

The Nightmare before Christmas

by Tim Burton

(Adapted book. Elementary level)

Chapter 1. Halloweentown's Scariest Skeleton

"I scare people every year, Zero," Jack Skellington said quietly to his dog. "It's boring and I'm tired."

On October 31 everybody in Halloweentown was excited.

Halloween night was the most important night of their year and they were all afraid. Dead people came up from under the ground. Thirsty vampires happily drank a lot of blood. Ugly old witches changed some people into cats and other people into fish. Everybody ran from the skeletons, from the sound of their long, thin arms and legs. Black cats jumped in and out of trash cans. Black birds flew through the dark sky with loud, high cries. And Jack Skellington sang his scary songs and danced his dangerous dances. People screamed. They were afraid. They loved it.

At the end of the Halloween night, everybody went to the center of town. The Mayor of Halloweentown stood in front of them and spoke.

"Tonight was the best Halloween party in many years, and the hard work of one man made it possible," he said. He turned to the town's greatest skeleton. "Jack - thank you."

"It was great, Jack!" people shouted. "We loved it! It was wild!"

"Yes," the Mayor said. "We all enjoy Jack's scary songs and dangerous dances. Jack, you're the scariest skeleton in Halloweentown! Thank you for these wonderful celebrations..."

"No problem," Jack said.

But Jack wasn't happy. Every year he repeated the same songs and dances and he was bored with Halloween. Of course, he couldn't tell anybody. How could he? The people of the town loved him and they waited all year for this night.

When the Mayor started talking about the scariest vampires and

witches, Jack walked away quietly. He wanted to think about his future. He walked out of town and past the old churchyard. He walked past Sally, too, but he didn't see her.

Sally was also sad. She watched Jack and she wanted to follow him. But she had to be careful.

The Doctor didn't like it when she left the house. And when she didn't listen to him, he got very angry.

The Doctor was a very ugly, old skeleton and he was not a nice man. After his accident, he couldn't walk. He made Sally, from old clothes, because he wanted a strong young woman in his house. Her clothes were not very pretty, but she had beautiful long red hair.

The doctor could move around in His chair but Sally had to cook for him. She cleaned for him and did everything in the house. Her life was boring and she really wanted to run away. She tried to leave many times but he always caught her.

"Why is Jack sad tonight?" Sally thought. "He's the most wonderful man in Halloweentown and everybody loves him."

She listened hard. She could hear Jack's words to his little white dog, Zero. Zero came out from under the ground and flew behind Jack. He was dead, of course, so you could see through him. But he had a funny red nose and it shone in the dark.

"I scare people every year, Zero," Jack Skellington said quietly to his dog. "It's boring and I'm tired. I don't want to hear another scream. Why do I do it?"

"Now I understand... he's bored," Sally thought sadly. "He wants to change his life... and I want to change mine, too."

She looked around the churchyard.

"I'll take some of those flowers," she thought. "I'll put them in the Doctor's drink again tonight so he'll sleep. But this time, when he's sleeping, I'll run away. I'll find Jack and maybe he'll go with me. We'll be free!"

A sound came through the trees from a long way away.

"Sally? Where are you?" It was the Doctor and he was very angry.

"I'm coming!" Sally shouted.

Chapter 2. A Door to a New World

"Nobody is afraid here!" Jack thought. "They aren't screaming. Nobody's dead!"

Jack walked through the churchyard and into the dark woods. His head was down and his eyes were on the ground. He walked for a long time and he thought about his future, without much hope.

After almost two hours, he stopped and looked around him. His eyes opened wide.

"Where am I? What is this?" he asked Zero.

Jack was in the middle of some very large trees and each tree had a beautiful door in it. On the doors were strange pictures and each door was different. One of the doors had a green tree with decorations on it. Of course, it was a Christmas tree, but Jack didn't know anything about Christmas trees. One door had a pretty egg with yellow flowers on it. It was the Easter door, but Jack knew nothing about Easter. The Thanksgiving Day door had a very big bird with a small head.

Jack liked the door with the green tree and pretty decorations, so he moved nearer. But before he could put his hand on the door, it opened. A strong, cold winter wind pulled him inside the tree and the door closed quickly. He screamed, but only Zero heard. And Zero couldn't help. The little dog stayed under the tree and waited. He waited all night.

The cold winter wind took Jack to a new and wonderful place. Here, everything was white and it was very cold. Jack knew nothing about snow and he took some in his hand.

"What is this?" he thought.

He made a ball and threw it. Then he laughed happily.

He stood on the top of a mountain and he looked down at a pretty little town. It was very different from Halloweentown. There were beautiful lights on the houses and decorations on the trees. People moved happily across the ice on strange, long shoes. They laughed and sang.

"Nobody is afraid here!" Jack thought. "They aren't screaming. Nobody's dead!"

Jack felt very happy, too.

"This is the prettiest place in the world," he thought.

Then he looked up and he saw the name of this place above the street - CHRISTMASTOWN.

"That's a funny name for a place!" he thought. "But I think I'm going to like it here!"

