

# To Kill A Warlock, H.P. Mallory

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## ONE

There was no way in hell I was looking in the mirror.

I knew it was bad when I glanced down. My stomach, if that's what you wanted to call it, was five times its usual size and exploded around me in a mass of jelly-like fat. To make matters worse, it was the color of overcooked peas—that certain jaundiced yellow.

"Wow, Dulce, you look like crap," Sam said.

I tried to give her my best "don't piss me off" look, but I wasn't sure my face complied. Shit in a hat, I had no idea what my face looked like. If it was anything like my stomach, it had to be canned-pea green and covered with raised bumps. The bumps in question weren't small like what you'd see on a toad—more like the size of dinner plates. Inside each bump, my skin was a darker green. And the texture...it was like running your finger across the tops of your teeth—jagged with valleys and mountains.

"Can you fix it?" I asked, my voice coming out monster-deep. I shouldn't have been surprised—I was a good seven feet tall now. And with the substantial body mass, my voice could only be deep.

"Yeah, I think I can." Sam's voice didn't waver which was a good sign.

I turned to avoid the sun's rays as they broke through the window, the sunlight not feeling too great against my boils.

I glanced at Sam's perfect sitting room, complete with a sofa, love seat, and two armchairs all in a soothing beige, the de facto color for inoffensive furniture. Better Homes and Gardens sat unattended on Sam's coffee table—opened at an article about how beautiful drought resistant plants can be.

"You have nine eyes," Sam said.

At least they focused as one. I couldn't imagine having them all space cadetting out. Talk about a headache.

Turning my attention from her happy sitting room, I forced my nine eyes on her, hoping the extra seven would be all the more penetrating.

"Can you focus please?" I snapped.

Sam held her hands up. "Okay, okay. Sheesh, I guess getting changed into a gigantic booger put you into a crappy mood."

"Gee, you think?" My legs ached with the weight of my body. I had no idea if I had two legs or more or maybe a stump—my stomach covered them completely. I groaned and leaned against the wall, waiting for Sam to put on her glasses and figure out how to reverse the spell.

Sam was a witch and a pretty damned good one at that. I'd give her twenty minutes—then I'd be back to my old self.

"Was it Fabian who boogered you?" she asked.

The mention of the little bastard set my anger ablaze. I had to count to five before the rage simmered out of me like a water balloon with a leak. I peeled myself off the wall and noticed a long spindle of green slime still stuck to the plaster; it reached out as if afraid to part with me.

"Ew!" Sam said, taking a step back from me. "You are so cleaning that wall."

"Fine. Just get me back to normal. I'm going to murder Fabian when I see him again."

Fabian was a warlock, a master of witchcraft. The little cretin hadn't taken it well when I'd come to his dark arts store to observe his latest truckload delivery. I knew the little rat was importing illegal potions (love potions, revenge potions, lust potions...the list went on) and it was my job to stop it. I'm a Regulator, someone who monitors the creatures of the Netherworld to ensure they're not breaking any rules. Think law enforcement. And Fabian clearly was breaking some rule. Otherwise, he wouldn't have turned me into a walking phlegm pile.

Sam turned and faced a sheet of chocolate chip cookie mounds.

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“Hold on a second, I gotta put these in the oven.”

She sashayed to the kitchen and I couldn’t help but think what an odd picture we made: Sam, looking like the quintessential housewife with her apron, paisley dress and Stepford wife smile and me, looking like an alien there to abduct her.

She slid the cookies in, shut the oven door and offered me a cheery grin.

“Now, where was I? Ah yes, let me just whip something together.”

Kneeling down, she opened a cupboard door beneath the kitchen island and grabbed two clay bowls, three glass jars, and a metal whisk. One jar was filled with a pink powder, the next with a liquid that looked like molasses, and the third with a sugary-type powder.

“Sam, I don’t have time to watch you make more cookies.”

“Stop being so cranky! I’m stirring a potion to figure out how the heck I’m going to help you. I have no idea what spell that little creep put on you.”

I frowned, or thought I did.

Sam opened a jar and took a pinch of the pink powder between her fingers. She dropped it in the bowl and whisked. Then she spooned one tablespoon of the molasses-looking stuff into the bowl and whisked again. Dumping half the white powder in with the rest, she paused and then dumped in the remainder.

Then she studied me, biting her lip. It was a look I knew too well—one that wouldn’t lead to anything good.

“What?” I demanded.

“I need some part of your body. But, it doesn’t look like you have any hair. Hmm, do you have fingernails?”

