



HAPPY 1ST BIRTHDAY

BEAT THE DUST

October 2008

Introduction

For our first birthday edition we thought we'd do something special. When Beat the Dust was launched a year ago, the aim was to create a space that would be synonymous with inventive, hard-hitting, intelligent, thought-provoking and, if possible, rule-breaking literature. With this in mind, we've brought together ten of the leading lights from the Brit Lit scene for a Literary Jam session to see what impact team-working and improvisation might have on the creative writing process.

The writers who took part are Brutalists Tony O'Neill and Ben Myers and various OffBeaters - Lee Rourke, Paul Ewen, Chris Killen, Steve Finbow, Darran Anderson, Jenn Ashworth, Matthew Coleman and Paul Kavanagh.

Here's what was involved:

- a short story written in relay. A relay race? No. A relay write? Mos def!
- each writer had to produce around 500 words in no more than 5 days.
- the order writers wrote the story was determined by a random draw carried out by writer and litup magazine's editor, Mikael Covey. Thanks Mike!
- the writer selected to go first and start the story was given an opening sentence to work with by Beat the Dust's ed.
- thereafter each writer was given the story so far to continue in whatever way they saw fit. The only brief was to work with the material provided by the other team members and to have in mind the other writers who would pick up the story after them.

- very little editing was done while the relay write was in progress in order to keep the process raw and 'live' like a real jam session would be.
- the relay write began on 28th July with the last writer finishing the story on the 20th September.

The end product of the Lit Jam is the 5,600 word short story below. A big thanks to all the writers for stepping up to the plate, trying something new and for humouring the ed with the mock obituary and the author pics idea... the Blue Peter Award for Handicrafts goes to... drum roll, fanfare, much holding of breath... Jenn Ashworth and Chris Killen.

So, how well did our writers perform as a team and what effect did collaboration and improvisation have on the writing? We were aiming for extreme creativity and the odd spark of genius from this seat of the pants approach to writing. Did we achieve that? You decide...



Lit Jam writer 1, **Matthew Coleman** writes his own mock obituary:

Matthew Coleman was a London based director, writer and editor. He had recently shot a number of music videos and was working on various books and artistic projects, including the forthcoming OffBeat Generation anthology. He was outlived by his erotic poetry and fiction, which can be found mourning the loss of its creator at www.the-provocative-pages.blogspot.com.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT KANSAS?

'In an act of desperation, Ed stuck a pin in the map, but when he opened his eyes, oddly, his first thought was not how the hell was he going to get to Kansas City, but rather, who was the poor bastard he'd just stabbed to death there with his pin.'

Grimacing, Ed closed the book and put it down on the coffee table. With a pen, he wrote in bold on a sheet of A4, the word...

causality

...then turned and plucked the dictionary off the book shelf behind him.

• **noun 1:** the relationship between cause and effect. **2:** the principle that everything has a cause.

Ed chewed the end of his pen then began to scribble some notes:

`Question: can one event (cause) impact another (effect) over Time and Space?

A piece of music - *Piano Sonata No.14, C-sharp minor - Op. 27, No. 2* or, as its original title was called, *Quasi una fantasia* - written 207 years ago by a man born in Bonn, Cologne can, in the here and now, make a man's heart break apart.

The man from Bonn is Ludwig van Beethoven and the piece of music is commonly known today as *Moonlight Sonata*.

But why the unofficial title of *Moonlight Sonata*? Because in 1836 Ludwig Rellstab, the German music critic, wrote that the sonata evoked the image of reflected moonlight on the lake of Lucerne. And, since that opinion was voiced, the name *Moonlight Sonata* has carried on through Time and Space.

Its original title *Quasi una fantasia* when translated from Italian into English, is *Almost a Fantasy*.

Question: how real is reality and how thin is the boundary that separates it from fantasy? How close even was Ludwig van Beethoven's sonata from becoming a fantasy and what stopped it falling short of being one?

Back to the original question: can one event (cause) impact another event (effect) over Time and Space?

Taking Ludwig van Beethoven's sonata as an example:

Quasi una fantasia in 1801 = cause

Man's heart breaks apart in 2008 = effect

Conclusion: from this example, cause and effect can, with ease, transcend beyond the realms of Time and Space. But what about a pin stuck in a map (cause) that kills a citizen of Kansas City (effect)? Is it almost a fantasy or has it manifested beyond the boundary to actually become one?’

Ed put down his pen and stared out the window, biting his lip.



Lit Jam writer 2, **Darran Anderson** writes his own mock obituary:

The Irish writer, raconteur, drinker of note and social misfit, Darran Anderson has died following an incident in a Turkish bathhouse. His autopsy revealed that, though he was a mere 27 years of age, he had the body of a 73 year old Chinese lady. His liver had shrivelled through years of abuse to the size and dimensions of a badly-made counterfeit leather wallet. His brain consisted mainly of chicken feathers and bits of old comic books. His heart appeared to be made from the blackest stone. He reputedly spent his days alternating between periods of morose melancholy and the telling of elaborate lies and slanders. He was no stranger to the disreputable alehouses of sailor towns. Contrary to idle drunken boasts, he never learnt to play the violin. Neighbours said he kept to himself and was rarely seen, bar occasionally digging up his patio in the middle of the night. He is mourned by few. He asked only that his life’s-worth collection of poems, stories, prospective novels, articles and assorted ramblings be sent to a publisher posthumously. Sadly due to a clerical error they were instead sent for incineration. Pray for his soul.

