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the MUSIC ISSUE



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meloncholy and the infinite sadness

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AFTER BLIND MELON'S LEAD SINGER was found OD'd on a tour bus last October, there were no rockumentaries or candlelight vigils. In fact, almost no one noticed. **Chris Heath** explores the unexamined life and death of Shannon Hoon.



FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES' OBITUARY PAGE, OCTOBER 23, 1995:

Shannon Hoon, lead singer of the rock group Blind Melon, died on Saturday in the band's bus in a parking lot in New Orleans. He was 28 and lived in Lafayette, Ind. The cause was apparently an accidental drug overdose.... Blind Melon achieved rapid success with its self-titled first album.... The video of "No Rain" was so popular that its images of a cavorting girl dressed in a bee costume threatened to eclipse the band....

In high school, Mr. Hoon developed a reputation for misbehavior.... Recently Mr. Hoon moved back to Lafayette with his girlfriend of 10 years, Lisa Crouse, and a daughter, Nico Blue, was born to them this summer. In addition to his mother, daughter and Ms. Crouse, Mr. Hoon is survived by his father, Richard, a sister, Anna, and a brother, Tim. ▶

LEFT: SHANNON HOON IN THE VIDEO FOR "STRANGE." RIGHT: SHANNON'S GRAVE, APRIL 1996.



FAR LEFT: SHANNON AT WOODSTOCK. LEFT: HOON USUALLY WENT WITHOUT SHOES ONSTAGE. HE WAS BURIED BAREFOOT. BELOW: BLIND MELON'S DEBUT LP.

THAT'S WHAT A LIFE CAN SHRIVEL INTO: AN overdose, a bee girl, a few leftover family members. There wasn't much fuss when Shannon Hoon died. He wasn't famous enough or iconic enough. His body gave out as Blind Melon toured America's clubs, trying but failing to interest the world in their second album, *Soup*.

The Monday after his death, a new Blind Melon video, "Toes Across the Floor," was serviced to MTV, as previously planned. You might have thought they would have played it a bit, whatever they thought of the video or the song: it did show the last public cavortings of a singer whom, two years before, they had joyously force-fed their audience. They didn't. In fact, the single's tepid reception—the embarrassed way it was ignored—acted as a perfect metaphor for the death with which it coincided. The truth is that Shannon Hoon's death was treated—was reviewed—exactly as if it were a new Blind Melon single. And in October 1995 there were few less valuable pop commodities than a new Blind Melon single.

I'm as swayed by pop culture's violent and callous mood swings as anybody, and maybe I would have also reacted to his death as an inconvenience and an irrelevance, if not for a few curious days in 1993 when I went on tour with Blind Melon. I went somewhat unwillingly—I needed some time at home, and I didn't consider it a peach of an assignment—but *Details* wanted to respond quickly to the band's sudden celebrity. So I went, and something about the experience stayed with me. Particularly Shannon Hoon. He was crazy and rude, and yet also unbearably sweet. It seemed as though he couldn't make up his mind whether to fight me, avoid me, or try to make me love him.

Then there was the matter of the lighter. It was an Elvis Presley lighter, slightly worn, bought in Memphis. Shannon would sit on the tour bus, the lighter in one hand, cradling his bong with the other. Midway through my visit, Elvis spluttered and stopped. Shannon Hoon and I had developed an odd relation-

Chris Heath wrote this at his desk in London, England.

At the funeral, Shannon's niece Grace put a little plastic cereal bowl in his coffin so that he could eat his Coco Puffs in Heaven.



ship, with plenty of jostling. He walked out of two interviews: I soon realized that the only way to deal with him was not to indulge him but to be equally rude back. Somewhere along the way, we got on quite well. There was an incredible spirit about him, wanton and careless, but also somehow innocent and invigorating. On my last evening, he suddenly passed me his spent lighter, clearly intending it as some kind of strange act of friendship.

Back home, I put it on the shelf full of dumb stuff above my desk. A bit of minor-pop-star detritus; Elvis junk. But then Shannon died. Since then, I've been staring at Elvis more often, and it has been asking me questions.

