

Heather Ramsay

Sixteen

Hair. Metal. Wired.
It's six-six-six, the number
of the best before date on the bread tag.
You crawl out of the basement
bedroom in time for softball
bats. Smoke rings rise
from the outfield and the vice
principal tells you he likes
your terry towel shorts.

Bang your quarters
on the counter. Slurpees cost
nothing, but make the clerk
turn his back. Stealing cigarettes
from Mac's leaves more money
for french fries. They allow smoking
in Dairy Queen and you squelch
butts into the thick, sweet
ketchup pile.

Hair, burning. Krimping iron.
Spray until stiff. Spandex
and black fingerless lace.
Later, the roadie gives
you a backstage pass to a room
under the Saddledome.
But Brian Johnson is no
Van Halen and you'd rather sneak
into the Live Wire.
At least you know those greasy,
long-hairs and they'll give
you a drive home.

Remember that concert when you lost
your fringe leather jacket
and Shannon met a stripper
and never did come back —
from Toronto or Phoenix
or wherever she ended up?

Hell bent twisted sister
running like a crazy train.
Burning cherries hidden behind
cupped hands. She said don't stop.

Are we killing ourselves to live?

That winter she taught you to light up
when there were no cars on the road.
Exhale whenever you want, she said,
because if your mom drives by she'll think
the white vapour is from the cold.