Deep in thought, Ed didn’t hear the lock go or the steps across the floorboards.

“What are you doing?”

“Jesus fucking Jones, don’t do that!”

“Sorrrry,” she sighed, dropping her bag and coat on the floor.

He hastily bundled the papers under the table, his face flushed with anger that she’d spooked him and seen it.

“Daydreaming again?”

He didn't look up or reply. Jen was already wandering idly round the room, opening drawers and cupboards.

"You want a drink?" she asked, already pouring one.

"No. Make yourself at home by the way."

She sprawled down on the sofa. Simultaneously, he got up and started to pace. Maybe he'd let her in on it. Just a little maybe. Then again it was a question of trust. He'd have that drink after all. It was conducive to the thinking process. An unholy hour for it of course but all things considered... Beethoven would approve.

What the hell was she doing here this early anyways? Didn't she ever sleep? Out of the corner of his eye, he could see her thumb through the pages of the book he'd left on the coffee table.

Ed walked to the window. At this time of the morning, the city sounded like an orchestra tuning up, and he said as much. He liked the phrase and made a mental note to write it down and then almost instantly forgot it.

She'd stopped at the one page that had its corner folded inwards. Holding it up, she could see a pinhole of light shine through the paper.

"What's so special about Kansas?"

* * *

The whole way to Louis' place Ed warned her. Say nothing. Just nod. Smile. He'd go in, get what he was owed and they'd split. He didn't tell her what it was for. Not yet. All would become clear. It was just a question of space and time.

Above all, he'd warned Jen repeatedly about Louis' flat mate, Franklin, Frankson, whatever his name was. The guy was a sleazeball. He'd been masquerading as a physician, so the story goes. He'd show up at hospitals, clinics. Inspecting... diagnosing. God only knows what else. They'd found drips, needles and catheters in his possession. He was a piece of work all right.

When they got there, Louis, after a customary, hearty and entirely counterfeit show of fraternity, took Ed to the next room to talk business. Jen took a seat, perched on the edge, her back stiff, legs tightly locked together. She could hear them mumbling through the walls.

Across the room was the flatmate. He hadn't said a word. He was just sitting there, staring at her without an iota of shame or self-consciousness. She'd smiled but he hadn't budged. She shifted nervously in the chair, looking around the walls. They were as blank as he was; the sort of walls that frame a murder scene.

After a painful, infinitely extended period of terrible silence, she finally summoned up the courage.

"Sorry, I didn't get your name?"

He didn't reply. Just kept on staring.

She caught the slightest glimpse of him and all she could see was an abyssal deadness in his eyes. Unthinking. Like the stare of a crab. She hoped he wasn't still watching but he was. She scratched nervously at her thigh.

"Is there something wrong?"

His voice was deeper than she expected. Jen looked at him, confused. He nodded towards her leg.

"Oh...um no it's... it's nothing. Just a bruise I think..."

He nodded sagely then leant forwards. He seemed suddenly animated. His fingers pressed together in a pyramid.

"I mean... I could have a look at it for you, if you like. I'm a doctor."

The door swung open and Ed bounded in. He had a holdall over his shoulder.

"Time to go."

* * *



Lit Jam writer 3, **Ben Myers** writes his own mock obituary:

Ben Myers was born in the cathedral city of Durham in the same year as punk rock. A promising career as a long distance runner and amateur boxer were dropped in favour of academic studies and he completed a degree in English Literature. At the age of 21 he relocated to London and became the staff writer for the now defunct *Melody Maker*, and also began publishing short stories and poems. At 23 he became a freelance writer and travelled extensively interviewing some of the world's biggest bands for a variety of publications. His first book - a collection of journalism - was published in 2002, followed by his debut novel *The Book Of Fuck*. From 2003-2008 he ran the independent record label Captains Of Industry and wrote a number of music biographies, translated into a number of languages. Along with Adelle Stripe and Tony O'Neill he formed the Brutalists, a back-to-basics poetry movement, published a collection of his own Spam e-mail inspired works through Blackheath Books and contributed to a variety of magazines and anthologies, including *The Guardian*, *Mojo*, *Bizarre* and *3:AM*. He had recently completed two novels.

They walked back in silence, Ed with the holdall slung over his shoulder, Jen trying to forget about the creepy guy and the itch on her leg.

Maybe the itch was ringworm, she thought. Then again, maybe it wasn't.

