Red Riding Hood Shoots Grandma’s Gun
by Shanan Ballam

She snugs the smooth wood into her cheekbone, expels her last wisp of breath. Left hand cradles the long barrel. Now her body is a girl-gun. Her hands, wood and metal, her mouth is the barrel, black, deadly. Her finger, the trigger. She selects one leaf in the distance; it stutters dull to shine, shine to dull—the same shift you see in the eyes of a person fresh-dead. Bright, watery eye of life, then iced over. She takes one deep breath, pushes it out. Steady! Blam! Blam! Words rip from her mouth and shred the left cheek of the leaf. Now it’s lovelier, transformed to lace.

On Closure
by Robb Kunz

Throng of teenagers, eyes like clubbed seals, theater make-up (all pinks, blues and yellows) skirts, tops, chinos and shoes immodest, cut with razor-blade care come crashing around us, louder than the drums, guitars on stage. We breathe in cigarettes, marijuana, fresh violence from pores, underarms, scant virginity. These kids who must climb a new ladder of taunts, bullies armed with laptops, phones used for anything but connection, with parents that fawn in public.

What to grow into now? The Goliaths and Noahs, now cheap fetishes. We are undermined, outwitted, carpetbagged by this thrust, this cyclical whiplash.

To feel compassion for their broken necks, suicide fantasies, their trashy cosmologies—God as wigs and engorged debutantes—the way they litter, shit where they eat, tattoo ancient words on their tired bodies.

Even here, as they rush at each other, scream hard enough, laugh with barred teeth, a pack of oversexed hyaenas, joke to joke perpetuated.

And I, I with my arms outstretched, bereft of catching, my bloom, a salted snail, a rose-hip menagerie, would leave them to their hunger, draw behind Cormac and chide, chide, chide.

Oh, the follies of the past. The impudent sisters, unruly skeins, and ramparts—silly statues that guard the Garden, an exit back into that holy precinct. I would throw them out of windows just to hear them butcher the language one last time, and to feel how alike we are as our bodies broke into stars.