Insomnia
Wren Murphy

As I’m forced to the ground, breathing in the musty carpet of a creaking farm house, I rip my arms from under theirs as they scream, “Just kiss him!” Dust stings my eyes as I press myself into a corner under a Hello Kitty bed, avoiding their search.

Hours later, I resurface and find the pitiful boy, denied what he thought was his. I regret giving him my dry, awkward lips.

Rebellion appears in highway walks to smell forest heartbeats. A red car lurks, watching brown sketchers with pink highlights. The crows’ feet, snake smile says, “Get into the car.” My soles crumble like roadkill on my path home.

I fled before his boot hit the pavement, but the cop comes an hour later. My mom insisted, shaking. “Wanted the county over,” the cop says. “Sexual assault.”
My clothes drip 409 and burger grease,
ice cream stains my chest,
and a new gender falls from my lips.
Customers ask for boobs for proof of lies,
and boss, 60 something, lays a heavy hand on my shoulder.
“Look at what’s in front of our eyes.”
“I can’t see you as not a girl.”
“When you walk, your butt jiggles.”

As I rest, the ceiling’s flaws
make a constellation, lulling
me to sleep
before the train of self-loathing
runs through my waking mind.

I will send it toward the fire—
their stares, whistles,
grabbing hands—
and release the smoke to the heavens
to pass over pinprick stars.
As a man lounges in the booth,
I forget the ice and milkshake
And say, “I won’t serve you again.”