

A Light in the Tower

Von abgemeldet

Kapitel 4:

Chapter 4

"So Oogie-Boogie wants bats that'll sing and fly in a way to shape his shadow against the moon... he's got imagination, I admit. And you, Jack, I presume you'll want that fire protection formula for your little gulping-fire act again, won't ya?"

Jack raised a non-existent eyebrow at the mild insinuation that Oogie had imagination and he didn't, but he ended up shrugging and sighing in defeat:

"Yeah," he said wearily. "That's the act everybody likes most, so if I don't repeat it this year they'll probably be disappointed."

"I see. Anything else, Jack? Maybe that mechanical monster you were talking about last year?"

Jack considered the idea. The temptation of something odd and different was strong, but he dropped it:

"I'm afraid not, but thanks. You see, our people are used to doing Halloween the same way every time; why try to fix what isn't broken?" That was a comment he frequently heard from people around him.

"If you say so." shrugged the scientist. That was up to Jack. Although the possibility of creating a monster or any other new experiment was always exciting, the Halloween stuff was indifferent for him. To fulfill those orders was the thing the doctor hated most to do; however, for an evil scientist like him there wasn't a better place to live, so he paid the dues.

"Alright, I'll make those bats for Oogie if he'll promise to put a leash on those three little monsters of his. They tossed rocks at me the last time I risked my poor skin out there." He put a hand on his metallic skull and shivered. "Ooh, my head still aches when I remember it."

"I know, and I already warned Mr. Oogie that if that incident is repeated, he and the kids will have to look for another place to live," Jack said sternly. "Well, I think that's all..." He gathered the blueprints and gave one step toward the door, but stopped and

turned to look at the scientist, one hesitant finger barely touching his mouth.

"Something wrong, Jack?"

Jack hesitated. He couldn't get Sally out of his mind since she had left the library. He was curious to know more about the mysterious rag doll, but he didn't know how to do it without betraying her secret.

As he thought about it, Jack realized that the doctor had always been reticent about his newest creation. Even at the start of his project, he never had let anyone to see it, and when Jack or the Mayor asked him about, he always changed the subject. Jack only knew that it was a girl and that her name was Sally. He had expected a sort of female version of Igor, the doctor's disfigured assistant, maybe not so horrifying, but he never had imagined the doctor could be able to build a creature so pretty and delicate. No wonder that he was so overprotective, especially if she had a problem.

It never would occurred Jack that the doctor could be lying. He was certainly an unpleasant man, but he was decent and reliable. In Jack's mind, all her subjects loved him so much that they'd never think of deceiving him or hurting him on purpose – save, of course, the nasty Oogie – Boogie and his three little cohorts. Well, the doctor didn't love him, of course - Jack knew the old man just tolerated him - but his loyalty was unquestionable.

For political and diplomatic reasons, the Pumpkin King never pried into his subjects' lives unless it was absolutely necessary, but this time he couldn't help it. His curiosity had to be satisfied, so he decided to be honest.

"Huh, no. Nothing wrong. I was just thinking about Sally... the things you said about her, I mean. I never saw her, but she must be a very special girl, from your description."

"Yeah," the scientist agreed acidly. "Sally's a very precious jewel. One that you want to lock up in a box and throw the key away." He shot a glare towards the threshold as if she was there, eavesdropping.

"But what's the good of having a precious jewel if you keep its glint concealed from the eyes of the world?"

"Whaddya mean, Jack?"

"No offense, doctor, but... I just think that, even though the way you protect Sally is very admirable, it can't be healthy for her to remain stuck here in your laboratory all the time."

The Doctor didn't like the direction that conversation was taking.

"What do you want me to do, Jack? Drag her out of her room? I don't like it either, but if she won't see anybody, I can't force her."

"Are you sure she never wants to see anybody? Ever? She could have changed her mind and you'll never know," insisted the king.

The doctor's face hardened.

"I live with her and you don't," he hissed stubbornly "Sally's like my own child and we have no secrets from each other. If she had shown any interest in the things out there, I would have known."

Jack didn't look convinced.

"There are things that children don't tell even to their parents."

"Are you calling me a liar?" the doctor almost screamed, his face beginning to turn red.

"Of course not!" The king waved a reassuring hand "It's just, well... you admit yourself that she is pretty scared of you. I'm only suggesting that, even if she started to feel curious about the world surrounding her, she might be afraid to tell. With all due respect, doctor, we all know that you're not exactly ...a social person."