Jack started to move down the mountain. He didn't know anything about snow or ice, of course. So when he started to walk, his feet flew out from under him. He moved, on his bottom, as fast as a river down a mountain.

"This is very funny," he thought. "Maybe they're inviting me to Christmastown! I hope they are. This place is great!"

At the bottom of the mountain he sat for a minute and looked at the beautiful world in front of him. He felt happy and warm inside.

Then he stood up. He looked up at the sky and laughed.

"I want to see everything here!" he thought. "I want to run and jump! I want to sing and dance! I'm not an old dead skeleton without feelings - I'm living again! But what happens in this place? I'm going to look around!"

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It was morning in Halloweentown and the Mayor stood outside Jack's house. He wanted to start making plans for next year's celebrations. There were only three hundred sixty-four days before Halloween! But Jack didn't open his door. The Mayor shouted. There was no answer.

There were some vampires in the street, so he asked them about Jack.

"We'll try to find him for you, Mayor!" they said.

The vampires asked witches and skeletons around town. "Where's Jack? Do you know?"

"We don't know but we'll help you," they said.

Later that day everybody knew - Jack was not in Halloweentown!

But where was he? Nobody leaves Halloweentown!

Chapter 3. Jack's Christmas Plans

"Do toys scare little boys?" asked an ugly old witch. Jack thought, "They'll never understand Christmas."

On the night of December 24, the night before Christmas, everybody in Christmastown was very happy. Santa Claus came on this night every year with toys for good girls and boys. At nine o'clock most of the children were in their beds and the youngest were asleep. But a lot of older children couldn't sleep because they were very excited. So they closed their eyes and waited for the sound of Santa Claus's feet.

Jack Skellington walked around the town and looked through the windows of the pretty little houses. He saw the children in their beds and he could see a Christmas tree in every house. Each tree had beautiful red and green decorations on it and pretty lights. He loved everything in this place. Suddenly, he had a great idea.

"I'm going to go back to Halloweentown," he thought. "I've got a great plan!"

* * *

Sally was busy in her kitchen with the flowers for the Doctor's drink.

"He'll sleep a long time after he drinks this," she thought.

"Where's my drink?" the Doctor shouted from another room.

"It's almost ready," Sally shouted.

She took it to him and watched carefully. He put his nose near the cup.

"What did you put in my drink tonight?" he asked her.

"I put some hot water, some milk, some sugar..."

"You didn't put any flowers in it, I hope," said the old man. "You did that to me before. I remember! You wanted to run away. I remember that, too!"

"Flowers? You are funny," said Sally. "Drink it and then I'll bring your dinner."

"I want you to drink some first," he said.

"It's very hot, so I'll take a little on my spoon," she said.

Sally took a spoon with holes in it from her skirt. She put the cup near her mouth and used the spoon. The drink fell through the holes and back into the cup. The old man's eyes were not very good, so he didn't see it.

"Very nice," said Sally. "Now you drink it."

She gave him the cup and the Doctor drank it. Then he fell asleep with his head on the table. Sally put a warm jacket over him and she ran out the door.

It was late at night but nobody in Halloweentown was asleep. They were very sad about Jack. Where was he? The witches didn't scream and the vampire children didn't want to play. Everything was quiet. The Mayor was the saddest because he couldn't plan the next Halloween without Jack.

Suddenly, he heard a dog.

"Listen! Is that Zero?" shouted the Mayor.

Then another sound - a strange sound - came from behind the large doors in the wall around Halloweentown. When the doors opened, Jack arrived in a big red sleigh. Zero flew behind him and his big red nose lit the way. The witches, skeletons, and vampires jumped up and down and laughed.

Everybody shouted, "Jack's back!"

"Jack! Where were you?" asked the Mayor.

"I'll tell you... I'll tell everybody!" Jack said loudly. "I want everybody in town to come here in two hours."

Sally was in the woods when she heard about Jack from one of the witches. She wanted to listen to Jack so she went back into town.

"The Doctor's asleep, so I have time," she thought.

In the center of town Jack, stood on a box in front of the witches, skeletons, and vampires. A lot of small black animals flew around excitedly.

"I want to tell you about a wonderful place! Its name is Christmastown," Jack said.

"Christmastown? What's that?" some witches asked.

"It's a world of wonderful white snow. It's a beautiful place, a happy place. Look at this!" Jack said.

He showed them a Christmas tree. Everybody's eyes opened wide.

"And look! This is a present!" he shouted.

He took a box with pretty paper from under the tree and showed it to them.

"What is it?" an ugly old vampire asked. He had a very white face, very black hair, and a very red mouth.

"A present is a box with pretty paper around it... and inside...," Jack said slowly.

"What's inside?" called a witch.

"We don't know," Jack answered.

"Don't know? Why not?" The people of Halloweentown didn't understand.

Quickly, Jack took off the paper and opened the box.

"Inside, there's a toy!" said Jack. He showed them a child's toy.

"A boy? That is strange!" said one of the skeletons.

"Not a boy! A toy" shouted Jack.

"Do toys scare little boys?" asked an ugly old witch.

Jack thought, "They'll never understand Christmas."

