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Tercets from the Train

Human dramas implode without trace.

—Marge Piercy

Gorgeous, they are gorgeous, these two women getting
on the train, one in lime green silk, black hair
a mile wide, the other slim as a whip, coiled

in red linen. Their two small boys, grinning,
have squirmed into facing seats, bubbling with spare
energy, the cuffs of their designer jeanlets rolled

at the ankles, their studded shirts glinting.
I overhear the women talking over what to wear
to some convention (should it be the gold

Armani or the St. Laurent?) while the boys are gazing
through the rain-spattered window, practicing their
locomotive lingo in shrill, five-year-old

voices, demanding information: are we going
faster than a plane, where is the engineer,
does this train have electricity or coal?

But the women's eyes are fierce, they are grumbling
over Lord & Taylor, which was once a store
to be reckoned with, although the one with wild

hair points out that even Bloomingdale's is growing
more K-Martish than it ever was before.

Don't you interrupt me, child,

she hisses to the boy who wonders why the train is grinding
so slowly through the towns, and where
the bathroom is and what the ticket-man is called

until she bends over him, glaring
from beneath her shadowed eyes, a crimson flare
on either cheek. *You're interrupting me,* she growls.

Now you'll be sorry. His mouth is gaping
as the flat of her hand splits the air,
annihilating two long rows of smiles.

I warned you, didn't I, darling?
Now don't you dare cry. Don't you dare.
Up and down the aisle, the silence howls.