

Next Years'

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Submitted: June 25, 2009

Updated: June 25, 2009

Brendon Skellington never thought much about his father, Jack's, status in Halloween Town--until his sister suggests one of them might someday take his place.

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The moon was beginning to sink below the horizon as, all around, citizens of this small town anxiously awaited the finale of their annual celebration. Nobody knew what it would be like--every year, it was a surprise for everyone!

One wraith carrying an unlit torch descended into the middle of the crowd, leaving in its path misty tendrils that disappeared in the night air. It swirled around in circles, a deathly expression haunting its face. Another wraith joined the first, also carrying a torch, appearing seemingly out of nowhere. More and more gathered with their torches, and as they congregated, spinning in their circle, they were nothing more than a small storm of white fog.

A single beam of moonlight--all that was needed--hit the torches, lighting them one at a time, and the wraiths flew faster, creating rings of fire as the moon sank lower.

Its light between the earth and sky caused a bright flash. The wraiths sped away in different directions, startled, their torches' flames blown out in their haste. And in the middle of the crowd, they had left behind a person.

No--more accurately, a skeleton.

He stood straight and tall, arms in the air, as the crowd went positively wild!

After they had settled down a bit, Jack Skellington took a bow. "What an absolutely dreadful Halloween," he said. "Everyone, none of this would be possible without your efforts. Thank you!"

The crowd was set off again. Jack frowned as he searched it. "Huh. So they couldn't come, after all."

His thoughts were interrupted by multiple voices speaking at him.

"Not without you, Jack!"

"You're an inspiration to us all!"

"Could we have a better leader?"

Jack smiled and said, "It's nothing, really..." It was the same thing every year, but that didn't stop all of Halloween's citizens from drowning Jack in praise every time.

Eventually, he slipped away, and started back home. He couldn't wait to get there, and be greeted by--

"MOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!"

The little skeleton boy's cry came so suddenly that it shocked all who heard it into cringing.

"Goodness, Brendon! What is it?" shouted his ragdoll mother, Sally, hands over her ears as she made her way from the kitchen to the living room.

"Jane took my baseball and then she hid it somewhere!" Next to Brendon sat another child, a girl with her red hair in braided pigtails, wearing a pink dress and an annoyed expression.

"I did not take it, Brendon. You lost it," she replied, trying to keep her tone calm.

"Did not!" shouted the boy.

"Would you two stop arguing for half a moment?" said Jack.

Everything was quiet. But not for more than a second. The two children stood up.

"Daddy!" They ran to him and hugged him.

Sally sighed. "It's a good thing you're back, Jack. Maybe you can get some sense into these two."

"So, what are you arguing about this time?"

Brendon's joyful mood evaporated. He pointed at his sister with his stitched up arm. "She took my ball!"

Jane smacked his arm. "No, I didn't!"

Jack sighed. At that moment, a bark sounded from outside. Jack turned to the door, and when he opened it, Zero, his faithful little friend, rushed in, a baseball in his jaws.

"Well, there it is!" said Sally. "Does that mean this argument can end?" She looked sternly at Brendon.

"No! Zero, Jane took it, didn't she?" said Brendon, sounding confident that he was right.

The little ghost dog shook his head and dropped the ball at Brendon's feet.

"See? I told you," said Jane. Brendon made an annoyed sound.

"Brendon, why don't you apologize to your sister?" said Sally.

He hesitated. Then, he said as quietly as he could, "Sorry, Jane."

His sister stuck her tongue out at him.

"Jane!" shouted Sally.

It looked like it was going to be a long day.