

Tyehimba Jess

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leadbelly's big city hustle

a clean start. a place to make things right  
as prayer and cool as fifty dollar bills  
fresh in my palm when i stroke stella high-  
up and down-low, 'til the crowd gets all still:

that's all i wanna reap from this concrete farm  
where they call the jook joint a cabaret  
and folks burrow underground in subway cars.  
even there, a busker can pull good pay

between the thunder rush of metal  
that crashes under 42<sup>nd</sup> street—  
damn if it don't ring my head like a cymbal...  
but the green i earn can keep our feet

in shoes that we plant beneath our bed  
after strummin' till the sky bleeds orange-red.