SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

This sample is an excerpt - an appetiser, if you will - from a full Samuel French title.

This sample is just for you to try out, and it can't be used for performance, downloaded, printed or distributed in any way.

Take it for a whirl and see if it tickles your fancy!

For more information about licensing this or other shows, or to browse thousands more plays and theatre books to buy please visit our website.

www.samuelfrench.co.uk
or, in the US www.samuelfrench.com

SF PERUSALS

The Soft September Air

A Play

Charlotte Hastings

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

SAMUELFRENCH-LONDON.CO.UK
SAMUELFRENCH.COM

Copyright © 1979 by Charlotte Hastings
All Rights Reserved

THE SOFT SEPTEMBER AIR is fully protected under the copyright laws of the British Commonwealth, including Canada, the United States of America, and all other countries of the Copyright Union. All rights, including professional and amateur stage productions, recitation, lecturing, public reading, motion picture, radio broadcasting, television and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved.

ISBN 978-0-573-11423-6

www.samuelfrench-london.co.uk

www.samuelfrench.com

FOR AMATEUR PRODUCTION ENQUIRIES

UNITED KINGDOM AND WORLD
EXCLUDING NORTH AMERICA
plays@SamuelFrench-London.co.uk
020 7255 4302/01

Each title is subject to availability from Samuel French,

depending upon country of performance.

CAUTION: Professional and amateur producers are hereby warned that *THE SOFT SEPTEMBER AIR* is subject to a licensing fee. Publication of this play does not imply availability for performance. Both amateurs and professionals considering a production are strongly advised to apply to the appropriate agent before starting rehearsals, advertising, or booking a theatre. A licensing fee must be paid whether the title is presented for charity or gain and whether or not admission is charged.

The professional rights in this play are controlled by Samuel French Ltd, 52 Fitzroy Street, London, W1T 5JR.

No one shall make any changes in this title for the purpose of production. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means, now known or yet to be invented, including mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, videotaping, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher. No one shall upload this title, or part of this title, to any social media websites.

The right of Charlotte Hastings to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

THE SOFT SEPTEMBER AIR

CHARACTERS

Lindsey Ashe, a novelist
Mrs Bevil, her daily help
Dickon
Chris } University students
Gavin ("Blitz")
Horace Bellamy, Dickon's father
Di, "Blitz's" liberated girl-friend
First Old Lady
Second Old Lady
Nurse Kelly
Dr Grieves, a lady doctor
Sister
Another Student

The parts of the two Old Ladies can be doubled with Nurse Kelly and Sister. "Blitz" can be doubled with the Student who appears at the end of the play.

The action takes place in Linnets Cottage, at Westfield Green, a village on the outskirts of a university town, and covers a period of twelve months.

Act I September to December
Act II June to September

Time—the present

The songs *The Soft September Air* and *Then and Now* composed by Michael Blanchard

The play was originally broadcast on BBC Radio in October 1978, with the following cast of characters:

Lindsey Ashe	Flora Robson
Dickon Bellamy	Andrew Branch
Mrs Bevil	Betty Hardy
Horace Bellamy	Hector Ross
Gavin (Blitz)	Kenneth Shanley
Chris	Sean Barrett
Millicent/1st Old Girl	Margot Boyd
Phillip/Sergeant	Gavin Campbell
Dr Porteus	Kenneth Barrow
Di	Susan Sloman
Inspector/TV Voice 1	Malcolm Gerrard
Doctor/TV Voice 2	Henry Knowles
Sister/2nd Old Girl	Brenda Kaye
Student/Waiter	Max Hafler
Guitarist	Eric Hill

The play directed by Graham Gauld
Songs composed by Michael Blanchard

Foreword by Dame Flora Robson, who took the part of Lindsey in the radio broadcast of this play.

I have been a great admirer of Charlotte Hastings' work since she wrote a beautiful play—*Bonaventure*. It was a great first night success with Irene Vanburgh, Fay Compton and Mary Kerridge.

When I was given a BBC choice of plays, in a series, I chose *Bonaventure*, since when I have been most happy to follow in a run of her plays on BBC Radio.

I am proud to say we are happy partners with the BBC accepting our choice of stories. Our interests are the same and we both feel we have much to give and receive.