"Never had time to waste with visits and little parties, if that's what you mean," the old man snapped. "My lab's more than enough for me." Too late, he realized he had agreed with Jack, and mentally smacked himself for this.

"That's my point!" Jack said briskly. "She might be afraid that you'll get mad at her if she shows any interest in the outside world. This way, she keeps pretending she doesn't want to leave or see anyone, so you'll be happy. It's just... psychology. I read a lot of psychology books. They help a lot with scaring people." he added with more confidence, mentally applauding himself for his geniality.

The doctor looked unimpressed. Ha-ha, if he only could tell that bag of bones what he thought about his stupid theories! Jack couldn't be more wrong. If that hypocritical girl bottled everything inside it certainly wasn't to avoid upsetting him. She was absolutely incapable of thinking of anyone but herself, even when she pretended that he was the only thing she cared about. He wasn't blind. The only thing true in Jack's babblings was Sally's fear of him. At least he had this.

"And what kind of solution would psychology have for us?" he sneered.

"Hmm..." Jack drummed his fingers on his chin. He hadn't thought of that. Then one idea occurred to him: "Well, she still hasn't contributed to Halloween: I think that would be a splendid way to spark her curiosity about our activities. If she did something new it would help to get her interested..."

"Sally's a failure at everything she does." The doctor interrupted. "Her sewing is wobbly, and she's such a horrible cook that I'm almost starving."

Jack looked at him suspiciously.

"I thought you had said that you never could teach her anything."

The doctor stiffened. He had been caught again.

"I said it and I mean it! " He almost yelled. " Sally is a stupid, moronic, good-for-nothing girl! I tried, God knows that I tried, so she at least be useful. But she's not even able of difference a piece of cheese from a bowl of pox. And that's the girl you want to help you with Halloween? She'll ruin the party."

Jack narrowed his eye sockets. Perhaps the idea of including the girl in the Halloween festivities wasn't that good after all. Even he had thought that she wasn't very smart. Still, the scientist's cruel words made him bristle inside. He didn't need to talk that way of that poor girl, as incompetent as she was. The thing he had suspected in the library was confirmed: the doctor had no patience with Sally. Perhaps she wasn't that stupid, but he disapproved everything of she did, and probably never had shown any fondness towards her. That could ruin the confidence and self-esteem of any person, especially someone as sensitive as she seemed to be. He decided to insist:

"Doctor, try to understand. It doesn't matter that her work's not good. What matters is that having something to do will make her feel better. She might to gain confidence and start to see our world is not so bad, then perhaps she'll want to see people and talk to them..."

"People... like you, for example?" the doctor asked in a venomous tone.

"Yes, why not?" Jack said without noticing the strange look on his face. "I could help you both to get along better."

The doctor turned his wheelchair until he was facing away from Jack..

"Look, Jack. I appreciate your concern, but there's really nothing you can do about us." He rolled towards the door. " This has been a long night and I'm not as young as I used to be. You know where the door is." He sat beside the door , his message clear.

Jack didn't know what else to say. So they went downstairs in silence and the doctor sat beside the end of the ramp watching as Jack made his way to the door and opened it. Jack put a foot through the threshold, but he suddenly whirled around and looked at his reluctant host.

"Doctor?"

"Yes?" the old man snorted.

"You know that, according to our oldest laws every Halloweentown citizen has the right and the obligation of contributing to the party, no matter how, remember?"

"Why are you telling me that, Jack?"

" No reason. Just reminding you of that.. See ya tomorrow." Then he left.

Outside, he stood for a while staring at the metal building and sucking a finger, as he often did when he was confused.

I hope I haven't caused any trouble, he thought.

He felt a little bad for having said those last words. He had practically threatened the doctor. And what for? Because he felt there was something wrong? Of course there was something wrong! The girl was disturbed, he had seen that himself. What else could explain her irrational fear that anyone could harm her for no reason? Practically paranoid.

Still, he couldn't help remembering Sally's eager look before she left the library, when they had heard the band playing. That was a look he knew well. If she was so scared of from the outside world, she would have reacted to the melody with fear, or at least disgust. Instead, she had looked like she wanted to join the crowd and sing, too.

And why had the doctor reacted so vehemently? If he was as concerned about her as he seemed, he jump at any opportunity to help her, instead of throwing him out as Jack was some sort of ogre that ate innocent girls. Very, very weird.

