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

David Wojahn

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Two Poems · David Wojahn

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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.