

Simon Gray

DUTCH

UNCLE

DUTCH UNCLE

by the same author

★

LITTLE PORTIA

COLMAIN

(*Novels*)

★

WISE CHILD

SLEEPING DOG

(*Plays*)

DUTCH UNCLE

by

SIMON GRAY

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CAST

INSPECTOR HAWKINS

POLICE CONSTABLE HEDDERLEY

MR. GODBOY

MAY GODBOY

DORIS HOYDEN

ERIC HOYDEN

Performing rights for DUTCH UNCLE

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are strictly reserved and applications for per-
mission to perform it must be made in advance
to Clive Goodwin Associates, 79 Cromwell Road,
London SW7**

ACT ONE

Scene 1

The year is 1952. A living-room in a decaying house in Shepherd's Bush. The wall, right, (the audience's right, that is) has a door leading into the hall. The wall, left, has a door leading into the bedroom. The back wall, left, has a door that leads into the kitchen. There is a door in the kitchen that also leads into the hall, but is not visible to the audience. Parts of the kitchen—the stove, sink, and parts of the hall—a door, opposite, that leads into the lavatory—are, however, visible to the audience when the appropriate doors are open.

The furniture is as follows. Back stage, centre, a shabby sofa. An armchair to the right of it and slightly forward. Two hard-backed utility chairs, one left of sofa, one well away from the armchair and in front of it. On a small table, left, and close to the bedroom door is a gramophone and a pile of records. In the right corner of the room there is an enormous wardrobe, sticking out and carelessly placed. It is tall and deep, freshly varnished and covered with curlicues, etc. Next to it, against the wall and to the left, is a more conventional wardrobe, shallower and slimmer. Both wardrobes have drawers in their bases. On the other side of the enormous wardrobe and to its right, against the wall and close to the door that leads to the hall, is an alcove covered by two curtains that don't quite meet and don't quite reach the ground. The heels of shoes and a few inches of boxes are therefore visible, also sleeves of jackets, etc. The room is very messy. Bits of newspapers and women's magazines scattered about, a pair of woman's high-heeled shoes near the gramophone table, two empty packets of cigarettes on one of the utility chairs.

The curtain rises on the room, empty. There is a long silence, then a slight thumping noise from the large cupboard. The door opens and MR. GODBOY steps out. He is carrying a gas cylinder with a length of rubber tubing, very long, attached to its nozzle. He puts this into the alcove, hangs the rubber tubing so that it sticks out a fraction from between the curtain, goes to the door, looks casually around the

room, then walks forward very quickly. With his left hand he slams the door shut, with his right hand he seizes the length of tubing, plunges it into a hole on the right side of the cupboard, then pulling the cylinder out, pretends to turn the nozzle with his right hand. Takes the tube out, puts it back as before, puts the cylinder back behind the alcove curtain, unlocks the cupboard door. Takes out of his coat pocket an enormous padlock, shut, with the key in it. Checks the padlock against the bolt, then holding the padlock, opens the cupboard door, steps inside, out of view, shuts the door behind him. Bangs on the cupboard door. The noises are muffled. Stops. There is a short silence then the door, right, opens and MAY GODBOY comes in. She is wearing a baggy dress and flattened shoes and an overcoat. She is carrying a basket with a greasy package on top. She puts the basket down, bends over it. While she is doing this the cupboard door opens a fraction. MAY stiffens, turns, stares at the cupboard, puts her hands on her hips in amazement. Then the door opens wide and MR GODBOY steps out, falters a fraction of an instant. The padlock, closed, is in his right hand. He closes the door fussily, keeping the padlock out of sight.

GODBOY: Oh hello dear, I wasn't expecting you for another hour, you said.

MAY: What's that?

GODBOY (*slipping the padlock into his right jacket pocket, drops it to the floor, picks it up with a*): Whoops! (*Laughs.*) It's a cupboard, dear.

MAY (*still staring at the cupboard*): What's it doing in here?

GODBOY: Oh no dear (*stuffing the padlock into his pocket*), it's not for us (*laughs*), it's for Eric and Doris. (*Little pause.*)

As cupboard space was conditional on acceptance of terms for the upstairs apartment, legally furnishings have to be approved as adequate.

MAY: Who by?

GODBOY: Um, Eric and Doris that would be, dear.

MAY: And have they come complaining?

GODBOY: It's a matter of conscience also, dear.

MAY: Whose?

GODBOY: Mine, that would be, dear.

MAY : If it's for Eric and Doris, what's it doing down here?

GODBOY : It's merely for the time being, dear.

MAY (*looks at him, turns, picks up the basket, turns again*): And what was you doing inside it then?

