

As the Mexian Train

by Judith Skillman

Continues at a dog-trot each day going north

—JACK GILBERT

How praiseworthy, to be a train
full of people with dark eyes,
hands holding baskets and visors,
soot in the nail beds, all these bodies
sitting erect, and the few who stand
due to a lack of seats. Even the seats,
stained and worn, have not given out

yet. Vinyl sags at the edges,
the *tussah* seated where it sits always,
in the center. How splendid to be a train
full of plans and maps, of minds
in whose labyrinthine gray matter
the other languages hobble this way
and that, come from dozing,

go back to sleep, waken suddenly
as from a dream. A girl plays
at being grown up, a woman toys
with being a girl. The men, plural
always, horde whatever pesos accumulate
in their pockets, keep their elbows
close in. Such stoic chests. The blush

of a marionette on the girl's cheek,
of powder on the woman. However
close or far from home, the quick
rubs against skin, thirst begins at the back
of the throat and inches forward
until all the cars in this string—
carriages replete with names

riding on steel wheels and tracks—
remember how thirsty travel is.
How little distance has been accomplished
by the machinations of the conductor
checking tickets made out of paper.
Leaving in his wake that shushing
as after a war.