**How to be a Cowgirl**

Ann Chinnis

First, don’t call yourself Cowgirl.

Shove your sockless feet

in the red leather boots from last summer.

Ignore your brother’s laughter.

Then go find a pony.

Snake through a break in a fence,

dare the brambles to stop you.

Sing towards the pasture like you are a siren

and your Ulysses–any friendly pony.

Cinch the strap tighter on your red straw

hat for lift-off. Grab a handful

of mane and fling yourself

onto destiny’s haunches.

Bow your head to the field before you-

the fescue, big bluestem, dogtooth violet-

grander than any garden in town.

Read your fortune in the galena that glitters

through the Missouri red clay.

Let the Queen Anne’s lace reveal

your true fate: its clusters of hundreds

whisper the words to a poem about your future

as a pilot, or a doctor or a forest ranger.

Let your holster and cap-gun be your courage–

tested at sunset, in thunderstorms, by the bark

of a stray. Lay your face on the neck of your pony

and smell how her sweat is sweeter than

peppermint in your Christmas stocking. Notice

how the clomp of her hooves on limestone

has more purpose than most people you know.

To cross a meadow like this is to ride with

unbridled ambition, like a hive of bees. Back home

on the porch, you would stare at the train tracks,

counting the minutes, ‘til the 10PM from St. Louie

rattles your glass with its whistle.

Before you, watch the sycamore peeling bark

that’s too tight for its stretch. Above you,

be humbled by the sapphire sky with no limits.

Below you, relax into the sway of the pony. Believe

that your pony knows where, one day, you’ll be going.