

When Sally Met Jack

By SKC

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"Sally meets Jack for the first time . . ." I wrote this a few months back and decided that I may as well post this here as well :)

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1 - part i

“When Sally Met Jack”

Ch.1

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Sally sat silently on the edge of her decrepit old bed, slowly running a black comb through her red yarn hair, her stitched face and wide eyes displaying ever revolving emotions. Apart from the moment that the young rag doll had first opened her eyes to catch her first glimpse of the world around her, today would be the most exciting experience to date. Today . . . today she would receive a **visitor.**

Now to most, receiving a visitor would hardly seem like anything to get worked up over, of course you may fret over what to serve for tea or if the house is tidy (or messy enough depending on the visitor), but most would not consider it a life altering experience. But for Sally, who had met but two people in her entire life, it was quite an event to be excited about; the visitor would come from . . . **outside.** Sally had never been outside of the laboratory that she had been assembled in and therefore it was true that Sally had met but two people; her creator Dr. Finklestein, a shriveled, bespectacled old man with a flip-top metallic skull who made his way around on his motorized wheelchair; and Igor, the doctor's humpbacked, simpleminded assistant and first living creation. Yes, they were the only two people that she had ever **met,** but that didn't mean that they were the only people that she had ever **seen.** From the barred window of her room, high in the mad scientist's tower, she had seen **them.** They were who the doctor called “rez-e-dents” of Halloween Town, but they were so small (which the doctor had tried to explain as being an illusion caused by distance) as no one ever came near the lab and she could not see the details of their faces; just an incredible myriad of different moving forms. And then sometimes, . . . sometimes she **heard** them. A yell, a scream, a booming laugh and Sally's personal favourite, **singing.** It was during one these songs that she had first heard the name, “The Pumpkin King.” Who was he? What did he do? What did “hail” mean? Was he really as great as they were saying? The doctor, to his merit, had tried to be patient at first as he attempted to answer her barrage of questions but eventually his wry patience wore thin and he found himself becoming annoyed with the rag doll. After all, her main concern should be him and not the goings on of Halloween Town and so he eventually, with gruff refusal, stopped answering her questions, unless of course he saw it fit for her to know. But the doctor's sudden silence did not stop Sally's wonderings as she had managed to get her most desperate questions answered before his new stance. She knew who The Pumpkin King was, she knew what he did, she knew what “hail” meant, she knew that he **was** as great as they said and as an extra bonus, she now knew that “The Pumpkin King” was a *title*, not his name. His name was Jack. Jack Skellington.

Unfortunately, the moment that she had asked what he looked like was the moment that the doctor had become suspicious and had clammed up, drying out her only tap of information. But that was fine by Sally as it gave her a chance to stretch her “imaginary” muscles and she would spend countless hours conjuring in her mind what the king could possibly look like. He was called the “Pumpkin King,”

so perhaps he was a pumpkin of some kind? But what about the name, “Skellington?” It just didn’t sound very “pumpkin-ish” to her. But for whatever image she conjured of him, Jack Skellington became her favourite fantasy and once she learned by a slip of the doctor that the incredible black tower that loomed over the town and outside of her window belonged to him, her barren and lonely room suddenly became much more pleasant . . .

Sally gently laid her comb on her night table with a small sigh. When the doctor had said that she was going to receive a very important visitor, her heart had nearly leapt from her chest as she had instantly assumed that it would be Jack. The doctor’s lip had curled into a cruel grin as he had informed her that the great Pumpkin King did not bother with trifle matters such as welcoming a mad scientist’s creation as an official member of Halloween Town, it would be the mayor who did this. Sally had felt her heart sink but was still excited at the prospect of at least meeting the mayor, or **anyone** from the town for that matter who could answer at least some of the many questions that the doctor had refused to answer. She felt foolish now to have expected the king to be the one who would do this, of course he would have more important things to do, more important things than a crudely constructed rag doll-

The rusty hinges of her door suddenly creaked open followed by the rough voice of her creator. “Sally?”

Sally had jumped clumsily to her feet at the first sound of the door opening, wishing not for the first time that the doctor would practice what he preached about knocking first.