HOW MANY DETAILS DO WE CARE ABOUT?

This is how Shannon Hoon died: He snorted lots of cocaine.

This is also how he died: The night before, October 20, Blind Melon played in Houston. They played badly; Hoon had already started into his big new stash of coke. He was acting a bit crazy. They drove overnight to New Orleans. Shannon sat at the back, mostly, ranting about their career, and how things weren't working, and casting blame all over the place. He stayed up all night, taking cocaine. Guitarist Rogers Stevens joined in to begin with, but soon he saw that Shannon was getting out of hand. "I've already got your eulogy written, Shannon," Rogers teased him. "I know what I'm gonna say at your funeral." Horribly ironic, of course, but he wasn't thinking about that night. They had all seen Shannon far worse.

He was still ranting as the sun came up.

They arrived in New Orleans at seven in the morning. A little later he called Lisa, his girlfriend, and they talked for forty-five

minutes. They'd had an argument the day before, but everything was fine now. She prided herself on always knowing when he was really fucked up, however he tried to disguise it, but that morning he fooled her. Around ten, he went for a walk and sat on a stool in L.A. Smoothie, reading the paper and drinking a smoothie.

Eventually he headed back to the tour bus in the Dixie Parking Lot. After his death, most people assumed that he had taken something to come down—prescription tranquilizers (he had some Valium which has never been accounted for) or heroin—but the New Orleans coroner would report only cocaine and traces of marijuana. The crew were fast asleep on the bus. He locked the door behind him; took off his clothes, apart from a pair of shorts; folded them up; and lay down in guitarist Christopher Thorn's bunk. He never woke up.

But I want to know more than that.

RICHARD SHANNON HOON WAS BORN SEPTEMBER 26, 1967, in Lafayette, Indiana. His mother, Nel, had met her second husband, Dick Hoon, on the beach at Monticello Lake. He was just out of the marines. She already had two other children, Tim and Anna. Nel and Dick got married two years later, because they wanted a child of their own.

Shannon was hyperactive. "I never wanted him to take any drugs," his mother explains (the irony doesn't register, but this close up it rarely does), "so instead of putting him on something like Ritalin I enrolled him in karate when he was five or six. And by the time he was nine he had a black belt."

His construction-worker father was a big sportsman, and he pushed Shannon to follow in his footsteps. Shannon excelled at karate, wrestling, pole vaulting, and all the usual sports as well. When Shannon lost, he heard about it.

FROM LEFT: SCOTT WEINER/RETNA; DANNY CLINCH

"I was only making grades high enough to stay on the teams," Shannon told me, "and I was only trying to stay on the teams to satisfy my mother and father. Trying to be accepted is what made me lose the first sixteen, seventeen years of my life. That's something that's always scarred me."

The good sportsman was also a bad boy. There were run-ins with the police. Lots of fighting. Breaking in and messing up the house of a teacher who'd crossed him. The fish tattoo he had on his back covered the scar where he was once stabbed.

He amassed quite a delinquent score sheet. Whatever he did, his parents stood by him. No one denies that. "He was just our special boy. I could never get mad at him," his mother explains, and in her voice there is more pride than regret. "I mean, the other kids were very much left out because of Shannon. . . . I could never say no to him." Mrs. Hoon has a scrapbook from when Blind Melon started. There are letters and cards from local acquaintances who have read about Shannon's success. This is one of them, a card from an Yvonne:

"I remember the last time I saw you, before you were fingerprinted at HQ. You told me then you wouldn't be down there anymore. . . . You did it! You pulled yourself above your problems and rose to the top! You dared to dream! Good luck, hometown boy."

Yvonne worked at the police station.

SHANNON HOON'S BODY WAS TAKEN BACK TO Dayton, Indiana. His girlfriend Lisa chose his clothes—he was buried in his favorite T-shirt, which said AMSTERDAM—and sister Anna made the universally approved suggestion that her brother would like to be buried barefoot. Shannon never wore shoes when he could do without, especially onstage.

