

## The Afterlife

*Theresa Burns*

I'm thinking of Ann, who stepped off a curb  
on Tenth Avenue,  
after shopping at Pottery Barn Warehouse.  
The driver said she never looked his way,  
never saw what killed her.

We'd meet for lunch once a month,  
the Chinese on Irving Place.  
Her hair would be a different shade  
of orange: auburn, tangerine, a kind of pale cantaloupe.  
She'd had her colors done again,  
decided she was a Spring, when clearly  
she was a Winter. She'd be trying a new  
lavender blouse, a chartreuse scarf that thrilled her.

Sooner or later, we'd get around to stress.  
She'd tried kundalini, Rolfing, shiatsu—  
she didn't blink when her Israeli acupuncturist  
ran off to join a commune  
the day of her appointment. She rang  
the chiropractor next door and had herself  
adjusted.

If she is there,  
she'll be calming everyone down, rubbing their necks and shoulders,  
telling them life's too short,  
even the afterlife.

I think of her sometimes around the holidays,  
midtown, the shoppers yelling into cell phones, traffic in every direction.  
Or when I'm worried about work and can't sleep,  
I try to remember, was it Valerian  
or St. John's Wort she told me to take?

What could have been so urgent in those bags—  
some cheap scented candles, a Christmas tree platter?  
I picture her making it home,  
before even taking her coat off,  
untissuing each object, holding it to the light.

Or maybe it wasn't that at all. Maybe she was just  
distracted, thinking about the person she would see that night,  
or the one she'd have lunch with  
the next day, or the day after that.

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