

# A Light in the Tower

Von abgemeldet

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## Kapitel 1:

I don't own Sally, Jack, Dr. Finkelstein or Igor. They're all Tim Burton's property. English is not my first language: although I've done my best to write correctly, maybe you'll spot some errors in the text. If something's not clear, please let me know.

<B>A Light in the Tower  
Part One</B>

<I>Safe behind these windows and these parapets of stone  
Gazing at the people down below me  
All my life I watch them as I hide up here alone  
Hungry for the histories they show me  
All my life I memorize their faces  
Knowing them as they will never know me  
All my life I wonder how it feels to pass a day  
Not above them  
But part of them  
And out there  
Living in the sun </I>

<B>Out There (Quasimodo's song) , from The Hunchback of Notre Dame</B>

The sunlight of the afternoon fell upon Halloweentown , painting her streets with golden hues. Across the round square, the small kid wrapped in bandages, would be a boy or a girl ?, ran playfully after the fat boy with the stripped T-shirt . The big man with an axe on his head came pushing a cart with bones from the opposite side, and the kids almost hit him. Near the fountain, the two witches brewed something smoky in their cauldron, like always. The man dressed with scales and with red-and-black things on his head spoke something to the wolfman. Thoughtfully, the girl looked up. Her eyes rested on the top of a tall, dark tower that reigned alone against the sky as the absolute mistress of all twisted rooftops lying around and beneath her.

The tower of the Pumpkin King. Jack Skellington, the terrible, fabulous lord of Halloweenland, feared by everyone except perhaps her creator and master, the Doctor Finkelstein.

Sorrowly, Sally tore her eyes off the tower and returned to her sewing. From the window, the world didn't seem as wicked and dangerous as the master said. So terribly dangerous that he didn't dare even to let her go out. She was still too young and too naive; she didn't know enough, too, even to be really useful to him, what about the Halloween activities? If something happened to her, he'd never forgive himself. And then, what would be of him, a poor old man, all alone and helpless in his laborathory?

When he said that, Sally felt so selfish and ungrateful for worrying only about her own

fun and neglecting her poor little master, who was like a father for her. She leaned over to embrace him and swear that she'd never abandon him, but the change was instantaneous. He had rudely pushed her away and told her to stop being silly and "do something profitable, for a change", what usually meant to prepare him a soup. She had complied, but as soon as she found herself in the kitchen, she walked towards its small, barred window and looked eagerly, though also with guilt, at the pumpkin sun shining out there.

As all that came back in her mind, she sighed, thinking about the enigma her creator was. She made a knot in her tread and bit off the rest of it, then looked down at her just-repaired thigh. A half-smile twisted the corner of her mouth: muuuch better. She was improving quickly. The master would have a surprise. Perhaps, now his opinion about her would change... Or maybe not. The smile died in Sally's stitched mouth. He'd probably say that she had messed it all up and redo the stitches himself. Sometimes, Sally wondered what the master needed her so much for, because she didn't seem able to do anything right. The soup was always too cold, too hot, too spiced or tasteless; there were always dust and dirty escaping from her most minucious cleanings, and his lab coats never become white enough, as much as she washed them. Rare was the day when she didn't receive at least a criptic; when he said nothing it was pratically a reward.

Sally wondered if that was why he insisted that she wasn't ready to face the outside: if yes, then she probably never would be. Or, when the wonderful day came at last, she would be then too old and had lost all interest about anything beyond the confines of her small cold world, just like the master. Sally tried to figure herself as a taller version of him, going around in a weelchair clad in a white lab coat and black glasses, and shivered. She shook her head self-admonishingly. It was not right to think such bad things about the master; he acted like that for her own good. Deep within, he had a good heart; he was just a little... stern. Her lips twisted in a forced smile. Abruptly, she pulled the skirt over her legs and stood up to reach out for an old wooden comb at her desk before sitting again. As the comb run through her soft long hair, her eyes rested again over the Pumpkin King's tower.

From all things Sally had learned about Halloween, Jack Skellington the Pumpkin King was what fascinated her most. She didn't know much about the misterious monarch, just what she had heard from her reluctant master: that Jack Skellington was a hideous, evil skeleton that traveled through the living world every Halloween night, frightening humans to death and occasionally spilling some blood. Sally used to figure him just like an illustration she had seen once in a book: a yellish, hideous-grinning skeleton wrapped in a black cloak with a hood and carrying a rather sizable reaping hook. However, as much as that image looked horrid or as much evil as he could be, she could not fear him, for a very particular reason.

There were nights when Sally just tossed and turned restlessly in her bed unable to sleep. When that happened, she just sit by her window to practice her sewing under the moonlight. It was rather common then to see a tiny light shining through the windows of the tower, signaling that she wasn't the only sleepless in town. The light remained up there by several hours, even after the ragdoll's eyelids finally become heavy and she went back to her bed. Even the almighty Pumpkin King could suffer

with insomnia; and, somehow, that thought comforted Sally. Not that she felt happy because he had a problem, she was actually too sensible to see anyone feeling bad. But it was sort of recomforting to know that the most important being of the Halloween world had something in common with such an insignificant rag girl like her, it sort of eased her solitude. She wondered what he'd be doing up there so late in the night and how did he live. If he spent all the time doing horrible things or there was something good in him. If he had friends... being so terrible and feared by everyone he shouldn't have any, so he should be as lonely as she was. In private, she even dared to call him Jack and to exchange confidences with him. No one had to tell her that was stupid: the real Jack Skellington never would waste his time listening to a simple ragdoll; when much he would cut her in pieces. It was just an innocent fantasy, a waste of time yes, but at least it kept her sane. She never had anyone to talk, to share her feelings, her pains and guilties, the way she felt torn apart between her dreams and her obligations to the man who had given her life. Nothing but these fantasies about a stranger. Maybe they were silly, but still much better than thinking bad things about master, or wondering why she just couldn't be happy with her lif...

"Sally!" a voice rasped suddenly.