The hum of electricity filled the room as the doctor entered in his electric wheelchair, glancing about for his young creation. “Ah, there you are.” He stopped in front of her. “Well are you ready yet?”

Sally nodded with enthusiasm. “Oh, yes. Yes, I am.”

Finklestein grunted his approval. “Good, because he’ll be here any minute and the last thing I want to do is keep him waiting.” Another grunt. “The sooner he’s out of here the better, why Jack **insists** upon this ‘welcoming’ foolishness is beyond me. It’s not like you’ll be having much of anything to do with the other Halloweener’s anyway.”

Sally’s eyes lit up. **Jack** insisted upon welcoming her? It was his idea? She felt a sudden flood of admiration for this Pumpkin King and she realized that for the first time he had directly interacted with her life, changed it and had affected what would happen . . . it was almost a little overwhelming.

Dr. Finklestein eyed his newest creation with suspicion. “Are you sure your ready for this, Sally? You seem . . . distracted.”

Sally snapped her attention back to her severe looking creator. “Oh! Oh no, I- I’m fine . . . it’s just . . . I-”

The doctor’s eyes narrowed behind his dark round glasses. “Just remember to be on your best behaviour, Sally. I don’t want you ‘worrying’ the mayor . . . unnecessarily.”

Sally frowned feeling hurt. Why would the doctor think that she would worry the mayor? Just what did he mean by that?

“Doctor, I would never-”

The sudden sound of the bonging doorbell from downstairs cut Sally off in mid sentence and the doctor turned away from her, forcefully twisting on the controls of the wheelchair to point himself in the direction of the door.

“Coming! Coming! I’ll be right down!” And then towards the lab in the back, “IGOR! Hurry and get the door!”

Sally could hear the shuffling footsteps of the humpback as he rushed to do his master’s bidding, and the doctor turned towards her once more.

“You stay here while I greet our . . . -hurumph- . . . guest. Wait until you’re called for. And remember, Sally,” His eyes narrowed once again, “your **best** behaviour. That means no pestering the mayor with silly questions either, understand?”

Sally nodded sadly as her creator made his way out of her room, the large iron door closing behind him. Her heart sunk and her previous excitement nearly dwindled completely now that she would be denied the answers that she desperately wanted, no, **needed**. But at least . . . at least she would meet someone new and surely she would learn at least **something** about the town.

She turned to slowly walk towards her bed when the sound of voices from the room below caught her attention. Her despair took a back seat to her new found excitement as she rushed to her door to press a stitched ear firmly against its side to listen. She frowned as she heard the fading, yet obviously flustered, voice of the doctor encouraging who must have been the mayor to follow him into the (usefully neglected) sitting room.

The rag doll let out a huff, mentally berating herself for having been wallowing in self pity rather than paying attention to the goings on downstairs. She strained to hear more of the conversation and catch the voice of the mayor, but they had moved too far into the other room for her to hear even a murmur. She sighed deeply and dejectedly sauntered back to her bed to flop down with a huff. “Oh well, I’ll just have to wait to meet him, I guess.”

As Sally sat waiting for her cue to come downstairs, she entertained herself with trying to imagine what the mayor might look like, much as she often did with Jack Skellington. From what she could gather from the doctor’s snide remarks, he must have been (in Sally’s much friendlier translation) a somewhat easily distressed/excited man who was on the pudgy side and was also two-faced . . . literally. Whatever “lit-er-ly” meant. The doctor had said it with a snicker so perhaps it was some sort of inside joke? Did he actually have two faces? Why would that be so funny? She tried to imagine what someone with two faces might look like, but couldn’t quite get her head around the concept of it. Maybe he-

A sudden, insistent banging on her door snapped her out of her reverie and she sprang unsteadily to her feet. Igor had been sent to fetch her, he was the only one in the house who spared her the courtesy of knocking (albeit a bit too loudly) before entering her room.