Then he had a good idea. "Maybe they'll understand this."

He looked at each of them very carefully and he spoke quietly and slowly.

"There's a very old man in Christmastown," Jack said. "He's big and round with long, white hair. His clothes are red and he flies through the night sky in a big red sleigh. He shouts loudly and laughs! They call him Santa Claus! He puts presents under Christmas trees inside every house. When the children wake up in the morning, they find them. Then they open them."

Everybody was excited when Jack finished his story. They were a little scared, too, and that was good.

Jack left and went home. "How can I tell them about Christmas?" he thought. "I have to find a better way. First, I have to understand."

Later that night in his bed, Jack looked in a lot of books. He read Christmas stories and he found Christmas songs. But what were they really about?

"Maybe the Doctor can help me," Jack thought. "Maybe his chemicals will teach me more about toys, decorations, and Christmas trees! I'll go to his house and discuss everything with him in the morning."

Chapter 4. Chemicals for Jack

Sally thought, "What does this mean? Does Jack love me, or not? Or is something bad going to happen?"

Sally's drink for the Doctor didn't work very well. It wasn't very strong, so the Doctor woke up after three hours. He could move fast in his chair and he found Sally. He took her back home and put her in her room at the top of the old house.

"You won't do that to me again!" the Doctor shouted angrily.

"It was a... a mistake!" she said.

She thought, "Why didn't I put more flowers in the drink? How did I make that stupid mistake?"

Now she was in her room and couldn't get out.

Jack arrived in the morning. Sally heard him from her room.

"Why is Jack here?" she thought.

She tried to listen to the conversation between the Doctor and Jack. She couldn't hear Jack very well, but she heard the Doctor.

"Take these chemicals, Jack, but be careful. They're very dangerous. I made a mistake one time and... look at me in this chair."

Jack took the bottles of chemicals and went home. He opened some of the bottles. Very carefully, he put them over fire. He put a toy boat into the bottle of green chemicals. He put the bottle over the fire and watched.

Nothing happened. Then he cut some Christmas paper and put it into some red chemicals. Again, nothing happened. He worked for hours, but he didn't learn very much about Christmas.

"What will happen when I put decorations into these chemicals?" Jack thought. He put some in and a green light shone.

From Sally's window, she saw the green light in Jack's window. She wanted to go to him and help him. She felt something strange inside - a happy and sad feeling. For the first time in her life she felt love. She really was in love with Jack.

"I want to be his wife," Sally thought. "How can I get away from the Doctor? I can't stay here!"

Sally stood at her window for a long time, without much hope.

"I have to help Jack!" she thought.

So she made a present for him. She put some dry flowers, some black vegetables, and some green water into a bottle. With the bottle in her hand, she stood at her open window and looked down. It was a long way to the ground, but she wasn't afraid. She jumped.

When she hit the ground, one of her arms fell off.

"Not again!" she said. But she took the arm with her other hand and put it on again very quickly.

Then she ran to Jack's house as fast as she could. She stood under his window and looked up. At that same minute, Jack looked down. When their eyes met, he smiled. Suddenly, he felt really happy - but why? He couldn't understand.

Sally put her bottle into his mailbox and ran away. She couldn't stay and talk to him. She wanted to but she couldn't. Sally was a quiet girl and she never said very much to anybody.

Jack watched her and felt warm inside.

When she was near the walls of the town, Sally sat down.

"He smiled at me" she thought excitedly.

There was a pretty flower next to her and she pulled it out of the ground. She began to pull off the petals and to repeat these words:

"He loves me," she said. She pulled off the second petal. "He loves me not..." she said. She did this again and again.

Strangely, the flower in her hand began going around and around very fast. It changed into a beautiful, small Christmas tree with pretty lights! Then, suddenly, the little Christmas tree was on fire. There was

nothing in her hand. She sat there in the cold, dark night for a long time and tried to understand.

"What does this mean?" she thought. "Does Jack love me, or not? Or is something bad going to happen? Are Jack's plans for Christmas a big mistake?"

Chapter 5. Jack's Great Idea

"Were going to have Christmas in Halloweentown this year. You will have to work hard, but it will be wonderful."

"Were going to have Christmas in Halloweentown this year. You will have to work hard, but it will be wonderful."

Jack worked hard all night with the chemicals, but he didn't find any answers to his questions. What was Christmas? What did it mean?

He stood at his open window and thought hard.

"How do these things work?" he thought. "Why do people in Christmastown want to sing when they see these decorations? Why are people excited when they open these presents?"

He stood there for hours.

When it was almost morning, Jack found the answer.

"I know! It's easy! Why didn't I think of this before?" he shouted. He jumped up and down excitedly.

"Halloweentown can have Christmas! Why not? We can make decorations and put them on a tree! We can put presents under the tree! We can make presents for every little boy and girl. And this year I'll be Santa Claus."

He shouted happily, "Christmas will be ours!"

It was time for another meeting. He couldn't wait, so he ran to the Mayor's house. The Mayor was asleep.

"Wake up! We have to talk to everybody tonight!" Jack told him excitedly.