This play, *The Soft September Air*, has splendid parts for mature actresses and some first class young people with their university and personal problems. It presents many interests and incidents common to both of us and I feel it will come to life before an audience.



To Roger, Duncan, Gerald, Colin, Neil and Michael—
and any others who may follow.

PRODUCTION NOTES

This acting edition of *The Soft September Air* offers societies something a little different from the standard three-acter, with interesting ideas for insets, recordings, etc.

The few costume changes, clearing of hand props, re-setting, lighting etc, have been worked out for a minimum of waiting between scenes. With organization, the play may be almost continuous.

The two inset scenes in the pub and the hospital may be produced in two ways. The simplest—as indicated in the script—is to play them before the CURTAIN. Societies who have no room for this, can lower the CURTAIN after the major scene, set two or three black screens across the stage a few feet from the front, then raise the CURTAIN and play the inset against the screens. At the end of the inset scene, the CURTAIN is lowered while the screens are removed, then raised again on the major scene in the cottage. *Recordings*. It is very effective to have the various letters, telephone calls, TV news and the scene in the car recorded and relayed from the side of the stage or the back of the audience. If Dickon cannot play the guitar, the songs may be recorded and played from the wings and he can mime.

If recordings are not possible, the alternatives are simple, as follows:

1. Lindsey reads aloud all the letters from her sister and her literary agent, and her own replies, also the last letter from Dickon at the end of the play.
2. The television news may be read from the wings.
3. The scene in the car may be omitted—but it should be noted this may cut the time allowed for Dickon to change into his dark suit for the next act.
3. The interlude of the song in the pub ('Then and Now') and the audience participation may be omitted. In which case it is suggested that when Lindsey and Chris exit to go into the lounge, a burst of music and laughter etc., is heard behind the CURTAIN, and the two old ladies also exit into the wings.
4. The telephone conversations with Dr Porteus may be simplified into the dialogue, as follows:

Page 25

Lindsey Westfield three-seven . . . . Who? . . . Dr Porteus, oh, yes, the Dean of Students, isn't it? Good evening . . . Gavin Marsh? Yes, but he isn't here at the moment . . . Oh no! Don't say he's come off that wretched bike? . . . No? Then what . . . Back here tomorrow, yes, I see . . . (*Slowly*) He's not in hospital? . . . Well, no—not just for a few bruises, but what has . . . You're looking after him? I—see. Thank you, Dr Porteus—it is very kind of you to let me know . . . Yes—good-bye.

Page 45 (*played before the* CURTAIN)

Chris Westfield three-seven . . . No, Mrs Ashe is out . . . Oh, Dr Porteus, Chris here. Chris Conway. Is it about Dickon? I've been out looking for the last two hours. Is he on campus? . . . Westfield General? . . . I knew he'd come off that bike . . . What! . . . An overdose! (*Quietly*) Oh, my God—he's not . . . I see. Where did they find him? . . . Yes . . . No, there wouldn't be an answer—his father's down here—at the Royal. And Mrs Ashe. Just a moment, are you at the hospital? . . . Right, I'll get out to the Royal and bring them over. Where do we go—Casualty? . . . Reception . . . The Park Street entrance—I know. I'm on my way. (*He mimes replacing the phone and hurries out through the* CURTAIN)

ACT I

SCENE 1

The living-room of Linnets Cottage, Westfield Green, a village on the outskirts of a university town. Afternoon

The room is a period one, of some taste and elegance, with beamed walls and ceiling. A brick fireplace with hood is in the middle of the back wall, with a wide, practical sash window and window seat to one side. The curtains and seat cushions are in chintz. To the other side of the fireplace are crowded bookshelves: on the middle shelf are a sherry decanter, brandy, and various glasses. In the wall below the sash window is the main door leading to the hall and the rest of the cottage: between this door and the window is a corner cupboard with an attractive green dessert service. Opposite the door is another large window. A big desk stands at this window, with a swivel chair before it, back to the door. On the desk are various papers, writing materials, etc., a telephone and a typewriter. Between the desk and the bookshelves is a small table with an electric kettle, coffee and mugs. There is also a comfortable settee

When the CURTAIN *rises the room is empty. Lindsey Ashe enters from the hall, carrying a gardening basket. She puts it on the window seat and crosses to the desk, pulling off her gardening gloves. She is a handsome, intelligent woman of fifty-eight wearing country clothes. A moment later Mrs Bevil follows her in, a stocky countrywoman of about sixty-five. She wears a tweed skirt, light sweater and "coverall" apron*

Mrs Bevil —and there's no need to go on your knees to them weeds. Bevil'll be up Saturday.