She startled and shut the window fast, then turned and stared at the door with anxiety.

"Sally? Are you in there?" the voice insisted.

"Yees" she moaned in reply. The door cringed open and the Doctor Finkelstein wheeled inside. Sally held her breath as she stepped back and against the window's sill, like a child caught with her hand in the jar of cookies.

<I> The world is cruel  
The world is wicked  
It's I alone whom you can trust in this whole city  
I am your only friend  
I who keep you, teach you, feed you, dress you  
I who look upon you without fear  
How can I protect you, boy, unless you  
Always stay in here  
Away in here?  
(...)  
Stay in here  
Be faithful to me (I am faithful)  
Grateful to me (I am grateful)  
Do as I say  
Obey  
And stay  
In here </I>  
<B>Out There (Frollo's song), from the Hunchback of Notre Dame</B>

The old man stared at his creation for a long moment. The dying sun painted her auburn hair with an halo of gold, leaving her face in the shadows. Still, he could perfectly figure out the haunted look in her eyes and her pursed lips resting off-centeredly from one another. A flaw that he never could fix despite his hability, and that made her usual gloomy expression so pathetic... but also made her strangely

beautiful when she smiled. Sally rarely smiled now; however, she used to smile and laugh a lot in her first days of life, even when she stumbled and dived-nose on the floor. Her balance was still precarious now, and her movements clumsy...though not completely ungraceful. She also talked too much and almost drove him crazy with her questions about everything; yet her voice was afar the sweetest thing he had ever heard.

Inwardly, the Doctor Finkelstein felt he would never be able to make anything like her again. There was something subtle, invisible still perceptible about his plenty-of-flaws creation that made her unique. This same feeling seemed to sneer at him, whispering into his mind that his ragdoll creation never would be completely his; she was meant for much more than being just his housemaid, and that the proud Doctor just couldn't bear. That was why he concealed her from the world; otherwise he would lose her.

"Step forward " he snapped out "Or are you expecting that an old, sick man like me will crawl to where you are?"

"N-no, no..., of course not." Sally complied, stuttering.

He frowned behind his black glasses:

"Why didn't you respond me when I called the first time?"

"I-I...I didn't hear you. Sorry."

His beaked lips stretched in a baleful smirk:

"You were doing something wrong, weren't you, you little naughty girl?"

"N-nothing, what I could do alone up here?" Sally faked a grin. The old man restrained himself from grinning, too. It was so funny to see the way she flinched and looked away from his stare, like she had committed the worst of the crimes; it was simply... intoxicating. He felt allmighty, almost like he was Jack Skellington himself, instead of an ugly, shrunk and pathetic piece of a man, good only to wait for death, if it wasn't by the fact that he was already dead. And it was only her fault if she didn't behave.

"Sally, Sally" he said as he shook his head "What did we learn about lying?"

"But I am not lying!" the ragdoll shouted in protest. The Doctor frowned and she looked down, muttering: "Sorry."

"What did we learn?" he pressed on.

" I must not tell lies. I must not hide anything from the man who gave me life and taught me everything I know." Sally recited "I must say only the truth: lies are bad. But... I'm telling you the truth! I can swear if you like: I was just combing my hair." she showed the comb still in her hand as a proof.

"Hmmm" the old man studied her face "But you don't have necessarily to comb your hair with the window open." Sally gasped guiltily and he smirked again: "My legs are useless, but my ears are still very good. Even through this thick door."

Sally looked down again and did not respond.

"So?" he insisted.

"Yes." she confessed in a murmur "I was looking through the window, too. It's just... that.... I...I didn't see anything bad in this. You've always told me to keep away from the windows downstairs because they distract me from work. But I'm up here and I had nothing else to do."

"Any excuse is good to do something that we know is not right."

Sally's heart beated stronger. He never had said that the window of her room was also forbidden, and she wisely never had asked him about it. Now she'd lose even that, the only pleasure she had, even if it was a clandestine pleasure. She curled up her lip, experiencing a strange new feeling: anger. What was so awful about the world outside that she couldn't even take a glance on it? Almost without feeling, she clenched her fist tight, and the Dr. noticed it. Sensing that he could have overdone with his docile ragdoll, he chose another tactic. He gloomily shook his head:

"I have noticed you've been rather distracted ultimately. More than usual, I mean. You don't hear when I call, and it always looks like your mind is away in a cloud. And you peep out through every window and crack at hand whenever you think I am not looking at."

Sally shivered, less for being caught peeping than for guessing what was coming for next. Effectively, the old same lecture came, opening with the also same old phrase: "I have done my very best to make us comfortable here."

"I know. You've been always generous to me..." she interrupted him fast, anxious to stop him from pouring it again, but he ignored her:

"But it seems that my best is not enough. It hurts so much to know that my creation, whom I built with these hands, wants to abandon me just to have some fun." he moaned very self-pitifully: "What did I do to deserve this? A poor old man, all alone in this huge, cold tower. What have I done to you treat me like that?" he shook his head and looked very downcast.

Like it always happened, Sally felt selfish and cold-hearted, but this time she was also a little offended that he kept thinking she would do such a foul thing with him, in despite of her evident dedication.

"But...I'm not going to leave you! Why would I? This is my home, and you made me. You are my only family. I'd just like to take a walk outside. Only once, just to know how it feels. Then I'll come back to you, I promise."

The doctor kept staring at the floor. Sally knelt beside him and tenderly cupped his chin with a hand, making him look at her.

"I am very sorry I've made you think like this. You are very, very patient to me, and you gave me this large, comfortable room to live" her voice wavered a bit at the word ~comfortable~ as her eyes ran by the naked walls and the old furniture "I... can't help."

It's stronger than me. I see the sun shining out there, I hear people laughing and singing as they work, the Mayor calling for the Town Meeting, and I just have to see what's happening..."

