

Title: September Again

Characters:

Time: Late afternoon in early September, 1971

Setting: Liverpool. Kitchen or living room of woman's house. One side of it is a separate room that's the bedroom for toward the end of the story.

Cast

Woman – Late 30's. Vibrant, sarcastic, emotionally complex. Her strength masks a deep vulnerability.

Mum – 65. Grounded, candid, loyal.

Jack – 19. Earnest, clever, romantic, restless. Appears only in final scene.

Lights up. Woman is curled in a chair, barefoot, lighting a cigarette. Mum sits across from her at the kitchen table, sipping tea from a chipped mug, possibly knitting.

The last verse of "Lay Lady Lay" by Bob Dylan plays (ideally sounding a little scratchy, like a record player). Woman looks around the house for her cigarettes, adlibbing lines like, "Where did I put them?" and "I know I saw them" and "Here they are!" Nora sings along with the final line:

MUM: ♪ Lay lady lay...lay across my big brass....bed ♪

WOMAN: Liked that one, did you? *(lights a cigarette)*

MUM: Yes. What's his name?

WOMAN: *(smiling)* Told you yesterday. Bob Dylan.

MUM: Oh, yes. Odd voice. Like he's singing after a long night at the pub. But somehow it works for him.

WOMAN: It does.

(awkward pause)

MUM: You know it's coming, don't you?

WOMAN: I know.

MUM: And you're still sitting there pretending you don't give a toss.

WOMAN: I give a toss, MUM. Of course I do.

(beat)

I just don't see the point in wringing my hands over it. It's what's meant to happen.

MUM: Doesn' mean it won't knock you sideways.

WOMAN: I've been knocked sideways before, love. I always get up.

MUM: Yeah, well... this one's different, innit? You've let this lad under your skin. He's not like the others.

WOMAN: He's a kid.

MUM: A kid you've let live here, cook you breakfast, play you songs, look at you like you hung the bleeding moon.

WOMAN: He's just... *(sighs, takes a drag of her cigarette)*
It wasn't meant to be anything. He was meant to stay for a night, maybe a week. I liked the company, the daft grin on his face, the way he made me laugh.

MUM: But he stayed.

WOMAN: Yeah. He stayed.

MUM: And now what?

(Woman pours gin into a glass and a little into Mum's teacup. Puts the bottle on the floor)

WOMAN: Now I brace myself.

MUM: It's alright if it hurts, you know.

WOMAN: If I tell him it's gonna hurt, he won't go. And he has to go.

MUM: You're sure of that?

WOMAN: Course I'm sure.
(beat)
I'm not gonna be the one that keeps him here, rattling around in this place, wasting his years with an old fool like me.

MUM: You're not old, girl.

WOMAN: Of course me mum wouldn't think so. But I'm old enough.

(laughs, without humor)
When I was nineteen, I thought thirty was ancient. Now here I am, one foot in the grave and the other on a gin bottle.

MUM: Oh, give over. *(Woman picks up gin bottle and hands it to Mum)*

WOMAN: He's got a life waiting for him. An' with that come girls who read books with proper covers, not just nicked paperbacks from charity shops. Lectures, football matches, parties that include more than jus' two people and a guitar.

MUM: And you'll be here. Minus him an' the guitar.

WOMAN: I'll be fine.

MUM: You say that a lot, you know.

WOMAN: Because it's true.
(beat where Mum gives her a look)
Look, Mum... the truth is, I don't regret a thing.

MUM: Did I ever say you should?

WOMAN: That's not what I meant.

MUM: Did I ever once judge who you've had through here? Let alone Jack?

WOMAN: That's **not** what I **meant**!

MUM: I get that the world's different now. I may have married your father right out of high school in '31, but I get that those were different times. I don't know what choices I might have made these days. Women have more options now. I wasn't your father's first, y'know, even if he was mine, but it might have been nice to have seen what other men were like first.

WOMAN: Oh, geez...

MUM: Oh, now who's judgy? I'm supposed to be okay with my daughter living her life with however many men come through it, but God forbid she has to think of her mum as an actual woman with wants and needs....

WOMAN: OK, I get it.

MUM: *(casually)* And If you're gonna throw Jack out.....I wouldn't say no if you sent him **my** way.

WOMAN: Mum! *(initially shocked, but then they both laugh as Woman realizes she's kidding)*

MUM: I'd like to say I couldn't do that to me daughter...but it's been a long time since I had the touch of a nineteen year old.

WOMAN: Pleeeeeease.

MUM: *(casually)* And Jack's the best of the bunch, so far. *(tenderly)* But I wouldn't.

WOMAN: Well, thanks for that.

MUM: *(pause)* But only 'cuz it's you.

WOMAN: Mercy.

MUM: *(pause)* Seriously, though. What made Jack different than the others?

WOMAN: He made me feel... *(searching for the word)* Alive.
Like the clock wasn't ticking quite so loud for a while.

MUM: Then, darlin', why push him away? What's so wrong on that?

WOMAN: Because loving someone means you let them go.
(She stares out the window, quiet for a moment.)

MUM: That sounds like some bleedin' fortune cookie advice.

WOMAN: No less true, though. Still...I'll miss him. God, I'll miss him.

MUM: Then tell him that.

WOMAN: I can't.

MUM: Why not?

