

Free Ride

“...13,000 cabs in New York City but only one that pays *you*...”

So as I wave goodbye to my husband, airport curbside,
he shouts, *Try to get a ride in the Cash Cab!* and we laugh

at the wish-of-it, the absurdity of it, this mission given
while I attend the AWP Conference, a veritable cornucopia

of readings and panels and a humongous book fair sprawling
over three floors of the Hilton where I'll stay within easy

walking distance of countless deli's and there's even someone
who will make my bed (oh decadence!) though I don't expect

to sleep much amidst the hubbub. In fact, like the proverbial
mosquito in the nudist colony, I won't know where to begin.

But my husband has a point. Given the chance, who wouldn't
take a ride in the Cash Cab because even if you get three questions

wrong and the driver kicks you out on the spot, you've still
gotten a free ride part way to your destination. So when Ben,

the host/driver asks, *Whaddaya say, you in?* no one says,
Hell no because there's nothing to lose and even if you

don't know the name for the mountain peaks in Wyoming named
after the French phrase for a well-endowed woman (Grand Tetons!)

and even if you don't know what superpower the Flash used
against his enemies (speed!), or if you lose it all on the double

or nothing video challenge because you don't recognize
the kookaburra, you've still had some fun along the way, and so

when you give an answer and smartass Ben responds with
downcast eyes, a groan and a sigh, *I'm afraid that's...*

...absolutely right!, yeah, he's messin' with you and that's OK, all of it
just a piece of squandered sunrise. A gung ho stumble with your compass

gone haywire. The impossible jumble of that TV what's-his-name
maharajah and the neighbor's yipping Chihuahua just confetti

in this ticker tape parade of cheering crowds and tall buildings—tidbits—
maple tree spinners falling around you like snow, like tears, like music.