

# A Light in the Tower

Von abgemeldet

## Kapitel 5:

### Chapter 5

The Doctor was worried well, actually worried was an understatement. To tell the truth, he was scared.

He simply couldn't understand Jack's sudden interest in Sally. That nosy bag of bones had always been curious, alright, but he used to respect people's privacy. That was the only thing about him that the doctor actually liked.

If anyone else had asked him all those things, like that stupid Mayor, the doctor would have just said that it wasn't any of his damned concern and then shrugged it off. But, when it came to Jack, that was impossible. The doctor had been working along with the current Pumpkin King for almost two centuries now, and he knew how stubborn Jack could be. When the long-tall boy got something in his mind, he never let it go until the subject was dead and done. If the doctor insisted on concealing Sally from Jack, the king would intuit that something was wrong and wouldn't rest until he knew the truth. And Jack never would understand the reasons why he had to keep Sally indoors. The Pumpkin King was an idealistic fool who believed in utopians ideas like kindness and equal rights for everybody; all the trouble and stress the doctor had gone through to bring Sally into the world and educate her would mean nothing to him. He would get angry and say the doctor was being cruel to her... and the last thing a poor sick old man like him needed was an angry King of Darkness on his metallic scalp.

Luckily, Jack was very naïve, too. Better still, he was also very busy, and busy people tend to easily forget things not concerning his work. The doctor just had to find a way to convince the thin guy that everything was alright and he would eventually forget Sally. Stupid selfish girl, she was more trouble than she was worth! He had planned to marry her, as soon as she was ready; now, however, he saw that that was unthinkable. To have her sticking around was more than enough to drive him crazy.

He sighed and shook his head when he saw the key on the floor. Sally probably had knocked it down during her hysterical pounding on the door. He picked it up and stared at it for a long moment.

Sally was sitting on her bed and staring at the opposite wall. She didn't turn around at

the sound of the door opening, or at the squeaking of the wheelchair as it entered the room.

"The visitor's gone. You may come out now," he said.

She didn't give any sign of having noticed his presence.

"I can't see what's so fascinating about a blank wall," he scoffed.

Her pursed lips finally moved.

"Sorry. I had nothing else to do," she whispered very, very quietly. "I may not look out there, I can't sew without impaling my fingers and if I comb my hair one more time I'll go bald." There wasn't any trace of irony in her voice, but its trembling tone just reinforced the sting of her words. "But if you prefer, I can close my eyes instead."

As soon as Sally said that, she regretted it. Even though he deserved to hear it, those words that practically had flown out of her lips by themselves, she felt bad. If you're used to respecting a person and being under his sway the whole time, you can't change at the drop of a hat, as much as you may have stopped respecting him. She waited for the usual berating about how bad and ungrateful she was, but nothing came. She took a chance and looked back. The mas... Dr. Finkelstein just stared at her. Then he seemed to compose himself.

"Good. So we're finally learning."

"Yes. We are," Sally echoed in a lifeless voice. Her eyes flew from the stone wall to the night out there, not caring if he would disapprove or not. It didn't matter anymore.

"Maybe now we'll be finally be able to live in peace and be content with what we have, instead of crying for the moon," he said, following her gaze to the white orb. "That's not for us. I know you think I am cruel, but believe me: I just want to spare you from all the pain I suffered out there. When you have learned the benefits of a sheltered, quiet life you'll be grateful to me."

He kept talking and talking, nothing that she hadn't heard before. Sally barely paid attention. His words made sense like always, but now they sounded empty to her, probably lies just like all the rest. If he really wanted to spare her from suffering, why he was always saying such awful things to her... making her feel bad? She used to think she deserved that, but then she remembered the way Jack had been nice to her despite her, typically, daring to peek in him and not letting him sleep. He had helped her up and fixed her mess; most impressive of all, he had even listened politely to her silly babblings without interrupting her with a "whatever, go away and let me in peace". Perhaps she didn't have to be badly treated, after all. This thought seemed so amazing that initially she didn't hear what the doctor was saying.

"Sally? Aren't you listening?" he scolded. She blinked and looked at him, as trying to shake a web off her forehead.

