

The Dead Parade - Table Read Pages

By

Kimberly Saunders

2022

[skann426@gmail.com](mailto:skann426@gmail.com)

SUPER: October Thirty-first

EXT. WHEATLEY HOUSE - FRONT YARD - DAY

TESS WHEATLEY - late-thirties or early-forties - stands with her arms folded examining an unseen sight with extreme scrutiny.

TESS

It just needs a little something  
more...

She takes a moment to consider and then grabs a fake skeleton from nearby and hangs it on a tree branch.

TESS (CONT'D)

There! What do you think?

She steps back to examine her work: a nonsensical amount of Halloween decorations cover the front yard, from cobwebs to an inflatable pumpkin. Her husband, SHANE, looks between Tess and the decorations.

SHANE

Um...it looks great, babe, but  
shouldn't we focus on things  
like...I don't know...unpacking the  
kitchen or fixing the hot water  
heater?

TESS

We will, but we can't be the only  
house on the street without  
decorations.

Shane looks up and down the street. Not a single house is decorated.

SHANE

Look, I love Halloween just as much  
as the next rational person, but  
the only thing we have in our  
refrigerator is a bottle of  
ketchup, and I'm pretty sure it's  
expired.

TESS

There's also leftover Chinese and a  
fresh gallon of chocolate milk.

(CONTINUED)

SHANE

For breakfast?

TESS

Why not? You act like it would kill you to get in the spirit of things.

He turns to the house to see NATALIE - their twelve-year-old daughter - standing in the front entrance dressed as a mummy wrapped in torn pieces of mismatched cloth.

SHANE

It just might.

Tess turns and her face immediately lights up.

TESS

Oh, sweetie! You look amazing.

NATALIE

I look ridiculous, Mom.

TESS

You look festive.

NATALIE

That's even worse. The other kids are going to laugh at me.

TESS

They are not! Why don't you finish getting ready for school? We're leaving in five.

Natalie sighs and stomps back up the stairs.

SHANE

She looks like a walking porta-potty.

TESS

It's all I could come up with last minute.

SHANE

Is this what you were doing yesterday when I asked you to call the exterminator?

TESS

It was an emergency.

Tess begins rearranging her decorations until they reflect perfection.

(CONTINUED)

SHANE

So is a rodent infestation.

TESS

We are not infested.

SHANE

I found droppings.

TESS

How do you know what rodent droppings look like? When's the last time you even saw a rat or possum that wasn't staring back at you from behind safety glass? Besides, if you think we're seconds away from being invaded by rabid squirrels, then you could have called.

SHANE

I was busy visiting every store in a twenty-mile radius looking for a phone charger because we somehow lost all six of them in the move.

TESS

Look, I never got to have any of this when I was a kid. I don't want Natalie missing out on it like I had to. It could have serious emotional consequences.

Shane looks between Tess and the decorations.

SHANE

Oh, I believe you.

His expression quickly melts into a playful smile. She throws back a smirk.

TESS

I'll call the exterminator during lunch. Meanwhile, can you pick up some more decorations while I'm at work?

SHANE

Seriously?

TESS

I still have the entire kitchen and hallway to do.

(CONTINUED)

SHANE

You're just going to take it all  
down tomorrow anyways.

TESS

This is the one time of year I get  
to indulge the inadequacies of my  
fractured childhood. Please let me  
enjoy it.

Just then there is a SCREAM from inside the house. Tess  
drops her decorations as she and Shane run for the front  
door.

INT. WHEATLEY HOUSE - UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - DAY

Natalie stares down at something on the floor. The pounding  
of footsteps grows louder as her parents approach.

TESS (O.S.)

Natalie?!

Tess and Shane burst through the half-open door.

TESS

What happened? What's wrong?

Natalie points to the corner of the room. Tess and Shane  
move to stand behind her. Both of their expressions shift to  
disgust. A dead raccoon is sprawled on the floor.

SHANE

Don't touch it.

NATALIE

Didn't plan to.

Natalie shuffles backward so her parents can get a closer  
look.

SHANE

Maybe we should call the  
exterminator now.

TESS

I think we're past that.

SHANE

Well, we should call someone.

(CONTINUED)

TESS

No. We can take care of it.

Tess nods, almost as if to reassure herself more than anyone else.

EXT. WHEATLEY HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

A shovel hits the grass and pulls up fresh dirt. Tess stands with the shovel in hand. She leans in and pulls up another bit of dirt. Natalie and Shane enter the yard from the house. Shane holds a small cardboard box. Natalie tries not to trip on her gauze.

SHANE

Good thing we unpacked the Keurig.

Tess digs out one more patch of dirt and then sets the shovel aside. Shane walks over and places the box in the hole. He steps back. They all look down at it for a moment.

TESS

Would anyone like to say a few words?

NATALIE

Like what?

TESS

Like...I'm sorry you were alone in the end. I'm sorry if you were lost or scared. I hope you found peace, and I know where you are now is a better place.

They stand there in thoughtful silence. Natalie breaks it.

NATALIE

So who wants to switch rooms with me?

She walks away. Shane can't help but smile. Tess continues to give her attention to the fresh grave.

INT. TESS'S CAR - DAY

Natalie stares out the backseat window with an expression of dread plastered to her face. She tries to distract herself with her cell phone. Tess drives as she takes in the quaint morning scene on Main Street.

(CONTINUED)

TESS

Maybe this weekend we can check out the ice cream shop on Main Street. I used to go there all the time when I was a kid.

NATALIE

That was, like, fifty years ago, Mom. I doubt it's still here.

TESS

First of all, recheck your math on that one. Second, of course it is. This is the kind of town where stuff sticks around.

NATALIE

You didn't.

Tess thinks about saying something and then decides it's not worth the energy.

TESS

Or maybe we could go see a movie at the arts cinema. And I know what you're thinking. It's not just foreign films and penguin documentaries.

NATALIE

We can't. It burned down six years ago.

TESS

How do you know?

Natalie holds up her phone.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Apparently, someone died. They got trapped in the projection room.

TESS

Oh my God. That's horrible.

NATALIE

And a few years before that some lady killed herself and it was, like, a week before anyone noticed. By the time they found the body, her dog had already chewed off three of her fingers.

(CONTINUED)

TESS

Now you're making stuff up.

NATALIE

I'm not! It says it right here. And thirty years before that police found a body behind the elementary school, but the corpse was so disfigured that they-

TESS

Enough! Thank you for that very grotesque history lesson.

NATALIE

Hey, you're the one that wanted me to get in the Halloween spirit.

Tess rolls her eyes as they turn down another road.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

As the car turns the corner, leaving Main Street, they pass by the town hall at the end of the road. A large table has been set at the bottom of the stone steps. Candles, pumpkins and decorative gourds fill the tabletop. Nothing is animated or commercial.

EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

YOUNG STUDENTS file off the bus or jump from their parent's car as they make their way toward the front entrance. Tess's car pulls up to the curb. Natalie climbs out as Tess hurries from the driver's seat and around the front of the car.

TESS

Just one picture.

NATALIE

Mom, stop.

TESS

It'll be real quick.

Natalie pauses long enough for Tess to take a picture and then begins walking toward the school.

TESS (CONT'D)

Do you want me to take you to your classroom?

(CONTINUED)

NATALIE

I got it.

TESS

Are you sure?

Natalie doesn't answer as she focuses on the doors ahead.

TESS (CONT'D)

Your dad will pick you up at three.

Have a great day!

Natalie disappears inside the school. Tess watches her, completely unaware of the other parents who have begun to stare. No one else is wearing a costume.