Lindsey I wanted to finish that border. Saturday we'll lift the dahlias. (*She sits at the desk and turns over some manuscripts*)

Mrs Bevil We don't never lift ours. Bevil don't hold with it. (*She moves to the desk*) Your supper's in the oven and there's a mousse in the fridge. You said you fancied chocolate, but I think the lemon's nicer.

Lindsey (*absently*) Thank you, Bev.

Mrs Bevil And George Billings just brought up late post. (*She takes three letters from apron pocket—one in a blue envelope*) Two bills—one's the 'lectric—(*she gives them to Lindsey*)—and this one I reckon'll be from your sister.

Lindsey Oh dear—so it is. How tiresome.

Mrs Bevil (*grimly*) Ah. She'll not be best pleased when she knows what you're up to. And I'll get gone myself—before this long-haired layabout arrives.

Lindsey Bev—students are not all long-haired layabouts . . .

Mrs Bevil Worst thing they ever did—putting that university in the town. All them up there—living off social security—

Lindsey —and student grants are not social security.

Mrs Bevil I don't know why we bother to vote. Bevil says what we want now is a collision Government.

Lindsey Oh, *Bev* . . .

Mrs Bevil And we certainly don't want one of that lot up here—disturbing all the peace and quiet.

Lindsey I cannot be alone at night in this isolated house any longer. And one boy studying quietly in his room, is not going to disturb *anything*.

Mrs Bevil Thass as maybe. (*She takes the gloves and goes to the window seat for the basket*) See you in the morning.

Mrs Bevil goes out with the basket

Lindsey (*calling*) Thank you, Bev. (*Looking at the blue envelope*) Oh dear, if I read this now it will spoil my appetite and if I read it later it will give me indigestion. I think—yes, I'll read it now and then have a very large sherry. (*She opens the letter*) And one thing's for sure, Lindsey my girl. If there's to be someone else in the house you'll have to stop talking to yourself. Now—where're my glasses. (*She finds them on the desk and either reads the letter aloud, or Millicent's recorded voice is heard, high, precise and rather censorious. See Production Note*) My dear Lindsey: This idea of taking an irresponsible student into your house is preposterous. You cannot need the money. Your writing does very well, though we have never been able to understand why. However we do appreciate your fear of being alone in Linnets at night after that attempted break-in, and Cedric wishes me to say we are prepared—(*she turns*) *the page*)

A motor-cycle is heard arriving

—to make a home for you with us. We cannot offer you separate accommodation, but there are two good rooms upstairs with quite a pleasant view over the kitchen garden, and Cedric has generously offered to put in a gas ring. Isn't this hot weather *trying*. Your affectionate sister, Millicent. P. S. It's a pity you are not more domesticated. You never did know one end of a dishcloth from another.

Lindsey (*angrily*) Oh, hell and damnation . . . !

Dickon (*calling, off*) Hullo!

Dickon appears at the casement window. He is nearly twenty-one, tall and good looking with a very pleasant speaking voice. His hair is worn just below his ears, but well-groomed. He wears jeans and a crash helmet

Dickon I'm from the university . . .

Lindsey I'm sorry, I didn't hear . . . (*She rises and crosses to the window*)

Dickon The Housing Office sent me. (*Suddenly*) My God . . .

Lindsey What *is* the matter?

Dickon This house. I've never seen anything quite so beautiful. The thatch—and the walls—with that kind of scroll pattern . . .

Lindsey Pargetting.

Dickon Par . . . ?

Lindsey Pargetting. Made with a pointed stick while the plaster is still wet. One of the medieval building crafts.

Dickon How old is it?

Lindsey So far as we've been able to ascertain—(*she sits on the window seat, resting one hand on the sill*)—it's fifteenth century.

Dickon I can't wait to come here. *Please—dear* lady—take me in. Look—on my knees—"I do entreat thee—in compassion's name . . ."