GODBOY : Investigating it for capacity, dear, merely. (*Long pause.*)

Would you like to have a look-see? (*Opens the cupboard door, makes a formal ushering gesture.*)

(MAY walks closer to it, stares in suspiciously. As she does so MR. GODBOY's right hand moves from the pipe hanging out of the alcove.)

MAY : What for?

GODBOY : It's very capacious, dear.

MAY : Perhaps it is.

(*She steps away. MR. GODBOY drops his hand.*)

But that doesn't mean I have to live in it. (*Walks across to the sofa, settles on it, takes off her coat, flings it on to the utility chair. It slides off, falls to the floor.*) What do you think I am, some class of hermit? (*Chuckles.*) Because no I'm not, no I'm not. (*She stares at him significantly.*)

GODBOY (*comes over, picks up her coat, folds it over the back of the chair*): Well dear, to tell you the truth, I've already been and placed some of your garments inside it. Your nightie and a frock you're fond of plus your comfy carpet slippers, dear, and other odds and ends.

MAY : Why?

GODBOY : Well, I thought we'd avail ourselves of the use of it, while we had it. Legally it's our cupboard until it's theirs. (*Looks at her.*) Anyway, if there's any article you can't find, it's likely to be in the cupboard waiting for you, you could peer in now for a check.

(MAY swings her legs up on to the sofa.)

But if I'm not here, give me a call so I can help you sort through. . . .

MAY : Ooo, the headaches you give me, you make a fuss out of breathing.

(GODBOY goes back to the cupboard, shuts the door, turns to the guppie case, scatters food from a packet into it.)

GODBOY : I'm sorry, dear, it was just a little idea of mine.

(MAY reaches down to the basket, picks the package up, opens it. It contains chips. She begins to pop them into her mouth. MR. GODBOY turns, stares. She stares back at him, goes on eating.)

GODBOY: Tasty?

MAY: Is that what you been doing all afternoon, then?

GODBOY (*smiling*): Pardon, dear?

MAY: Messing about with cupboards?

GODBOY: Yes dear.

MAY (*knowing*): You sure?

GODBOY: There was a lot to be looked after dear. It had to be purchased first, then arrangements had to be made for its delivery, myself accompanying in the van, no laughing matter as you can imagine, then various matters arose in connection with the padlock I insisted on for security measures. . . .

(*He hesitates, then boldly takes the padlock out of his pocket, flashes it at her, stuffs it away. While he is talking, MAY gets off the sofa and goes into the kitchen, leaving the door open.*

MR. GODBOY hurries over to the sofa, picks up her coat, takes it to the cupboard, puts it in, shuts the door, as MAY comes back in, sprinkling vinegar over her chips.)

GODBOY (*coming back to the centre of the room*): And on top of that I had to supervise the placing of the cupboard, also no laughing——

MAY: Doris or Eric didn't drop down then?

GODBOY: No dear, as I was explaining, I was compelled to be out all afternoon.

MAY: Well, Eric was down looking for you while you was gadding about with cupboards; he wants to know when you're going to do some work on his Doris, if you're still up to doing work on anyone, that is . . . (*settling back on the sofa*) seeing as he says as he's asked you five times.

GODBOY (*after a pause*): Yes dear, it's been a matter of waiting until the time is right, which it now is.

MAY: And there I was thinking you'd be glad to get your hands on her shy little toes; think of the liberties (*making prising gesture with a chip*) while you was knocking off a corn.

(MR. GODBOY looks at her, then goes to the kitchen door, shuts it, comes back, sits down on one of the utility chairs, laughs, shakes his head.)

GODBOY: I hope you don't joke like that around the neighbourhood, dear, on account of what you know it could do in the way of damage to my professional standing.

MAY (*sucks her fingers*): Oh and would it? (*Wags her head.*) What standing?

GODBOY: It might give people the unfortunate impression that everything wasn't right between us, dear.

MAY: It's unfortunate where the truth is, then. (*Pause.*) What about the standing that never stands because it's already had damage done to it according to your story and as I was the last to know?

GODBOY (*after a long pause*): Pardon, dear?

MAY: I've been thinking. How's your wound today? Throbbing, is it? Throbbing away?

GODBOY: It's merely been causing me a trifling pain, dear, thank you for asking. I managed to get down to the chemist for a prescription refill that'll assist me to doze off at night.

MAY (*sarcastic*): Well, that'll bring me some peace at last, won't it. (*Little pause.*) Your passion's been on the doze since the day we was married. (*Gets up, looks irritably around the room.*) And so's your foot-doctoring, so's your everything.

GODBOY (*watching her alertly*): As you know dear—are you looking for something?

MAY: Where's my coat?