"Uh...no, I mean, yeah. S-sorry."

"I asked if you wanted to know who our visitor was."

For a few seconds, Sally didn't react. But then, she realized he would be suspicious if she didn't show a little curiosity.

"Uh... yes, sure," she said forcefully.

"It was Jack Skellington."

Sally widened her eyes, trying her best to look very surprised.

"Oooh... and what did he want from you?"

"What he wanted is merely business stuff and even if you had the right to know, you wouldn't understand," he scolded her with severity "I'm just telling you that because he asked about you."

"A-about me?" Sally stuttered. "But that's impossible! I mean... I'm not insinuating that you're lying, it's just... well, why would he give a thought to someone like me?"

"I asked the same of myself. He was very interested in you, and wanted to know when you would contribute to Halloween. "

"And... you told him that I can't," She practically stated.

"Don't dare to presume what I did or didn't say, you insolent girl!" the old man yelled, making her flinch. Sally muttered apologetically and he went on. "Yes, I told him, but he was inflexible. Quite stubborn, he has that in common with you; and, if I know him well, he'll come back and talk about this again, over and over, until I give in."

"Sooo..." Sally held her breath, not daring to believe ... the possibility of...

"So, I have no choice but to allow you to work for Halloween, as much as it disgusts me.'

Sally joined her hands, her face beaming with pure bliss. Even in her early days of life, the doctor thought bitterly, he never had seen her smile that way.

Could it be? It was too good to be true! She felt like collapsing in front of the Master to kiss his feet... until his next words broke the enchantment.

"I'm going to tell Jack, however, that you're not still prepared to see more people. I think that, at least, that he'll understand. You're going to learn how to use a sewing machine and make clothes for the party, and Igor'll deliver them. That way, you'll not have to trouble yourself by walking among those crowds out there and meeting any ruffians and creatures of dubious reputation. Naturally, you're not dismissed from

your chores, so you'll have to sew during your free time; but even that'll be good: you'll never have again to worry about at staring at the walls." He cackled.

That would be perfect. Jack would be satisfied and she could no longer complain that he didn't let her take part in the preparations.

Sally's face fell. She knew it was too good to be true. This wouldn't change her situation at all; it would be just more work to be added to her list, as if she hadn't enough. The doctor enjoyed her disappointment, but feigned shock:

"What? Didn't you want this so badly?"

"Oh no... I mean... of course, its' wonderful. Thank you very much," Sally muttered weakly.

"Sally..." the old man grilled. "What did we learn about lies?"

Oh no. Not again. She shut her lips firmly and defiantly. He could take her apart, but she'd never repeat that stuff again, ever. He was the one who supposed to say that, not she!

The scientist noticed the fierce glint in her eyes, the same she had hours ago when she had insisted about being ready to work on Halloween, and decided not insist, preferring once again to use the guilty card:

"I knew it. Nothing I can do will ever be good enough for you. All you want is to be with people that wouldn't care a damn about you, while I, the man who gave you life, will be rotting away up here, all by myself..."

"Oh c'mon!" Sally burst out with exasperation, months of resentment coming up to her throat like steam "You know that's not true. Just because I put a foot out there doesn't mean I would abandon you. You should trust me a little!"

He smirked mysteriously.

"Trust you, you say?" Slowly, he reached in his pocket, taking out one metallic object. He held out his gloved hand with it, and Sally bent to look.

"See this?" he asked.

She looked confused.

"It's... the key of my room."

"Look closer."

The metallic surface of the key, darkened by the years and the rust, had tiny, brilliant scratches all over it.

"See this?" he asked again.

"Yeah, but I don't get it..."

"I'll get there. This key was clean when I locked you up hours ago. Why it is completely scratched now?"

Sally's heart failed a beat.

"Maybe... because it fell from its hole when..." she stuttered tentatively. "When I pounded on the door. I'm so sorry..."

"Wrong. It's like this because someone I told to stay here wouldn't listen; and, I don't know how, she found a way to pull the key under this door to get out here, and to go to the library and to see and pester my visitor when I wasn't around! Then she came back to her room and pushed the key under the door again, presuming I would be fool enough to think it had been pushed down and fallen, you fake, treacherous, backstabbing LIAR!" The hand holding the key slapped across Sally's face, so violently that it sent her flying backwards.

