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Brown Bread

Susie Miller Oduniyi, Jeff Blair and Dr Fay Dennis

SETTING THE SCENE

The overdose epidemic is raging globally. Deaths in the UK have just risen for yet another year. There are rumours of a new drug on the scene, which promises the ultimate high: a pleasure that penetrates so far into the body that it leaves the lungs forgetting to breath. Gathered in an east London flat, one unsuspecting group are negotiating the selling and buying of this 'Brown Bread' – cockney rhyming slang for dead. Through the patter of bread, drugs and addiction, and rhythms of poetry and prose, we are taken on a rollercoaster ride through the stories of these lives lived with substances: the yearning, shame, trauma, and injustice, as well as the laughter, joy, care and vigour. Buckle up!

CHARACTERS

UNKNOWN MAN Unknown, well-known, only speaks in verse

BOB Male, late 50's. Wily, wry sense of humour, controlling and uncompromisingly

TERRY Male, mid 60's. Child-like, nervous and well-spoken

BELL Early 30's. Flamboyant, identifies as... her/him 'who gives a fuck!'

SAM Female, late 30's. Over friendly, sexually wired, lost

SANDY Female, early 60's. Desperate, rattled always swooping looking for remnants

STELLA Softly spoken, kind, mutters to her hand for comfort

VERONICA Counsellor in her 40's, straightforward and pragmatic

PC STEW Police officer, a useless 'plod' played by SANDY

PC PICKLE Police officer, a useless 'plod' played by SAM

DCI DOPPELGANGER 'Old school' detective, seen it all before, played by BOB

PROLOGUE GRIMLY FIENDISH

UNKNOWN MAN (As the music fades a lone man, standing in a dimly lit stage, recites verse)

A story as yet unwritten

Is about to unfold

Yet a story of such terrible consequences
it has to be told

With a rising death toll
Of innocent victims
it has to be said

With simple ailments
they visit a doctor
But end up as addicts
instead

From a normal life
to drug addicts
Who end up breaking the law
To moving in an underworld
Of lies and deceit
And so much more

While in pursuit of a substitute
of their opioid pill
They turn to a deadlier product
More lethal it can kill

There is an additive
To plump the product again
To make it more powerful

The high to sustain
Like the Pied Piper
He stands before them
So tall

So strong
They kneel at his feet
Arms stretched
Fingers long

On his menu
It's number one
Heroin is the main dish
without a second thought
he serves up,
He is grimly fiendish

Lights flicker on and cross-fade to reveal a sofa in a shabby flat. The UNKNOWN MAN walks on slowly, sinks into the sofa and closes his eyes.

SCENE 1 BREAD AND BUTTER

Upbeat music plays from a radio. TERRY enters looking lost, he spots an open suitcase and clothes and objects scattered over the floor. He takes a teddy bear from the suitcase and hugs it into his body. Noticing the sleeping UNKNOWN MAN on the sofa, he creeps over to him to have a closer look. He reaches out removing the sleeping man's glasses and puts them on. Looking around him, he picks up a magazine from the floor, reads it with satisfaction and creeps away.

One by one, the characters enter and take something from the suitcase. TERRY looks confused and tries to take the items back but does not have the confidence to challenge anyone. BOB enters humming 'a spoon full of sugar...'. Everyone is silent, aware of BOB's presence. BOB continues to sing and BELL dances for him excitedly.

BOB What's it to be then? (BOB shouts, addressing the group, and snatching TERRY's teddy, with a smirk).

BELL I got this dough on me. (BOB distracted by BELL's comment abruptly chucks the teddy back at TERRY. TERRY scrambles to catch it).

BOB Nice bit of bread that, that's a nice brown loaf. I can sort you out.

SANDY That would sort quite a few of us out that would.

SAM I actually haven't got any dough today, but I can get something tomorrow.

TERRY I might be able to help you out.

SAM Really (smiles at TERRY). The only thing is... (to BOB) can you get it in a tin?
Last time you served it in a packet and it just wasn't the same.

BOB What are you after? This is the best bread you ever tasted.

SAM But I prefer it in a tin.

BOB It's going to be in a wrap sweetheart.

SAM Yeah, but the tin is better.

BOB Take it or leave it – it's going to be in a wrap.

BELL It was a little bit sticky last time. Don't you think it was a little bit sticky last time?

(To SAM) Don't you think so?

BOB It's not sticky, it's been cooked with a spoonful of sugar, that's all.

