

Rush Hour

The lanky worn stranger stepped into the subway car
where a man in a suit read
about money sitting next to a fleshy girl glued
to a magazine whose cover glared
the latest diet.
A tired teenager held a baby – tried
to get her other kid to sit still
and a woman wearing tennis shoes stared
at what the city could do to her by looking at a sister whose face fell
with age. His voice boomed
when he asked for money. Eyes hit the floor. Mine stared
at the book in my lap where Langston Hughes returned my gaze.
I looked up, though, when I heard the man say:

I am a poet.

*. . . need money to publish my book spread
a smile across my face. I was ready
to savor the scam. Opening lines were drowned
out by the screech of a hot train riding
electric rails – yet stanzas refused to die and rode
with underground captives. When the weathered hat was passed
only a man who had lived long enough to care and another poet gave
to a clean-tattered black man heading uptown.*