Sally moved as fast as her unsteady legs would carry her to the door and shoved it open. She looked down and saw that it was indeed Igor and he looked very excited- or was it anxious? It was always hard to differentiate the two when it came to Igor. He shuffled from foot to foot, wringing his rubber covered hands together with a squeak. “Hur-hurry! They are waiting for you downstairs! Come!” He beckoned

her to follow him and he limped ahead, turning every now and then to encourage her to go faster. They were halfway down the spiraled ramp that led to the main floor when Igor spoke to her again.

“Come now! The master and the master’s master are waiting for you! You mustn’t keep such an honoured guest waiting!”

The master’s master? Sally mentally winced as she thought of the doctor’s reaction to hearing Igor calling the mayor that, she didn’t think that the good doctor would be very pleased. Not very pleased at *all*. But why would Igor call the mayor that? And why was Igor so . . . so *excited*? After all, it was not Igor’s first time meeting the mayor and Igor was the only one within the household (labhold?) who went into town on a regular basis. If anything, Igor should be the least bothered by the whole affair. But then again, it *was* Igor and he was probably just winding himself up into a ball of nerves, desperate to please the doctor by making sure that nothing went wrong. Yes, that had to be it.

They were now nearing the bottom of the spiraling ramp, and Sally was beginning to feel more than a little nervous. What would she say to the mayor now that she couldn’t ask questions? How should she greet him? Should she shake his hand? What if her hand fell off? What if she tripped over her own feet and bowled the mayor onto the floor? What if she-

Sally stopped dead in her tracks. Voices. She could now just make out the murmurings of the doctor and the mayor, from their place in the sitting room. Not loud enough to determine what was being said and by whom but-

Igor suddenly noticed her lack of progress and began wringing his hands mercilessly. “N-no time to dawdle! Come! Come! We must hurry! Yes! Hurry! This way, this way!” He began tugging on the bottom of her patchwork dress and she found her feet moving forward of their own accord.

The entrance to sitting room drew closer and closer until she was standing at the threshold and she could now hear the voices quite clearly.

The first voice she heard was unmistakably of the doctor’s. “Yes, yes that is true of course, but ah- . . . I must warn you that she is exceedingly, how should I say this . . . *peculiar*. She has no desire whatsoever in being frightening, in fact she spends more time being afraid *herself*, if you can imagine that.”

And then the response; a second voice that she immediately loved and would never, never forget: “Well be that as it may, doctor, there is a place for *everyone* within Halloween Town. She’ll find her niche eventually and besides, a little diversity would be good for the town. Variety *is* the spice of life, you know.”

The doctor did not sound convinced. “Yes, well if you’re fond of that sort of thing . . .”

The mayor had defended her! And his voice . . . his voice was so unlike the doctor’s . . . it was soft and gentle and *warm*, yet held an elegance and sense of authority. It was even sweeter than how she had imagined the Pumpkin K-

Igor chose that moment to plow forward into the sitting room, disrupting Sally’s enchanted daze.

“Master, she’s here. Just as you asked, master . . .” Sally didn’t have to see Igor to know that he was

nearly doubled over in a humble bow before the doctor.

“Very good, Igor. Sally? Sally, come on in!”

Sally’s stomach felt like it had dropped into her feet as she numbly and slowly made her way inside the sitting room. The doctor was the first person that she saw as she entered the room, he was looking at her but his wheelchair was facing a cushion chair that was facing away from Sally.

“Oh, there you are Sally!” The doctor’s cheeriness seemed to be quite strained as did his entire demeanor. “Er . . . Sally you should know-”

But the doctor never had a chance to finish for the visitor suddenly stood up from his chair and turned towards Sally with a dazzling smile.

For a moment, Sally’s heart ceased to beat within her stitched chest as her wide eyes drank in every inch of the man before her. He was . . . he was so very **different** from the only other two men that she had ever seen and he most certainly didn’t look at **all** like what the doctor had said. Unlike the doctor and Igor who were both shorter and squatter (especially Igor) than herself, this man was tall, taller than she, and he was most certainly not squat. He was, in fact, incredibly **thin** which of course made perfect sense as Sally now saw that he was a skeleton. His thin limbs were long in comparison to his torso, yet he was not awkward; he moved instead with a seemingly impossible grace that reminded Sally of a spider that she had once seen nimbly dancing across her window to build its shimmering web. He had no eyes and yet the hollows in their place were just as expressive; as was the rest of his face for his skull, although made from bone, moved and curved as if it were flesh. The skeleton man wore a beautiful black pinstriped pant suit with ragged coat tails and a matching striped bat bow tie to top it all off. All of these things combined created a man that Sally thought was incredibly beautiful, a man she instantly trusted, and a man that she instantly fell hopelessly in love with . . .