GODBOY: I popped it in the cupboard. (*Gesturing towards it.*) I believe it would be fatal for me to practise full time owing to the effect on my pension and side-benefits, even my little family legacy would suffer.

(*As MAY goes towards the cupboard, he gets out of his chair.*) And the fact that I'm perfectly willing to assist out on the wife of a tenant doesn't mean I have to go begging for it, merely, dear.

(*Sits down again as MAY walks past the cupboard to the alcove, pulls the curtain back, heaves the cylinder out of the way, scrambles about on a shelf, knocking down bits and*

pieces of clothes, then comes back wiping her hands on a large handkerchief. MAY blows her nose, settles back on the sofa as MR. GODBOY goes to the alcove, puts the cylinder right while pretending to be putting the clothes back.)

MAY: What's that?

GODBOY: Pardon, dear?

MAY: Those tubes and pipes?

GODBOY: Oh. (*Laughs.*) Merely a little device I was offered at the chemist to try out a little experiment with merely, dear. (*Straightening, he closes the curtain.*)

MAY (*looking at him*): All day I've been thinking about you. I've got a surprise coming up for you.

GODBOY: Pardon, dear? (*brushing at his clothes*).

MAY: When we got started together you was brim-full of talk about how you was going to swell up until you was too big to handle on your own, as feet was feet and would always cause pain and need doctoring, and all I seen you do in two years of marriage is monkey about on that pension of yours and go on about your wound and bother them down at the police station. (*Points a finger at him as he comes back.*) Where else was you this afternoon? (*Nods.*) Where was you? At the police station, that's where you was, wasn't you?

GODBOY (*sits down*): Indeed, dear, I did drop in for a chat this morning.

MAY (*kicks off her shoes, sighs*): And what was you doing down there this time?

GODBOY: Merely discussing, dear, as I said.

MAY: What?

GODBOY (*after a pause*): Murder, merely, dear.

MAY: What murder?

GODBOY: James Ryan O'Higgs, the Dublin accountant and wife and female tenant murderer, dear. The one who polished off his wife and tenant in a week, and how he kept the police at bay with clever lies, although they was—were suspicious after the first. But still he kept on at it. . . .

(*As MAY gets up, he watches her.*)

Chat merely, dear.

(Getting to his feet as MAY goes to the cupboard.)

What you might call shop.

(Moving towards her as she opens the cupboard door: takes the padlock out of his pocket. MAY turns, looks at him. He has been walking furtively, now walks nonchalantly to stand beside her.)

MAY *(looks at him with contempt)*: No wonder you need medicine, the way you fill your brain up with stuff like that. *(She moves closer to the cupboard as MR. GODBOY slips behind her to the alcove.)*

Where did you say my slippers was?

(He puts his hand against the cupboard door to shut it, takes the pipe in his right hand. He cannot of course see MAY, as the cupboard door blocks her from view.)

GODBOY: That's right dear, in there dear.

(MAY steps around from the cupboard, stands behind MR. GODBOY, who is still poised, holding the pipe in his right, the door in his left hand.)

He did it by gassing, May! *(in a shout)*.

(He slams the door as MAY puts a hand on his shoulder. He whirls around, laughs.)

MAY *(as MR. GODBOY drops the pipe)*: What's the matter with you, I don't care if he did it by eating them raw; let me through and why can't you leave my things alone. *(As MR. GODBOY steps away from the alcove, she bends down, knocking aside the cylinder, then comes out carrying a pair of slippers.)*

GODBOY: Those are mine, dear. Yours are in the cupboard.

MAY: They'll suit.

(She puts them on. He watches her malevolently.)

And talking of gas, you be careful; the number of times you left the oven taps on for no reason, it's a wonder you're still here. And now it's tubes and what.

GODBOY *(laughs)*: Merely a device. . . . *(Slips the padlock back in his pocket.)*

MAY *(turning her back on him)*: Not that it matters. I've got a surprise for you.

GODBOY: Indeed? What sort of surprise?

MAY: You'll find out when it comes. (*She settles again on the sofa.*) And who was you having this chat with? Your Inspector Hawkins?

GODBOY: With Duty Officer Larkins, dear. (*Shuts the door, comes back.*) Although it's funny you should mention Inspector Hawkins, dear, as he did come in while I was talking to Duty Officer.

MAY: And has he remembered you yet?

GODBOY: His eyes were red-rimmed with fatigue and there was stubble on his chin; I garnered from Duty Officer's hints that he's been working twenty-four hours on the Merrit Street case—he wasn't in a condition to remember me.

MAY: But he's been at that station two months now, and you been down there every day of the week, how is it he don't remember you if you was so close to him in the war?

GODBOY (*stiffly*): I never said I expected him to remember me, May, I merely said in my capacity as Special Constable we'd come into contact before he was posted.