Lindsey (*laughing*) Don't be an idiot. Get up. No—I don't want my hand kissed. Get up and give me a few details.

He gets up and takes off his helmet

Dickon Bellamy, Richard Paul. Known as Dickon. Twenty-one in six weeks' time. Third year—reading English Lit. Honest, sober and reasonably industrious. Only vice—playing the guitar. I think you are as beautiful as your house—and please may I now kiss your hand?

Lindsey Lindsey Ashe. Novelist. Widowed five years. As I desire above all things to remain in this cottage I need someone in the house at night because . . .

Dickon I will defend you both to the death and beyond. (*Getting up*) May I move in now?

Lindsey I have not yet said you may move in at all.

Dickon Then I will hang myself from one of those willows and you may gaze from your window at my dangling, twitching body . . .

Lindsey (*interestedly*) What with?

Dickon Sorry?

Lindsey With what will you hang yourself? There must be something to support your dangling twitching body?

Dickon Oh. Do you—do you have a clothes-line?

Lindsey (*gravely*) We could not spare it. It is in constant use.

Dickon I—see. No other piece of rope available? Thick string? Or garden twine?

Lindsey Regretfully, no. This is a thrifty house.

Dickon Then I will drown myself in that beautiful pond—"There is a willow grows aslant a brook . . ."

Lindsey (*abruptly*) It is only two feet deep.

Dickon So you condemn me to live.

Lindsey It would appear so.

Dickon But to condemn me to live miserably—is that not illogical?

Lindsey Not in the least. Why don't you want to live at the University?

Dickon On campus? You must be joking. I've stuck it for two years—two years of hell. Please let me come here. (*His tone changes completely. Quietly*) I think—I think I might find peace in this place.

Lindsey gets up. They look at each other for a second

Lindsey (*also quietly*) The front door is at the side. Just—lift the latch and come in.

A sports car roars up and stops

Chris (*calling, off*) I say—! Is this Linnets?

A car door slams. Steps are heard.

Chris appears in the window. He is about the same age as Dickon, stocky, sensible and very practical; wears the inevitable uniform of sweater and jeans

I'm from the University. The Housing Office said . . .
Lindsey I'm afraid you're just too late. Oh—this is Dickon Bellamy.
Chris Chris Conway. Hi.
Dickon Hi.
Chris What a marvellous place. Couldn't you possibly fit me in somewhere?
Dickon I shouldn't think that old banger would bring you. Where on earth did you salvage it?
Chris You leave her alone—the only woman in my life at the moment. Look—wouldn't a house like this have more than two bedrooms?
Lindsey Two double rooms and a bit of an attic.
Chris A double? Two beds? I suppose you wouldn't share?
Dickon Well, I . . .
Lindsey Now, just a moment . . .
Chris I've left it late—and honestly, I can't find a *dog kennel.* And you must know what it's like on campus these days . . .
Dickon (*quietly*) Yes.
Chris Well, then . . .?
Dickon It's up to Mrs Ashe. Dear lady, could we perhaps see the room?
Lindsey Well, I really hadn't considered—very well. You'd better come in.

Chris and Dickom disappear from window

Lindsey turns into the room

(*Half-amused, half-exasperated*). Well, well . . .!

Dixon and Chris enter through the door

Dickon Oh—it's even better inside. The beams and that fireplace. Do you burn logs? And just look at that china? What is it?
Lindsey A dessert service—Davenport. One of my treasures. (*She goes past them to the door*) The staircase is through that door opposite. Go up and see the room—right on the landing.

Dickon and Chris go out

(*Calling*) There's only one place you'll have to duck—just at the top . . .

There is a crack

Chris (*off*) Ouch!
Lindsey (*laughing*) Well, I *did* warn you.
Chris (*calling*) There's bags of space—couldn't be better . . .

The telephone rings. Lindsey calls off

Lindsey Excuse me. Settle it between yourselves and we'll talk it over. (*She picks up the telephone*) Westfield three-seven . . . Marsh? . . . Gavin Marsh? (*She pauses*) The Housing Office? Oh. No, I'm sorry, but I'm afraid I can't . . . (*There is a long pause*) Yes—you certainly have left it late, but there must be *somewhere*. Surely the University has—no, really I haven't even a corner.