"You were there, you little monster!" he screamed as she thudded against her desk. "You talked to him, that's why he's been pestering me with all those questions! And you want me to trust you?"

He sat there, panting from the effort, staring with wild eyes at the slender form lying on the floor. Then, slowly and shakily, she leaned on her hands and sat on her knees, her head downcast and completely covered by her hair. She pushed the hair away and put a hand to her face. Not fast enough, however, to keep him from seeing an open hole on her right cheek. He stiffened, a chill running down his spine like an electrical shock. Then he realized what had happened. The key had just torn the stitches on her cheek. What a relief - she wasn't disfigured. That could be fixed easily.

The doctor abhorred violence. That was one of the reasons he despised the rest of the vulgar inhabitants in that stupid town. Even though he contributed to Halloween, the party always had seemed a celebration of violence, and violence was for the brainless. That was why he isolated himself, to not be contaminated, but he hadn't been able to keep his most precious creation from having her purity maculated by that. And now she had transmitted it to him. As much as he may have felt like before, he never had laid a hand upon Sally until that moment. Well, he had a few times knocked some sense on Igor's stupid head, literally, but he didn't consider that violence. He stared with hatred at the hand that had committed the crime, and then shot at the rag doll the same look. It was all her fault. If she hadn't been so stubborn and disobedient, he wouldn't have desecrated his principles.

Her lips moved slightly, but her eyes were downcast. Her voice trembled and the opened cut made her speech a little harder, but her words were audible despite the low tone they were said:

"I used to trust you. I believed in every word you said to me. And Jack believed in you,

too. In every word." She sniffed, remembering her humiliation.

He cackled with disdain.

"Of course he did. That idiot would believe anything, even if someone would tell him the moon's going to blow up. He believes everything he's told."

Sally looked up abruptly, a strange sparkle in her eyes. That he called her idiot, stupid oaf, or anything else didn't matter for her, she was used to that. But he had no right to insult such a wonderful man, who was a million times better than him ! She forgot that she had thought basically the same when she had seen Jack being defeated by the doctor's arguments.

"Don't talk of him that way!" she snapped, as she stood up.

He gave her a shocked, outraged look. Sally shivered, but didn't look away.

"You shouldn't talk about of him that way." She repeated hesitantly, then scolded herself mentally and her voice become firmer. "You always said that Ja...our King was a monster, but he's not. He could have forced you to show your li-bra..." She pulled the stitches in her mouth to speak better "...your library, or to allow me to go out, but he didn't. He asked. He didn't even get mad when he found me up there... he was nice to me... I wished so much that you treated me like that..."

Those last words were practically whispered, but the doctor heard them. His eyes flared up behind his black glasses. That was what he had feared, since the first time she had opened her eyes and smiled at him, he had felt that would happen. He was going to lose her to that walking stick!

"Ah, he was nice to you?" he mocked as venomously as he could "So that's what's been wrong - you want to be pampered, and to hear how good you are at everything you do. You want some rewards."

Sally looked uncomfortable at this. But, why not? Even Igor received a dog cookie when he worked well, and even the rag doll knew that she was much smarter and capable than he was. Not that she wanted cookies, eww, but what was wrong with saying something good for her, at least once?

She protested timidly:

"No, I don't want any rewards. I'd just like..."

"Don't deny. I've always known. Do you think that I haven't noticed the way you try to butter me up, with all that your pretended devotion and fake concern for my welfare? Ha!"

"It's not fake! I really..."

"You might be able to deceive someone else, but not me. It was easy for Jack to be

nice to you, since he hasn't had to put up with you with every day of his life. But if you think that he cares about you, you'd better thinking again. He doesn't care about anyone but himself."

"He's not the only one," Sally muttered as she looked away. The old man scowled again and rolled threateningly towards her, but she didn't back away, or even flinch. She was too broken, too hurt by his cruel words to be concerned about what he could do to her.

He stopped a few inches from her, and then looked in silence for a while. Finally, he said, "You are too young to understand. That's the only reason why I forgive you." Then turned his back on her and started towards the door.

