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SF PERUSALS

September Tide

A play

Daphne du Maurier

Revised version by Mark Rayment

Samuel French — London
New York - Toronto - Hollywood



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SEPTEMBER TIDE

First performed at the Aldwych Theatre, London, on 15th December, 1948, with the following cast:

Robert Hanson	Cyril Raymond
Mrs Tucket	Dandy Nichols
Cherry Davies	Anne Leon
Evan Davies	Michael Gough
Stella Martyn	Gertrude Lawrence
Jimmy Martyn	Bryan Forbes

Directed by Irene Hentschel
Designed by Michael Relph

This revised version opened at the King's Head Theatre, London, on 20th July 1993 with the following cast:

Robert Hanson	Peter Byrne
Mrs Tucket	Mary Chester
Cherry Davies	Francesca Hunt
Evan Davies	Brendan Coyle
Stella Martyn	Susannah York
Jimmy Martyn	Toby Walton

Directed by Mark Rayment
Designed by Jonathan Fensom

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CHARACTERS

Robert Hanson, a friend of the family
Mrs Tucket, the daily woman
Cherry Davies
Evan Davies, Cherry's husband
Stella Martyn, Cherry's mother
Jimmy Martyn, Stella's son

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ACT I

SCENE 1

The living-room of Stella Martyn's house on a Cornish estuary. Late afternoon, summer 1948

The furniture — sofa, piano, armchairs, tables, stove, etc. — suggest the interior of a simple but comfortable seaside home. A low doorway and semi-visible curved stairwell, UC, *give the impression of a studio above the main stage. A door, extreme* L, *leads off to the kitchen, pantry and the rear of the house. Another door, extreme* R, *leads to the front door and the main staircase. The house is directly above the harbour. Throughout the play the screech of gulls and the wash of the tide below can be heard. Entrances to and from the harbour and ferry were made through the auditorium for the production at the King's Head, and the porch was downstage. This edition follows the conceit employed at the King's Head*

Robert Hanson, an old friend of the family, is heard off. He is in his sixties, proud and principled, yet never priggish. He enters, carrying a bottle of whisky

Robert (*calling*) Hallo! Stella! ... Anybody home ...?

Mrs Tucket, the Martyn's long-standing housekeeper from the village, also in her sixties, enters from the pantry door, L, *carrying her basket and outdoor shoes*

Good-evening.

Mrs Tucket Oh, evening, sir. Mrs Martyn's just gone up to the village, see if she can get any whisky from the *Ferry Inn.*

Robert Oh, I could have saved her the trouble! Just remembered I had this hidden away on my boat. (*He shows her the bottle and places it on top of the piano, on a drinks tray)*

Mrs Tucket (*changing out of her work shoes and overall into her civvies*) She will be pleased, sir. She had half a bottle of gin, but it seems that Mr Davies won't touch anything except whisky.

Robert Well, you have to take what you can get these days and be grateful.

Mrs Tucket Oh, you know what she is, sir. The children only have to ask

for something and it's theirs. And she'll be just the same now with Mr Davies. We've been turning this place upside down all day to get it ready. Not that I mind hard work ——

Robert (*interrupting*) Yes, well I'm sure Mrs Martyn will be very glad of your help, and Miss Cherry too.

Mrs Tucket (*correcting him*) Ah!

Robert Oh, but we mustn't call her Miss Cherry anymore, must we?

Mrs Tucket Mrs Davies. It'll take a bit of getting used to.

Robert I suppose Mrs Martyn's very excited?

Mrs Tucket Over the moon! Talking 'bout grandchildren already, and how she wants to build on a new wing. Well, you've seen what she's done to the attic?

Robert No, what?

Mrs Tucket Turned it into a studio for Mr Davies. You wouldn't recognize it from what it was. Decorated the whole thing herself in two days. Have a look. (*She makes to open the studio door*)

Robert Er, no. I think I'll wait until he asks me.