There was a wake in Dayton, where Shan-

non had gone to elementary school, and where his ancestors were buried. Later, the casket was opened for those closest to him. Guitarist Rogers Stevens remembers: "It's the first time I ever saw him not talking. I was sitting there thinking, I can't believe he's not going to get up and just fill my ear full of the hugest steaming pile of horseshit you've ever heard. I was just crushed. It was my best friend." Each of them put in objects to be buried with him. Lisa put in the most. Mrs. Hoon put in a letter to Shannon, saying she loved him and that he should sing to the angels. That's what she figured: that the angels needed a singer, so he had to go. His niece Grace put in a little plastic cereal bowl so that Shannon could eat his Coco Puffs in Heaven.

Shannon Hoon was buried in Dayton Cemetery. His grave is near the back. His sister Anna takes me there. There is no gravestone yet. They haven't decided what it should be, or how it should read. Right now, there is simply a rectangular piece of slightly damaged chipboard on which has been written: SHANNON HOON / WE MISS AND LOVE YOU / MOM, DAD, SISTER, BROTHER, NICO, LISA.

Anna breaks down soon after we arrive. "I can't wait to see him again, because I'm going to slap the shit out of him." She has brought two peach-pink roses with her and we each push one into the peat where she says her younger brother's head is. Then her older brother, Tim, drives up and they have a polite, sad disagreement: He says the head's at the other end.

WHEN HE LEFT SCHOOL, SHANNON DUMPED the athletics and formed a band. Singing made him feel good. His mother went to

every show. She still has photos of Shannon in a band called Styff Kitten with hair frizzed and permed, no shirt, pointing at the audience, his pants shiny black plastic and crotchless. She says to me, "Shannon would die if he knew I'd shown you this." The sentence just hangs there, in the air.

Eventually, Shannon moved to Los Angeles, where he quickly met the people who would become Blind Melon. He was the first singer they auditioned. They were impressed by his talent, and amazed by his craziness. He loved attention. He was always on ten. (Pot could bring him down a little, maybe to an eight and a half, or a nine.) He loved winding people up as far as he could, until they wanted to punch him, and then he'd laugh and be buddies with them.

Blind Melon were quickly signed. After "No Rain," they were famous. With his new celebrity, the craziness went public, too. One night in Vancouver, he became the first pop star to be arrested for urinating on his audience; then he was locked up

after a fight with security at the American Music Awards. Shannon's attorney for the awards fracas, Robert Shapiro, smoothed everything over, but rehab was part of the deal.

It's not as though he took drugs all the time. He would go in circles: nothing, a little, too much, nothing. I'm sure sometimes he just took them because life seemed more fun that way. But he would talk about his youth, and his strange family ties, and sometimes it seemed as if he was struggling to cope with all that. And he would obsess about bad things he'd done in his past, and how he didn't deserve good things to happen to him. Sometimes it seemed as if the drugs were just one of the many ways he had to sabotage himself. "Every time he got close to winning," says Christopher, "he would fuck himself up. Whenever things would get really good, Shannon always would do something to destroy us. It's not something you could ever stop."

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Shannon was hyperactive. "I never wanted him to take any drugs," his mother explains. (The irony doesn't register.) Instead of Ritalin, he took karate.



ABOVE: SHANNON ON HIS MOTHER'S LAP WITH HALF-SIBS ANNA AND TIM, 1968. LEFT, FROM LEFT: SHANNON AND ANNA AT HIS 1984 GRADUATION; SHANNON (RIGHT) WITH KISSIN' COUSIN BRENDAN; WITH HIS DAD, DICK, AROUND 1970.

COURTESY NEL HOON

RIGHT, FROM LEFT: SHANNON WITH NICO BLUE HOON; SHANNON AND LISA WITH NICO. BELOW: MOTHER NEL HOON IN 1991 WITH HER SON'S SENIOR PHOTO AND VARSITY JACKET.



None of the Hoons have seen Lisa and the baby since a week after the funeral. Ever since they dared to suggest that Nico might not be Shannon's.

