

Louise G Cole

Walking the Back Road, After'

From 'Soft Touch'

The way the green lane opens for me,
stretches full length, often cranky,
but with arthritic fingered branches
beckoning, dry-tufted centre-parting
dividing the poor pock-marked tarmac
into uneven halves, my long absences
unremarked, no Where have you been?

even though I missed last summer's
sweetness, small scarlet strawberries
squashed alongside tractor-flattened
frogs, by morning all gone, no memory
of being magicked off into eternity
by carrion eaters in the dark velvet
hours below soft, star-stacked skies.

Then later, the way I see the fox left
on the hill vetch, that kill stretch,
where she lies low, grass verge hunched,
teeth bared, eyes missing, tyre tracks
if you look, though I can't, even when
winds ruffle autumn-fired fur to flick
the black-tipped brush back into life,

as if movement's all there is to living
and I think of you, unexpectedly quiet,
still, shape-shifted into chair-slumped
awkward, as though you've been knitted
on wrong size needles, dropped stitch
baggy, your violent vixen colours faded
from gilded ginger to silver grey, not

caring for appearances, vanity dropped
at the Care Home door, bagged up for
charity, those smart tailored suits,
fitted outfits made with your skilled
hands – someone else wears them now,
while I keep on walking the back road,
my eyes salted, trying not to unravel.