snaps into place
with a series of cracks. What work was it
that I did not do? Joy, distilled
out of that blank existence as butter

out of sour milk. I dip a glass into the bathwater
and it reeks of the ocean. It is fit for the hand, this glass,
this happiness, the surreal surrender.
My friend is stepping over the wild foptails:
she is knocking on my door.