Jen was sick of walking everywhere. It took them forty-five minutes to get to Louis' place, and the same again back. A round trip of – what? – five, maybe six miles? Why couldn't she have dated a guy with a car. A guy with friends who didn't disturb her.

She felt sweat gathering on her back. The balls of her feet began to ache.

The lack of an automobile was just one thing Jen was beginning to resent about her boyfriend. Ed's problem was he was a cloud-dweller. A fantasist. He was one of those arseholes who thought that by not taking a job and declaring himself a poet, a writer, a *thinker* somehow made him exactly that. He thought that to just 'be' was enough. Anyone can 'be', she thought, but who ever heard of a writer who doesn't – you know – write. An adventurer who goes nowhere. A lover who can't express love.

And he was always so enveloped in secrets. Their entire time together had been a concoction of mystery and half-truths on his part. Jen found his lack of transparency insulting and patronising, as if she somehow wasn't ready to hear about his plans. What was he up to with his maps and atlases? All part of what he called his 'research.' Was he even up to anything?

The questions bore down on Jen as they walked through the city but she refused to ask them out loud. She refused to ask what was in the holdall because that was what he wanted her to ask and stubbornness and pride prevented her from setting herself up for the inevitable crushing answer he would give: "It's just something I'm working on."

And then of course, the inevitable pay-off she'd heard a dozen times already: "You wouldn't understand."

So they walked on in silence.

Ed began to whistle a familiar tune, a low, awkward rasp of a whistle that was so deliberately nonchalant-sounding that it could only be masking guilt, more secrets; layer upon layer of them.

She recognised the tune immediately. Beethoven. *Moonlight Sonata*. The song she had mastered at the age of eight on the piano under the instruction of that cruel old woman of a teacher.

Another reason to resent this man: his pretend passion for classical music. She knew for a fact that he owned as many Bon Jovi albums as he did 'the masters'.

Bored of her own internal dialogue, she suddenly found herself speaking. Out of spite she had sworn herself to silence, yet here was her own voice escaping her mouth like she had no control over it.

"What are you thinking about?"

"Me?" he said, vacantly. Nonchalantly. "Oh, I was just thinking about Kansas."

The randomness of his answer surprised her. She racked her brain for a witty response, then realised she was obviously still subservient to this man. The thought depressed her further.

"Kansas," she said. "Home of Dorothy, right?"

"What?" he whispered. "Dorothy who?"

* * *



Lit Jam writer 4, **Chris Killen** writes his own mock obituary:

Chris Killen was born in 1981 in Kenilworth, Warwickshire. He was interested in things like small birds, moustaches, cats, etc. He wrote one novel called *The Bird Room* which got to 513,000 sales rank on Amazon (pre-order) before being deleted by Canongate Books one month before its January 2009 publication date. Small excerpts of the novel can still be found on the website www.thebirdroom.org.uk. Chris also wrote a blog called 'Day of Moustaches' at www.dayofmoustaches.blogspot.com, until it was taken down due to complaints, after Chris' 'humorous' 100-step plan to destroy it, culminating in the posting of a large, high resolution digital photograph of his tiny, microwaved penis. Chris spent the remainder of his life working (unpaid) in the gardens of country houses, feeding small bits of bread to swans, until one of them broke his arm and he lay there and eventually died. That was in 2012. Chris' gravestone has the phrase 'I'm sorry' written on it, which is probably a reference to something.

In Kansas, a man is lying on the floor, not moving very much. The man needs to go to the toilet. The man doesn't get up and go to the toilet though. Toilets remind him of the woman. Pretty much everything in the small house reminds him of the woman. He decides what to do about his toilet problem. He lies on the floor and wets himself. About an hour ago, the phone in the man's house in Kansas rang and when the man picked up the phone a woman said some things which caused the man to hang up the phone and lie down on the floor and wet himself.

The only thing that would make the man get up off the floor right now is if the phone rang again, and it was the woman, and she said nice things, miraculous things which somehow reversed her feelings and the whole of the last hour or so.

The man turns his head slightly in the direction of the phone table. He winces quietly up at the phone table. A droplet of water comes out of the corner of one of his eyes and moves slowly onto his cheek.

The phone starts ringing.

A small, trapped bit of piss leaks involuntarily out of the man's penis. He's excited. He's scared, too. He stands up quickly and sees electric crackles on the wallpaper. He picks up the phone.

"Dorothy?"

There's a beeping noise, then the voice of an operator. "Mr Edward Greer?"

"Yeah," he says. Some of the excited feeling in the man's stomach disappears.

"I have a long-distance collect call. Do you want to take it?"

"OK," he says.

It's not Dorothy. Who the fuck is calling him collect? Dorothy couldn't have gone anywhere particularly long distance in an hour, could she?

"Right, I'm putting them through," the operator says.

"Hi," says a man in a limey accent. Something like classical music is playing in the background. The rest of the excited feeling in the man's stomach disappears.

"Yeah?" says the man in Kansas. "What do you want?"

"I don't know," says the limey.

"What?"

