Tomboy

At eight I long for a horse
with a velvet nose and bright eyes.

My father gives me a box camera.
A portable stable. Joy!

In Tien-mou I trade my dad’s Luckys
for an hour astride a Mongolian pony
fast and lean as a thought.

I race him past rice paddies
and the farmer and his water buffalo
slowly furrowing the mud with a wooden plow. Hello!

My father has more Lucky Strikes in his sock drawer:
strike, the flare of the match to light the cigarette
and burn the smoke my father loves.

If you don’t let the boys win, they won’t like you.

True pony!
I grab your mane and grip the pommel
tight, my legs astraddle the world, and urge you on,

leaving behind the banged-up furniture
of gender.

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