Downtown

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Exhaust fumes
Form a pillar of cloud
I follow.
It doesn’t matter which avenue,
The odd numbers almost all lead
Downtown.
Sun is lying low;
Must be sunrise.
Or sunset...
I don’t remember.

Sidewalk musicians are perched by the gutter,
Quiet blues are sung
Into the angry red
Of the Manhattan sky.
Street players know about sadness,
Their notes are ringing
True in my ears.
Somebody
Must have let them down,
But they keep the beat
As they fade away.
Tourists toss them silver pity,
A tin splash in an empty cup.
It's getting colder every minute;  
Must have been sunset after all.  
The pillar of cloud is filling out  
To become the night.  
I need a pillar of fire—  
Hey mister,  
Have you got a light?  
I'd like to set myself alight.  
Let the ashes fall  
Through the cracks  
To the subway,  
To be swept along  
By the metal river rattle,  
Still heading downtown.  
Yeah,  
Heading down has been my life.  
One of these days I'll find a bottom,  
And I'll stick to its filth  
Like spit on the sidewalk.

Come on, do you dare tell me  
That I mean more than that to you?

Richard G. Barrington