An odd rehab story. As part of his therapy, they told Shannon to carry around this big teddy bear. This is how Shannon explained it to Chris Jones, the band's manager: It was their way of objectifying the need he felt to take care of his mother. "I think they were trying to show him," says Jones, "literally show him: that you are carrying baggage that you didn't need to carry."

AT MRS. HOON'S HOUSE, A DOG LEAPS ON you, then spins off around the house, then leaps on you again. He's called Buddy. He was Shannon's dog. "A lunatic," says Anna, "just like Shannon." Whenever they leave the house, they put him in his cage and turn on the Discovery Channel. Apparently it calms him.

Mrs. Hoon cries through much of our conversation. "No matter how many Prozac you take, it doesn't help," she says. The pride she took in her son was extreme. Sometimes, talking about him, she sounds less like his mother than his biggest fan. "I didn't know how to stop bragging on him," she tells me. "I didn't know how not to tell people that my son was the singer of Blind Melon."

She gets out the photos. There are thousands. The baby Shannon watching *The Glen Campbell Goodtime Hour* on TV. Pretending to be one of Kiss. In the back of the limo his mother rented him on his twenty-first birthday. His thirteenth birthday cake, a football surrounded by roses. At his high-school graduation, holding his penis out of his trousers. Shannon with about ten karate trophies. Shannon and his dog. There's one of Shannon passed out drunk at a party. "He looked like he was dead," says Mrs. Hoon. "It always haunted me."

Mrs. Hoon volunteers the information that she did not really know about the drugs, apart from the pot, right till the end. If she didn't know, maybe she simply didn't want

to know, for as she is telling me this, she is showing me a story in the local paper about her son getting a big record contract. A story in which the son confesses that he went to Los Angeles partly because he was getting in a mess with drugs in Indiana.

She says something that makes it clear that she blames the band for leading him astray, and I realize: She has no idea what kind of relationship Shannon had with them. So I tell her how much I think they did to try to help him. On the tour bus, when I was with them, there was no beer, out of deference to where beer might lead him. She listens, crying, clearly amazed.

"I never knew. The first two months you just spend hating everybody, I've hated Chris Jones. But I don't know how not to, I've lost the dearest thing in my life and I don't know how to deal with it."

Shannon's parents split up when he was a teenager. Mrs. Hoon blames the drinking. These days Mr. and Mrs. Hoon are friends, and Mr. Hoon is supposed to meet me at his ex-wife's house. He doesn't come. "I know he has got to be hurting so bad," she says, "but he drinks away the pain." (The next day I call him anyway. He sounds awful. His voice is husky, warm, and terribly terribly sad. "He was a fantastic kid and he's broke my heart. All accidental and everything, and I just don't want to get into it." I ask about the sports, whether he pushed his son too hard. "I tried to set goals for him," he replies. "And he met every one of them head-on. I tried to get him into other things. I guess it backfired. I'm fifty-eight years old. It's just something I'll never get over.")

Mrs. Hoon has not been able to listen to

any Blind Melon records since her son died. There is just one recording she plays. It is a cover version of Pink Floyd's "Mother," just Shannon and his guitar. A gift, from him to her. She puts on the tape. "Okay, Mom," he begins, "this is a Mother's Day present to you from your ugly son."

It is unbearable to listen to, for two reasons. First, to hear a dead son privately serenade his weeping mother is a lesson in heart-break. That would be enough on its own. But second, and more creepily, there is the choice of song. "Mother" is the key song from *The Wall*, in which we learn that the narrator has partly built the wall of the title—the repression which has messed him up—because of the attentions of an overpossessive mother. He shortens the song, skipping over some of the most harsh lines, but he still ends: *Mother, did it need to be so high?*

So what was on Shannon's mind? Did he just think—as his mother certainly did, and does—that it was just a sweet song by a cool group that said the word "mother" over and over again? Or was it some sly comment about his own mother, a mother who may have doled out with love her own brand of possessiveness in her own smotheringly permissive way?

I want to know, but I never will know. So I just listen, and Mrs. Hoon cries.

