

JANE MCKIE

Grass Slide

Before I was a girl you dared me run
up the end of your road to slither down
an embankment of long cursive grass, kiss-
curls squashed flat. Above it flowed an endless
stream of commuter trains, whistling distance.
They spoke to us about pandas, Madame
Tussauds, Nelson, a great snaking river.

I was a boy then, made of stem and briar.
Your grandma, high on Valium, picked grit
from my split knee with a pair of old pliers.
At that moment, I bled for the first time,
becoming long hair, soft flesh. We both flinched
for my pain, for lost alliance, wanting
to touch. But terror inched up my new skin,

making me shy. Girlhood—a form of dying.