

Finding Kindness

—*JD Lloyd*

For a Southern man like me
it's almost automatic, hoisting
the carry-on for a new mother
or holding the elevator doors
for a hustling businessman.
But a reflex can also be mindless—
after all, who wouldn't give up their seat
to a thread-worn old woman,
bumping her way onto the bus
with a jumble of plastic bags.

When your heart does open
with good intent, don't let a gloating
ego close it again; too much
self-congratulation and you might forget—
you're only a few degrees of misfortune
from the crook-legged man pushing
his clattering cart full of cans.
You might fail to understand
that any moment, any one of us
can be flung like cotton-stuffed dolls
from the surface of this spinning world.

If you really want to know kindness,
try looking for it on the freeway.
Switch off the chart-topping audio book,
the Dharma talk, the drone of NPR.
This is your Sangha—a thousand Buddhas
just like you, rushing by in a river of cars.

The real trick in the traffic jam
is noticing—your own clenched fist
in the raised knuckles of another,
your shrill voice in a shrieking horn.
When you find yourself crushed
in the tide of red taillights and that
irritating car is blinking to squeeze in,
keep your foot on the brake just
a moment longer. Allow some space
to open up in the roadway ahead.
And find the dignity to nod
and wave as you let yourself in.