Just before Shannon left town, he wrote a song called "Change." It would become one of Blind Melon's very best. He would sit on his mother's porch, singing it over and over in his beautiful husky, high voice, and his mother would listen in, so proud and happy. It is words from that song that Anna wants on his headstone: *But I know we can't all stay here forever / So I want to write my words on the face of today.* The family considers it a song of wonderful innocence; a song of hope. And it is, sort of. But most of Shannon's finest songs were also haphazard shouts for help, wild cries for absolution, and often his metaphors weren't metaphors at all. He told Chris Jones about the day he wrote "Change": "He wrote it at the very end of a three-day coke binge in Indiana. During the first part—*I don't feel the sun's gonna come out today*—he was



eyewitness

on the other side of the room, trying to see through the venetian blinds which were drawn so no light was coming in, and he was at a point where he couldn't even get up."

LISA CROUSE MET SHANNON AT MCCLUTCHEON High School when she was sixteen. Shannon was in his senior year, but they'd rub sports



Melon went on tour. Lisa and Nico visited for a week, and everything was mostly fine, though on the last night he went out drug-taking. Chris Jones had arranged for a drug counselor of sorts to travel with Shannon. The idea was that he would slowly get Shannon's confidence, but after two days Shannon was smoking crack in front of him. There would be regrets later—there always are—but the counselor was fired, and Shannon was left to his own devices.

THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED THAT FINAL SATURDAY morning: The crew woke up and realized that Shannon was on the bus. (His feet



FROM LEFT: BLIND MELON—GLEN GRAHAM, CHRISTOPHER THORN, BRAD SMITH, HOON, AND ROGERS STEVENS; HOON THE DAY KURT COBAIN DIED.

DNA tests (a gruesome specific—the coroner in New Orleans has samples of Shannon's DNA from the autopsy) to confirm or deny it.

I can't hide my disgust or horror at this, and Anna accepts that. She does not think she is doing something terrible, because she can justify it by the tortuous logic that grief encourages. Never mind that Shannon wholeheartedly embraced the baby. Never mind the effect it will have on their relationship with Shannon's only offspring. Anna blithely explains that, assuming Nico is Shannon's after all, "we know it will never be the same with Lisa, but we want a relationship with the baby."

There's more. The family believe Shannon may have possibly sired another, hitherto undiscovered child seven and a half years ago. "I don't think Shannon even knew about this kid, to be honest with you," says Anna. "It just seemed like the right thing to do."

shoulders: Her gymnastics and his wrestling team shared the same practice area. "I was just crazy about him. It was just, like, love. Gaga over him. And it has always been that way." They split up when he moved to L.A. and she went to college. But they stayed friends, and just after Blind Melon began turning a few heads, they got back together.

For a couple of years before Lisa got pregnant, he'd been telling his bandmates he wanted a kid. He wanted, says Chris Jones, "something that would make him—that would force him, and these are his words exactly—to become responsible." His daughter, Nico Blue Hoon, would be thirteen and a half weeks old when he died.

He told everyone he would straighten up for the baby's birth. But first, the band recorded their second LP, *Soup*, in New Orleans, a city where those hungry for trouble can find their fill. Hoon was a mess, smoking crack and occasionally doing heroin. After the album was finished, he kept delaying going into rehab, but eventually he kept his word. Though he messed up badly midway through—he went out with some friends and injected heroin into his leg—he got sober, and moved home.

Sometimes it seemed that every place Shannon visited, he wanted to live there, but he had finally bought a house in Lafayette, just a few blocks from his mother's. For his music-world friends, who saw how his family past and present pushed and pulled him, it was a surprising decision.

Shannon would get up early, see his child, work with his father on his house. Then Blind

Shannon always kept his video camera close at hand. He loved pointing it at the world. Also, it was where he kept his stash.

were sticking out of the bunk.) They were due at the venue and had to wake him. The monitor technician tickled his feet, but Shannon didn't respond. Lyle Eaves, Blind Melon's sound man since the beginning, pulled back the curtain to wake him. "I called out his name, shook him, turned on the light, and as soon as I saw him I knew something was wrong. I screamed at the bus driver: Go call an ambulance." They took him out of the bunk, and the tour manager tried CPR. The ambulance came, and they announced that he was dead.