"Whatever happens out there is none of your concern."he snapped out, so harshly that Sally pulled back, losing her balance and falling seated."And you're not ready to go out. We've been over this. The world of Halloween is vicious and dangerous, and by no way appropriated for a helpless child like you. "

Sally stood up slowly as he lectured; a glint of determination appeared in her eyes: "That was true when you made me" she said for the Dr's surprise and hers."But I'm no longer a child; I'm grown now and I've learned how to take care of myself. And you've always told me that everyone in this world has to contribute in something for the Halloween party if they want to live here. Even you. Why not me? I feel so useless, stuck here all the time...no-no-no, that's not what I mean, I mean... I feel that I should contribute in something for the Halloween, too, like everyone do. I know I can help. Please."she clasped her hands together begginly.

The Dr. stared pretty shocked at her. She never had acted like this before. Not that would change something, though. He composed himself.

"Let's suppose I agree with you."he said warily "What could you do? "

Sally was caught off-guard. She never had thought about that.

"I can... cook."she said tentatively.

"Of course."the old man scoffed "I had forgotten that. You could serve cold soup around, so I'd have the whole Halloweentown to share my stomachaches."

Sally bit her lip. The master never had a stomachache, not from her food! And despite everything he said about her cookings, she knew that he actually liked them. Why was he doing that to her? Outwardly, however, she tried and calmed down by breathing deeply:

"Okay...maybe I'm not that good in this.... but I can sew, too. I have practiced when there's not work to do, and I've improved a lot..."

A cruel cackle interrupted her.

"Please, Sally. We both know what happened when I tried to teach you to sew. I made you partially unsensitive to pain, so you wouldn't get hurt when I had to fix you. But in consequence you can't use a needle without impaling your fingers."

"Not anymore!"she protested "If you'll only let me show y..."

He kept talking like she hadn't said a word:"The only things that you can do are preparing my food and cleaning up my house. Poorly. What sort of use you'd be out there? To sweep the streets and serve tea? You may do that here. And you don't even know how to interact to people. How to talk and behave in society at the proper way. The Halloweeners are cruel: they would laugh at you, and at me, too. Is that what you want? That I'll become the laugh of everybody?"

"No, of course not!"Sally retorted feverishly "But that's just the point.You've never

taught me how to inerr..."she fought with the new word "to inn-terr-ack to other people. How can I learn to behave in society if I never see anybody but you and Igor?"

"Be patient, my dear. You'll learn all that when it's time. Not before."the scientist said in a definitive tone. It was not good in insisting, and Sally slumped her shoulders in defeat. The old man looked satisfied and continued:" But this is not what I came for. I'm receiving a very important visit tonight."

"A...visit?"she looked up, her eyes shining with surprise and interest. The master never received visits, except for the Mayor, who had come once soon after she had been brought to life and her mind was still blank. However, along with other things, Sally had been taught about how to serve and behave in case of visits."And do you want I make you some tea? I can make some cooks, or maybe those nettle muffins that you lik..."

"You're not going to do anything!"the Doctor snapped. Sally stared at him in confusion and shock.

"I want you to stay quiet and don't make a sound until the visit's gone."he said"I'm receiving someone very important, and I don't want you to embarass me with your stupid questions, or to stumble and spill tea over us!"he turned away and went toward the door followed closely by a very desperate Sally:

"Please! I'm not going to say a word, believe me!"she begged "Just give me a chance. I promise I will behave..."

He smirked at her: "You may bet that"and closed the door on Sally's face. She stepped back, stunned, nearly loosing her balance, but just for a few seconds. The sound of a key turning into the door woke her up from her stupor.

He had locked her away! In her own room!

"NOOO!"the doll pounced her fists over the door, howling in despair" Please, don't! Please let me out! Let me ooooouuut!!!! How will I be ready to meet people if you'll never give me the chance?"

"Shut up! Or I'll disassemble you to make something silent and useful!" it was the distant respost. Then, only silence. Sobbing, Sally rested her forehead over the door, silent tears trailing down her cheeks. Slowly, she slidded to the floor until she was on her knees, and buried her face in her hands. Why was he always so angry about her? Why could she never see anybody? To have fun? Had she done something so awful to be guarded and trapped like that?

Maybe she had. How many times he had yelled at her for not acting at the way he expected:

"I'm burdened with you... You're just an ungrateful, good-for-nothing girl... Stupid oaf, you broke this... ..Even Igor, that is a moron, can do it better than you... ..I don't want you to embarass me with your stupid questions, or to stumble and spill tea over us..." the master's beratings nagged into her mind, in a cackophony of multiple voices sneering at her. One in special, outstanded among the others like a louder shout:

" I wasted my time and my valuable material in you. By all rights I should had taken



you apart, but I did not because I' pity you."

She sit resting her back against the door , shutting her eyes tight and plunging her long nails into the palms of her hands. Pity. That was the only thing she deserved.

"I wish you never had built me."she whispered, as more two tears trailed down her cheeks.

She opened her eyes and sniffed.

Her blurred vision foccused on the window. It was getting dark and the tower's silhouette was barely visible now, but she didn't even notice it. Slowly, she got up and trudged towards the window to open it up again. She rested her hands upon the sill and looked down.

The smooth light of a street lamp lighted up the sidewalk down there. It was made of squared stony tiles, disposed one beside another in a way to form one circle into another, or a spiral, if you rather. From where Sally was, she only could see the thin line of the spiraled mesmerizing her, a safe and clear solution for her distresses.

Maybe it was the best to do.

She was no use to anyone. At least, if she died, the Dr. could use her pieces to built something better. Maybe then, he could fix up what was wrong in her. She would become smarter and capable and no longer would have impossible dreams, and they finally would be happy together.

The doll rised her eyes up to the tower for an instant and sniffed. She'd never know how the Pumpkin King was... but she'd never know anyway if she remained stuck up there for all the time.