"I don't know. Listen. I'm not even sure why I called, exactly. I just dialled international directory enquiries and asked to be connected to someone with my name in Kansas. You see ..."

"What? What the fuck?"

"I'm sorry, but then you said 'Dorothy' when you first answered, and ..."

"Too fuckin' right you're sorry," the man says. "Fucking limey faggot."

The man in Kansas slams down the phone. It feels good to slam down the phone. It feels good to be angry at a prank-calling limey douche bag for a second or so, too. But quickly the man just feels sad again. He goes back into the middle of the room, to the groin-shaped dark patch on the

carpet, and carefully lies down in it. He winces up at the phone table and watches electric crackles crawl up and down the table leg.

It's about 3 pm, Kansas time. His kid will be coming out of school soon.



Lit Jam writer 5, **Paul Kavanagh** writes his own mock obituary:

Paul Kavanagh lived in Charlotte. He was a shit. His wife is very happy.

Dorothy vacuumed up the dog. She didn't intend to. She was doing Eddy's job. Eddy was such a lazy god-damn dreamer. The dog must have been asleep and in her path. At least it wasn't the kid. The Dyson didn't even groan, not a whisper. The engine just hummed monotonously.

"Stupid dog," she said. "Eddy!"

She screamed that a lot.

"Eddy!"

Eddy was lazy, a good-for-nothing dreamer, and the dog, the dog was always sleeping in her path. She must have tripped over it a hundred times. She had terrible scars on her knees and elbows. The kind of scars a prostitute wears with pride.

The dog was an accessory, a show dog, a piece of ostentatious garb and it slept most of the day. Eddy had bought her the dog to keep her company – a friend, he said.

Stupid dog, she always said.

She had been daydreaming and whistling something she'd heard Eddy humming. Edward Greer. Why couldn't she be dating a poet, a writer, a *thinker*? Can you imagine the conversations they could have? The walks through parks would be amazing. Together they could break the record set in *À bout de souffle*. Now that would be fun.

Next door her neighbours were fighting. They were always fighting.

The Dyson had sucked up the dog with the ease of a tornado with a mobile home, the poor dog fragmenting into a thousand pieces. It was the smell that alerted her. A terrible reek from the Dyson. She turned the machine off and bent down. The cylindrical collection vessel looked like a food blender. The liquefied dog looked like a strawberry smoothie. A strawberry smoothie with clumps of matted hair, eyeballs and rows of teeth. It was fluffy, aerated and extremely thick. It wasn't appetizing, but Dorothy felt those familiar pangs of hunger. Oh how she hated to be hungry. Maybe Eddy could drive to White Castle, or Taco Bell, or Wendy's. Wendy's do the best smoothies.

She hid the reek behind a curtain of Lysol and Febreze.

For a second she thought she was hallucinating – the walls were undulating.

"Lovely Dorothy send Eddy to Applebee's," said her belly. "There's thirty bucks hidden in the Lipton Diet Iced Tea mix."

Dorothy licked her lips.

No. The chemicals were manipulating her brain.

Dorothy pushed the Dyson around the room like you would a sick child, fearful that just one bump will push the child over moribundity.

She thought of running, escaping, going downstairs, asking for help. When you sneak out of the house though never do it on tiptoe. That's a sure way of being caught. They sense it. They always do. Abandon all surreptitious designs.

Instead Dorothy picked up the phone. She wouldn't go downstairs and he wouldn't make the journey upstairs. She held the phone like it was a broken piece of China. She felt a need to speak badly about the dog, she couldn't help herself.

"Eddy your dog's had a shit on the carpet and the kid will be home soon," said Dorothy down the phone. "Get up here and clean it up!"

He said nothing. Not a word. There was only silence. What more could she say to him, that man, that good-for-nothing dreamer. Every time they were together he was reduced to a Crumb character, salivating, eyes protruding, sweat collecting on his brow; she could say nothing to him. Eddy possessed a uric reek. She wanted to tell him, but she couldn't.

Dorothy slammed down the phone.

"That damn dog!" she screamed, predictably.

The Dyson wasn't airtight. It was seeping like one of those boils on the kid's face. That kid was ugly. An ugly brute. Her mother had warned her about the Greers. "A hippo can't produce a swan," said her mother.

Poor Eddy. He was a pinhead. But he was safe. You wouldn't find him at the bar, drunk, loudmouthing. You wouldn't find him in the car park stuck up some barfly.

"Fuck Bon Jovi!" he shouted. Her neighbour. "I want Hall & Oates and Pabst Blue Ribbon! I'll knock the fucking walls down. I'll fuck you up like never before!"

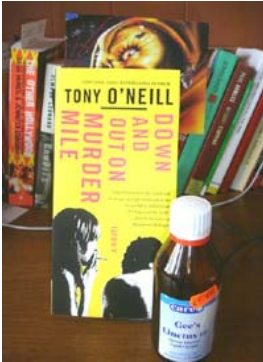
Dorothy collapsed onto her unmade bed. She picked up her hand mirror. Before the crazy idea of cleaning, she had been removing unwanted hairs from her chin.