"OK, Jack. But it's very early. Go away now," the Mayor said.

Later, the Mayor called everybody to the town's center.

Jack said, "Everybody's here, I see. Thank you. I have a new

plan."

Everybody listened carefully.

"We're going to have Christmas in Halloweentown this year. You will have to work hard, but it will be wonderful!"

"Will it be really scary?" asked a vampire.

"No, not scary... but happy!" answered Jack.

The Mayor thought, "This is a strange plan, but I'm not going to stop him. When they are happily celebrating Christmas in Halloweentown, they'll be happy with me, too."

Jack said, "I want the witches to make Christmas cakes. Can you do that, witches?"

"Yes, Jack, we always cook wonderful things. We can make cakes without any problem!" they said.

They laughed and started discussing ideas for the cakes.

Jack said, "I want the vampires to make red and green decorations. OK, vampires?"

"Can we use blood for the red decorations?" asked one young vampire.

"No, no blood in the decorations, please!" said Jack.

Then the Doctor arrived.

"Doctor! You're here! Thank you," said Jack. "Can you please make four reindeer for Santa Claus's sleigh?"

Jack showed the Doctor a picture of reindeer.

"Can you do it?" he asked.

"Of course, Jack. I'll start now," said the Doctor.

The Doctor left and three young boys arrived.

"Jack, Jack!" said the Mayor. "Be careful! It's Oogie Boogie's boys!"

Chapter 6. Jack's Little Helpers

Jack's three young helpers had a very different idea about Christmas in Halloweentown - so the nightmare before Christmas was beginning.

Lock, Shock, and Barrel were three young boys. They were Halloweentown's famous trick-or-treaters and they played a lot of tricks on everybody in town. They always had a plan, and their plans were never very nice.

Nobody in town liked their boss, Oogie Boogie. He was a big, round bag full of maggots! He had a big head, short legs, and long arms and sometimes the maggots fell out of him through holes in the bag.

Oogie Boogie went around the woods at night and ate a lot of animals. He drank their blood. Sometimes he ate people, too! He was always hungry. He didn't like good children and they were really afraid of him. He was the scariest thing in Halloweentown. When he scared children, they ran to Jack. Oogie Boogie was different from everybody in Halloweentown because he didn't like Jack. The Mayor didn't like Oogie Boogie or his bad boys. So his eyes opened wide when he saw Oogie's boys.

"Why does Jack want to talk to them?" he thought. "Is he crazy?"

Jack spoke very quietly into each boy's ear. "I want you three boys to do something for me. But don't tell anybody. It's very important. Nobody can know."

"What? This isn't possible!" the Mayor thought. "Why is Jack making plans with them? What's he saying?"

"One last thing..." Jack said to the boys. "Don't tell Oogie Boogie. I don't want him to know anything!"

"Of course, Jack," the three trick-or-treaters said. "We won't say a word to Oogie Boogie about this."

They ran away with big smiles on their faces. Were they happy about Jack's important job? Or did they have other plans? Did Jack do the right thing or did he make a big mistake?

"This is going to be wonderful," thought Jack. "This is the happiest day of my life. Those three trick-or-treaters are going to do something good for the first time in their lives. And this time there'll be no tricks."

Everybody in Halloweentown wanted to help with his Christmas plans. Nothing could be better.

But Christmas was now in dangerous hands. Jack's three young helpers had a very different idea about Christmas in Halloweentown - so the nightmare before Christmas was beginning.

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Lock, Shock, and Barrel loved nightmares as much as they loved tricks. When they got to their home at the top of a big tree, they started planning their trick on Jack.

"Jack is a stupid skeleton!" they laughed.

Lock said, "He wants us to go to Christmastown and get Santa Claus? We'll bring Santa back here... but we won't give him to Jack! We'll scare him with our tricks!"

Shock was more intelligent than Lock and he had a better idea.

"Listen... We'll get Santa Claus and put him in our biggest Halloween bag!" said Shock. "We'll bring him here and show him to Jack. But then we'll give him to Oogie Boogie! Oogie will really enjoy that big fat man for his dinner!"

"Great!" shouted Barrel. "That will teach Jack Skellington a lesson!"

The three trick-or-treaters laughed and danced around the room. Then they got busy with their plan.

Chapter 7. Big Mistakes

Santa wanted to ask, "What does 'trick-or-treat' mean?" But they put a big bag over his head before he could ask his question.

Not one witch, vampire, or skeleton in Halloweentown could say "No" to Jack. When he asked for happy music, he got it. When he asked for cakes, decorations, and toys, he got them. But when he asked Sally for some red clothes, she didn't want to make them. She wasn't happy about Jack's plan. She thought about the Christmas tree on fire in her hand and she felt afraid.

"Jack, listen to me," Sally said. "This isn't going to work."

"Yes, it is! You can do it. I only want a wonderful red Santa Claus jacket and some red pants!" Jack answered happily. He could think of

nothing but his clothes for Christmas.

"I'll make them for you, Jack. But I think it's a mistake," she said sadly.

Sally could make clothes very well and she did a very good job on Jack's new red pants and jacket. When she finished her work, she left his house. She walked to the center of town.