She closed her eyes and breathed deeply before getting the impulse. But at a sudden, she stopped, unballancing a bit and let out a squeal. Something horrible had occurred her: what if she didn't die ? Her limbs kept alive and kicking even when they weren't attached to the rest of her. What if she remained alive even if she got all in pieces down there? Sally shuddered at the thought of her peaces squirming on the ground. Would someone be pity of her and help? If the Halloweeners were as cruel as the master said, they could set fire on her. Or they'd just walk past her pieces lying down there, under the rain and wind, until she rot and died at last. Sally shivered and backed away. That was even worse than being trapped!

Her look fell upon the needle on the desk and she picked it up. She picked up also a small pool of thread and put both in her pocket. Just in case.

Sally started to prepare again for the big jump, but looked down and hesitated. Suddenly, the spiraled ground down there didn't look so attractive. She drummed her fingers on the sill, a bit annoyed about herself for being so coward, but still afraid. As trying to gain some time, she turned and went toward her old desk, from wich she took out a slightly bald feather, an almost empty bottle of ink and a piece of yelled paper (remains of her early days, when she learned how to write and read). Then, she carefully ignited up a piece of candle and sat to write:

"Dear Master

I know I promised to never leave you, but can't stand it any longer. Hope some day you'll understand. If I won't survive the fall, please use my pieces to make an useful and silent Sally so she'll make you happy, because I couldn't. But if do..."

the ragdoll thoughtfully chewed the end of the feather for a moment "If I'll survive, please forget me and let me live out there. One way or another, it'll be better for both of us.

Forgive me,  
Sally.

P.S: There's fresh soup in the fridge. It's not spiced.

P.P.S: I couldn't remove the acid stains from your fave lab coat. I'm very sorry. Maybe the future new Sally can do it.

Gingerly, Sally placed the letter on her pillow, turned around and marched towards the window. She pressed her hands upon the sill, shut her eyes, breathed deeply and ...

And the doorbell rang. Sally blinked, like she had been awoken from a nightmare and looked down in curiosity. From the angle of her window, she couldn't see who was down there, but obviously was the master's announced visit. She could hear him wheeling his way downstairs and past her door as the doorbell rang again.

"It's open!" he screeched. There was a pause, then he spoke again, in a soft, very different tone: "Jack Skellington! Up here, my boy!"

Sally, who was already crouched at the door and almost flattening her head over it, all suicide plans temporarily forgotten, suppressed a gasp. Jack Skellington? Jack Skellington himself was there? Of course, silly! The dr. said he was receiving someone very important. Who'd be more important than the Pumpkin King?

"G'night, doctor!" said a jovial voice that made her doll heart jump "I'm sorry I am so late, but the Mayor got me stuck in the Town Hall."

"The old good Mayor." the dr. replied with fake joviality "Enthusiasted as always. But, come on, Jack. Would you like some tea? "

"Maybe later, thank you." Jack said, his voice getting louder as he came up the ramp "Well, doctor, we've got those assignments to see. But I have come specially to abuse of you."

"To abuse of me?" the old man echoed in shock.

"Yeah. I'd like to take a look in your library, if possible."

"Ah."

Sally drunk every word that Jack said. She was simply floored at the sound of his voice. By all odds, he'd supposed to have a horrible, dreary voice, quite suitable for someone who frightened his vitims to death. Instead, it was the sweetest sound she ever heard in her eight months of life. Her gloomy room suddenly seemed warm and comfortable, and the master's voice seemed so petty and pathetically old as the King's evolved her like a caress. Like a voice of an... angel. She looked up and blinked. What was an angel? She shook her head and pressed it further against the door.

"Why, Jack, I'll feel honoured to let you see my library" the scientist said forcefully "But I'm afraid you'll find it too poor, compared to yours. I haven't any romances nor the other sort of things you like so much. Only scientific books."

The two men were now talking in front of her door. Sally peeped through the keyhole. If she only could see Jack's face... A person with such a gentle voice couldn't be that bad. She couldn't see anything, however. The key had been left in its hole, making the ragdoll suppress a growl of frustration.

"That's exactly what I need," the King's voice cheered a bit "Mostly of my lybrary is actually composed of fictions, but lacks in technical stuff. About herbs, to be very specifical."

"Are you planning to make a potion?"

"More or less. Among other things, I'm looking for is something that'll make me sleep."

Sally's eyes widened up. So her guess that he couldn't sleep was right! Poor Jack.

"Do you suffer with imsomny?" her master asked with apparent concern.

"Yes," Jack sighed "It's all this work and stress, I suppose, and everybody needing me and asking me things every waking moment...well, waking's not a good word. But, everynight I come back home longing for a good nightsleep, and I just toss and turn instead. I've tried everything: bat's warm milk, relaxing exercises, even to read the Mayor's paperworks" he added in chucklingly, then his voice fell again: " But nothing helps. I'm in my wits' end."

"Hmm. Did you ever try Deadly Nightshade?"

"Uh, no. I heard of it, sure, there's no one in town who doesn't know it, I guess. It grows in the graveyard. But isn't it a poison?"

" Yes, it's poison...if you are alive. But we're already dead, aren't we?" the old man cackled" So, the worst that might happen to you is to wake up with a pretty bad headache, and only if you'll use a very strong dose. You can slip some in your usual night tea or in your food. Both taste and smell aren't not pleasant, though, so I suggest you to add something stronger to overpower them. Frog's breath, for example."

Sally grimaced in disgust. Master loved frog's breath and constantly demanded it in his food, but the smell nauseated her. It seemed that Your Majesty didn't like it, too, because the Dr. added in: " Of course, there are other herbs you can use, Jack. None of them'll work as well as Deadly Nightshade, tough."

They chattered a little more, until the Dr. suggested that they went to the library right then, so they would do later whatever assigment they needed. The voices faded away, signaling that the two men were going upstairs. Sally pressed her back against the door and stared dejectedly at the ground. Damn it.

Casually, her gaze fell upon the suicide letter, which she had absently pushed off her desk in her rush to eavesdrop. Her face lightened up. That's it! She pressed her face against the ground to inspect the door underneath. There was a small clamp, not much larger, of course, but maybe large enough to allow the passage of the key. She reached out for the paper...