The body stayed on the bus for a couple of hours, until the coroner took it away. (According to the driver, the bus just carried on. It wasn't fumigated, or refurbished, or taken out of commission. It simply transferred to the next band who needed it—Wilco.)

THERE ARE TERRIBLE THINGS HAPPENING in Lafayette, Indiana. Grief can wake us up and save us, but it can also make us monsters. It is Anna who talks to me about what the family are doing. None of them have seen Lisa and the baby since a week after the funeral. Ever since they dared to suggest that Nico—the baby Shannon doted on and glorified in song—might not be Shannon's. Ever since they demanded that there must be

Quite why the Hoon family may be trying to discover other potential heirs, one can only imagine. It just seems like they're striking out with their grief in every direction, looking for people to blame; maybe looking for ways to make themselves the center of Shannon's life even in his death; maybe looking for ways to get what they feel they deserve of his legacy.

He died without a will, which means that—unless the Hoons disprove paternity—all his estate goes to Nico. Anna swears that none of this is about money, but she also says that they found a yellow notepad on which Shannon had written his accountant's number and the beginning of a draft will, which she implies leaves everything to his mother. Her implication—that it's what Shannon would have wanted, and is what they want—is clear. We sit in Mrs. Hoon's house, and Anna stares at her mother's curved, carved wooden fireplace. She always figured she'd have to fight Shannon for that after their mother died. I guess not.

For her part, Lisa seems to be dealing with all this with unnatural dignity, though obviously she is horrified. (I go from one faction to the other, and back, in Lafayette; four days as a tourist in their awfulness and grief

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Melancholy and the Infinite Sadness

(Continued from page 44)

and unnecessary carnage.) Understandably, Lisa can hardly bear to address or dignify their central suggestion except to note that she even knew exactly when Nico was conceived. She was visiting Shannon in—as if we could deal with another irony—New Orleans.

FOR THE CHRISTMAS OF 1991, SHANNON SENT each of his immediate family the same poem from Los Angeles, typed out in block capitals on paper which he'd burned around the edges and signed with a blue thumbprint. He called it "1920 Schyler Avenue," the address where they'd all lived together:

*Im gonna go outside for a little while
Mom and dad Im gonna ride life for
A thousand miles till I find whats mine.*

*Brother and sister, what lives we have
come to know.
Theyve watched us grow to the sky.
More pain from some of us than others,
But still we all survived through the
Times, your only halves but all of
Mine, in my heart.*

*I feel its time I let you all know,
Now that all of us are apart and out
On our own, I may not call that much
But your with me in my soul, your my
Family...and I love you.*

Anna read it at her brother's funeral.

IT IS A SAD TRUTH THAT THE STORY OF OUR lives, in all its maddening, futile detail, may be rewritten by the manner of our death. Even here, there is a danger of that happening to Shannon Hoon. What would merely seem a fairly average messed-up life if he were still muddling through it becomes recast as an unstoppable singular trajectory toward an inevitable conclusion. "I don't want people to get the wrong idea about him," Lisa sighs. "He was not a constant fuckup. People, because of all the trouble he's been in, get the impression that he's like this punk. And he is kind of, but he wasn't just a punk. He did care. He did a lot of really special things."

Most of the time, Lisa and Nico stay with her parents. It's easier. But she takes me to the house where she and Shannon lived, and where they planned to live so much longer. Outside, on the lawn, is the evergreen the band planted after the funeral. Inside, on the front-room wall, there is his Kennedy memorabilia. It's another fact you can make as sig-

nificant as you need to: Shannon's taste for the morbid. At home, he and Lisa would sit down and watch Kennedy videos together. When he was living in Los Angeles, he had three photos on the walls: Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison, and Janis Joplin. All dead.