Dickon and Chris enter

Chris If it's all right with you . . .

Lindsey holds up a warning hand

Lindsey Now listen—please. I've already two students here—and I . . . (*Another pause. Slowly*) Well—if it's like that—it is? Then there *is* an attic—but I do *mean* attic . . .

Dickon and Chris exchange glances

Chris (*softly*) There's a TV too. Do you think she'd let us watch football?
Dickon (*watching Lindsey*) S-hush.
Lindsey I see. Oh, dear, in that case—come and see me. Have you got transport? A motor bike—oh heavens! No, no. When will you come? *Now!* Oh, just a moment . . . (*She pauses, then takes the receiver from her ear, looks at it, then replaces it. She turns and looks at the boys. Despairingly*) And what Mrs Bevil is going to say, I just don't know!

Beaming, Dickon and Chris shake hands with each other, as—

the CURTAIN falls

SCENE 2

The same

Lindsey is at her desk, wearing her spectacles and typing. She rips letter from machine and sits back reading it aloud, or her recorded voice is heard

Lindsey My dear Millicent: I have waited before breaking the news. My three students moved in five weeks ago. They are Dickon, Chris and Gavin—who is called Blitz, apparently because his politics are both red and warlike. They are not as worldly as they would like to think—but they are young and gay, and I feel we may deal pleasantly together without personal involvement. I hope the view over the kitchen garden continues pleasant. Your affectionate sister—P.S. Reassure Cedric that I use the word *gay* in its archaic sense. (*She pauses, laughs, then takes a pen and scribbles*) P.P.S. Who wants—to know anything—about a dishcloth—anyway! (*She puts an envelope in machine and starts to type*)

There is a knock at door. She goes on typing. Knock is repeated

(*Calling*) Yes?

Chris (*off*) Could we see you for a moment?

Chris enters with Dickon and Blitz behind him. Blitz is a contrast, with large spectacles and a beard. He has a very slight Cockney accent

About the rules?

Lindsey (*only half attending*) Rules—(*she stops typing and turns*)—can't we just make them up as the occasion arises?

Blitz Organization is essential both inside and outside industry.

Lindsey Oh. Actually I *am* trying to be industrious myself just now—I suppose you'd better come in. Sit down somewhere.

Blitz closes the door. Lindsey puts letter in envelope and stamps it

You'll find some sherry over there. Help yourselves—someone get me a glass.

She swings her chair rovnd and takes off her spectacles. The boys pour sherry, there is a buzz of conversation as glasses are passed—"Thanks", "Cheers", etc. Dickon and Chris sit on the settee. Blitz stands by the bookshelves

And why this sudden urge for discipline? We seemed to be coping quite satisfactorily so far.

Dickon Well—you *were* a little—*edgy*—last night . . .

Lindsey I merely pointed out that it was somewhat injudicious to scrawl across the bathroom mirror "Bev rules O.K."

Chris (*straight-faced*) We're all very repentant and we won't do it again.

Lindsey Mrs Bevil has worked for me for twenty years and we understand each other. Either treat her with respect or leave her alone. Understood?

Murmurs of agreement

Otherwise we go on as we are. One of you should be here at night. You have your rooms cleaned but you provide your own food, cook your own meals—and always leave the kitchen absolutely clear before going to bed. Any further questions?

Blitz I don't graduate for another year. When these two leave, can I have the double room?

Lindsey If you stay on.

Blitz Good show. Di will like that.

Dickon } Watch it
Chris } Hold on, Blitz } *Speaking together*

Lindsey And who is Di?

Blitz My girl friend. Will she pay the same rent?

Lindsey Are you proposing this girl friend should—I believe the current term is *shack up* with you?

Blitz Sure. You'll like Di—she . . .

Lindsey (*firmly*) No.

Blitz (*surprised*) No?