And stopped.

That wasn't right. Perhaps the Dr. had a real good reason to not allow her to see Jack Skellington. Maybe he was really evil. Maybe he could try to kill her or harm the doctor if he caught her peeping on him. Sally shivered at this. Anyway, even if she managed to see him and go back to her room without being detected, how could she lock up herself again? When the Dr. would come to free her, he'd see the door unlocked and see that she had disobeyed him. He would be so mad at her! He'd never trust on her again.

But, he didn't trust on her anyway, or he wouldn't have locked her away. And she hadn't to stay up there too long. Just a quick look at the King, that's all. She wouldn't disturb him, so the master couldn't say anything. And even if he would... Sally gave a quick glance to the window and swallowed ...she wouldn't be there to be punished. So what did she have to lose?

Her eyes fell again over the paper. The temptation won out.

Quickly but also carefully, Sally passed the paper under the door, making sure that it was placed right under the keyhole. Among her few belongings, she found out a thin, pointed chopstick that she used to keep her nails clean. She introduced the stick in the keyhole and pushed it forward. A metallic bump announced the fall of the key, startling her for a second. She paused, waiting if someone else had heard it, only then loosened her breath and pulled the paper. She felt a small weight at the other side. Yes! Or... no. The clamp wasn't large enough, and both the key and paper got stuck. Oh, no, not now that we're so close! Sally insisted and gave the paper a stronger pulling, but just ripped it off. In despair, she tried to pull the key off with the chopstick; it was too fragile, however, and snapped. Finally, with the help of a rusty scissor, she managed to retrieve the key.

She was free.

To Continue

Note: For who's wondering about, the door of Sally's room still hasn't the heavy crossbar that it had in the movie. The Dr. added it a good time later, for obvious reasons.

Some phrases of the Dr. Finkelstein are quoted from the early script of *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. There, Sally was naive and gullible, frequently tricked by the Dr.'s call-guilties. The script gave me a lot of insight to write this history. Maybe you'll think Sally looks a little doormat here, but just think that all she knows was learned from the Dr, so he's naturally the center of her world...until now. Wink Hope you're enjoying it.

## Kapitel 2:

### A Light in the Tower

#### Chapter Two

Sally's heart raced as she sneaked up the ramp that led to the library. She wasn't allowed anywhere near that place since that fateful day, two months ago. Sally still could hear his voice yelling that she was too stupid to learn anything beyond domestic stuff and that he'd no longer waste his time teaching her. It still hurt, too. The ragdoll never could understand what she had done wrong. She had been such a dedicated pupil, always hungry to learn more and make him proud, but that just seemed to make him angry, instead.

Luckily, the door wasn't closed shut. Very carefully, she pushed it just enough to open a crack and peep in. A scent of mold and humidity assaulted her nose, despite her lack of nostrils, and she pinched it to stop a fatal sneeze. She peered in again. The place was just as she remembered it: the same dry, giant bat hanging from the ceiling with its wings open wide; the same yellow skull and the same old stuffed animals resting randomly over the shelves; the same

dusty, tottering piles of books resting on the floor here and there, too. And, a few meters away, the same table and chairs, where she used to sit with her master for her lessons of arithmetic, geography and many other subjects. It was precisely there that the two men were now. Her eyes widened.

There, standing beside her creator, was what looked like a huge, long, ten foot tall black whip with a white ball at the top. Sally never had seen anything or anyone so tall, even considering that the only people she saw closely were Igor and the master. The Pumpkin King reached out to point at something, and she gaped, noticing how long and thin his arms were, almost as long as his legs. Looking more carefully, she saw that he actually didn't look like a whip, but more like a sort of strange spider with four legs. Six, if she counted as legs the two ragged things hanging from his backside, probably his tails, and that fanned out at the slightest movement of air.

That was the Pumpkin King? Sally pouted in disappointment. He looked weird, alright, but nothing like the horrible apparitions she had imagined. No black cloak, no hook, nothing scary at all. Thinking hard, she remembered now having once or twice glimpsed a sort of tall black scarecrow running through the crowd. Well, maybe it didn't look that scary from that distance. Perhaps if she moved closer...

The thought made Sally bit her lip nervously in frustration. She had no way aside from entering the library, and that gave her the creeps. Maybe it was better to give up and run back to her room before she was caught. She was taking risk enough standing out here...

Just that moment Jack asked the doctor something. At the sound of his voice, a rush

of courage invaded her body: she took a deep breath, opened the crack a little wider and squeezed through it.

That was probably her lucky day, because at that precise moment the doctor opened a big tome on the table and the two men bent over it. That's why neither of them noticed the ragdoll tip-toeing and sneaking from shelf to shelf until she slipped behind the closest one at their backs. Sally leaned her back on the shelf for a moment as she waited for her heart to slow down. Carefully, she stretched her neck out of her refuge and peered.

Hmm. Muuuch better.

The Pumpkin King kept his back turned to her, so she couldn't see his face, only the back of his skull, round and very white like a full moon. She noticed that his outfit wasn't entirely black. Instead, it had thin white stripes all over, realcing his slim figure. She also noticed that the tails, which she had thought were part of him, were actually a part of his coat.

He looked nice, which somehow fit his voice. However, according to what she had been told, the Pumpkin King wasn't supposed to look nice. Why had the master said the King was horrible? Well, maybe he had a horrible face, she thought with a weak smile; still, that sounded forced. Or maybe... maybe the master was ashamed of telling her the truth. That would explain why he didn't want her to see him. He had built her the image of a splendid King, and now he was afraid that she become upset with him if she discovered the truth. Maybe it was that.

However, she couldn't help feeling a little upset at the thought that he had lied to her. Since Sally had learned to talk she had been told over and over never to lie, so she naturally expected that he never lied, either.