Jack's next visitors were Lock, Shock, and Barrel. They arrived with a very big Halloween bag. But they did not have candy inside the bag this time.

"Jack, we caught him!" they shouted.

"Open it! Let's see him!" said Jack excitedly.

But when the three boys opened the bag, Jack's eyes and mouth opened wide. He did not see an old man in red clothes. He saw an animal with very long ears. It jumped out of the bag and ran around the room. Up and down, up and down.

"What's that?" Jack asked. "It's not Santa Claus!"

"Isn't it?" asked Shock.

"But we went through the door in the tree," said Lock.

"Which door?" asked Jack.

"The door with the egg and the yellow flower," said Barrel.

"You went through the wrong door!" Jack said. "Go back and go through the door with the Christmas tree on it. And take this thing back to its tree!"

"It was Lock's mistake!" said Shock.

"It was Barrel's mistake!" said Lock.

The angry words turned into a fight. Shock hit Lock and Barrel hit Shock. Jack watched them for a minute or two. Then he moved very quickly and scared them with the sound of his skeleton arms.

Usually he only did that on Halloween night.

The boys, afraid, jumped and ran out of the door. The animal with the long ears followed them.

"Take that thing back to its tree and bring Santa Claus here," Jack shouted behind the three trick-or-treaters. "And be nice to Santa!"

When they were in the woods again, Shock turned to his friends.

"How did we make that mistake?" he asked.

"When I saw the egg and flower on the tree's door..." Lock said slowly.

Shock said, "You shouted 'decorations' and we went inside! You stupid boy!"

* * *

Everybody in Halloweentown was very busy and Jack watched them happily. The Doctor came with his reindeer and they were almost as big as horses.

In Christmastown Santa Claus was busy, too. His helpers' beautiful toys were almost ready. He looked at the names of the children in Christmastown. He had a present for each child.

"Are the cakes ready, Mrs. Claus?" he called to his wife.

In the kitchen, Mrs. Claus smiled. She loved cakes and she enjoyed her job on the night before Christmas very much.

"Here comes the last one!" she shouted happily.

Santa Claus said, "I'm going to get the reindeer. They have to pull a very heavy sleigh tonight, so I'll give them more food and water."

"Good idea!" his wife said.

Suddenly, there was a loud noise at their front door.

"Who's that?" Santa shouted to his helpers.

But his helpers were singing loudly and happily in the next room, so they didn't hear him.

"I'll answer the door!" he called to his wife.

When he opened it, he saw three strange children in very strange dark clothes.

"Trick or treat!" they shouted.

Santa wanted to ask, "What does 'trick or treat' mean?" But they put a big bag over his head before he could ask his question. From inside the bag, he shouted for his wife and helpers, but they didn't hear him.

Chapter 8. Santa Claus is Coming to Town

"Hi, Santa Claus!" said Jack happily. "I'm going to give you a

Christmas present. This year I'll be Santa Claus, so you won't have to work."

In Halloweentown, the vampires finished making Christmas lights - with little skeleton heads. The youngest witches finished making their toys - wonderfully dangerous toys. Jack's plans for Christmas, the most important thing in his life, were almost ready. But he didn't look at the lights and the toys before they went into the bags.

"Now I can dress," he thought happily. "Sally, bring my clothes, please!" he said.

She brought Jack his new red jacket and pants and he put them on.

"These are wonderful! How do I look?" he asked Sally.

"I liked you better in black clothes, Jack," she said sadly.

But Jack was excited and he didn't listen to her answer. He ran out the door to his wonderful sleigh. In the back of the sleigh there was a mountain of big bags, full of dangerous toys, scary presents, and strange packages. Jack was as happy as a trick-or-treater on Halloween night with a big bag full of candy.

Before he got into the sleigh, he heard somebody shout, "Jack!"

He turned and there were Lock, Shock, and Barrel with a very big bag.

"He's in here! And he's really heavy!" shouted Barrel.

"Let's put him down!" said Shock.

"Let me out!" shouted the old man inside the bag.

They opened the bag and Santa Claus fell out. His face was as red as his jacket and pants. His hair was as white as snow. He looked around and he saw the ugliest people in the world. He was in a nightmare and everybody was a skeleton or a witch or a vampire!

"Where am I?" he thought.

"Hi, Santa Claus!" said Jack happily. "I'm going to give you a Christmas present. This year I'll be Santa Claus, so you won't have to work. You can sit down and enjoy a quiet night here in Halloweentown! I'll do everything. Look! I have a sleigh, presents, a red jacket and pants!"

Santa Claus's eyes opened wide. "What does he mean?" he thought. "This is the happiest night of the year for me! The children are waiting - and I'm going to be late! But I..." he started to say.

"It's OK," said Jack. "You can have a vacation."

"This is a nightmare!" Santa thought. But he couldn't speak because he couldn't find the right words.

"Come with us, Santa. We'll take you to Jack's house and you can sleep there," said Shock.

"But I don't want to sleep!" Santa shouted.

The three trick-or-treaters took him away, but not to Jack's house.

