

Terminus and other plays

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DANIEL KEENE



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for Alison

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the telling

Our eyes register the light of dead stars.

ANDRE SCHWARZ-BART
from The Last of the Just

Characters:

MR SKELTON *in his seventies*
JOHN *in his twenties*
THE MAN *middle aged*

A saloon bar. A long bar with stools. A coat rack to one side. A door marked exit. Late at night. The light is subdued.

JOHN *the barman*. MR SKELTON *seated on a stool*.

- Sometimes I think I'm a missing person
- How do you mean?
- That I've gone missing and someone is looking for me who can't find me
- How could that be?

– I don't know but anything is possible

– I suppose so

– It's just how I feel sometimes

– That's peculiar

– I know it is but what can I do about it? sometimes it's like . . . I don't know how to express it

– Try

– You're very patient with me John

– You're my best customer Mr Skelton and I've got time

Pause

– It's like . . . somewhere along the way I lost my memory maybe I had another life somewhere some time but I can't remember it I remember lots of things I look back and I can say to myself that was my life but I wonder sometimes is something missing? because I'll be honest with you I don't feel I've led a very

Pause

– What?

– I don't know what I mean I just feel like there's something missing like a jigsaw puzzle with a piece lost how can you finish it? you can't

– You don't need to finish it

– Soon I will

– You've got some time yet

- But how long?
- No one can tell you that
- I'd like to know
- Who wouldn't?
- Some people some people wouldn't
- I guess you're right
- Let me buy you a drink John
- It's a little early for me yet Mr Skelton
- Do you think I drink too much?
- You're never any trouble
- A man drinks because he wants to but when he needs to is a different matter
- You're a man who knows his limit
- I've got all kinds of limits and I know them all
- I have to go down the cellar for a moment you want another before I go?
- I'm just fine right now
- I won't be long
- You've got work to do and there's no business at the bar right now I'll stand guard for you
- I won't be long

– Take your time

JOHN *exits*. MR SKELTON *watches him go*.

A nice man and a good worker

After a pause MR SKELTON *takes a deck of cards from his inside jacket pocket and begins to spread them on the bar*.

Not everything will be here only some things a book of many pages but not all pages pages without numbers without order we shall have to find an order using our understanding a little knowledge out of disordered things something will become clear other things . . . are for another time another place another ordering

MR SKELTON *studies the cards he has spread*. A *well dressed middle-aged man comes to the bar and sits a few stools away from MR SKELTON*. *After a pause*:

– How do I get some service here?

– John is in the cellar he'll be back soon

Pause

– I see you're a card player

– You know . . . I've never in my life played a game of cards

– But you're playing one now

– It's not a game at least not a game in the way that you mean nothing is being wagered and there is no desired outcome

– Then what are you doing?

– This is my favourite book and these cards are its pages

- You're a fortune teller
- I am a dabbler in an art of which I have no understanding
- Like most card players

Pause

- My name is Skelton Paul Skelton
- Pleased to meet you
- I haven't seen you in here before
- I'm just passing trade I have an hour or so to spend
- There's no better place
- There are places where you can get a drink
- John won't be long
- What do your cards say?

MR SKELTON *examines his cards a moment*

- That I'll meet with pleasant company tonight
- Did you mark those cards yourself?
- It's pure interpretation

Slight pause

- You're a regular here
- Does it show?

- There are signs
- I'd be interested to know what they are
- They're hard to explain Mr Skelton let's say it's all just a matter of interpretation
- Is there an aspect of any man's life that isn't?
- There aspects of any person's life that are open to question and so they should be but there are also some simple facts that are not to be questioned
- And what are they?
- What else do you see in your cards?
- These cards are just a game of mine they're not

Cutting him off

- Look closely

Pause

- I spread these cards every night they're really of no consequence
- They are tonight
- Are they?

MR SKELTON *looks at his cards.* JOHN *returns behind the bar*

- What can I get you?
- A scotch and water and the same for Mr Skelton
- Mr Skelton drinks brandy

- Tonight's a special night

JOHN *glances at* MR SKELTON

- Are you a friend of his?

- Are you his Guardian Angel?

- Mr Skelton is a friend of mine

- You mean here in the bar?

- I mean any place I see him

- Where else do you see him?

- Are you a policeman?

- Not really

- Why so many questions?

- It's not many

- That depends

- Can I have my drink?

- That's what I'm here for

- And the same for Mr Skelton

JOHN *Gets the drinks.* MR SKELTON *looks up from his cards*

- Can I be honest with you?

- It's all I'd expect

- There's nothing here I don't know
 - But what do you know?
 - That day is not night that a lion is not a lamb that a man is never who he thinks he is and dies never being what he was
 - You spread a very fine deck of cards Mr Skelton
 - Who knows? maybe I was a gypsy in some other life
 - Is there one?
 - Some say so
 - What do you say?
 - What I say depends on how I feel sometimes I hope it's true sometimes I don't
 - I understand
 - Because even a soul can get tired
 - Yes it can
- JOHN *delivers the drinks to the bar*
- Thankyou John
 - It's not your usual
 - What is it?
 - What that guy said you wanted
 - I never asked him for a drink

- He said it was an occasion

- What occasion?

- You'll have to ask him

JOHN *leaves the bar.* THE MAN *raises his glass*

- To another life

- What's the occasion?

THE MAN *moves a stool closer* the MR SKELTON

- A leave-taking a parting of the ways

- Are you going somewhere?

- What do your cards say?

- My cards?

- Yes

- I've told you they're just

- Look at them again

- I've looked

- Look again

- I don't care to

- I want you to

- That may be

- Look at them Mr Skelton tell me what they say

- I could look but I have no idea what they might say

- But you look at them every night don't you?

- Yes I look I look at them because

Pause

- Why do you look at them?

Pause

- It gives me something to do something to

Pause

- To pass the time?

- Yes

- But you can't read them

- It's a deck of cards! fifty two cards in a deck

- There are fifty two weeks in a year

- What?

- Fifty two

- That's a coincidence

- Is it?

- It happens all the time things happen in the strangest ways but they're no stranger than the human mind the human mind is like a