"This is my best tome about herbs, Jack," said the Dr. Finkelstein "If you don't find what you need in it, you won't find it anywhere else. But of course, you're free to browse around if you like."

"Thanks, Doctor."

"You're welcome. Now, if you don't mind, I must go back to my lab now and check on Igor. I don't like leaving him alone for too long. He ate my spare livers last time."

Jack nodded absently and the old man turned to go. Sally quickly ducked behind the books as the wheelchair passed by.

"Speak of Igor," Jack said "I forgot to ask you how your most recent creation is doing. "

Sally felt her heart jump. Jack had asked about her!

"Still refusing to leave?"he added.

Sally's eyes widened in shock. What?

The wheelchair silenced, like if the Dr. had stopped dead in his tracks. There was a heavy, tense silence. Sally could almost feel her master hesitating, choosing his words carefully.

"I wish I could say no, Jack," he finally said, "but I have to be honest. Sally is a very peculiar girl. From the moment she opened her eyes, she has been terribly scared of everything. Even of me, the man who built her!" he continued in a very depressed tone. "You should have seen her a few months ago -- even to convince her to leave her room was a battle. She's doing a little better now, but she won't listen to a word about the things out there. She wouldn't have any use for Halloween anyway. I tried in vain, but Sally has shown herself completely incapable of learning anything."

"I'm sorry about that." Jack said.

"We've got to be patient, that's all. It's very tough. I don't know if I can stand it much longer."

Jack said a few more polite words of comfort and the doctor finally left, but Sally no longer paid attention. She squeezed out of her small hiding place and sat with her back against the shelf. She felt as though a huge rock had crashed down on her.

Not only he had lied to her, but to Jack, too. To the important, the respectable Pumpkin King. He had made him think that she was afraid of the world out there and that she was unable to do anything. Well, it was okay that he had called her good for nothing in private, but to tell someone that... he made her look even stupider than Igor!

But why? Why he was doing that?

The answer came immediately, in the form of that old thought nagging in the corner of her mind: the master didn't want to let her go. He had said all those things to keep her indoors with him. Sally shook her head feverishly. No, it couldn't be. He couldn't be so cruel... He did that because he was concerned with her safety... because the world out there was dangerous...but the thoughts no longer convinced her. What if that was a lie, too? That the world wasn't dangerous, nor people cruel?

But that meant that everything she had learned wasn't true!

How could he have done such an awful thing to her?

If she couldn't trust in her own creator, who could she trust?

Confused and devastated, she embraced her legs tight and lowered her head in a fetal position, wishing to disappear.

As soon as Jack had found himself all alone (at least he thought it so), he let out a relieved sigh, then stretched his long limbs with a long, booming yawn. Actually, the doctor was right: all the information he needed he could have found in his own library.

But this research gave Jack a pretext to spend a few free hours in a place where he couldn't be disturbed. His subjects simply didn't understand that even the Pumpkin King needed to relax occasionally. Wherever he went, there was always someone asking him for help, flattering him or (if it was a female) hitting on him. The Mayor was the worst. Every day the rotund politician came to Jack's house and pulled his doorbell over and over: if the reluctant King wouldn't come running at his call the Mayor immediately started to get anxious, because even the simple idea of thinking by himself caused the little conical man to panic. He had made a point of coming after Jack even in his favorite refuge, the spiral hill of the graveyard. Complaining only caused hurt looks and teary eyes that immediately made Jack feel bad and apologize; then the circle started again. The laboratory wasn't a pleasant place and the doctor was far from a congenial host, but at least in there no one would come after him: excepting Jack himself, all Halloweeners avoided the disagreeable scientist's lab, fearing the possibility of being used for spare parts in an experiment. Even the Mayor had been there only once or twice in his long career, out of obligation, and Jack didn't believe that he would come by now. He sighed again. Moments like this he felt like a prisoner in his own kingdom... he flipped absently through the yellowing old pages as he yawned again, his eyelids suddenly starting to weigh down.

Sally brushed one eye and sniffed, not caring if she had been heard or not. She no longer wanted to remain there or to see the Pumpkin King. All she wanted was to leave immediately and go away from that place forever, jump down from the tower, no matter what, so she'd never see the master again. She took the chance and peered out. Jack was still there, his back turned to her, but his head was leaning backwards in a strange position. Sally startled a little and pulled herself back: maybe he had heard her! Then she heard a sound that gave no doubt.

It was a snort.

She knew the sound well because the master snored a lot whenever he ended up sleeping on his table from working too much. Although the soft buzzing produced by the tall, slender man in black was far from the rasping sound the master produced, it gave her no doubts that he was sleeping.

A little surprised at this, Sally took the chance to sneak out of the shelf right to the door.

Then, almost half-way there, she froze. Her head tilted back and towards the sleeping skeleton-man. Just one look at his face... No, no, she had done enough. She wasn't even supposed to be there. Clenching her teeth, she forced herself to turn and sneak to the door...but as though they had a will of their own, her feet took her toward the Pumpkin King.

Guiltily and shyly, Sally leaned over him, her heart racing, and per her hound over her mouth so as not to make a sound. She peered at his face, and couldn't suppress a gasp of astonishment. He was beautiful. Sally couldn't tell what exactly made him so attractive, but he was beautiful, indeed, beyond words. And he didn't look like a skeleton at all. Sally had seen lots of skulls and skeletons, in books or into the master's lab, but never something like him. Maybe the master had lied again and he



wasn't a skeleton, despite his name. Then her eye fell over one of his hands, hanging loosely beside the chair. She took it in her hand and examined it. Yes, it was really a skeletal hand, but how huge it was! Her two small hands could fit loosely into his... the thought made her blush and she carefully put the hand down, taking care to not wake him up. She turned her attention to his clothes. He had a strange thing strapped to his neck, like a sort of bat. Sally reached out to touch the wings.