STELLA I've got an electric food mixer (Everyone looks at STELLA quizzically).

BELL Seriously it was a little bit sticky.

BOB Look! What's it to be? This stuff will blow your fucking head off.

STELLA I'll have two brown, but have you any white bread?

SAM I haven't got any dough.

BOB No white bread today, only brown.

SCENE 2 CUCKOO

TERRY (Whispering to BOB). Can I speak to you... (they walk down stage, to the right. TERRY leans in, not wanting anybody else to hear). Does it taste better than your average shop bought loaves?

BOB (Shouting back, showing a complete disregard to TERRY's hushed voice) Oh absolutely, I baked it myself, you'll love it...

TERRY Err (leaning in again) ... Did you ask all these people to come here?

BOB Yeah, I hope you don't mind... I'll look after you don't worry... you got a nice gaff here, right in the middle of town. This lot are my regulars, they're all sound. You gotta understand, people come pick up a little bit, and go...you'll get well rewarded. Okay? (telling him, rather than asking).

TERRY Well, who's that? (Gesturing to a sleeping UNKNOWN MAN on the sofa).

BOB He's you, he's him, he's her, he's all of us.

BELL Well, he ain't me. (BELL dances around the UNKNOWN MAN, grabs TERRY's teddy and tucks it under the arm of the UNKNOWN MAN).

TERRY (Light comes up, TERRY addresses the audience)

Where's my codeine

These empty packets are goading

My sanity's eroding

The empty pillows

Are like bubble wrap

Little white capsules

Of dough

And Like dough

I am kneading

Kneading the intervention

To stop my mind screaming

Here they come the cramps again

Where is my doctor when I need him?

Only he can stop my pain

I have vinegar in my eyes

And salt in my veins

Hot water in my skull

It's boiling my brains.

Convulsions are so severe

They make me sweat

I've used my prescription

I am beginning to fret

Like a private eye

Searching the street

Marching

Turning every corner

My feet on the beat

I need something to fix me

BOB (To audience)

What is your poison

What is it you seek?

What is the food

You need

That makes you so weak

For the realm that we enter
Is not for the meek

Your naivety could harm you
And this you will learn
I can feed you
Your food
I can relieve your head
We can do this together
We can break bread

TERRY (To audience)

I am sick
Please help me
I can't breathe
Please catch me
My world has crumbled
My status has changed
My mind is collapsing
I feel deranged
The air is like quicksand
My limbs are like lead
Please bring me to your realm
Before I am dead

SCENE 2 FOOD

SAM The shop bought loaves aren't a bad idea either, if it comes to that.

(Pulls TERRY beside her) I can do you a favour if you'd like, if you help me out.

SANDY Talking of shop bought loaves - look at what I got, fresh from the supermarket... I got bacon, prawns, even got a nice bit of steak... come on people what can I interest you in... need to make some dough to buy my bread.

STELLA I'll have some bacon, goes nice in a roll.

BOB Look sweetheart (threatening SANDY), this ain't your shop, I'm doing the business here, you either got the dough or you ain't.

BELL (Talking to SAM) I'm just saying it was a bit sticky last time, you didn't see what he gave me last time.

BOB (To BELL, annoyed at what he overhears) I gave you a decent loaf last time. All it needed was a gentle toasting. It wasn't sticky, it was just right, and nobody's complained.

SAM Can I get two loaves? Terry's going to shout me for one, if I could get one on tick...? I could give you a favour too...?

BOB Look, I don't need your favours, I just need the dough!

SAM So, you're knocking me back then?... No problem I'd rather have a baguette than a cob any day!

BOB Oh Fuck! (Momentarily puts his head in his hand, exasperated)... Listen. this is 100% better than you've had before, it's 100% stronger than your average toast, and because it's me I've managed to mix it so there isn't any tiny bits that can kill you. All I'm saying is that it's strong, so be very careful, be with someone when you're doing it. Don't do it on your own. Oh, and by the way, I'll give you an anti

OD dose.

SAM So, we get that free! So, you do care! We can all do it together. I've always wanted to have that near-death experience. Haven't you? (To TERRY) It could be quite romantic coming back (Sharp intake of breath like she's just come round from her death bed). You know like in Pulp Fiction.

BOB The amount of near-death experiences you've had, for fuck sake! The next one will put you over the top, (sarcastically) whether it's in a wrap or a fucking tin!