Softly, she started to sing. Maybe, she could win *American Idol*. Yes, maybe, just maybe that could be her way out of her life here with Eddy and Kansas City.

Dorothy stopped singing.

Dorothy was sad. It felt good to be sad. When you're sad you're filled with emotions. Dorothy was happy to be feeling sad.

"I mean, what's so special about Kansas anyway?" Dorothy asked the chubby Dorothy in the mirror.



Lit Jam writer 6, **Tony O'Neill** writes his own mock obituary:

The author Tony O'Neill died today, aged 89 years old, following a high speed car crash. Toxicology reports found that he was under the influence of a variety of illegal substances when his vehicle veered off the road and crashed into a dynamite factory. Following the collision, his ashes were spread over a 100-mile radius. A memorial service will be held in Gold Diggers, a strip club on Santa Monica Boulevard, Los Angeles.

Casanova's bar. Neon Santa Claus by the cigarette machine and sad, half-dead garland lights pinned to the wall with malformed nails. The place is almost deserted. It is two o'clock in the afternoon.

Eddie staggers out of the toilet, holding his gut. He makes it to the bar. He eases himself painfully onto the stool. Marty the barkeep puts down his rag and glass.

"Another?"

"Gimme a shot of Wild Turkey, and call an ambulance." Eddie hisses.

Marty pours the drink and slides it over to Eddie.

"What about the ambulance?"

"Oh yeah."

Marty picks up the phone, and dials nine one one. He hands the receiver to Eddie.

"Hello, yes? I need an ambulance. I've uh, I've been stabbed."

Marty looks at Eddie quizzically. In the dim light he notices the red seeping from between his fingers. Looks like someone got him good. From out of the toilet comes a six-foot-two man made almost half a foot taller by his high heels. He is wearing a denim miniskirt and a tight Hooters T-shirt. The man's name is Dorothy. He has a five o'clock shadow and his makeup is melting off under the murky heat.

Eddie hangs up the phone. "They're on their way," he says, "My guts hurt like a sonvobitch. Gimme another."

"You'd better get out of here," Marty warns Dorothy, "The cops'll be here soon."

"I oughta have pulled his insides out," Dorothy says. "Nobody treats me like that."

"I'm SORRY, goddamnit" Eddie says without looking around, "I just got carried away."

"You pig fucker. You watch your goddamned manners next time."

Dorothy stomps out of Casanova's. The dark bar is momentarily bathed in afternoon sunlight, before the door swings shut again and the midnight pall returns.

Dorothy clumps down the street, shaking a little from her encounter with Eddie. She is late. At Wendy's she finds Beethoven sitting alone, drinking a Hi-C pink lemonade. Beethoven is a faggot Cuban in a purple silk shirt. What kind of a goddamned name for a dealer is Beethoven? She'd asked him that once. He'd shrugged. "I dunno, *Dorothy*."

She sits down opposite him.

"Thought you were gonna stand me up," Beethoven says.

"Trouble with a customer."

"What you need, girl?"

Under the table, Dorothy slips a handful of twenties. Beethoven counts them quickly and passes the hormones to Dorothy. An ambulance roars past the restaurant, almost as an afterthought.

"Fucking limey faggot!"

Dial tone.

Eddy hangs up the phone. So that was that. Maybe he was going mad. Maybe some kind of strange bug had gotten into his ear and was eating its way through his brain, driving him slowly insane.

"There's good news and bad news. The good news is it ate its way straight through. It was a million-to-one shot, but the thing burrowed in a straight line, coming out the other ear."

"What's the bad news, doc?"

"It's a female. It laid approximately 10,000 eggs in there."

Eddy falls to the floor clutching his skull, the scraping of 10,000 hungry mouths as they eat his head from the inside out. Her hand on his shoulder snaps him out of it.

Dorothy says, "You look pale. What is up with you today, Eddy Greer?"

"I need a drink."

In the ambulance, Eddie wonders why the fuck shit like this keeps happening to him. The paramedic looks young, inexperienced. There is an abyssal deadness in his eyes. Unthinking. Like the stare of a crab. He is checking Eddie's pulse. The radio is playing some fruity classical music. The paramedic's name badge reads Franklin, James.

"Will I be OK?"

"Sure. You'll be fine. Have you been drinking?"

"Of course I've been drinking. I was in a bar for christ's sake. Are you sure I'll be OK? I don't want to have to piss into a bag for the rest of my life."

"You'll be fine," Franklin says, "Trust me. I'm a doctor."