I went to move my arm and four came up. But, even with four arms, I didn’t have a single fingernail—just webbed hands that looked like duck feet. I bet I was a good swimmer.

“Sorry, no fingernails.”

“Well, this might hurt then.”

She turned around and pulled a butcher knife from the knife block before approaching me like a stealthy cat. Even with my enormous body, I was up and out of her way instantly.

“Hold on a second! Keep that thing away from me!”

“I need something from your body to make the potion work right. I won’t take much, just a tiny piece of flesh.”

I felt like adding “and not a drop of blood,” but was too pre-occupied with protecting myself. I glanced at the wall and eyed the snotty globule, still attached to the plaster as if it had a right to be there.

“What about that stuff?”

Sam grimaced but stopped advancing. “I’m not touching that.”

“Okay, fine. How about some spit then?”

“Yeah, that might do.”

My entire body breathed a sigh of relief which, given the size of me, was a pretty big breath. She put the knife back, and I made my way over to her slowly—not convinced she wasn’t going to Sweeney Todd on me again.

She held out the bowl. “Spit.”

I wasn’t sure if my body was capable of spitting, but I leaned over and gave it a shot. Something slid up my throat, and I watched a blob of yellow land in her bowl.

It was moving. Gross.

It continued to vacillate as it interacted with the mixture, sprawling this way and that like it was having a seizure.

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“Yuck,” Sam said, holding the bowl as far away from her as possible. She returned it to the counter as the timer went off. Facing the oven, she grabbed a mitt that said “Kiss me, I’m Wiccan”, pulled open the oven door, and grabbed hold of the cookie sheet, placing them on the counter.

My stomach growled, sounding like an angry wolf and unable to stop myself, I lumbered toward the cookies. I grabbed the sheet, not feeling the heat of the tin on my webbed hand. Sam watched me, her mouth hanging open as I lifted the sheet of cookies and emptied every last one into my mouth, swallowing them whole.

Sam’s brows furrowed with anger, giving her normally angelic face a little attitude.

“I was saving those to bring to work on Monday, thank you very much!”

Sam didn’t wear angry well. She was too pretty—dark brown shoulder length hair, perfect skin, perfect teeth, and big brown eyes.

“Come on, Sam,” I pleaded, my mouth brimming with gooey chocolate. “You know I didn’t do it on purpose. I don’t even like sweets.”

Something slimy and pink escaped my mouth and ran itself over my lips. It took me a second to realize it was my tongue. Rather than curling back into my mouth, it hesitated on my lip as I focused on a stray chocolate chip lounging against the counter. Instantly, my tongue lurched out and grabbed hold of the chip, recoiling into my mouth like a spent cobra.

Sam quirked a less-than-amused brow and ran her palms down her paisley apron, as though composing herself. I have to count to ten, twenty sometimes. Otherwise, my temper is an ugly son of a bitch.

“Besides, none of the guys at work deserve them anyway.” I knew because I worked with Sam.

She appeared to be in the process of forgiving me, a slight smile playing with the ends of her lips. I turned to the potion sitting in the bowl. The yellow ball of spit was still shivering. I nearly gagged when Sam stabbed it with the whisk and continued stirring.

I peered over her shoulder and watched the potion change colors—going from a pale brown to red then deepening into flame orange.

“What’s it doing?”

Sam nodded as if she were watching a movie, knew the ending, and was just dying to tell someone what happens.

“Ah, of course, I should’ve known. The little devil put a *Hemmen* on you.”

“A what?”

“It’s a short-term shape-shifting charm. You’ll be back to normal in about five hours or so.”

“Five hours? Look at me! Can’t you get rid of it sooner?”

Sam shook her head. “Would take lots of herbs and potions I don’t have. I’d probably have to get them at Fabian’s.” She laughed. “How ironic is that? Just hang tight. It’ll go away, I promise.”

It figures the little bastard would’ve put a short-term spell on me. Currently, there weren’t any laws against turning someone into a hideous creature if it would wear off after a day. And, even if he had turned me into this creature long term, he’d probably only get a slap on the wrists. The Netherworld wasn’t exactly good with doling out punishments.

I was working on making it better.

“You’re sure?” I asked.

She nodded. “One hundred percent. Let’s just watch a couple movies to keep your mind off it.”

She hurried to her entertainment center and scanned through the numerous titles, using her index finger to guide her.

“Dirty Dancing? Bridget Jones?”

“The first or second Bridget?”