WOMAN: Because if I do, he won't leave. He'll stay – out of guilt or pity or that wide-eyed boyish sense of loyalty. And it'll ruin him. And it'll ruin me too, watching him fade away like all the others.

MUM: And you don't think he should be allowed to make his own choice?

WOMAN: He's nineteen, Mum. At nineteen you don't know your arse from your elbow.

MUM: And you know the world so much better at thirty-six?

WOMAN: More years than he's had.

MUM: An' less than me. At nineteen you know who you love.
(A pause)
It's okay to be scared, sugar.

WOMAN: I'm not scared.

MUM: You're bloody terrified.

(Woman lights another cigarette, avoids MUM's gaze.)

WOMAN: I don't get to be terrified. Not anymore.

MUM: Why now?
(Woman hands her an envelope. Mum pulls out a paper and reads it)
Crikey...they'd drop him?

WOMAN: He's taken off two semesters already. They aren' gonna hold off for him comin' back forever.

MUM: He showed you this?

WOMAN: Worse. He *didn't* show me. Found it three days ago in his stuff when tidyin' up.

MUM: Wasn' yours to read, girl
(Woman shrugs sheepishly)
So you're gonna tell him he has to go.

WOMAN: No. *He's* gonna tell *me* that.

MUM: I don' think so. He hid it for three days.

WOMAN: Which is why I gave him an ultimatum at breakfast.

MUM: *(beat)* What? Whatcha said, girl?

WOMAN: I told him I wanted all of his school books out of my house.

MUM: His books?!?

WOMAN: Tol' him all those stacks of text books were a reminder of everything he might leave me for someday. An' if he was committed to a life with me that he couldn't have it both ways. So I never wanted to see them again.

MUM: But those books is his whole future.

WOMAN: Yes.

MUM: He worked so hard at the shop to afford them.

WOMAN: Yes.

MUM: An' his parents won't store them...not since they kicked him out.

WOMAN: I know!
(A pause)

MUM: *(suddenly gets it)* Oh....An' you know that'd be the **one** thing...that he **wouldn'** do for you.

WOMAN: Yes. *(beat)* He'll be the one to choose to leave. And it'll hurt. And then I'll get on with it.

MUM: Will you?

WOMAN: I always do.

MUM: You'll just be pretending it don't hurt.

WOMAN: I won't be pretending. I'll be... ignoring it. There's a difference.

MUM: Is it a useful difference?

WOMAN: *(sad smile)* Not really. *(mum puts hand on hers during a pause)* What time you got?

MUM: *(looking at watch)* 9:20.

WOMAN: Oh, blimey! I didn't even notice the sun set. He'll be home soon. I don't want to be up. I don't want to make eye contact. *(beat)* I....like the way he looks at me. I'll miss that.

MUM: What else?

WOMAN: The way he sings along badly to Bowie. The way he says "I'll be right back" and he means it. The way he sits at this table...and has to cover every inch of his scone with butter evenly before he takes a bite.

The way he always kisses my shoulder before he falls asleep. *(She swallows hard)* All the quiet bits. The things no one will remember. The things I don't get to keep.

MUM: He'll remember.

WOMAN: He won't. Not once the world opens up for him like a bloody novel. And it will.

MUM: That's going to rip you open.

WOMAN: Better me than him.

(A quiet stillness falls between them.)

MUM: Do you want me to stay tonight?

WOMAN: No. *(smiles gently)* You've done your part.

MUM: Will you be alright?

WOMAN: Eventually.

(MUM rises. Crosses to Woman, kisses her on the head. Picks up her bag. Gestures at the record player)

MUM: Bob Dilbert will keep you company.

WOMAN: *(confused for second, then smiles softly)* "Dylan."

MUM: *(Doing a poor impression of Boy Dylan)*

♪ Why wait any longer for the one you love
When he's standing in front of you? ♪

(Woman chuckles a little but looks closer to tears)

Don't let your record player eat you alive.

WOMAN: Just the sad songs.

MUM: I'll come by tomorrow. Afternoon.

WOMAN: Bring those chocolate biscuits. And gin.

MUM: Naturally.

(MUM exits. Woman stands alone. She crosses to the window, looking to the sky. She turns out a light. Lights shift to a cooler blue. Evening now. She picks up Jack's guitar, picks at a few strings aimlessly, softly sings a capella, from the same song, but a different line)

WOMAN: ♪ Stay, lady, stay...Stay while the night is still ahead ♪

(Then silence. She places the guitar down. She changes into a long shirt, climbs onto the bed. Sound effect of a car door closing and then a key in the front door. She hurries under the covers, lies on her side, eyes closed, pretending sleep.)

(Jack enters quietly, careful with his footsteps. He carries a small suitcase. Sets it gently near the door. Walks to his side of the bed. Kneels on his side, but close to her. Kisses her shoulder. A pause.)

JACK: *(softly)* Wake up, Maggie... I think I've got something to say to you.

(Ideally Woman's head doesn't move, unless it's necessary for us to see her eyes. She opens her eyes, looks straight out at us, and exhales.

Blackout, as the song picks up {either from sound booth or live band}, probably on the second line of the song, since he's just said the first line...director's choice.

Alternative option for final line, by director's discretion:

*Jack opens his mouth, as **if** to say something, but instead of **his** saying the line, the song starts where Rod Stewart says those words for him.*