The mayor strode over to her with a smile and extended a bony, yet elegant hand towards her in greeting.

“Well, hello, Sally! It’s wonderful to finally meet you!”

Sally shyly slid her tiny hand within his, and marveled at how much bigger his hand was as the long, cool fingers curled around her own.

He was now looking at her expectantly and she realized that she had not yet responded to his friendly greeting.

She blushed from embarrassment and finally managed to stutter out a greeting of her own. “I-it’s . . . it’s **wonderful** to be meeting you as well, Mr. Mayor . . .”

The mayor’s face suddenly looked perplexed and Sally flushed deeper thinking that she must have done something wrong.

Across the room the doctor started to splutter but before he could say anything, the mayor’s face suddenly brightened.

“Oh! I see, you wouldn’t have known! You **couldn’t** have! -nervous laugh- Oh, you must forgive me, the doctor here didn’t know I was coming either or I’m sure he would have told you. Of course you were expecting the mayor but I’m afraid he couldn’t make it tonight (allergies to pox of all things) so I came in his place.” His smile grew warmer. “My name is Jack. Jack Skellington.”

Sally’s eyes went impossibly wide and her body went numb from shock, her mind desperately trying to deal with the information that her ears had just informed her of. This . . . this was not the mayor. This was Jack Skellington. Jack Skellington, the Pumpkin King. The Pumpkin King of Halloween. The Pumpkin King of all of her dreams. The Pumpkin King of Halloween was standing in front of her. The Pumpkin King’s hand was still firmly grasping her own. She was touching him . . . he was holding her hand.

And suddenly, the weight of realization came forward with a tremendous force that overwhelmed the young rag doll completely. The last thing she saw was the surprised face of Jack Skellington before there was nothing but an engulfing, yet comforting darkness . . .

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## 2 - part ii

“When Sally Met Jack”

Ch.2

By: SKC

Sally was having a wonderful dream. She was lying in a grassy, yellow meadow surrounded by the twisting, spiraling trees of the land of Halloween, above her the pumpkin sun in the sky burned a brilliant orange as it neared the hills in the distance, signaling the anticipated end of day. . . it was an image derived from a picture that she had once seen in one the doctor's books. She stretched on her back feeling entirely too comfortable and sighed deeply with contentment. A little gray flower brushed against her face and she lazily plucked it from the ground to admire it. She lovingly stroked its soft petals before delicately pulling one after the other loose from its stem, a previously unknown verse repeating in her mind.. A gentle breeze began to blow across her then, carrying with it a voice. It was Jack Skellington. And yet his voice had changed from her phantom Jack's; it was a clearer, sweeter and *\*truer\** voice than before. It was his real voice and he was calling her name.

Sally sat up looking around her, searching excitedly for the King of Halloween. His voice grew louder and she soon saw his slender shadow arriving ahead of him as he came towards her from a forest path. She smiled widely and opened her mouth to call to him when a black ball of *\*something\** landed heavily on her lap.

She let out a choked scream in surprise before she realized what had perched none to gently upon her knee. It was a crow. A very familiar looking crow . . . and she gave a startled gasp as she realized that instead of the black beady eyes and beak that a normal crow should have, it had instead the black beady glasses and beak-like mouth of Dr. Finklestein!

The crow Dr. Finklestein rose suddenly into the air, beating his black wings furiously in front of her, causing a great gust of wind that pushed her back and kicked up dust and grass. The angry fowl then started squawking at her, drowning out the tender voice of the king.

“WAKE UP! -SQUAWK- WAKE UP!”

????????????

. . . Sally's eyes flew open as she awoke with a start only to nearly faint once more as her eyes came into focus on a closeup view of the doctor's angry face.