MAY: Ooooh! Well, to hear you tell it sometimes, you was always at his side.

GODBOY: I admire him May, yes, and I've followed his career, yes, and I'm proud to have been in contact, yes, and that's all I've said May.

MAY: And yet he don't remember you even! Yes?

GODBOY (*looks at her coldly*): Inspector Hawkins will remember me all right, May, when the time comes.

MAY (*stares at him*): It's funny to me the way your voice changes at the mention of his name, why didn't you marry him instead.

(*Long pause. MR. GODBOY is sitting stiffly.*)

And from what I hear you're not the only one's coming into contact with Hawkins. Who was he with?

GODBOY (*coldly*): Pardon?

MAY: Who was your Hawkins with?

GODBOY: He was in the company of a female constable.

MAY: That sounds like the Hawkins I've been hearing about.

GODBOY (*still coldly*): Doubtless she has a key part to play in the Merrit Street case, May, given the nature of the offence.

MAY: As long as she's female that's not all she'll have a key part to play in, constable or no constable, from what they say about Hawkins.

GODBOY (*after a little pause*): There's always gossip about inspectors of a filthy nature.

MAY: Oh, he's of a filthy nature all right, ladies and Hawkins are never out of each other's sight, that's what I hear.

GODBOY: You're talking about Inspector Hawkins, May. There's not, nor never has been no stain on his record.

MAY: That's not where the stains would be. Manly Hawkins!

(**MR. GODBOY** *sits staring straight ahead.*)

MAY: Isn't that what they call him?

GODBOY: That nickname was acquired because he's got the looks and manners of a born policeman. At first it was Irish Hawkins, but he soon put a stop to that, and then it was Mannerly Hawkins, from the respect he'd earned with his politeness, and then people got careless with it and it slipped into Manly, which only a few proven constables ever called him by to his face and was—were allowed to get away with it in my hearing, if he thought highly of them to be on intimate returns. (*Little pause.*) As for the female constable, if she's working under Inspector Hawkins, and has been brought in special to do it, it's because she's developed a reputation in her own right. (*Little pause.*) I'm under oath to Duty Officer not to divulge what she's been requested to do in the Merrit Street case, I can only say she's in danger up to the hilt.

MAY (*laughs tauntingly*): If she's hanging about hoping the Merrit Street attacker will rip off her skirts to get in her up to the hilt, then that's Hawkins's idea of pleasure too, from what I hear, oh yes what the Merrit Street attacker don't give her, Hawkins'll make up for.

(*Long pause.* **MR. GODBOY** *sits staring straight ahead.*)

And I'll tell you something, I wouldn't mind being in her shoes. With *either* of them.

GODBOY: May I ask, May, may I ask where this gossip you've been hearing's been taking place?

MAY: Never you mind where.

GODBOY: Because I don't believe you've had the pleasure of seeing Inspector Hawkins in the flesh.

MAY: And he hasn't had the pleasure of seeing me the same way. (*Laughs.*) It's a wonder to me they let you come snooping around the station, you've got no business there, and as for Manly Hawkins, he'd order you back to the corns and bunions, which is where you belong, if he noticed you at all, which he won't.

GODBOY (*laughs softly*): He'll notice me, May, when the time comes.

MAY: Well, I won't be here to see it. (*Significantly picks up and shakes the cigarette packs.*)

(MR. GODBOY *looks at her, looks away.*)

MAY: And you remember I said that. (*Little pause, feeling irritably under her.*) Where's my coat then?

GODBOY: Oh, I do believe I hung it in the new cupboard, dear. (*MAY sighs, gets up, tramps across the room to the cupboard.*)

MAY: I have to do everything for myself in the place, why can't you leave me alone?

(*As MR. GODBOY follows her. She opens the cupboard, stands thinking as MR. GODBOY comes up behind her, then leaving the door open, goes out of the hall door, right, leaving that open also. MR. GODBOY is fumbling for the padlock.*)

GODBOY: No dear (*laughs*), it's in the cupboard here.

(*Shakes his fist, then goes out into the hall after her. As he does so the door, left, opens, and MAY comes tramping in holding some cigarettes and matches, lights up as she settles back on the sofa. MR. GODBOY reappears through the kitchen door.*)

MAY: What you doing, following me about like a mongolese idiot?

GODBOY: I thought you wanted your coat, which is in the cupboard dear. (*Shuts the kitchen door, comes over to his chair, sits down.*)

MAY: What for? Im not going anywhere—yet. It was me fags I wanted. (*Taps ash on the floor.*)

(MR. GODBOY *sits staring at her. After a minute gets up, picks up an ashtray from the gramophone table, puts it on*