TERRY We should be very careful. Are you confident of your sources?

BOB I done the mixing – it's cool.

BELL Why you being so kind?

BOB Because it's cheap, and I need you to come back, don't I?!

SAM You've given me a BOGOF before now in here... buy one get one free.

BELL It's not going to be sticky, is it?

BOB It's one fucking spoonful of sugar, what the fuck! You know it's not like a fucking bag full – try it, see if you like it, and come back.

BELL I'm in.

SAM I think I'll go for it.

TERRY Yeah, we can do it together? If we have the antidote with us, whoever goes off first, the other can...

BOB walks forward centre stage and stands still as others huddle and swerve around him like feeding sharks.

BOB Oh, I forgot to mention, if you need the antidote, you wake up clean, every bit of opioids out of your body, you come up cold turkey, just like that.

SAM So, we'll be all pure to do it all over again!

SCENE 3 SOB STORY

SANDY Takes the teddy from under the UNKNOWN MAN sleeping on the sofa.

SANDY (To TERRY) Is this yours?

As TERRY reaches out to take it, SANDY throws it to the others, who pass it between themselves goading him. TERRY becomes irritated, turns to the audience and starts to tell his story...

TERRY Do I look like them? Am I one of them? I don't know them and I don't want to know them, but... they're here and no-one else is. No-one else... Are you listening?

BELL We'll listen if we have to, but make it quick! (salsas across the floor and finds a resting place propping up a wall as if she's on a photo shoot. TERRY turns back to the audience and continues his story.)

TERRY

Hey I am talking to you

Are you listening

These surroundings

Are unfamiliar

My environment

Is surreal

It's like a shitty sob story

Life has lost its appeal

I used to be a rebel

A free spirit

I played In a band

Life was fucking good man

I liked a drink

I loved a party

With hardcore drugs though

I was never a fan

Now look at me
Through these eyes of mine
These empty hollow
Eyes of time
When did I cross the line
When did I lose myself
I got lost in transition

I had a loving family
A great pension
I lost it all
Over a bad back
I honestly thought I was gonna get the sack
But I didn't
I was a good manager
I suppose
I had a secure position

Although I didn't feel like I deserved it
The guilt was terrible
It made me worse
You know I was even stealing
Money at that point
From my wife's purse

Then one day I got called in for a random drug test
Needless to say the results wasn't the best
I was let go quietly

An 'addict' manager
Oh the farce

A manager (that's a fucking joke)
If only I was as good a manager in life
As I was in my job
Now I'm bugged
Having to put up with users
And losers
And being manipulated
By Bob

BELL (Abruptly, showing no sympathy at all, affronted by Terry sharing his story). Get over yourself, that's nothing! Really! Poor you! I've been kidnapped by gangsters, I had to jump through a window, I smashed myself up, and had to go cold turkey in the hospital...

BOB Err... For fuck sake man... my ulcer burst and I had sixteen minutes to fucking live... with the poison running through my body... the pain, oh the pain...

SAM I knew it, you eat bread too!

BELL Bloody codeine.

SANDY I've been in a coma, and nearly died, 3 times.

SAM That's nothing, my alcoholic father locked me in a room and I had to service all his mates...
(They all look at SAM)

Oi what you lot looking at
Don't think I don't see
What it is exactly
You're thinking of me

I know exactly what's
Going through your mind

You men are all the same

I've sorted out

Loads of your kind

Come on darling

Just a little lick

I will give you some money

Just play with me stick

Some give a fiver

Some give a score

Some give me nothing

Treat me like a whore

Men they're all the same

First me dad

Then me uncle

It's all I seem to remember

Never ending it was

From January to December

School holidays

Was always the worst

Other kids loved the holidays

But to me they was a curse

Me dad used to come home drunk

Always with some fat smelly pig

I see them give him money

And said they could have a go

At first I used to get a slap

If I ever said no

So I learnt to survive

Do whatever it took

I got smart

I got tough

Started planning

A way out of

This complication

I pissed off

I ended up sleeping on the streets

But only for a while

I found some dirty old man

With loads of money

Who liked sleeping

With a juvenile

He took me in

Put a roof over my head

This time I was being paid money

I fucked his brains out

Until he was almost dead

It was a win win

As far as I was concerned

I was saving all the money

That I had earned

Saved up a lot

Had a fair bit of cash

Then one day under his bed

I found a box

I guess you could call it

His stash

Boxes and boxes of pills

Oxycodone

Liquid morphine

Codeine

To name a few

Oh fuck me

What a high

It was like being reborn

All my hurt vanished

It was how I got by

My new coping mechanism

Every high was like

A warm hug

Like warm water

Coursing through

My veins

All the bad memories

Had evaporated

The nightmares

All my life's stains

I would take more pills

Drink more morphine

And I wouldn't give a shit
Sold my body
To get what I wanted
Now it just comes easy
It don't hurt anymore