"This is a nightmare," Sally thought. "I have to do something!"

Then she had an idea. Quickly, she walked away and began working on her plan. First, she had to get the right chemicals.

Before Jack could leave in his sleigh, the Mayor called everybody into the town's center. He wanted to say goodbye to Jack because he wanted everybody to look at him.

When he finished speaking, something very strange happened.

"What's happening?" Jack cried.

He looked around at the black sky, but it wasn't black. A thick, white fog, as thick as the worst London fog in an old black-and-white movie, moved into the town. Nobody could see anything.

"The reindeer can't see their noses!" Jack said. "We can't leave now."

"Oh no! No Christmas!" everybody cried. "No presents!"

There was only one person in Halloweentown with a smile on her face. Sally was happy with her fog.

"Jack will understand one day. I had to do this," she thought. "I'm doing it for him."

She walked nearer so she could see Jack's face. "Is he very sad?" she thought. "I hope not."

But Jack wasn't very sad. His eyes were on Zero's red nose. It shone in the dark and it shone in the fog!

"Will you show us the way, Zero?" Jack asked his little friend. Zero couldn't say no. He jumped up and down happily.

"Goodbye, everybody!" Jack shouted.

Zero jumped onto the first reindeer's back and they flew up through the fog and across the night sky.

* * *

Everybody in Halloweentown laughed and shouted happily. Only one person had a sad face.

"Goodbye Jack," said Sally quietly. Then she looked up and said, "There's something in the wind. What's going to happen to Jack tonight? It won't be good... but I hope I'm wrong."

Chapter 9. Dangerous Toys for Good Girls and Boys

Some toys screamed and some toys laughed wildly. One very long toy animal started eating the Christmas tree!

"Where are we going to take him?" asked Barrel.

"To Oogie Boogie, of course," said Lock and Shock. "That's right. I almost forgot!" Barrel said. "Oogie will like that!" Santa Claus listened to these three strange little children. "Who is Oogie Boogie?" he thought. "What's going to happen to Christmas?" Inside the bag, he felt very hot.

"I want you to open this bag now!" he shouted. "Christmas is about love! Don't you know?"

"No!" they shouted. And then they laughed wildly.

* * *

Jack drove the sleigh across the sky. In front of him, Zero's nose was as light as the morning sun. The reindeer easily pulled the heavy sleigh with the presents in it. Jack enjoyed every minute of his new job.

He stopped his sleigh at each house and put pretty presents under each Christmas tree. In one house, a little boy came down the stairs and watched him. When Jack turned away from the Christmas tree, he saw the young child.

"Here, little boy! A present from Santa!" said Jack. And he gave the boy a present.

Jack had to go to the next house. He couldn't wait and watch the

boy's face. But when the child opened the present, he didn't smile. His face went white and his mouth fell open. He screamed wildly.

Jack heard the boy's screams and he smiled. "He likes it," Jack thought. "Nobody is scared of me and I'm making everybody happy!"

After "Santa Claus" left their houses in the middle of the night, some of the other children quietly left their beds. Their little feet slowly took them down the stairs because they couldn't wait for Christmas morning. Each child carefully took a present from under the tree and quietly opened it. Then, with their mouths and eyes wide open... they screamed.

Toys ran around Christmas trees after the children. Heads jumped out of boxes and scared little girls and boys. Some toys screamed and some toys laughed wildly. One very long toy animal started eating the Christmas tree!

The children ran as fast as they could up the stairs to their parents' bedrooms. Their screams woke up their baby brothers and sisters. They woke up their dogs and their cats. The children woke up their parents, and their parents woke up the police. It was the worst Christmas of everybody's lives... and the scariest!

The police were busy because the telephone calls didn't stop.

"Turn off your lights and don't open your doors!" they said to the mothers and fathers on the phone. "Yes, we know about this crazy man in Santa Claus's clothes. We'll stop him. Don't go near him. He's very dangerous."

"What are we going to do?" a young policeman asked.

"Get our biggest guns," said his boss.

The police worked quickly. Then every policeman and policewoman went outside and looked up into the sky. They had to do something. They had to stop this man.

Chapter 10. Problems for Jack and Santa

"I wanted to do something good, Zero," said Jack. "Now look at me. Look at the sleigh. Where are the reindeer? We have to find Santa Claus."

There was only one happy face in town. High above the police station in a strange sleigh, a skeleton's smile shone. Inside his head were pictures of happy children's faces. He had no idea about the problems below.

The police used their strongest lights. Their biggest guns were ready, too.

But when Jack saw their lights, he smiled again.

"They're celebrating this wonderful night," he thought.

"Look, Zero!" he said to his little dog. "They're celebrating! They're having a wonderful Christmas!"

Then a gun almost hit one of the reindeer.

"Was that a mistake?" thought Jack. "Or are they shooting at us?"

The guns didn't stop and Jack started feeling scared.

"I don't like this. It's getting very dangerous up here," he said to Zero.

Zero put his head down and looked up at Jack with his big, sad eyes.