"Go to bed now. It's getting late. I'll have Igor bring a second-hand sewing machine up here tomorrow, so I'll want you up with the sun."

He was crossing the threshold when her voice reached him again.

"You can make other creations, too, you know. Someone more capable of taking care of you than me."

Yes, he could do other creations. Of course he could.

But no one would be like her.

He looked over his shoulder. She still stood in the same place, trying to cover the hole in her face. Maybe he should take her to the lab and fix her now, he thought, but decided no. Sally might think he was getting soft and take that as an advantage. Spending a night like that would teach her who the boss was. That thought put him in good humor, and he allowed himself to be magnanimous.

"You may look through the window, if you can't sleep. But don't stay up until late hours."

"Thank you." Sally looked a little surprised, but not glad.

"You're welcome," he said, before going out and slamming the door. The sound of the key was heard once again, but this time she knew it wouldn't be left in its hole. She didn't care, however.

She dried her eyes with dignity and trudged towards her bed, though not for sleep as he had said. How could she sleep when she felt all shattered inside? She sat on the bed, took the spool of thread from her pocket and the needle from the place where there supposed to be her ear. It was difficult, because she didn't have a mirror, but soon her face was closed again. The new stitches were a little tighter and probably more uneven than before, but her appearance didn't matter. Actually, what did matter, now?

Bending forward, she picked up the pillow, revealing a very small bag underneath. She

took it out and put some of its contents on the palm of her hand, wrinkling her nose a bit, then put it back in the bag. Even dry, those smashed herbs didn't smell good. At least the old man had told the truth about this. It had been when he had followed Jack downstairs. She had been there, listening to the whole conversation. Initially, she hadn't mean to, it was too much of a risk, but she was very anxious to know if Jack would keep his promise of not turning her in. He had, or at least he had thought so, but his questions certainly had planted the seed of suspicion in the doctor's brain. Not that she blamed Jack; he had tried to help her at his way, even though she thought he could have made the doctor release her if he really wanted it. What really hurt her was the way the doctor had talked about her. Until that night she had never realized it, but that man always had been her world. He had given her life and taught her everything she knew; even though he wasn't affectionate, she had loved him, and her dedication had been sincere. Deep within, Sally always had the hope that someday he would return her affection. But after everything she had heard, she realized how delusional she had been.

There were things that Sally never had learned, but she knew instinctively, even their names, perhaps remains of the memories from the dead women whose parts composed her body now. Although she never had heard about love, she knew what it meant. And the man who had created her was completely unable to love. He didn't even think of her as a daughter, as much as he said otherwise: for him, she was nothing but an expensive tool that he wouldn't lend to anyone. One precious jewel meant to be forever locked in a box and never see the daylight.

After realizing all that, she hadn't wanted to stay at that place any longer; however, before she could slip from there to run for the door, the two men had left the room and she had to hide. Having lost this chance, it occurred her that the doctor himself could have some Deadly Nightshade among his medicines. She had been lucky enough to find it with just a quick search, to pull things back in place and then run back to her room, lock herself up and push the key under the door before that old man could notice anything wrong.

At least that was what she had thought, then, Sally thought as she caressed her slapped cheek, her lips shut tight and twisted, trying in vain to not tremble. To get the herbs had seemed the solution, that moment, but now... now she wasn't that sure. Suddenly, she pressed the bag against her face and burst into sobs. Her eyes, however, remained dry. She had already cried too much that night, and now was sobbing just to release her nerves from the tension, like some people do by laughing hysterically. After a minute or two, she managed to stop and took a deep breath. Then, she stood up and walked towards the window.

So many times she had spent looking out there, even guilty and afraid of being discovered. Well, now she would not have to fear that any longer. He had given his permission, which to him seemed a gesture of great generosity. But nothing he would try could fix what was broken.

Vaguely, she noticed the light on Jack's tower - the Pumpkin King's tower - but her thoughts were on the rooftops and dark streets below, and the few creatures that still stalked around. Perhaps she didn't really belong to that world, but she didn't

belong up here, either. That was quite clear now.