She gasped in shock and attempted to scamper backwards, away from the intruding visage of the doctor. That is, she *\*attempted\** to scamper away, for when she propelled herself backwards, she promptly ran out of supporting ground, flipped backwards with limbs flailing, one of which connected with the underside of the doctor's jaw causing his skull to open and slam shut again with a sharp *\*CLANG!\** and finally landed on her back on the floor, legs straight up in the air and draped over the arm of the couch that she had just fallen off of. All in all it was quite the spectacle for a Monday morning.

Sally blinked several times staring now up at the dark, metallic ceiling, her mind working frantically through her confusion to piece together what had just happened; She was on the floor. That was because she had just fallen off of the couch. The doctor was angrily howling in pain across the room. That was because she had kicked him in the face when she had fallen off of the couch. She had fallen off of the couch. That was because she had been startled. She had been startled. That was because the doctor's face had been far too close for comfort when she had awoken. She had awoken. That was because she had been asleep, no . . . unconscious. She had been unconscious. That was because she had fainted. She had fainted. That was because the mayor had turned out to actually be . . .

"The Pumpkin King!"

Jack Skellington, the Pumpkin King in question, was now looking worriedly at her from above but he smiled wryly at her use of his title. "There's no need to be so formal with me, Sally. Just call me, 'Jack,' like everyone else." And then his expression turned worried once more. "But are you alright, Sally? We didn't mean to startle you . . ."

Sally listened to the skeleton man's words in a daze, he was just so . . . so *\*enchanting\**. Her eyes roamed over his face, trying to memorize every detail and it was then that she noticed a blossoming bruise on the side of his face that she was sure hadn't been there before. . .

She flushed a deep scarlet at the thought of being the cause of the injury. It was also at that moment that she realized the precarious state of her dress and she hurriedly tried to untangle herself with the couch, to pull her dress back down to a respectable position.

"I-I . . . I am *\*so\** sorry! I-I"

In one fluid movement, Jack extended his hand to grasp her arm and pulled her back up to a sitting position on the arm of the couch.

She landed with an, "Oh!" Sally had never thought that it was possible for arms that thin to be so strong and for some reason that she didn't quite understand, this fact made her blush.

"There you are, Sally! There's no need to be sorry about a thing!"

Sally wanted to believe Jack, she really did, but she had her doubts as she scanned the deepening mark on his face. "B-but, your face . . . t-that mark . . .was it. . . did I-"

Jack was about to wave it off when he was quite literally cut off by the doctor who wheeled himself in front of the king, looking very, *\*very\** angry.

“Yes, you did, you wretched girl! Poor Jack here was merely trying to give you some air when you nearly knocked his head off! And just now you tried to finish the job on me for bringing your useless consciousness back into this world!” And then he deflated, his tone turning into tragic self pity, “Oh, *\*why\** must children be so selfish? Why-”

“That will be quite enough, doctor.”

Sally lifted her head from her shameful stance to gaze in wonderment at Jack as he stepped out from behind the doctor and turned to the now gaping mad scientist with a frown.

“Really, doctor, there’s no need to get so upset. There’s no harm done and besides, this whole thing is entirely *\*my\** fault, not Sally’s. I should have sent word that I was coming rather than to spring a nasty surprise on her like that.”

Sally’s awe quickly turned to horror. Did he actually think that she thought his sudden appearance instead of the mayor’s was *\*nasty?!\** The surprise was anything but that! It was . . . it was the most *\*wonderful\** surprise that she could have ever asked for! It was true that it was a bit *\*overwhelming\**, but most certainly not in a bad way! She could *\*not\** allow him to believe this awful lie another moment longer!

She stood up (nearly stumbling as one of her leg seams had slackened during her tumble) and opened her mouth to protest but was, as in her dream, cut off by the doctor.

“Yes, well I suppose that you’re too much of a gentleman to blame your subjects, Jack m’ boy.” He adjusted his beady glasses to better scrutinize the rag doll. “. . . Even if they may not deserve it.”

Sally was certain that if Jack had eyes, he would be rolling them.

“Nonsense, I don’t have to defend anyone because what I’m saying is true.” The doctor tried to persist but it was Jack who had the floor now. And when Jack spoke, *\*everyone\** paid attention.