Suddenly, one of the policemen shot at Jack. It didn't hit him, but it made a big hole in the sleigh. When they shot again, it hit the sleigh for a second time. The sleigh broke in two.

"No! What are they doing?" Jack cried. "Are they crazy? We have a lot of toys on this sleigh! Think of the children!"

Suddenly, everything began to fall and the reindeer flew away. Jack hit the ground hard and one of his arms broke off. But worse than that, the sleigh was on fire. Now he knew. His Christmas plan was a mistake. That felt worse than his head, his legs, or his arms.

Zero ran and brought Jack's arm back to him. Jack put it back on easily.

"I wanted to do something good, Zero," said Jack. "Now look at me. Look at the sleigh. Where are the reindeer? We have to find Santa Claus. Only he can change this nightmare into a happy Christmas for the boys and girls."

Jack quickly ran and found a churchyard. He jumped down a hole

in the ground and ran through the dark woods back to Halloweentown.

* * *

When the police started shooting, Sally heard the guns. She heard the witches in Halloweentown, too. Witches always know everything and they knew about the problems in Christmastown.

"Jack's plan isn't working. Only Santa Claus can help him," she thought. "Where can I find him?"

She thought about Lock, Shock, and Barrel. They were friends with Oogie Boogie.

"I'm going to go to Oogie Boogie's house. I'll find Santa Claus there!" she thought.

Ten minutes later, Sally stood outside the hole to Oogie Boogie's dark, dirty underground house. She looked down the hole and, of course, Santa Claus was there. He was in a chair and he couldn't get out of it. Oogie stood over him. She could see maggots around Oogie's mouth. Some climbed up and down his arms. He danced around Santa and scaled the old man. This was Oogie Boogie's idea of a good time.

Sally had to help Santa Claus.

"You're old and ugly, but I'm going to eat you for my dinner!" Oogie Boogie said to Santa. "I'm hungry, so I'll start the fire now."

"No!" cried Santa. "Please, don't eat me! The children are waiting for their Christmas presents. I have to go. They can't celebrate Christmas without me!"

Oogie Boogie laughed. "Go? Never! You're dinner, Santa Claus!"

"What am I going to do?" Santa Claus thought. "This is the worst place in the world! What's going to happen to Christmas?"

Oogie Boogie sang and laughed. The fire got bigger and hotter.

"I am really hungry, Santa Claus," he said. "Do you know about me? I scare everybody! Are you afraid of me?"

"No, I am not!" Santa Claus said. He moved in his chair and tried to get free. "I'm Santa Claus and I'm not afraid of anybody."

Chapter 11. Oogie Boogie's Scary House

"It's not the end of Christmas, I hope!" Jack said. "The end of

Christmas? Never!" shouted Santa.

When the Mayor heard about Jack's fall from the sky, he sadly told everybody in his town. They all looked down at the ground. They didn't scream or shout. They stood and remembered their great friend.

"We will never see our dear friend Jack Skellington again," the Mayor said. "This is a very sad day for us all."

Everybody felt very bad, but nobody was sadder than the Mayor.

Sally could hear the Mayor from inside Oogie Boogie's house. He spoke loudly and she tried hard to listen to his words. They sounded very important and very sad. When Sally understood, she cried quietly. Oogie Boogie laughed at her.

"Now I'm the scariest person in Halloween town!" he shouted happily. "No more Jack Skellington! Yes!"

Sally was in Oogie Boogie's house because she tried to help Santa Claus. Oogie Boogie caught her. He put her on another chair, next to Santa, so she couldn't get away. Oogie Boogie laughed at her, but Sally wasn't afraid.

"You can laugh now," she said to him angrily. "But you'll be sorry!" Oogie laughed again. "Very funny, Sally!" he said.

* * *

But Jack's life didn't end when his sleigh hit the ground. He ran as fast as he could through the woods, with Zero behind him. Then he heard Oogie Boogie's laugh under the ground and stopped suddenly. He looked down the hole to Oogie Boogie's house and he could see Santa and Sally in the chairs and the hungry Oogie Boogie by the fire.

"Look, Zero!" said Jack. "He wants to cook them for his dinner! He's the worst bag of maggots in the world! He'll be sorry!"

Oogie Boogie took Santa and Sally out of their chairs and he pushed them near the big fire in the middle of his dirty kitchen. It was very hot and Sally and Santa screamed.

Jack jumped down the hole into Oogie Boogie's house. That really scared the ugly bag of maggots and he jumped. Santa and Sally quickly got away from him.

"Jack?" shouted Oogie Boogie. "You're not really dead!" Oogie Boogie turned on a machine in his kitchen and a lot of knives started shooting at Jack. He jumped out of their way, but more knives came at him.

"Come this way, you old skeleton!" shouted Oogie Boogie. He laughed wildly. The knives flew at Jack from the left and from the right. Jack jumped this way and that way.

"Look behind you, Jack!" shouted Sally when more knives came from the dining-room.

Jack jumped out of the way again.

"Goodbye, Jack!" shouted Oogie Boogie.

He jumped up onto a shelf and was up high above Jack's head.

Jack looked up.

"You're not being very nice to my friends," he said. Oogie Boogie laughed loudly.

