

A Light in the Tower

Von abgemeldet

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 delicated limbs. The same stitches kept together the irregular pieces of fabric of diferent 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, effectivelly. 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 ghouls 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.