Mrs Tucket (*picking up the local paper from a chair*) There's quite a bit about him in the newspaper. With his photograph and so on. Have you seen it?

Robert Yes, I saw it at the club.

Mrs Tucket Quite famous he seems to be. Pictures in galleries and so on. Have you seen any of them?

Robert Er, no, can't say that I have.

Mrs Tucket Mm, well, boats are more in your line, aren't they, sir? Well it's lovely for Miss Cherry to be married and it's lovely for her mother to have her home again. But I know Mrs Martyn would have liked it better if she'd come home sooner and had a proper wedding down here.

Robert Not much chance of a proper wedding with a girl like Cherry for a daughter and an artist for a son-in-law.

Mrs Tucket Suppose not. And then Miss Cherry was always one for having her own way.

Robert Spoilt! Always been the trouble. Same with the brother too, but perhaps the navy'll knock some of that out of him. Their mother's been too good to them all these years.

Mrs Tucket You're right there.

Robert checks his watch and moves downstage to look out of the window towards the harbour. A ferry horn is heard

Robert Well, I suppose they'll be here any minute now. The ferry's in, looks like them coming ashore now.

Mrs Tucket joins him at the window

Mrs Tucket Oh yes! That's them. Oh dear. Mrs Martyn will be so upset that she's not here to meet them.
Robert I should run up to the village if I were you. Warn her that the happy pair are about to descend on her.
Mrs Tucket I think I'd better. Oh, you'll stay, sir?
Robert Not on your life! No, I'll look in again later, when they've broken the ice. Besides, I've got my boat to put to bed. Evening.
Mrs Tucket Evening, sir.

Robert exits R

Mrs Tucket, in a panic now, grabs her basket from the chair, checks once more in the window and leaves, R

A moment's pause. Gulls and wash are heard

Cherry Davies is heard calling, off. She is lively, unpredictable, nonconformist and in her early twenties. She enters from the harbour

Cherry Mother! Mother!

Evan Davies follows her in reluctantly. He is in his late twenties and is initially uneasy in his new surroundings. His stern manner conceals a quiet, brooding nature

They both carry their luggage, which they dispose of on the porch steps. Cherry crosses to the kitchen door and calls out as Evan enters the room. He stares about him and takes in the view

Mother! You here? ... Evan, she's not here. She can't have forgotten us. (*She sees some letters on top of the piano and picks them up*) Oh, letters. Mrs Davies ... Mrs Davies ... Mrs Davies! Why does something as simple as marriage make friends so ecstatic? I can't possibly answer them all, I wouldn't know what to say. (*She sees the whisky*) Oh, Evan, whisky! Wonderful. Just like Mother to remember. (*She senses his silence*) What's the matter?
Evan This room. You described it very badly.
Cherry Did I? Are you disappointed?
Evan God no! It's perfect. The sort of room I've always wanted.

Cherry I told you it was lovely. You never listen to a word I say. (*She moves towards the window*) I bet you thought it was going to be a dreadful seaside villa with a flag-pole in the garden! (*She moves next to him and stands looking out)* It's so good to be home again. (*She sees Robert and moves across to the porch to call out to him*) Robert! ... Robert! (*She moves back to Evan*) There goes Mother's faithful boyfriend, out with his boat. I can never tell which he loves more. That boat or Mother. (*She shouts again*) Robert! ... Come up and have a drink!

Evan Oh for Christ's sake, don't start throwing parties! It's all I can do to face my mother-in-law.

Cherry Robert's not a party. Anyway, you'll have to meet him sooner or later. He runs everything down here, from the hospital to the Boy Scouts. (*She reassures him*) And anyway, I've told you a thousand times that Mother's the easiest thing in the world. She's remembered your whisky anyhow. Surely that's one good mark in her favour. (*She moves away again*) Oh! You've no idea what it is for Jimmy and me to get down here and relax, knowing we don't have to do a damn thing because Mother'll do it all for us. Even down to mending our knickers!

Evan Well knowing the state of yours, I should think they keep her very busy.