"There's something about those people I don't get." He scratched the top of his skull.

"Jack?" asked a voice in the dark.

He blinked and whirled around, as though he had been woken up abruptly.

"Mayor?" he said, recognizing the odd little figure that marched at his direction. "What are you doing out here at this time of night?"

"I could ask you the same. I was just checking on those papers..!" the short, cone-shaped man said. He widened his mouth for a howling, guttural yawn. Despite his visible weariness, he had his happy face up, as he usually did when he dealt with paperwork. That was the chore he loved most to do.

"I was at the doctors', "Jack said. The Mayor's head spun to show his unhappy face as he flinched a little, but if Jack noticed it he didn't let on. He continued:

"Tell me, do you know anything about that Sally girl ... the doctor's new creation? You saw her once, when she was first brought to life, didn't you?"

"The girl? " The Mayor echoed "Ah, yes. I saw it...err, her. I didn't even know she had a name. She was quite an odd thing. Stumbling and fumbling like a drunken zombie, and repeating every word we said... ugh. It gave me nightmares. "

"Well, she no longer repeats words."

"Whatever. But why are you asking me, Jack?"

"Well, I guess there's something the matter between Sally and the doctor... Something I can't figure out." Jack began, unsure of how much he could tell, but the Mayor was already drawing his own conclusions about the "something" stuff:

"You're not thinking that the doctor Finkelstein... are you? " his pale face blushed " He's a decent man, for heaven's sake!"

"I know that," Jack said absently, unaware of the Mayor's particular interpretation "That's what makes everything so odd."

"Jack, Jack." The Mayor shook his head. "It's natural that you think of this sort of thing. In your place I would have, too, and probably a lot of people here do. But the doctor is very old. He's an invalid, too, and sick, and it's obvious he needs to be taken care of. That's why he built that... Molly or whatever she calls herself, to have a nurse and a caring companion. A pure and respectable relationship, nothing more, nothing less. He even told me that, if everything worked as he expected, he'd probably marry her someday."

A lightning streaking right over Jack's skull wouldn't have produced as much effect as that phrase.

"M- MARRY HER! "Jack literally dropped his jaw. He fast picked it up from the floor, rubbed it with his sleeve and put it back with a scowl, before turning back to the Mayor, who had warily taken a few steps back at his reaction. Jack's mind refused to accept what his ear sockets had heard: "You can't be talking seriously. Sally's practically the doctor's daughter, he told me that a thousand times! And she is so young! She isn't even one year old yet."

"Biologically, she's not his daughter. And, young or not, she can't be called a child, if you see what I mean . It would be perfectly legal. " There was a slight tone of annoyance in the Mayor's voice. He didn't understand why Jack was making such a big deal because of one of the doctor's creations, a girl he never had seen before. If he only had this much concern about Halloween... The Mayor was having problems to keep Jack's mind on work, lately. Not that his bony friend was lazy or anything, oh no, but he surely wasn't as enthusiastic as he used to be in the good old days. Frequently, Jack looked like he was somewhere else, and the Mayor had a hard time bringing him back to Earth.

Even Jack couldn't tell why the idea of a probable marriage between the doctor and Sally bothered him so much. It made sense, and explained many things. If the doctor really saw Sally as his future wife (even if it was in a platonic way), that could explain his reluctance in accepting the king's suggestions. In fact, Sally's terror of the outside should be quite convenient for the old man, since he was obviously afraid of losing her. He was afraid of losing her... for him, Jack! The king's eye sockets become round in realization. Why hadn't he thought of that before? The doctor had behaved just like

a jealous man. Which was absurd. The Pumpkin King didn't take women from his subjects. Maybe the other kings would have done it in the past, but not him. Still, he couldn't help feeling a strange disappointment, like he had been deceived, and suddenly he wished he never had got involved in that affair.

Hope you're not disappointed because this chap is so short: actually, it was much longer, with the doctor posteriorly having a talk to Sally. But I was managing to do this last part in a satisfactory way, and it was getting me stuck; so, cut it in two again. Must be a curse, just can't do chapters very short.

Whatever have happened before the movie, I truly believe that Jack thought the doctor and Sally had something: it gets evident by his shocked face when he sees the doctor with his new companion, "jewel". I guess that inwardly he felt attracted for her, however, even though he didn't realize it.