

Merryn Rutledge

Fox

Our fox appeared one last time
the day I sold your things at a yard sale–
fur-lined gloves worn to the shape of your hand,
your mother’s recliner where you waited for death,
the oiled chain you kept for a quarter century
after you used it to rescue a mud-stuck traveler.

Fox crouched on our front stoop and watched me
as I moved among the parts of you I would shed.
Pitifully thin, mangy coat, bare skin scabrous, red.
Your sagging, hairless skin, angry from chemo invasion.
At last fox looked away, got up,
limped toward the woods and marsh beyond.

Have I told you he stopped by the week you died,
when I prowled our suddenly silent house?
Pausing midstep, forefoot raised,
he held me in a glass-eyed gaze.
For a moment I felt less stranded as I recalled
moonlit winter nights when he crossed the yard,
shadowing the snow phantom-like
while we stood arm in arm admiring
russet coat, floating tail, graceful gait.

Poem-writing is **Merryn Rutledge**’s avocation after careers teaching literature and writing at Phillips Exeter Academy and then running a national leadership development firm. Merryn’s essays on leadership and social justice were published in peer-reviewed journals and in books. Poems have appeared in many journals such as *Aurorean*, *Speckled Trout Review*, *The Poetry Porch* and *Multiplicity*. Her work has been featured in Mass Poetry’s *Hard Work of Hope series*. She writes, bikes, sings and practices meditation from her home south of Boston, USA.