However, she started to wonder if it wasn't better to jump and end everything at once.

There was no guarantee that outside people were better or worse than her pesky creator. And, now that the possibility of her dream coming true seemed so close, she was scared. What if they disliked her, too? What if they didn't even let her take in part in Halloween? Actually, she didn't know anything about the outside, besides the Doctor's lies and her clandestine peeps. The only person she knew that was kind was the King, Jack.

That thought made her look up at the tower, whose light still shone beautifully, like a lighthouse standing out amid the dark sea of roofs. Jack's tower. Without realizing it, Sally curled her mouth in a smile as she tried to remember the things she had imagined about him before they met, but she realized that that wasn't possible. All her fantasies and chimeras had faded away, leaving just the tall figure of a gentleman with a fantastic black outfit and a wonderful voice. Her hand, which still held the package of herbs, was taken to her heart. Although she couldn't express it in words, she knew that somehow, he had changed her inside. It had been just a few minutes and they barely had exchanged a few words, but that quick meeting had been enough to wake in her a warm sensation that she never had felt before, though she had craved it her entire short life.

She realized she didn't want to die. There was too much that she wanted to do and see, especially concerning her first and only friend.

The light on the tower was turned off. Jack would be able to sleep that night. And so would Sally.

"Jack," she whispered "I'm going to see you again, I promise."

With that, she walked back to bed. And that night she had her first good dream. In it, Jack was dancing with her while all the monsters and hags cheered and sang happily and the doctor cursed, because he was too far away and couldn't reach them.

Pulling the nightgown over himself, Jack popped his head through its collar and buttoned it all the way up to his neck. As he reached out for his nightcap, his gaze was attracted by the night sky through the opened balcony. He walked outside and looked up. The Skellington tower had the best view in town, and he had spent many nights watching the stars before going to sleep. From here, he could see the Doctor's laboratory, but there wasn't any light in it, and Jack wondered if Sally was already sleeping. He felt Zero's nose against his leg.

"Zero, I met a girl today. A beautiful, gentle girl, a little timid perhaps," He said thoughtfully. "I hope I haven't put her in trouble," he finished with a yawn. Ah, why he was worrying? She would be okay, and with that he directed his line of thought towards other things. Any rising feelings he could have started to feel towards Sally

other than uninterested friendship had been pushed aside by the thought of her future commitment to the doctor, and even though he didn't realize it, that also would keep him away better than any plan that the old man could concoct.

Next morning he would have to check on those damned blueprints with the Mayor. Why, he didn't know, since they had been using the same old yellowing blueprints for centuries and their fading drawings were already known by heart. But he followed the routine because the Mayor and the rest of the people liked it; that was Halloween was supposed to be done. No matter every year was just the same, they always worked with the same enthusiasm as though it was the first time. Everybody, except him.

He yawned again. Hopefully, he wouldn't have to use the doctor's herb. That thing smelled really bad! He took a step back and shut the window.

*Since the first time I saw the movie I have wondered why did Sally have a sewing machine in her room, since she apparently didn't use it ; that battered frock of hers seemed to have been sewed by the doctor, and I guessed she probably wasn't allowed to sew new clothes for herself. So, what was the machine for? Maybe she made clothes for the doctor and his creations, but it didn't sound satisfactory. Since Jack knew Sally was a great sewer, it occurred to me that maybe that she actually worked for Halloween, even though she wasn't allowed to join the party.*

Hope you'll forgive me for the slap. Even I got shocked when I caught myself writing that thing the first time. I erased it and tried to find other ways, but it always came back, and seemed fit as much as I despised doing such thing to my dear Sally. She's clearly scared of the doctor in the movie, even if she defies him. Maybe she feared to be disassembled, but doesn't seem to me that he would do that. Despite his temper, he seems the coward type that prefers psychological torture, rather than physical, but I think that sometime he could have made something worse than just dragging Sally away, in a moment of rage. Okay, these are just theories.

I confess that when I started I was initially a little reluctant of writing this story because I didn't see myself writing something so dire and depressing; I even deleted my first try. However, after this, it poked in my mind like it demanded to be done. Now I'm glad I have written it. *</i>*