Lit Jam writer 7, **Steve Finbow** writes his own mock obituary:

Steve Finbow, who has died age 47 after a long battle with Perfectionism (a variant strain of Bighead disease), lived an exemplary life of chastity and temperance. At the age of two, Finbow invented a mechanism that transmuted thoughts into the written word. Neglecting to submit a patent, his invention became public property resulting in the things we call novels, short stories, and poetry. Although stalked throughout his life by women such as Kate Moss, Natalia Vodianova, Aishwarya Ra, and Mia Matsumiya, Finbow remained strictly celibate preferring the company of flowers and plants at his home in Cork. His novels such as *The Dark Side of Summer*, *You Gave Me Jell-O When I Wanted Jam*, and *I've Had So Much Bad Luck Lately If I Bought A Circus My Dwarves Would Begin To Grow* topped the bestseller lists throughout the world and were translated into 6,800 languages including Khomani, of which there are only ten surviving speakers. At the age of 40, he turned down the Nobel Prize for Literature, his reason being that he saw one of the Swedish judges drinking a can of Stella Artois – something anathema to his Tee-totalitarianism. He is survived by his Siamese cats Poe and Dickens. Steven David Finbow, writer, born January 22 1961; died October 3rd 2008.

Eddy slaps his right ear with the heel of his right hand.

"What are you doing?" Dorothy asks. She'd come downstairs to see why Eddy'd been shouting at the phone.

"I got this sorta buzzing gnawing situation going on."

"Maybe you picked up an infection from the phone."

"Maybe," Eddy said.

Eddy takes a sheet of paper from his pocket, unfolds it to reveal a page torn from a book – a map oblong in shape with a corner missing as if chewed off. He looks round and finds a table to settle the map. Dorothy follows. Eddy rubs his chin, taps the map.

"What is it?" says Dorothy.

"That's it," he says, "It must be a linguistic space-time anomaly."

"Come again," says Dorothy.

"See where the Missouri river takes a chunk out of Kansas?"

"Yeah, that cute little dog-bite thing?"

"Yeah, look... Kansas City here. And across the river is...?"

"Kansas City."

"Exactly. Two of them. One in Kansas. One in Missouri. That's how it happened."

"How what happened?"

"I was trying to pinpoint the exact centre, trying to divide one from the other. For your birthday, I planned on making you a jigsaw out of the 48 continental states. The pressure caused by separating linguistic dualities forced a split in the space-time continuum. Someone with my name was killed in order to repair the schism."

"To repair the what?"

"But on killing him, I made him my double. I killed him in the real world but accidentally created another world. You see, all cities exist in reality but they also exist purely in our minds. I've created a bipolar Kansas City populated by doppelgängers."

"What like the Crips and the Bloods?"

"No. Doppelgängers not gangbangers – it's us but not as we know us, living in a bilocation."

"You mean, I'm in another Kansas City right now but don't know who I am? And it's your fault?"

"Yes. I could be anything – a poet, a drifter, a drunk. For all I know, you could be Miss Gale herself or a transsexual hustler. Jeez, Beethoven could be your pimp and dealer."

"What made you think of Beethoven?"

"The last few days, I've had *Moonlight Sonata* going through my head. During the opening notes, I get flashes of the space-time disorder. I phoned my double to see if I could get it to stop. I thought maybe if my double knows I'm his double then maybe cognition would pull reality back together again. Or wait, maybe my double phoned me. Oh God, Dorothy, you gotta help me. I need you to...

DUM-dum-dum, dum-dum-dum, dum-dum-dum, dum-dum-dum, DUM-dum-dum, dum-dum-dum, dum-dum-dum, dum-dum-dum, DUM-dum-dum, dum-dum-dum, DUM-dum-dum, dum-dum-dum, DUM-dum-dum, dum-dum-dum, DUM-dum-dum, dum-dum-dum...

Wiping ketchup and mayonnaise from his purple silk shirt, Beethoven bares his pointed teeth at Dorothy.

"Bitch," he hisses, "Howma gawn get this clean?"

"Who the fuck do you think you're trying to kid?" Dorothy says. "This is pirated HRT! Give me my motherfucking money back!"

Beethoven leans forward, "Sorry, chica" he says, "I seem to have gone deaf."

DUM-dum-dum, dum-dum-dum, dum-dum-dum, dum-dum-dum...

Orderlies wheel Eddie into reception. His clothes stink of piss. He is left in an antiseptically white room, a map of Kansas on the wall. A puff of what looks like smoke moves from the bottom-right-hand corner up towards the town of Lawrence. The door opens, in walks a man who looks a bit like the paramedic Eddie spoke to in the ambulance – only, this man's older, wearing a white coat with rusty scalpels poking out of the breast pocket.

"Your name?"

"Edward, but my friends call me Eddie, or Ed."

"I'm Dr Benway. Dr James Franklin Benway."

"What's that, Doctor?" Eddie says pointing at the map and the growing plume.

"Nothing for you to worry about. We call them twisters in this part of the world. This here is Tornado Alley – where time, space, and language collide. You, my dear Edward, are an appendix in the great Book of Shadows.

DUM-dum-dum, dum-dum-dum, dum-dum-dum, dum-dum-dum...



Lit Jam writer 8, **Lee Rourke** writes his own mock obituary:

Lee Rourke lived an ordinary life. One day, mid-way through his 4th decade, he met the love of his life. Together, they did ordinary things spectacularly well.

