

# On Harrowdown Hill

by Shaun Gardiner

*[A hillock sits at stage centre. It is the only lit area in dark space, as if it rose out of a smooth body of night-water. There is sufficient space on either side of the mound to permit the movement of actors around it.]*

*At the hillock's apex is a tree. The tree is bent at an extreme angle from stage right to stage left. It has been subject to the stress of a prolonged, hard wind, and its roots are partially torn out of the earth. It appears uncertain as to whether it will stand or fall.*

*At the base of the tree sits a man, facing as if into the wind. He is in his late fifties, balding, bearded. He is without a coat, though it is a cold day. He is the INSPECTOR. He begins quietly, resignedly.]*

INSPECTOR

When my cue comes,  
call me,  
and I will answer.

Wind rags  
the smooth cloud;  
fins break  
the calm water;  
a million edges  
bloom within a circle.

I will answer.

*[A man has emerged from around the curve of the hill, stage left. Confident, slick, he wears a well-tailored, expensive suit, shoes polished to mirrors. He is the ADVISOR.]*

*He carries a sheaf of papers in one hand. As he walks around the hill in an arc towards stage right he takes sheets and scatters them behind him, as if he were an overconfident participant in a paper chase. The trail of pages he leaves behind is picked out in the darkness.*

*Throughout, the ADVISOR and the INSPECTOR do not look at each other. It is as if each is at pains to minimise any acknowledge of the other's existence.]*

ADVISOR

Dull.

Dull dull dull.

Shiterature.

Dull as doubt.

Something with  
a bit more tooth,  
a bit more eye,  
a bit more bite  
is what we need  
to sell, something gory.

INSPECTOR

These are the facts.

ADVISOR

Then fresh facts must be found.

*[The ADVISOR disappears around the curve of the hill stage right.]*

*Immediately another man emerges around the hill stage left. He is the JOURNALIST. He carries a notepad, and is following the route of lit pages left by the ADVISOR. He stops occasionally to bend and pick up a sheet, examining it before replacing it or tucking it into a pocket of his coat.*

*When the JOURNALIST enters the INSPECTOR stands, becoming more animated. The JOURNALIST's attention throughout is on the trail he follows.]*

INSPECTOR

They wanted a war  
when war was not needed.  
They needed the facts  
which weren't there to be found.  
They found the means:  
dubious proofs, reported true.

JOURNALIST

*(without stopping on his path)*

Dull.

Dull dull dull.

Chipwrappers.  
'Dubious' – that's dull.

*[The JOURNALIST scratches in his pad.]*

Something with  
a bit more tooth,  
a bit more eye,  
a bit more bite  
is what we need  
to tell, to make the story.

INSPECTOR  
Those aren't my words.

JOURNALIST  
(tapping his pad)  
But these have a sexier sound.

*[As the INSPECTOR resumes, the JOURNALIST disappears around the hill stage right.]*

INSPECTOR  
I whispered doubts,  
Doubtful I should say.  
A half-truth known  
and knowingly told on is half a lie –  
and they laid more words  
on me than my heart could bear.

*[The INSPECTOR has moved downstage, descending the hillock. The lights go up, revealing the setting in its entirety.]*

*The hillock is surrounded by a carpet of newspapers. They blanket the entire stage, all bearing lurid banner headlines: SEXED UP; ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE?; DODGY DOSSIER; and so on. The trail of papers left by the ADVISOR winds through them.*

*As the INSPECTOR reaches the bottom of the hill people burst onto the stage from several directions. They bear microphones, cameras, voice recorders, palmtops, notepads: more JOURNALISTS. Moving wildly around the stage, they give the impression of a gyroscope, maintaining balance only through ceaseless motion.*

*The ADVISOR also enters around the hill, stage left. He follows the path he wound before. As he goes, the JOURNALISTS question him.]*

JOURNALISTS  
Who is the source?

ADVISOR

We will not say ...

JOURNALISTS

Who is the leak?

ADVISOR

... but we could meet you half-way.

*[The INSPECTOR looks on with impotent horror; he is being thrown to the wolves.]*

JOURNALISTS

Is it this man?

ADVISOR

No.

JOURNALISTS

Is it this man?

ADVISOR

No.

JOURNALISTS

*(indicating the INSPECTOR)*

Is this the man?

*[By the effect of a short silence the ADVISOR confirms the INSPECTOR's identity, and strides off stage right.]*

*The JOURNALISTS immediately coalesce into an unruly knot around the INSPECTOR. For a few seconds flashbulbs flare and microphones stab. Then the JOURNALISTS turn and retreat offstage in various directions.*

*A second group has entered. These are POLITICIANS. They also form up around the INSPECTOR, arriving almost as soon as the JOURNALISTS depart. Whereas the first group were disordered, unruly, the POLITICIANS organise into a rigid semi-circle broken into two halves, as a committee might arrange itself.*

*The POLITICIANS' rapid-fire verses alternate between these halves, who compete to tempt the INSPECTOR. One half, the party in power, wants him to deny all knowledge of any wrongdoing on their*

*part while admitting to being the JOURNALIST's (dishonest) source; the other half, the party in opposition, offers him the chance to deny being the source while confirming that shady acts have been undertaken by their opponents. As they advance, also by halves, the INSPECTOR is pushed back towards the broken tree.]*

POLITICIANS

We must be calm. How can it be?  
How could you tell what you could not see?

We must be clear. Are you the leak?  
Did you and this newsperson speak?

INSPECTOR

It couldn't be me.  
I can't have said it.  
I don't recognise myself.

POLITICIANS

Who else have you spoken to?  
To whom else was this broken? Who?

It's plain that you have kept your word.  
But are these facts, the claims we've heard?

INSPECTOR

I don't recall.  
I don't know who.  
That wasn't what I said.

POLITICIANS

So something was said? What did it  
[comprise?  
Whatever you possibly said was lies.

You did not tell him. It was not you.  
But whatever you did not say was true.

INSPECTOR

*(anguished)*  
They aren't my words!

*[The light changes: the newspaper-covered stage disappears and once more the hill sits alone. The POLITICIANS, under cover of darkness, fade away.]*

INSPECTOR

*(suddenly louder, despairing)*

You cannot bomb a country into peace.

ADVISOR

*(appearing out of the darkness; with strong conviction)*

Only into line.

INSPECTOR

You cannot fool a people into sense.

JOURNALIST

*(appearing opposite the ADVISOR; he is uneasy, doubtful)*

Only into line.

INSPECTOR

You cannot twist a man into his truth.

INSPECTOR, ADVISOR *and* JOURNALIST

Only into line.

*[Exeunt the ADVISOR and the JOURNALIST. The INSPECTOR is once more alone on the stage.]*

*He looks tired and utterly exposed. The light begins to drain away; as he climbs the hill once more darkness closes in around him.]*

INSPECTOR

Half-clothed against the cold  
of quiet shame,  
the half-lies that I told  
to save myself  
from half-truths that were sold  
wearing my words.  
The falsehoods that extolled  
the case for war,  
that I wanted to unfold –  
somehow, by all  
forgotten.

*[The wind blows. The INSPECTOR huddles into himself.]*

An animal in the trap  
of its own life,  
a creature fallen in the gap  
of its own existence.

*[Slowly, he sits down at the tree's base. The light narrows and narrows. Only his face is exposed.]*

Truth does not forgive;  
only we forget.

It will call me when it comes;  
I will answer.

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