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Mystery Train: Janis Joplin Leaves Port Arthur for Points West, 1964

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Train she rides is sixteen coaches long,
The long dark train that takes the girl away.
The silver wheels
click and sing along

The Panhandle, the half-assed cattle towns,
All night until the misty break of day.
Dark train,
dark train, sixteen coaches long.

Girl’s looked out her window all night long,
Bad dreams:
couldn’t sleep her thoughts away.
The wheels click, mournful, dream along.

Amarillo, Paradise,
Albuquerque still a long
Night’s ride. Scrub pine, cactus, fog all gray
Around the dark train
sixteen coaches long.

A cardboard suitcase and she’s dressed all wrong.
Got some cousin’s address,
no skills, no smarts, no money.
The wheels mock her as they click along.

A half-pint of Four Roses,
then she hums a Woody song,
I Ain’t Got No Home.
The whistle brays.
The Mystery Train is sixteen coaches long.

The whistle howls, the wheels click along.