Up against a wall
Bent over a chair
On my knees
On the floor

A suck or a fuck
I'm a professional
It no-longer
Fills me with me
With dread

My body earns my wages
Its how I get my daily bread

(Pausing looking around) Don't look at me! What about her... (Pointing at STELLA. They all look at Stella)

STELLA I'm fine, absolutely peachy... Yep, just fine... (Everyone burst out laughing).

SCENE 4 DEMONIC BAKER

As the music begins BOB enters, he hangs up his coat and throws the parcel he's carrying onto a table centre stage. (Mumbling to himself) 'a spoonful of poison, makes the recipe go down'.

At the back of the stage, he puts on a white coat and an oversized, bright-red chef's hat.

He begins opening cupboards, frantically. He finds a bowl, puts it on the table and immediately turns to open another cupboard. This time, he pulls out a box emblazed with a skull and crossbones symbol on the front and jumps for joy. 'This is the shit I've been looking for!'

Still holding the box, he turns to the audience and starts walking towards them slowly, taking dramatic pauses with each step. He breaks into a Fred Astaire dance, moving the box from side to side like a cane, making his way toward the table. He does a full spin and bangs the box on the table, 'Violá, you arseholes!' (talking to the audience).

He begins to laugh hysterically. He grabs the bowl, tears open the parcel and throws the contents into the bowl, creating a dust cloud that covers his face, giving him the look of a ghost. He then scowls, demonically, and says with poise and conviction: 'I am the Pied Piper'. Stops. Looks around, then starts again

Just watch me beat my tune. Ha ha ha

Money, money, money

Bash it

Mix it

Crash it

Smash it

Bag it

BOB bags up his mix, Lights crossfade to a spotlight in the audience.

SCENE 5 TREATMENT

VERONICA (Sitting in the front row of the audience centre stage).

Bob, take a seat.

(BOB walks forward into the light down stage centre, BELL moves his chair for him to sit facing Veronica and the audience).

VERONICA Have you ever thought about recovery?

BOB No

VERONICA There are a lot of services out there.

BOB Yeah, for people that need them.

VERONICA So, you don't think you need them?

BOB No, do you think I need them?

VERONICA It's not about me. So why did you come here today then?

BOB Where am I?

VERONICA You know where you are. (BOB smiles) So why did you come then?

BOB Cos I fancy you.

VERONICA It's not about that.

BOB It could be

VERONICA How old are you?

BOB 27 ...

VERONICA Be serious, Bob.

BOB 47 ...

VERONICA Seriously

BOB 57...

VERONICA And this is what you want to be doing?

BOB This what I've been doing for the last 30 years.

VERONICA So, you want to be doing it for the next 20...?

BOB Hopefully...

VERONICA You know people will stop offering you this.

BOB Offering me what?

VERONICA A change.

BOB But I don't want a change...

VERONICA Okay, it's up to you. Is that it?

BOB (Faking break-down crying). I can't cope, I had enough...I wana change but ... (He looks up and smiles). Is that what you wanted? ...You ain't getting it. No, I'm not going to change, why the fuck should I change.

VERONICA Bob, I get paid to be here.

BOB I get paid to sell fucking gear... I probably earn more than you do...I ain't sick. I've got a good lifestyle... fuck you...

(He starts singing 'A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down' ... walks back into centre stage and suddenly turns to the audience).

BOB Enchanté

You lovely people, just a small request

Please, settle down,

I do love an audience

And you people look like you need a smile

Not a frown

I'm going to tell you a story

About the world we live in

Why I'm here

Why they're here

An explanation, of how them losers

Got in this state

You don't need

To be Sherlock Holmes

To see we are all addicts

Although I'm nowhere near

As bad as these rattlers

I have my habit under-control

I still function, I earn money

Got new clothes

In a day I probably

Use two, maybe three

Bread rolls

So, what makes me different from them?