“Yes, I assume full responsibility for this whole ordeal and I apologize to you both. So why don’t we just say it’s water under the bridge and give dear Sally here a proper welcome, hmm?”

Had Jack just called her, *\*dear?\** Sally was certain that all of the blushing that she was doing today couldn’t be good for her. She didn’t want Jack to assume any responsibility for what had happened, but she didn’t wish to argue with him either; especially since he was being so very gracious.

The doctor on the other hand looked as if he wanted to do anything besides forget the matter, but a threatening glance from Jack made him relent with a vengeful nod.

Jack’s demeanor quickly switched to pleasant once more as the doctor finally agreed. “Splendid!” He gestured to the sofas. “Shall we make ourselves comfortable then?” He offered an arm to Sally and at first she didn’t know what to do for the doctor had taught her nothing about this sort of gesture.

Jack noticed her distress and smiled encouragingly at her. “You slip your arm through mine like this . . .

.” He used his other hand to gently guide her arm through his and she tentatively rested her hand on his forearm with a blush.

Jack laughed good-naturedly as he led her to the sofa, “Why, you’re a natural noblewoman, Sally! Are you sure you haven’t done this before?”

Sally laughed for the first time that night as she shook her head, ‘no.’ This Jack Skellington was just . . . *\*amazing.\** She had fainted on him, nearly knocked his head off and had humiliated herself beyond belief; and yet he was still being so *\*kind\** to her. And it was a *\*genuine\** kindness she was sure of it . . . at least she hoped she was sure of it. But at that moment, it didn’t really matter because Sally had never been happier and not even the muted mumblings (which she was sure were nasty) of the doctor who followed behind them could ruin her joy.

Jack led her the short distance to the musty couch and she gingerly took a seat on one end, Jack the other. The doctor came to a stop on his wheelchair in front of them, looking very fidgety indeed. It was obvious that he wanted this meeting to be over with as soon as possible.

Jack however, either didn’t notice or ignored the doctor’s stress and throbbing vein at his temple, a sign that Sally knew meant that the doctor was *\*very\** annoyed. Sally had never known the doctor to show this kind of restraint with her or Igor or *\*anybody,\** and so the fact that he was so submissive towards Jack now . . . well, it was impressive to say the least.

The Pumpkin King surveyed them both with a happy grin and seemingly unconquerable glee. “Now, isn’t this better? Much more comfortable at least, wouldn’t you say?”

The doctor gave a begrudging grunt of approval, yet seemed to be anything but comfortable. “Yes, I suppose it is . . . er . . . perhaps you’d like some more tea, Jack?” Sally had to give the doctor a few merit points for at least trying to be civil, but she was far from being reassured.

Jack however, beamed at the friendly suggestion. “Why, yes, that would be lovely. Thank you! And what about you, Sally? Are you having any?”

Sally was taken aback by the question, no one had ever asked her if she wanted anything before. Dr. Finklestein most certainly hadn’t and from the look on his face he hadn’t intended to now. But the reassuring presence of the king sitting next to her, filled her with a confidence that she would not have dared to have in his absence. She pulled herself up straighter and smiled at Jack. “Yes, . . . yes I think I will have some tea as well.”

The doctor didn’t look to pleased with her, what he would call “impudence,” but there was very little that he could do about it in the presence of Jack Skellington; the good doctor had tested the Pumpkin King’s patience once that morning, and he knew better than to test it twice. After all, Jack could be the most pleasant and good-natured person in all of Halloween Town, but when he got angry . . . well, it was safe to say that there was indeed a reason why he was considered to be the most terrifying being in Halloween.

The doctor suppressed a shudder and snapped his fingers. Immediately, the sound of shuffling feet could be heard as the previously forgotten Igor trudged into the room.

“Igor! Run into the kitchen and fetch us another pot of tea and . . .-hrmm- . . . an extra cup as well, if you please.”

The hunchback’s face nearly grazed the floor as he bowed before his creator. “Yes, master . . . as you wish, master . . .”