Lisa takes me out to the garage. Most of it is filled with beat-up secondhand furniture. He would find things on tour, and fill up the bus; he used to fantasize about opening up his own antiques store. But walking through the garage door, the first thing you see is his stack of Kurt Cobain magazines—all the tributes and accounts from after Kurt died. The day of Cobain's death, Blind Melon were on David Letterman. On the show, Shannon sang Blind Melon's new single with a question mark drawn on his forehead. For the next few days he would videotape the TV footage about Kurt, just as he used to tape the L.A. riots. (He always kept that video camera close at hand. He loved pointing it at the world. Even I'm on there, somewhere. Also, the camera bag was where he kept his stash.)

We go in the house and Lisa shows me around upstairs. Nico's crib is in the bedroom, against all strict child-rearing advice. Lisa put it there when she got back from tour the last time, because she couldn't bear for Nico not to be in the same room as her. She figured that Shannon would kill her when he got home. But he never got home. "We had plans," she says. "Him and I wanted to have four children. I'd say to him at some periods, 'You have a death wish, and it bothers me.' He was so hardheaded: 'Don't try to change me.' He was just so carefree. I don't think he ever thought he would die."

Lisa, Nico, and I go out for dinner at Lafayette's only Japanese restaurant. The two of us eat Japanese; Nico has some drab fruit concoction and a biscuit. I hold Nico on my lap for a while, and she paws at my face, pulling my lips, grinning. Lisa is smart, easy company and sometimes, for a few minutes, I even forget the calamity which has brought us together here. I doubt she has that luxury.

I HAVE VISITED LOS ANGELES, SEATTLE, LAFAYETTE, New Orleans. I have talked to his manager; to his four band members; to his sound man; to his girlfriend; to his mother, father, brother, sister. For two weeks I get used to the fact that whenever I sit down with someone, they are likely to burst into tears. I wanted to know more, and I end up knowing much more than I wanted to.

I learn all that I have written above.

I learn, most horribly, that we sometimes mess each other up, and even in the face of

terrible catastrophe, our only way of coping is to mess each other up even more.

I learn that in our precious pop-culture world, where everything is oh-my-God-so-important and everything is meaningless, our response to death is as flimsy and fickle as our response to the rest of it. Shannon Hoon's demise was met with such silence partly because it simply wasn't seen as *generational*. Kurt Cobain blowing his brains out in a Seattle garage: That was the all-too-perfect encapsulation of young-boy despair and alienation. Shannon Hoon—cocaine on a bus during a struggling tour—encapsulated nothing. Except that... isn't Shannon Hoon actually much more like our generation? Feeling fucked up and fired up by strange parents and self-defeating ambitions. Searching for meaning in drugs and love and success and music. Slipping away, not in a melodramatic moment of epiphany, but from the same casual carelessness and recklessness—not specifically with drugs, but with living—that we use to pinch ourselves awake, to make our lives feel real.

I learn that we all live several lives at once, even those of us who are not secretive or scheming. And when you die—especially when you die unexpectedly—you can no longer keep the different people you've been apart; the walls collapse, and the different versions of yourself collide. And people fight over the rubble—a fight which is the ugliest of all spectacles—because that's all there is left.

Except in dreams. They all dream of him. Some of them will share their dreams, and some won't. In his sister's dreams, Shannon sees her and pushes some drugs under the bed. In his brother's, Shannon is doing drugs, and his brother is partying with him. Mrs. Hoon dreams that Shannon is ten, and he is asking for her help. *You gotta help me. There's a black stallion in the coal barn, and it's about to fall down.* So she and her boy go out there, and the horse is wild, but Shannon trains him, just like that, and saves the day.

Christopher's dream is the one which haunts me most, because it is the one that freezes most vividly Shannon Hoon's unexpected, pointless departure. There they are, all together again, the band and their manager. The magnificent Blind Melon six. And Shannon is talking away, just like he always did—unstoppable, riffing from idea to idea, from sense to nonsense and back again. Except he looks like he did in the coffin. He looks like a dead guy. And the others all share glances. They all realize it. Somebody's got to tell him.

But he just carries on, talking, laughing, spewing out the same old lovable bullshit. And he doesn't know he's dead. •