But what fascinated her most was the mouth. Although there were no mirrors in the whole house, Sally knew how she looked, by seeing herself in the polished surfaces of the devices of the master's lab when he fixed her up. Many times he had said she was so plain that nobody would bother himself looking at her, and Sally somehow agreed. Her eyes were too big, her nose and chin too little, and the stitched lash running through her mouth and cutting her face through one side to another didn't help anything. But now, she could see that Jack's face wasn't much different from hers. He also had a small nose (well, almost) and chin. Okay, she couldn't be sure if his eyes were as big as hers, but they probably were. And the mouth... Sally looked fascinated at the long line of teeth that almost cut the man's skull in two. She touched the lash in her face and reached out to take his...

Jack's eyes opened.

"Whoaah!" he yelled as he sat up straight like a spring! Sally let out a yelp and turned to run away. However, in her panic she didn't see where she was going and ran into a tall, tottering pile of books.

The sound as she stumbled and crashed down helped Jack to wake up. At first, in his confused mind, he thought that the vision of a red-haired woman yelling at him and disappearing was part of his nightmare. But, those sounds were real. He stood up and looked around.

The woman lay sprawled on the books and didn't make any efforts to stand up and run. Instead, she was crying. Carefully, Jack came towards and bent over her.

"Are you okay?" he asked, worried. "I'm sorry, didn't want to scare you. "

"Please, don't hurt me." she whimpered "I know I shouldn't be here, I just wanted to know how you were..."

To Continue

## Kapitel 3:

### A Light in the Tower

#### Chapter 3

The woman was sprawled over the books and didn't make any efforts to stand up and run. Instead, she was crying. Carefully, Jack walked towards and bent over her.

"Are you okay?" he asked, with concern. "I'm sorry, didn't want to scare you. "

"Please, don't hurt me." she whimpered. "I know I shouldn't be here, I just wanted to know what you were like"

"What are you talking about?" Jack asked, thinking that the woman was completely crazy. Still sobbing, she sat on her heels but didn't look at him, her face hidden by a thick mass of auburn hair. Now that he was closer, Jack could see that she wasn't human, as he had thought at first. She had pale blue skin, like a zombie's, with several scars... no, rough black stitches on her delicate limbs. The same stitches kept together the irregular pieces of fabric of different colors and stamps that composed her dress. The girl was a walking patchwork. Probably her face was made of stitched pieces, too, and Jack was glad that he couldn't see it. He knelt beside the weeping girl and touched at her shoulder, but she pulled back.

"C'mon, don't be afraid," cooed Jack. "I'm not going to hurt you"

She seemed to not believe.

"I... I'm sorry I woke you up. I'm not even supposed to be here, but I couldn't help..." she repeated.

"But it wasn't you who woke me up. It was a nightmare I had"

Her shoulders lifted a bit, like she was considering the phrase.

"So... you aren't mad at me? Really?" she asked, hopefully.

"Of course not. If I got angry at everybody who wanted to look at me I might as well give up being the Pum..." He trailed off. The woman had pushed her hair off her face and was staring at him.

The stitches were there, effectively. One, shy and discreet, crossing the left side of her forehead; another, very evident, cut the lower part of her face and through her mouth from one side to another. Jack, however, barely noticed them. He was too busy in contemplation of the big black eyes with spiked lashes that stared back at him in awe, and the delicate features below, which the stitches hadn't been able to disfigure. She was beautiful, much more than any woman Jack had ever seen, at least talking of ghoulish women.

Sally, by her turn, couldn't take her eyes off Jack's big black eye sockets. In principle, eyes sockets weren't supposed to be pretty, but these looked so expressive, and fitted perfectly with the rest of his figure. If she had thought he was handsome sleeping, now... She regained her composure and looked down with modesty. To disguise her embarrassment, she turned her attention to the books spread around and started gathering them. To her shock, however, two large skeletal hands took the books from her:

"Allow me." Jack said, and he quickly arranged the tomes in a straight, solid pile, in front of the petrified ragdoll.

"T-thank you," she blurted out.

"You're welcome." He stood up and offered her a hand. Sally looked puzzled at the big hand, not understanding what to do with it. Patiently, the King seized her hand and pulled Sally up to her feet, to her complete surprise. Usually, if she knocked or crashed something down, she would be admonished and told to clean up the mess - maybe something else, too, to learn her lesson well. Nobody would trouble himself in helping her to stand up if she tripped, let alone actually help fix what she had messed up.

She lost her balance and fell forward, but Jack promptly hugged her. The two founded themselves almost nose to nose, then pulled apart.

"S-sorry," Sally stuttered, her faces turning slightly purple.

"Hey, y'don't have to say sorry for everything," Jack said with a grin. "Are you hurt?" he asked, noticing that she checked on her legs.

"No,no, I am alright, thanks. Just a few wobbly stitches, but I can repair them later"

"But why did you think I'd hurt you?" he said, coming back to the subject.

"Because..." Sally started, not knowing what to say. It looked so obvious. "Why, because you are the king of Halloween. The Master of Terror, the one who frightened hundreds of humans to death"

"Well, not exactly hundreds. Just a few." Jack chuckled with fake modesty. "But seems you know a lot about me, uh... what's your name?"

"Sally... your Majesty," she completed with a respectful bow.

Jack chuckled again, uncomfortably this time.

"Oh, please, don't call me Majesty. I never liked these sort of ceremonial stuff. Just call me Jack, just like everyone else does"

"Okay... Jack." she complied. Although she always called him by his name inwardly, doing it personally sounded naughty, like she was taking liberties with him that she hadn't. She pouted in frustration, berating herself for being so timid.

So many nights she had dreamed of this. To meet the Pumpkin King, to have his

attention and talk to him. To tell him about her life and to learn about his. So many questions to ask, so many things to share and now she barely could force herself to say a few words. The master was right : she didn't know how to act towards people. But it wasn't entirely her fault. She realized that now.

"Sally. Nice name..." Jack started, then blinked in realization : "Of course! You're Sally, the Dr. Finkelstein's new creat..." he was going to say "creature", but stopped in time. This girl looked so sensitive that he didn't want to offend her by using a wrong word "...I mean, the Dr... he has...y'know, he...you..." Jack gestured clumsily, as if he was putting a thread through a needle and sewing.