Cherry Oh, ha, ha! I can't be bothered with that sort of thing. Never could and never will. But Mother's thoroughly domestic and old-fashioned. I always tell her she ought to have lived a hundred years ago.

Evan You fill me with more and more dread. I won't know what to say to her at all.

Cherry You don't have to say anything if you don't feel like it. Mother will rattle on quite happily. And, like all her generation, she has a mind like a sink. Enjoys nothing so much as a good dirty joke.

Evan My range of jokes is very limited. And any sense of humour I started out with is fast vanishing. If it wasn't for the charm of this room and the view of the harbour, I'd catch the first train back to London.

Cherry You wouldn't dare! (*She looks towards the studio door*) I wonder what she meant about a surprise in the attic?

She opens the door and climbs up the stairs, giving a surprised gasp when she sees the studio

Evan remains transfixed at the window

(*Off*) Oh! Evan!

Evan (*calmly*) What's the matter?

Cherry (*off*) Ha! It's unbelievable! She's turned the attic into a studio. Come and see!

Evan (*to himself*) I don't want a studio. (*He calls off to Cherry*) I want to look at this view.

Cherry (*off*) You've got the same view from here, only better. Come on!

Evan (*conceding*) Oh, all right. (*To himself, as he moves up*) What's the old lady done? Bought me a box of paints and an easel? (*He calls to her again*) I didn't come here to paint. I came to lie in the sun and fish.

Cherry appears back at the top of the steps

Cherry You can't lie in the sun in Cornwall. It rains every other day. And all the fish have defected to the East coast. (*She takes him by the arm and pulls him towards the steps*) Besides, you've got to work. I only married you because you were famous, and you can't disappoint me now! Come on!

Evan groans and climbs the stairs

Cherry remains below, waiting for his reaction. Evan whistles in surprise at what greets him

What did I tell you! What the hell is Mother doing? It's so unlike her not to be on the spot with open arms. I wonder if she's gone up to the village for anything?

Evan (*off*) Let her stay there then. The thought of meeting a mother-in-law reminds me of every music-hall joke I ever heard.

He re-enters and looks about him

What did I do with all my junk?

Cherry (*indicating where they entered*) Dumped it all on the porch. Do you want to see the rest of the house?

Evan Not particularly. I never want to move out of this room. Come and help me carry my stuff.

They move out to the porch and, ad lib, bring their luggage into the room. Evan places his paints on the piano stool, UC, *and leans his easel against the open studio door. Cherry knocks his rucksack against the piano*

Evan Watch that bag will you! There's a bottle of whisky in it!

Cherry Oh, Evan. Don't get plastered too early will you? I want you to make a good impression.

Evan I'll get plastered as soon as it suits me.

Cherry Well, in that case I'll leave you to it and go and warn Mother what to expect. She can't have gone far.

Cherry exits towards the harbour

Evan, still unpacking his luggage, calls after her

Evan Well, if she's dishing out soup at the Women's Institute, let her stay there. I can look after myself!

Evan collects a few things together and exits up to the studio

A brief pause

Stella Martyn enters from the door, R, *in a hurry. She is in her late forties and has a natural, unforced personality and beauty. She carries roses and a whisky bottle. She looks around quickly and then goes to place the whisky on the piano. In doing so she sends Evan's paint box crashing to the ground, spilling its contents across the floor*

Evan (*off; shouting from the studio*) For Christ's sake, don't touch my things!

Evan appears at the studio door, obviously surprised but not giving anything away

Stella remains frozen for a few moments, while she decides how to minimize the embarrassment

Stella (*eventually*) How do you do? I'm Mother.

She holds out her hand. He declines to shake it

Evan How do you do?
Stella Do I kiss you?
Evan I don't know.
Stella (*awkwardly*) It's absurd. I've no idea how to behave. I've never had a son-in-law before.
Evan (*simply*) Perhaps I'm the first of many.

She glances at him briefly, uncertain if it was a joke or not

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