

# **The Solace of the Sea**

Stephen Wade

*Scene: today, on Mablethorpe beach.*

Characters.

**Alfred, Lord Tennyson**

**Miss Alyse Langenby**

**Jean**

**Ted**

*We hear the voice of the tide as it swells and retreats. Then the call of gulls and the cry of children.*

**Tennyson:**

Here, facing the wonder and terror of the German Ocean, this great universe allows one small glimpse into its mystery. It is a creature with a wilful soul, relishing here its bullying of my Lincolnshire coast, and this fragment of life with its minute vestiges of humanity...

**Interviewer:**

Mr Tennyson, My Lord Tennyson that is... I apologise for my American ignorance. Of course, you are a peer of the realm...My Lord, my readers want something more homely, related to your deep affection for this quaint little village. I mean, time never stirred here did it, to attempt even one iota of change....

**Tennyson:**

Change? Quaint? My word, young woman, have you any knowledge at all of my home county? You stagger me with your lack of understanding. The strength of our Mablethorpe, and in truth of our county, is the earth in our spirits, our Englishness... why our very Saxon heart....have you learned nothing from this savage ocean?

**Interviewer:**

I do beg your pardon...

**Tennyson:**

Who are you again? What is your name?

**Interviewer:**

I am Alyse Langenby. I represent the magazine *New English Leaves*. As I said, my readers long to know more of the Sage of Somersby.

**Tennyson:**

Why, your name is Norse! You are of our blood...Viking blood coursing through you, woman, Viking blood. Now what were you saying?

*Fades, and the sound of the sea fades too.*

*Then a woman's voice, humming **I do like to be beside the seaside**, which stops and then she speaks.*

**Jean:**

Yes I *do* like to be here. Always did. Being here reminds me who I am - Jean Cade, been by the seaside for three weeks every year since 1960, and now I'm here on my own, apart from Ted. He proves that a neighbour can be a little gem... drove me here, he did, all the way from Newark. Always used to be in a crowd, but now there's just me, little me. Back then, there must have been thirty of us at one time...our Fred and his brood, and our Sheila with her four kids. Then there was grandma and the aunty who wasn't really an aunty... one year we all came on a coal-wagon. Cricket on the beach, picnics... Wally and Al sloping off to sink a few pints...wonderful it was.

But then, well, I lost the last of them after the Covid started.... three gone in the last eighteen months... *last* three. But you know what, Jean my girl, you can still lick an ice-cream and sing an old song or two....

How the sea works its magic I don't know, but it does.

*Sound of the sea increases. A dog barks. Then a man's voice:*

**Ted:**

Jean... Jean... here... let's go to the dunes. I got sandwiches.

*More sounds of the tide, then:*

**Tennyson:**

Something more homely, dear Miss Viking. What about some lines from the Laureate himself:

*A voice calls to me from some forgotten land,  
Far beyond these waves; it beckons the restless soul,*

*To forge a path deeper into Lindsey, abandoned to old tales...*

Will that suffice for homely, Miss Viking?

**Interviewer:**

Oh, My Lord Alfred, you honour me... pray tell, what poem is this from?

**Tennyson:**

From? Why this has been conceived and spoken this very instant, woman... conceived and spoken, as we stand here, where I look over the waves and see Troy, and the arrival of fair Helen on an alien shore....

**Interviewer:**

I am astounded Sir! Astounded.

**Tennyson:**

That's as may be, but the true words eluded me, young woman. I still search for them here. I came here as a child, and here I learned the metre of the heart, where verse begins.

*Again the sound of the sea, but now there is a strong wind.*

**Jean:**

Oh it's chilly, Ted.

**Ted:**

Have my coat, love. Here.

**Jean:**

You're a gentleman, Ted. Cheese and onion? I got one left. Then there's some biscuits... you bought some digestives didn't you? My faves.

John, my eldest, used to love these dunes. I remember him, when he was just turned ten, playing with his transformer on this bit along here.

**Ted:**

Transformer?

**Jean:**

Never mind. Just a toy. Think of all the buried toys along here. Gone, like so much, taken away by this damned bug .But Ted, put your booty down and... give us a hug!

*The sound of the waves, and the wind.*

**Tennyson:**

Buried in this Mablethorpe sand, the words that eluded me, lost forever. Yet still I feel the love in this sea, somewhere inside its anger.

*Strong wind, then it subsides*

**Jean:**

What we've been through, Ted, it didn't kill the love.