Sally almost laughed. Not even in her craziest fantasies she had imagined Jack Skellington acting like this.

"Yes, he made me." She finished the sentence with a slight smile. The smile faded as she remembered her recent discovery. Jack let out a whistle.

"Wow. You must want real bad to see me, if that took you out from your room. I feel flattered."

"How come?" It was Sally's turn to blink.

Jack continued cheerfully:

"Oh, you don't need to feel ashamed. The doctor told me everything. He's been so upset about you! He'll be glad when he learns that you're finally getting over"

"No!" Sally shrieked, with such a panic that Jack looked shocked. The doll put both hands to her mouth, embarrassed, thinking about telling him the whole truth. As soon as this thought flashed in her mind, however, she realized that she couldn't. In part, because of her natural shyness, and because she wouldn't even know how to say it; mostly because she cared about her creator and master despite the way he treated her. As much as Jack looked charming and gentle, she didn't know him enough to predict how he would react when he learned that one of his men had deceived him. Maybe he would kill the doctor... she shivered at this. And, even if she didn't have feelings for the old man anymore, she'd never want to be responsible for anyone's death.

"S-sorry. Didn't want to shout" she said. "But don't tell him you've seen me, please. He won't like it, believe me."

Jack frowned in confusion. "I think you're misunderstanding it. The dr's been really concerned about your condition"

"Please" she joined her hands together begginly "I-I can't explain. Just don't tell him I was here. "

Jack was genuinely confused. The doctor wasn't kidding when he said that his creation feared him. Maybe part of her fear, however, could be actually his own fault. Jack knew the old scientist, and he could be everything but a warmth, nurturing father. He probably wouldn't have been very patient with his creation as she gave her

first awkward steps into the world: Jack could perfectly imagine him yelling at her to do it right until the poor girl, who was naturally shy, had become terrified of him and of everything else that surrounded her. Poor little thing.

"Okay, okay, slow down," he said, in the same tone he'd use for his dog Zero or a small child. "I won't tell him, I promise."

Sally sighed in relief. She noticed, however, the subtle change in Jack's voice, and felt a little humiliated. The look Jack gave her was filled with pity. Of course, he thought she was just as the master had described her, a poor moronic child scared of the world. And everything she did or said just reinforced that impression. That was more than Sally could bear, and suddenly she decided she couldn't stay there one more minute.

"I gotta go now," she said. "He'll be here soon"

"It's a wonder he's not here yet," remarked Jack, "with all the racket we've made"

"Impossible. This used to be his lab, at first. It is...soundless or something alike"

"Sound - proof?"

"Yeah. Master said once that he could cut a live cat's belly open if he liked, because no one would listen. " They both shuddered and made faces at this.

"So you're lucky." Jack grinned at her, and Sally couldn't help smiling in return. They both giggled like mischievous kids, then an uncomfortable silence fell between them. Jack didn't know what else to say and Sally stared at her hands.

"Ok," he said at last. "If you really have to go... I don't want you to get in trouble because of me"

Sally gratefully turned around to go and he added : "If he sees you, don't tell him I was sleeping, okay"

"Huh... okay," Sally echoed, a little confused. It sounded odd that the almighty Pumpkin King also feared her master's screeching. She wondered why, but she was too timid to ask him something that could be personal.

Just at that moment, the band of Halloweentown started to play a song outside, near the laboratory. A few ghouls and monsters passing by stopped to join them and sing the song that was practically their national hymn:

"This is Halloween... this is Halloween... Pumpkins scream in the dead of night..."

Both the skeleton and the ragdoll stopped an instant to listen to the music, each one reacting in a different way. Jack rolled his sockets and suppressed a sigh. Not that he disliked the song, but he was positively sick of it. People sang it every year at every Halloween, and they sang it as they worked, too. It never occurred to anyone to sing something new, and even if it did occur to them, why would they? That was their

favorite song and they'd never get enough of it. Jack started to wonder if there was something wrong with him. Sally, however, drank in the melody with such an intense longing that she almost ached. How much she desired one day to sing that song along with the people out there! It wasn't fair that she had to be the only one excluded from all fun, the doll thought gloomily as she left and walked down the ramp.

The key was in her door, just as Sally had left it, in case of her creator showing up before time. She was wondering if she should take the chance and run away or to go back to her room before she was caught, when the wheelchair squeaked at the corridor. In a panic for the second time that night, she dashed inside. It took every bit of her self-control not to slam the door and close it softly, instead. With her heart in her mouth and her back pressed against the door, she heard the wheelchair coming.

Dr. Finkelstein rolled past Sally's door without even a look. Suddenly, he stopped and spun around. He stared at the door for a moment that felt like years to the ragdoll inside. Then, as though he had made some decision, he went forward and reached for the knob.

"Doctor!" Jack called from upstairs (or upramp). "I'm done, if you want to check on those plans now"

The scientist spun again and started to roll up the ramp towards Jack. Sally let out her breath. That was close.

"So, Jack, " she heard him say. "Did you find what you were looking for"

"Uh... not exactly." Jack's voice responded, sounding a little uncomfortable. "I thought it so. I told you nothing would work better than Deadly Nightshade." There was a tone of victory in the scientist's voice as they went toward the doctor's laboratory.

It's not finished yet! I can't warrant, however, when I'll finish chapter four, but it'll have a little surprise.

Note: Maybe you're a little disappointed about the Jack's and Sally's meeting happened here; remember, however, that in the movie Jack barely knew her and Sally only came to know Jack better when she heard him sing in the cemetery. Of course I felt tempted to put them opening their souls one to each other, but it would be too soon. I took months thinking about how I'd solve this dialogue, until I realized Jack had to believe that Sally was really scared of everything; that also fits with the way he treated her until he learned she had risked her life for him.

## 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.

## 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.