Jack's eyes turned to Oogie Boogie's foot. He could see a small hole in it. Jack had an idea. Before Oogie Boogie could stop him, Jack put his finger into the hole. Then he pulled it hard.

The hole got bigger... and bigger. Maggots started falling out of Oogie Boogie's foot. More and more fell onto the floor. They were free from Oogie Boogie - and they moved away fast! Oogie Boogie got smaller... and smaller.

"Look at me! My maggots!" cried Oogie Boogie. "I'm dying! This is the end for me!"

The maggots quickly climbed up the walls and out of Oogie Boogie's house. Santa watched them and he felt sick. When the last one ran near him, Santa killed it with his big black shoe. That really was the end of Oogie Boogie.

"Santa Claus, I'm very sorry," said Jack quietly. "I wanted to help - but I didn't."

"Christmas is more than a bag of toys and a red hat," Santa said.

He pulled the hat from Jack's head and turned away.

"It's not the end of Christmas, I hope!" Jack said.

"The end of Christmas? Never!" shouted Santa.

He quickly flew up and out of Oogie Boogie's house.

"Everything will be OK, Jack," said Sally. "Santa Claus will give everybody their presents. He can do it before morning."

Jack turned to Sally. He looked carefully at his good friend.

"She has a beautiful face," he thought. "Why didn't I see that before?"

"Why did you come down here?" he asked.

"I... I wanted to..." she said slowly.

"Help me?" Jack asked.

Sally smiled. Jack wanted to take her in his arms, but something stopped him.

"Jack! Jack!"

The Mayor arrived with Lock, Shock, and Barrel. They looked down into the hole.

"There he is!" shouted Shock. "He's fine," said Lock. "We told you," said Barrel.

"Everybody is waiting for you, Jack!" the Mayor said happily. "Let's go to the center of town!" He put out his hand. "Take my hand," he cried. "Help me, boys," he said to Lock, Shock, and Barrel.

Everybody pulled. First Jack came out of Oogie Boogies dark and scary home, then Sally.

They walked as fast as they could away from that dark hole to the Mayor's car.

Chapter 12. Christmas Comes to Halloweentown

Suddenly, some beautiful white snow started falling on Halloweentown - a Christmas present from Santa Claus.

When they saw Jack in the Mayor's car, the witches, the vampires, and the skeletons shouted, "Jack! Jack! You're home!" Suddenly, a louder sound came from the sky above. Everybody looked up.

"Happy Christmas, everybody!" shouted Santa Claus. He drove across the night sky with his sleigh full of presents. Jack smiled happily up at Santa.

Suddenly, some beautiful white snow started falling on Halloweentown - a Christmas present from Santa Claus. "What is this?" asked the witches.

They put out their long fingers and tried to catch the snow.

"White blood?" asked the vampires.

"It's cold!" said the skeletons.

"It's snow!" Jack said happily.

The witches, the vampires, the trick-or-treaters, the black cats, the skeletons, the Mayor, and Jack jumped up and down in the snow and laughed. Christmas was here... in Halloweentown!

Only one person was not there. Above the town's center, Sally stood and looked down on the celebrations below. The snow was beautiful but the smile on her face was sad. She watched for a minute or two and then she had to turn away.

"How does he feel about me?" she thought.

She sat down next to some pretty flowers and pulled one from the ground. With her small fingers, she pulled the petals off, one at a time.

"He loves me, he loves me not... he loves me..." she said quietly

Down in the town, Jack stopped suddenly and looked around. He wanted to celebrate with Sally. But where was she? When he couldn't find Sally's face, he had to look for her. He left his friends and walked to the top of the town through the snow.

He didn't have to look for very long. Near the wall around the town, he saw her with the flower in her hand. When he was near her, he heard her words. She didn't see him because her eyes were on the petals. But then she felt his eyes on her. She turned slowly and looked at him. He looked at her and smiled. He finished her words.

"He loves you," said Jack.

Sally stood up and Jack took her hands in his.

The nightmare before Christmas ended happily for everybody. (But not for Oogie Boogie, of course.)

Santa Claus never forgot that night before Christmas. It was the longest night in his life. He remembered Jack Skellington very well for many years. And every time he thought of Jack, he smiled.

It was strange, but Santa Claus enjoyed that night in Halloweentown. He couldn't understand why. He thought about the really scary vampires and witches, and those three trick-or-treaters. They were different. It was exciting.

Of course, Santa Claus could never say this to his wife or to his little helpers. What could he say about Halloween? How could he tell them about life there?

"It's a very strange place," he told his wife. "I hated every minute in that place," he told his helpers.

But for years after that night, Santa Claus sometimes left Christmastown for an hour or two when he was bored with his happy helpers and their happy songs.

When his life felt boring, he climbed into his sleigh. He drove to Halloweentown and there he visited his old friend Jack Skellington. They talked about the year when Jack wanted to be Santa Claus.

Jack was always happy when Santa visited him. He liked to ask questions about Christmastown and Santa liked to ask Jack about Halloweentown. They could talk for hours and they were never bored.

- THE END -

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