

You Might Think I'm An Idiot

So I'm standing here coldly stiff, too alone,
On this cold and dirty grayish curb hailing for a taxi
As if I don't even exist! Hey, World! Gotta name here!!
Non-stop traffic passes me endlessly, droning on by,
Nothing's new, just blank gray faces, just vacant undeadly eyes.
Everything in every big city is so colorless, a vast death-mask.
What have we given up for this so-called progress? Life.
Everyone starves here for a simple, human connection...
A little eye-contact, a pat on the shoulder, a how-do for heaven's sake!
Am I utterly lost in a cruel, labyrinthian necropolis?
How can I fight the despair? Where walks the alive ones?
And I'm afraid. Am I eternally condemned to this...?
Maybe I'm just being a drama-queen. Whatever.

In a couple of cold-blooded minutes a yellow cab pulls up
And I jump in, relieved. Big exhale. "To the airport please."
I sit down on the synthetic beige back-seat, and I wonder,
Why are taxi seats always beige? And darkly stained?
Excuse me, sir! What's this smell? Urine?! Voment?!
And what's this sticky stuff? I don't even want to guess.
City people, I figure. I'm glad I'm only passing through.
Yet for a few moments I have some peace and quiet.
Silent, I stare at the back of the cabby's head, an older guy.
He's black with gray hairs in stripes over his ears,
And, man, he sure likes talking! Armchair preacher, eh?
So much for some silence, I grumble to myself.
But this dude's manner of speech catches my ear.
I'm going to give this old timer some of my precious time,
And listen to his musical, old fashioned sermonizing.

Clearing his phlegm-filled throat into his rough, peasant, right hand:

*I can tell you somethin', and you might think I'm an idiot.
My family, he boasts, were one of the richest in the worl',
But not with money, no suh.
We had love, kindness, tolerance and patience, ya know.
Uh, huh, qualities that're worth **more** than money.
Yas, suh, You can't buy that! Yas, suh....*

I haven't heard this kind of talk in too long a time,
Not since I was a wee lad listening to Gramma.
Always with her soft, southern accent she'd speak gently.
And even farther back in my heart lives my mom.
We did church together on each Sunday morn.
O the torturous boredom to my little ADD ears!
O the fool I've been! How could I commit such a crime?
I'd forgotten irreplaceable, sweat-earned proverbial words!
I'm talking ancient, biblical-times wisdom, man!
In a world of pandemic madness, those few words matter.
Instead of narcissistically thinking only of myself,
Maybe I should have better listened to my elders.
Sometimes a person's oft-handed remarks will make me pause,
And like lightning this taxi-preacher has caught my full attention.

So Mr. Preacher Man scratches the back of his right ear:
*My family told me to love people for who they are,
Not what **I** want them to be, see?
They told me how to get along with people.
They told me to treat people the way I wanted to be treated.
They told me to accept people for who they are.*
Pausing, he looks at me in the rear-view mirror:
*Not clump'em together, ya hear?
Cause we're all different in our own ways.
Yas, suh, that's the richness **I** was brought up in.*

This serendipitous message makes me crack a grin,
Something like a cool shower after a sweaty day, refreshed.

It had to be to break through this cynical, callused heart.
You see, I learned the hard way, the naïve way:
Never ever wear one's heart on one's sleeve.
And like everyone who does, I've known disappointment.
So I seek a little peace in my head, maybe with a book,
Yet I hear the constant chanting of this world:
If you want to get ahead and be somebody,
*You **must** do this, and you **mustn't** do that!*
But why? Why, I cry? As I cover my ears to block out the hate?
BECAUSE I SAID SO! NOW OBEY OR BE LEFT BEHIND!

Enough of this noise! Go back to the abyss, thou evil spirit!!
I'm not really living and I desperately want something satisfying.
I look out the window and see the cars and people
Just going through the motions, a semblance of life.
We're more robot than human it seems. Maybe the matrix is real
And not just a syfy metaphor to explain the emptiness.
The international airport suddenly appears and I get out of the cab.
I'm feeling better than...well, than awhile.
I open my wallet and pay the fare with a healthy tip,
Not for a safe ride, but for an enlightening ride.
All my years in school it really can't compare.
The only way I can repay this wise man is to pay it forward,
Give it to all, to anyone who wants, who needs its life-affirming power.
I bend down and I look him in the eye: *Amen, brother!*

As the plane taxis into position I'm smiling again, feeling light.
I only wish I got the old man's name. Maybe he is an angel.