I hear you ask, well it's simple

My habit don't cost me anything

Absolutely zero

Look at these losers

Shoplifting, burgling, selling themselves

Just to buy this

I'm their fucking hero

You know it's funny

On my way over

I read an article

In the metro

The reform of the NHS

Is happening too slow

Too many antibiotics

Anti-depressants

And painkillers

Are being prescribed

Normal people

Your average Joe

Are becoming addicts

Society is losing

It's beginning to slide

Fuck reform

That's what I say

Business is booming

Doctors are creating

More and more addicts everyday

These doctors are a blessing

Keep prescribing

Is what I say

Come closer

I don't want them to hear
Did you listen
To the sob stories
Fucking self-pity
Boo fucking hoo!
From me there will be no tear
'Self-absorbed', 'narcissist'
I have been called many things
Do I give a fuck?
Of course, not
All I wanna do
Is supply a product
And take money from
Losers, like this lot

Although I'm not completely
Heartless
I don't want them to die
Well, that would be wrong
If these pathetic souls died
Then my income
Would be gone
Yes, I've heard the debate
That if it wasn't for people like me
Supplying to meet the demand
There wouldn't be a high death rate
Well, it's easy to blame the little guy
This argument makes me so irate

So, let's see
If my product being an opioid was let's say

Manufactured in a factory
And I had a few initials
In front of my name... G.P.
Then no-one would be pointing a finger at me
Right there, that is the hypocrisy
I'm not trying to be a smartarse
But Newton's third law
Says for every action
There is a reaction
This applies to everything in life
Just like the day I crashed my car
And killed my children
And my wife

Oh, fuck it, there I go again
Talking too much
Getting carried away
That's a secret
I keep to myself
I don't like talking about
What happened that day?

Months in a coma
Fighting for a pulse
Not knowing I had lost everything

In a moment
My world ended, all I loved was dead
Now that's bona fide pain and torment
I can't get that day out of my head
Months of physio, counseling, morphine

Discharged with painkillers
Being told by busybodies
I'm a survivor,
I will be alright
Well, they don't have to live with
The memories and guilt
That, keep me up at night

If I'm honest this life I live
Gives me purpose
Makes me feel wanted
To these lost bodies
I feel like a dad
And the bonus
I feed my habit
And earn some money
Ok yeah, my bad
Ok enough of the pity party
Enough is enough
It's all done and said
Time to get back
To selling my bread

SCENE 5 FIVE Oh

BOB (singing) 'A spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down, the medicine go down, the medicine go down, in the most delightful way'.

TERRY finds the teddy on the floor and tucks it back under the UNKNOWN MAN's arm. TERRY realises he's not breathing; he is visibly shocked and increasingly becomes more panicked. The others stop still and watch on.

TERRY (Cradling him and trying to revive him) Oh my god. We should get help.

GROUP (They all switch on him, there is a chorus of alarm) What! We don't need fucking help! Let's get the fuck out of here. He's going to call the 'Five- 0 '. (They all scarper).

TERRY What's the 'Five- 0 '? (He looks around, everyone has already left he continues to try to revive the UNKNOWN MAN).

Dressed up as police officers, Sandy and Sam play two useless 'plods'.

TERRY hears a voice coming from the front door. TERRY turns around again, a police officer has appeared in the doorway (PC STEW). Just as TERRY is about to speak, another PC turns up. PC PICKLE is bent over with her hands on her knees trying to catch her breath.

PC PICKLE (Panting) You could have waited for me, I had to run up the bloody stairs.

Instead of answering her question PC STEW looks suspiciously at TERRY.

PC STEW What seems to be going on here, Sir? Have you been robbed or assaulted? I noticed some undesirables leaving the building in a hurry and they looked like they were absconding from a crime scene. I assume you know who I am talking about? Were they leaving these premises, Sir? (Looking over TERRY'S shoulder into the flat). Did they steal anything, Sir?

TERRY stands motionless staring, in shock. PC PICKLE composes herself and pushes passed PC STEW into the flat.

PC PICKLE Are you okay, Sir? Do you need any help?

TERRY (Stuttering) There is a man, dead inside my flat.

STEW and PICKLE look at each other in surprise, then look at TERRY.

PC STEW I'm sorry Sir, did you just say that you have a dead man inside your property?

TERRY (Blankly) Yes.

PC STEW Sir, I am PC Stew and this is my colleague PC Pickle. May we enter your property to ascertain the situation? (Pushes passed PC PICKLE who is already inside).