Jack had looked a little uncomfortable with Igor’s blatant display of servitude before the doctor, but shrugged it off as the hunchback exited the room, and turned his attention back to Sally with a grin.

“So, Sally, let’s take things from the top, shall we? Well, you know my name is Jack Skellington and it seems that you know that I’m the Pumpkin King as well, so . . . would it be safe to assume that you know what that means?”

Sally nodded shyly. “I-it means that you . . . that you’re the ruler of Halloween Town?”

Jack nodded as well. “Yes, it does, yet it’s not only Halloween Town and it’s residents that I’m responsible for, but the entirety of the Halloween holiday itself. Tell me, Sally, do you know what Halloween is about?”

The rag dolls brows knitted together as she pondered the question, desperately not wanting to humiliate herself any further by saying something foolish.

“Um . . . w-well . . . it’s . . . it’s about, ah . . . s-scaring people?” Her worried eyes darted towards the king and she frantically prayed that she had said at least *\*something\** akin to the correct answer. But she needn’t have worried for Jack was very unlike anyone that she had ever met, . . . or ever would meet.

Sally felt her apprehension dissolve as Jack’s grin grew wider. “Well . . . Yes, Sally, you’re very right. In a nutshell, that *\*is\** what Halloween is about.”

Sally was positively beaming! She had actually answered one of Jack’s questions correctly!

“However,” Sally’s smile faded slightly as Jack continued, “do you know *\*why\** we scare people?”

Sally felt her heart sink as she already knew that she wouldn’t be able to answer the question. She had no idea why and from the puzzled look on Dr. Finklestein’s face it was obvious that he didn’t know the reasoning behind why they did what they did either.

The doctor spoke up before Sally had a chance to take a breath.

“Now, Jack, be nice. It’s no fair asking a young girl such a thing when the answer is so debatable. It’s like asking someone why the sun is orange or why water is green or-”

Jack held up a hand for silence and the doctor abruptly halted his tirade. “Let me assure you doctor, that I had no intention of not being fair or being unkind; I simply wanted to know what *\*Sally\** thought, that’s all . . .”

Jack turned back to her with an encouraging smile. “So, Sally why do *\*you\** think we scare people?”

Jack wanted to know her *\*opinion?\** She blushed not really knowing what to say, she was happy that was Jack was inadvertently answering the questions that she had wanted to ask, but she had never thought that she would have to ask *\*herself\** questions. She watched as Igor returned from the kitchen and began passing the tea around. Why would they want to scare people? Why? . . .

And then, although afterwards she could not explain it, an answer came to her as clear as daylight. “We scare people . . . because deep down inside of them . . . they want to be scared.”

A slow grin crept its way across Jack’s skull and something changed in his expression. “That . . . that is a very good answer.”

Sally gazed back at him with a smile. She had never been so proud in her life! She wished that Jack would visit every day, or maybe she could visit him . . .

The doctor looked from Sally to Jack and didn’t like what he saw one . . . little . . . bit. Jack’s gaze was just a little too intrigued and Sally’s just a little too admiring for his liking. It was best to nip this situation in the bud . . . before a certain something decided to take root . . .

“Yes, yes a very good answer indeed.” The doctor took a deep swig of his tea, some of which dribbled down his chin. It was time to assert his ownership.

“Yes, I’m sure that she’ll keep me some very interesting company for many years. That is, after all, the reason I made her . . .”

Sally snapped out of her trance not sure if she should feel pleased at the doctor’s first compliment or upset because her future had already been planned for her; and a future of only having the doctor for company was beginning to look more and more bleak . . .

Jack seemed to come back to his senses as well. “What? Oh, ah, yes, well I-I suppose so, if that’s what she wants. That, along with her Halloween duties of course.”

Sally froze. Could Jack possible mean what she thought he did?

“H-Halloween duties? You mean . . . you mean that I can . . . take part in Halloween too?”

The doctor looked like he wanted to protest but Jack, as he had been doing all morning, beat the good doctor to be the first to speak.

“Of *\*course\** you can, Sally! In fact, *\*all\** the citizens of Halloween Town contribute something towards the progress of the holiday, usually by utilizing their best talents.”