'At this time of the morning, the city sounded like an orchestra tuning up.'

Jen remembers Ed saying something like this to her, as he hung out the window listening to the hustle and bustle below. She immediately thought it sounded phoney. She much preferred the sound of the sea anyway. But she knew he'd liked it, that turn of phrase, so she didn't say anything.

She put the book back on the coffee table and started to think about an article she'd recently read by some English author she liked. The article was about lots of things, some of which she didn't understand, but that didn't matter. It was about stuff most people she knew didn't care

about anyway – and this was enough to make her happy. The article seemed to be mostly about navigation, how difficult it was, starting with a long section on Melville's *Moby Dick*. She had never read *Moby Dick*, although she had always wanted to. The article proposed that Queequeg, the Polynesian harpoonist who has a coffin made when he is sick with fever covered with drawings of his own tattoos, is, by doing so, mapping himself onto the surface of the coffin. Through this mapping, the article proposed, Queequeg is seeing himself for the first time. The article pointed out that even if Queequeg used a mirror he wouldn't be able to see himself; to see the tattoos on his shoulders and back he would need two mirrors, then three to see more, four mirrors, a whole hall of mirrors and still he wouldn't truly be able see himself. So Queequeg simply *maps* himself onto the surface of the coffin instead. Revealing all.

Jen liked this idea a lot, this *mapping*. She'd copied down a paragraph from the article into her notepad. When she did this – write arbitrary things in her notepad – it made her feel like she was doing something important, something that had meaning. She'd seen Ed do it a lot.

Jen often read the paragraph back to herself:

'As it is impossible to make a sheet of paper rest smoothly on a sphere, so it is impossible to make a correct map on a sheet of paper. It is for this reason that projections have become necessary. [. . .] All maps are projections, be they zenithal, gnomonic, stereographic, orthographic, globular, conical, cylindrical or sinusoidal: projections, method[s] of transforming the sphere-like surface being mapped onto a flat plane. A globe, on the other hand, is not a map. It's a miniature, a copy.'

She revelled in the fact that, just like Queequeg, maybe Ed too, in his own idiosyncratic way, was *mapping* himself. Maybe that's what he was doing, projecting himself with that map, trying to truly see himself with these thoughts of Kansas, with each pin prick. And just like in *Moby Dick* she figured this *mapping*, this projecting, was a miniature of the whole. Ed's whole. Yes, maybe everything Ed was trying to do could be found on that little map. In each little prick of the pin.

Still, something niggled inside her.

'But what's so special about Kansas?' she thought and reached for the book on the coffee table again.



Lit Jam writer 9, **Jenn Ashworth** writes her own mock obituary:

The first reports of suspicious circumstances surrounding the 'death' of Jenn Ashworth have been published. It seems in the time preceding the grisly discovery of her decomposed remains, Jenn made several large purchases of waterproof material and, in another bizarre twist to this case, a large Ali-Baba style laundry basket. There are also rumours of eye-witness reports describing strange lights and fires in the woods, floating objects in the night sky, and continued attempts to publish Jenn's later, darker works of fiction via a number of anonymous online proxies, e.g. www.jennashworth.blogspot.com Amid this confusion, rumours grow that she is not dead at all, but flying somewhere over the North of England in a self-constructed hot air balloon. Which begs the question – just who was discovered rotting gently, stinking sweetly, softening silently, in Jenn's special brown armchair? Her family has refused to comment, but police are examining CCTV footage carefully and are anxious to speak to anyone who may know of her whereabouts. Jenn will be remembered for her cactus collection, her love of cheap wine and her remarkable ability to roll a fag with one hand. Her debut novel, *A Kind of Intimacy* will be launched posthumously in March 2009 by Arcadia Books.

Jen quickly grew tired of the book, and of Ed's humming and sighing.

"Tell me again why we had to walk six miles to your creepy friends' house today?" she said.

Ed was hunched over the desk, refilling his fountain pen and dropping ink on the carpet, rattling boxes of pins.

"Ed, why don't you have a cup of tea and a sleep?"

"There isn't time for that!" he shouted at her. There was something wrong with his accent. He sounded almost American. Strange. Her leg was itching again. Almost burning.

Jen threw the book on the sofa and stood up. She should have given the crazy prick his marching orders long ago. The itch on her leg was getting unbearable.

"I'm going for a bath!"

Ed didn't move. He was humming that tune again. His eyes blank, jaws slack.

Amid the steam and with the mildewed shapes on the shower curtain resolving themselves into faces that stared at her lecherously, Jen examined the mark on her leg. Locked in the bathroom, trousers down and one foot hitched up on the toilet seat, she might have realised how ridiculous she looked. She might have worried about Ed bursting in and seeing her poking away at her thigh. She might have been annoyed at the utter lack of antiseptic cream in the medicine cabinet.

But as it was, she was frightened.