TERRY moves aside and both PC's walk into the living room. They spot the UNKNOWN MAN on the sofa. Approaching him, one feels his pulse, while the other puts her ear to his chest. They nod to each other confidently.

PC STEW We can confirm that your analysis appears to be correct, Sir, this man is dead. PC Pickle can you radio the station to inform them that we have a body in the premises. (She scans the flat suspiciously with her eyes).

PC PICKLE walks out of the flat into the hall mumbling on the radio, stops suddenly and turns back to PC STEW.

PC PICKLE Err they are asking if it appears to be murder or natural causes? What do I say? This is why I hate calling-in; they ask me all these bloody questions I don't know how to answer.

TERRY looks at the police officers with disbelief.

PC STEW So did you know the man? (Before TERRY can reply she continues) Did those nasty junkies I saw do something? I bet they did, that's why they were running away. (Forgetting herself, she rephrases) I mean those reprobates.

PC PICKLE Oh amazing! Yes, that makes sense, I think you're on to something there, Stew. Well spotted, you really are clever. (She opens her notepad and speaks as she writes). Several reprobates were seen running from the premises, description: (ponders) 'junky like'.

TERRY is still standing staring blankly.

TERRY No I don't know him.

PC STEW So why is he reclining on your sofa?

TERRY He came with the others.

PC STEW What others?

TERRY His friends, I guess.

PC STEW And he was definitely alive when he got here?

TERRY WHAT?

PC STEW The deceased, Sir, was he alive when he arrived?

TERRY Yes, of course he was alive! What sort of question is that?

PC STEW I understand you're upset Sir, but please can we just focus here. The first 24 hours of any murder case are critical. It says it in my book here (s he reaches inside her coat pocket and produces a book and shows it to TERRY), 'Policing for Dummies'. I've solved many, many cases because of this book, it's like my bible, I take it everywhere I go.

TERRY So who said it's a murder case? You have only just got here; this has got to be a joke, hasn't it? (He sits down on the sofa next to the deceased).

PC STEW (Grabs TERRY by his arm and pulls him up off the sofa) Sir! Please this is a crime scene, you're contaminating all the evidence! Okay Pickle, look around the property, see if you can ascertain where the killer made his escape, but be vigilant, the killer may still be here, hiding.

PC PICKLE I'm not sure I like the sound of that Stew, what if he is a serial killer?

PC STEW This is 'the job', Pickle, this is what it's about, bravery, selfless acts to protect the common man. This is why we are here, Pickle. We are here to do good, a beacon of hope in this cruel world.

Both PC STEW and PC PICKLE take a deep breath and puff their chests out. TERRY looks aghast. PICKLE walks towards the bedroom sliding his back against the wall, creeping slowly, he enters the bedroom.

TERRY Do you by any chance have this building under surveillance? (To STEW) Your face looks really familiar to me. I have definitely seen you around and your partner, Stew.

PC STEW Err sorry you got our names wrong, I'm Stew and she is Pickle.

TERRY (Mocking her) Well I guess that's the first real fact I've heard so far.

PC STEW I'll ignore that comment Sir and put it down to shock. Okay so let's see if I have this straight. You woke up, went to the bathroom and noticed a dead man sitting on your sofa. Is that what happened Sir?

TERRY Hold on a minute, where are you getting these stories from? I looked round and you were at my door, I never said it was murder, you did.

PC STEW No I never.

TERRY You did.

PC STEW No Pickle did.

TERRY Oh my god! This is unbearable.

PC STEW Have you seen a murder weapon Sir?

TERRY NO!!

PC STEW Where the hell is Pickle?

TERRY (Sarcastically) Maybe the serial killer has murdered him.

PC STEW Go and have a look will you. (Nervously) I might have to call for back up.

TERRY Fuck off! What if the killer is waiting for me!!! (Terry slaps his forehead) What am I saying? You two have got me all discombobulated, there is no killer.

PC STEW Ah, so he has fled the scene!

PC PICKLE (Re-entering the room). I looked everywhere, Stew, no murder weapon, no disturbance, nothing.

TERRY For the love of god, he wasn't murdered, or he may have been, I think he took some bad drugs.

PC STEW Oh, so it was a suicide.

TERRY I would have said misadventure.

PC STEW Hmm are those red marks around his neck? Is it possible he may have strangled himself? Examine the body, Pickle, look for signs of suicide.