Lindsey Again to use your own expression—no way.
Blitz Why ever not?
Dickon (*softly*) Leave it, Blitz.
Lindsey This applies to all three of you. You may certainly invite your girl-friends in for a drink—or a snack. If you want them to share your beds you must go elsewhere.
Blitz (*disgustedly*) For Gawd's sake—didn't you ever . . .
Chris Blitz . . .
Lindsey Since I enjoyed nearly thirty years of happy marriage, one may assume that I did. (*Quietly*) Sexual fulfilment is not the prerogative of your generation.
Chris (*sotto voce*) Wow!
Blitz I only said . . .
Lindsey It would be all round the village in forty-eight hours. And undoubtedly Mrs Bevil would leave—which I could not for a moment contemplate.
Blitz All right. You've made your point. And—I beg your pardon . . .
Lindsey Thank you. (*She puts the envelope on a pile of others and gets up*) I'm just going to the postbox with these. Finish your sherry and then you can wash up the glasses.
Dickon Could I go for you?
Lindsey No. I need to stretch my legs.

Lindsey goes out

Chris The old girl can pack a mean punch when she wants to.
Dickon I don't mind when she shouts. It's when she stands on the rug and goes all quiet—why do you keep calling her *old*?
Blitz Fifty-eight . . .
Dickon Fifty . . .?
Blitz Fifty-eight. Her age. I borrowed her dictionary yesterday. It said "To my dear daughter, Lindsey Margaret on her twenty-first birthday"—and it gave the date. Like I said. Fifty-eight. Old as God.
Dickon (*angrily*) How would *you* know His age? You're an atheist!

Dickon goes out sharply

Blitz Now you look here . . . (*He starts to go after Dickon*)

Chris pulls him back

Chris Cool it, Blitz.
Blitz I won't . . .
Chris (*quietly*) I said cool it.

Blitz jerks his arm free

Blitz He's always getting at me . . .
Chris And you're always getting at him. You two can never agree—so leave each other alone.
Blitz It's all very well for you . . .
Chris Let's get these glasses done, shall we? (*He puts his glass into Blitz's hand and fetches the others. Moving to the door*) Come on.

Chris and Blitz exit

A slight pause during which Dickon's guitar is heard playing softly

Lindsey enters. Before shutting the door, she stands listening to the guitar. Then she goes and sits at the desk

That's better. Now—(*she puts on her spectacles and picks up some papers*) —what's next. Ah—Phillip . . .

She sits back with a letter in her hand, reading. Phillip's recorded voice is heard

Phillip Dear Lindsey. If I am to show *Love Me Long* to Regius Films, I need the finished manuscript in the next six weeks. We shall be all right for Blaine's spring list—but I am just a tiny bit uncertain about the character of Rosalind. I will ring you next Thursday night—late-ish. I hope things are not too hectic. Bianca sends her love and so do I. Yours ever, Phillip.

Lindsey Six weeks! Oh God! (*She takes a sheet of paper and writes. Her own recorded voice is heard*) Dear Phillip. I will do my utmost. The plain truth is I have been solitary so long and so used to peace and my own way . . .

There is a knock at the door. Lindsey continues writing. The knock is repeated

Oh, damn—come in.

Blitz enters

(*Swinging her chair round*) Yes—what is it?

Blitz (*somewhat awkwardly*) I suppose—I suppose—I couldn't . . .

Lindsey Couldn't what?

Blitz Borrow the car this afternoon?

Lindsey The car?

Blitz I've got to get a part for the bike, and neither Chris or Dickon . . .

Lindsey Oh, all right. (*She opens a desk drawer and brings out her handbag*) I think you'll need to put in some petrol. (*She finds her car keys in her bag and throws them to him*)

Blitz Well, actually—you see my grant isn't due till Wednesday—I was rather hoping . . .

Lindsey (*resignedly*) How much?

Blitz Could you—manage—three quid?

Lindsey I should think it might be arranged. (*She takes some notes from her handbag and gives them to him*)

Blitz Thanks. And—and I could get you any shopping while I'm in the town.

Lindsey Ask me after lunch. And for goodness sake get off—I'm trying to work.

Blitz Sorry.

Blitz exits quickly

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

Please visit our website to buy the full script, apply for a license to perform this show (if it's available), or to explore hundreds of similar titles.

www.samuelfrench.co.uk
or, in the US www.samuelfrench.com

To be the first to know about new books, licensing releases, and enjoy other theatre-related larks, do follow us on our spangley social media channels.



Samuel French London



SamuelFrenchLtd

SF **PERUSALS**