Sally felt like she had been punched in the stuffing; the people of Halloween had *\*talents.\** She knew what ‘talents’ were and she was certain that she had none. After all, what kind of talent would a clumsy rag doll like her possibly have . . .

“I . . . I don’t have any talents . . . t-the only things that I do are cooking, cleaning and sewing . . .”

Jack raised a brow with a smile. "But Sally, all of those things *\*are\** talents! And did you say that you can sew?"

A blushing rag doll slowly nodded. "Yes, I-I make all of our clothing . . ."

Jack looked positively thrilled. "You make *\*clothing?\** How marvelous! You see, we've been in *\*desperate\** need of new seamstress to make the Halloween costumes! (And I've been needing a new tailor myself) I'm sure you'd love it! So, how about it, Sally? Would you like to be the town seamstress?"

"Why I'd *\*love\** to! I-"

"I'm afraid that I can't allow it."

Both Sally and Jack turned towards the, once again, intruding Dr. Finklestein. Jack frowned and looked as if he were seriously trying to restrain some severe impulse.

"And why is that, doctor?"

The doctor took his time in answering, finishing off the remnants of his tea before he spoke. He laid his cup on the table next to him and steepled his hands in front of him, obviously enjoying the *\*very\** temporary shift in power.

"I cannot allow it, because Sally sews by hand and would not have time to do her duties around here."

Jack looked put out at first but then brightened. "Well, then she can learn to use a sewing machine! It'll take her less than half of time! Why, she can even use my grandmother's machine! It's been in the attic for years, but it still works like new! It's a shame to let such a wonderful machine go to waste, for I'll most certainly never use it."

The doctor was spluttering now. "W-well that's very *\*kind\** of you, Jack but-"

And then Sally did something else that she had never dared to do before. She interrupted the doctor.

"Yes, it *\*is\** very kind of you, your highness- ah - I mean *\*Jack.\** It's so much more than I deserve . . . I-I don't know if I can accept, I mean it was your *\*grandmother's\**. . ."

Jack waved it off with a happy grin. "Nonsense! Of *\*course\** you deserve it, Sally! Please, it would make me *\*so\** very happy if you would accept and I'll warn you, I can be quite persistent! Isn't that right, doctor?"

The doctor slouched in his wheelchair. He knew when he was defeated. "Yes, you most certainly are *\*that,\** Jack . . ."

Sally hardly heard Jack and the doctor making arrangements to have the machine delivered the next day, she was too preoccupied with simply staring at Jack. The whole morning had been more wonderful

than she had ever dared to dream for. And Jack . . . she sighed deeply . . . he was almost too good to be true, and yet he *\*was\** true. Everything about him was genuine and he radiated an energy that Sally was quickly becoming addicted to . . .

“. . . Well, I guess that I'd better be on my way. I have quite a bit of work to tend to at the Town Hall today I'm afraid, and I really must check in with the mayor to see how he's doing. -sheepish grin- It ah . . . was sort of my fault after all . . .”

Sally watched Jack stand and panic gripped her as she realized that he was leaving. She didn't want him to leave! She wanted him to stay! No, better yet she wanted to go with him! Yes! She wanted to be able to see and talk to him whenever she wanted! Out there, out there in the town like everyone else! What if he never came back? What if she never got out of this place?

Sally stood up as quickly as she could and turned to Jack who now shaking hands with a very relieved looking Dr. Finklestein.

“Y-you're leaving?”

Jack turned to her with a sad smile. “Yes, I'm afraid so, Sally. But I'll be seeing you again sometime soon, I'm sure . . .”

He offered her a slender hand and this time she took it immediately, gripping his hand tightly, not wanting to ever let go . . .

“It was wonderful meeting you, Sally. I hope that I'll get to see a lot more of you from now on.”

Sally knew that if it were up to the doctor, Jack would *\*never\** get to see her ever again. She knew that the doctor was going to be furious with her after Jack left; he would never let her out now. And then, she knew what she had to do. Jack had given her a glimpse of what she was missing in her life. He had given her a true reason, a true *\*purpose\** for being. All she had to do was get to it . . .

Her heart was beating with determination.

“You will, Jack . . . You will.”