PC PICKLE Okay Stew.

TERRY and PC STEW stand looking at PC PICKLE as he examines the body.

PC PICKLE Nothing, no signs of suicide, no suicide note.

BOB as DCI DOPPELGANGER enters, he scans the room and moves directly to TERRY.

DCI DOPPELGANGER I'm Chief Inspector Doppelganger. I believe you are the owner of this flat. (Before TERRY can speak) PC Stew, I hear you have ruled out murder, death by natural causes and suicide. By the state of this place (noticing one of the baggies). He's a 'junky', he must have OD'd. Well done Stew and Pickle, excellent work as always.

TERRY

How do you know he OD'd? You have to investigate! How did he die? Was it cut with something? (Losing his rag) You have to do something, please...

DCI DOPPLEGANGER smirks, dismissing TERRY's pleas. Pushed to his very limit, with a strength and anger that shocks even himself, TERRY lurches forward and takes a swing for the DCI. Both PCs stutter into action and hold him back. As the lights fade, a dim light illuminates the UNKNOWN MAN, he rises and walks down stage to address the audience.

UNKNOWN MAN

Take a look at me

Not just a glance

But look

Really look

Stop staring at your TV

Please if you will

Lay down your book

Would you say

You don't know me?

I trigger nothing

In your memory

To you I am

Just another

Person

A Mr Smith

A Mr Jones

Another body

Of blood and tissue

Of muscle and bones

If we passed in the street

You wouldn't
give me a second thought

To you I am
No-one
Maybe someone's
Father
Maybe someone's
Son

But if you stopped me
And asked me
My name
Or who I am

I think my answer
Would confuse you
I would have to
Repeat myself again
For I am you
Yes I am you
I carry the same name
I am Eddy
I am Kathy
I am John
Whatever your name
No matter how many letters
if it's short or if it's long

You may hold up a hand
As a blinker

To shield me
From your view

Yet you cannot
Disguise the Fact
that I am you
Denial only lasts
For a short space In time
Tell yourself
You are not me
Convince yourself
You are fine

Look at your surroundings
Your dignity's
Almost gone

You lie
You cheat
You sell
Yourself
You too will be nothing
Before long

Like you
I once had a name
A history
That has passed

Yet we share
The same shadow

Which the setting sun

Has cast

So as my weary body passes

This unknown vessel

That has no name

One day

You

Will be a nobody

As our destinies

Are the same

THE END

About

This script is based on a collaboration between performers and a poet in recovery from drug and alcohol dependency, a director, and a researcher. We were brought together in 2017 by our shared interest in theatre as a mode of telling substance use stories differently and telling different kinds of substance use stories. Drama has a unique ability to stir memories and ideas through embodied movement and collaboration. In this play, we were drawn to the theme of 'drug-related deaths' as an ongoing public health crisis in the UK that despite getting worse every year for nearly a decade has received very little governmental action. We wanted to raise awareness of this emergency while also working to complicate the usual stories that get told around drugs as unilaterally harmful and spotlight the complex lives of the people behind the statistics. Given its troubling subject of drug-related deaths, the play refuses to tell a 'good' story. Instead, we aim to provoke and confuse, and with this, invite audiences to ask questions of our relationship to drugs, how we know and tell stories about them, what it is that makes them harmful, and how we can learn to live with them better.

Contributor bios

Susie Miller Oduniyi is a director and writer; she creates original work driven by a devising process that stimulates stories of lived experience, where reality and absurdity are indistinguishable. She is artistic director of Humourisk, an arts organisation that draws together diverse artists and communities. Humourisk makes work that speaks to disparate audiences; utilising humour to challenge perceptions and reconcile individual yet shared stories.

Jeff Blair began writing and performing his poetry as part of his recovery from addiction. He uses verse and prose to tell dark tales from his own experience of 38 years of addiction. From a scaffolder to a poet, Jeff is now a prolific writer and story teller.

Dr Fay Dennis is a Research Fellow in the Department of Sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London. Her research explores the social and material aspects of drug use, treatment and related harm. She has a particular interest in the potential of 'the arts' for representing and intervening in drug 'problems'.

Developed from an original 'scratch' production devised in 2018 Cast: Liam Quinn, Michael Halden, Emmer Thompson, Sue Wilson, Bellavie Lady Bee, Alison Kakande, Doreen Thorpe. In Memory of Wayne Blair 04/02/2013