It wasn't ringworm. The small red and blue blotch, half bruise, half rash - it was a pattern. An outline. A map. She rubbed at it with her thumb and something black came away on her fingers.

"Ed?"

She caught him again, bent over the desk with his bottle of ink and his pins. "What have you been doing to me? What's this?" She pointed to her leg.

The tattoo was growing.

"Ah. It was meant to be a surprise," he said, "something for your birthday. Louis and Franklin helped me." He shrugged then said, "I think I've worked it out, Jen but I'm afraid... I think things may have... got out of hand."

Jen stared at him. He gestured emptily towards the holdall. He'd taken the biscuit this time, all right.

"Have you been tattooing me in my sleep? Have you been paying your friends to tattoo me in my sleep?!"

"Not sleep, exactly," Ed said.

There were bottles in the holdall too. EatmeDrinkme type bottles. Jen shuddered at the thought of being unconscious and trouser-less in Franklin's company.

"Don't say anything. I've worked it out," Ed said, and waved his hands around the empty room.

"Really, you have, have you?" Jen said, fastening up her trousers and looking about for her shoes.

"It isn't the pins, it's the pattern. The picture. Dot to dot. Dorothy. Kansas. Or not, anymore. The music. Dots and sticks. Yes? It's a pattern. A frequency. There's nothing special about Kansas. Ask anyone. I think anyway. It's just..."

"I'm going home," Jen said. She moved towards the door but Franklin and Louis appeared from the kitchen. Franklin was wearing a surgical mask.

"Ed? What are they...?"

"Can you lie down on the couch?"

The phone rang.



Lit Jam writer 10, **Paul Ewen** writes his own mock obituary:

When asked if he wanted to be buried or cremated, Paul Ewen responded by saying he hoped he would be blended into a delicious smoothie. When pressed for the flavour, he supposed it would most likely taste of ale and cheese. Ewen was born in Blenheim, the sunniest town in New Zealand, situated in the rich wine-growing region of Marlborough. Sadly, this sunshine would not find its way into his nature or disposition, each of which was gravely dark. The local wine would find its way into his bloodstream however, and his trademark pissy breath would be recognised by all who knew him. Born to a New Zealand mother, his father was an English Geordie who travelled to New Zealand by boat as a youth. When Paul moved to England, he travelled by aeroplane, and his hope was that his offspring would in turn travel to New Zealand wearing shoes with rockets. Messages of sympathy, or jeers, should be sent to: www.myspace.com/shoeswithrockets.

"You should turn your phone off," asserted Dorothy above the noise of the propellers. "It contravenes the aeronautical code." Eddy listened a few moments longer before he hung up without leaving a message. "We're in the middle of the Pacific Ocean," he replied. "There aren't any control towers out here."

Two hours later, the skis of the seaplane landed on a still, sparkling lake, as if settling into a pile of leaves. In the distance a bell was ringing.

The midget was driving the arrival kart erratically, causing people to scatter across the well-kept grounds. His head was sunk well into his neck, and he eyed his passengers in the mirror. "Where you from?" he rasped. Dorothy leaned forward. "Kansas City." The midget nodded, barely. "Which one?" Dorothy looked confused. "You mean...which Kansas City?" Again, barely a nod. Dorothy looked to Eddy for help. He shrugged and said, "There's only one Kansas, Tattoo. It is Tattoo, isn't it?" Tattoo frowned and stepped on the gas.

A tall man stood waiting by the entrance. He looked a bit like Barack Obama, and like Tattoo, he was wearing a stark white suit. He jiggled the glass flutes of champagne he held in each hand. "My dear guests, I am Mr Roarke, your host. Welcome to Fantasy Island!"

The ringing phone had created a diversion, allowing Jen to run to the bathroom where she locked herself in. Now it was quiet outside, she tried to compose herself. Her thoughts returned to the itch on her thigh. She grabbed Ed's shaving mirror and inspected the scratched design more carefully. In the magnified glass, she realised that a figure had been carved into her skin. It was a man, she guessed, or a boy. His head appeared to have sunk into his shoulders.

Dorothy and Eddy clinked glasses. It was evening, but the air on the restaurant patio remained balmy. "We needed this time alone," remarked Eddy. "No kids."

Dorothy smiled.

"No dog."

Dorothy flinched and looked away, biting her finger guiltily.

"No piss-stinking clothes, no ear aches, and no random phone calls from limey bastards!" Dorothy put her hand on his arm. "Yes, you need to make a full recovery. Dr Franklin's orders. It was all getting way out of hand, Eddy."

Jen found Ed lying alone on the doorstep. He had wet himself and was staring at the moon reflected in the small pissy puddle. She pricked up her ears - a low sound - and realised he was humming softly that same Beethoven tune.

In the lounge room, Mr Roarke called out from behind the piano. "Excuse me ladies and gentlemen. A request now for Mr Eddy from a Kansas City. A Beethoven piece entitled *Quasi una Fantasia*, or," he smiled, "*Almost a Fantasy.*" And he began playing in C-sharp minor.

The End