“I have both,” she said with a triumphant smile.

“I like the first one better.”

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With a nod of agreement, Sam pulled the DVD out and gingerly placed it into the player.

I wasn't really sure what to do with myself. I couldn't fit on her couch, and with my slime ball still suspended on the wall, sitting was out.

Sam pointed a finger in my general direction. "How did Fabian catch you unaware enough to change you into...that?"

I sighed—which came out as a grunt.

"Well?" she asked while skipping into the kitchen to microwave a packet of popcorn.

I couldn't quite meet her eyes and, instead, focused on drawing slimy lines on her counter top with one of my eight index fingers.

This was the part of the story I was least excited about. Fabian never should've caught me with my guard down. I'm a fairy. We're renowned for being extremely quick, and we've got more magic in our little finger...well, you get it.

"My back was to him," I mumbled. "I know, I know...super dumb."

Sam's eyebrows reached for the ceiling. "That doesn't sound like you at all, Dulce. Why was your back to him?"

If I wasn't excited about that last part of the story, this part excited me even less.

"There was someone in his shop—a guy I've never seen before."

Sam laughed and quirked a knowing brow. "So, let me make sure I've got this right."

She plopped her hands on her hips and paused for a good three seconds. Maybe she was getting me back for the cookies.

"You, one of the strongest fairies around, turned your back on a known dark arts practitioner because he had a hot guy in his store?"

"No, it wasn't that at all. I'd never seen him before, and I couldn't figure out what he was."

As a fairy, I have the innate ability to decipher a creature as soon as I see one. I can tell a warlock from a vampire from a gorgon in seconds. I don't get paid the big bucks for nothing.

Sam's face took on a definite look of surprise, her eyes wide, her lips twitching.

"You couldn't tell what he was? Wow, that's a first."

I nodded my bulbous head. "Exactly. And if he's here permanently, he never checked in with me or Headquarters."

Any new creature who hoped to settle in Splendor, California needed to contact Headquarters, otherwise known as the A.N.C (Association for Netherworld Creatures). And more pointedly, they had to register with me. This new stranger had done neither. Maybe he'd gotten lost when coming over. It wasn't rare for a creature to come through the passage from Netherworld to Earth and somehow get lost along the way. You'll find the directionally challenged everywhere.

"Maybe you should talk to Bram," Sam said. "He always seems to know what's going on."

It wasn't a bad idea, actually. Bram was a vampire (I know, how cliché...) who ran a nightclub called No Regrets. No Regrets was in the middle of the city and was the biggest hangout for creatures of the Netherworld. If something was going down, Bram was always among the first to know.

"Yeah, not a bad idea," I said.

First things first, I'd pay a visit to Fabian and let him know how much I didn't appreciate his little prank. Then, if he couldn't give me any info on his strange visitor, I'd try Bram. My third choice was Dagan, a demon who ran an S&M club called Payne that wasn't far from No Regrets. Dagan was always my last resort—I hated going to Payne. I'd seen things there that had scarred me for life.

So, it looked like my plans for the weekend were shot. Not like I had much planned—just editing chapters of my romance novel, *Captain Slade's Bounty*. I'd been looking forward to a quiet weekend, so I could focus on Captain Slade and his ladylove, Clementine. Now, it looked like I'd be working the streets of Splendor instead.

Big Goddammit.

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Six hours later and with Bridget Jones one and two, Dirty Dancing and four bowls of popcorn under my belt, I was home and back to myself. I felt like shit considering I'd eaten more in one evening than I usually ate in a day.

I headed through my sparse living room and straight to my bathroom. I threw off the clothes Sam had lent me (the mass I'd been turned into had shredded my outfit) and turned on the shower full force. I was back to myself, but still disgusting—covered in a layer of what looked like clear snot, like I'd just dropped out of God's nose.

I tested the water, waiting for it to warm. Then I turned to face myself in the mirror. I'm not a vain person but I was very happy to see my small and slender self reflected back at me. I pulled my mane of honey-gold hair from behind my back and inspected it. If I was narcissistic about anything, it was my hair. It was long—right down to my lower back and it looked like it had fared well in the metamorphosis. Except for the slime.

I keep my hair long because I'm not thrilled with my ears. As a fairy, my ears come to points at the tops. Think Spock. Other than that, I look like a human. And, no, I don't have wings.

I checked the water again; it was warm enough. I lived in a pretty shitty apartment and the pipes in the wall screamed every time I turned the hot water on—they'd just pound if I wanted cold. I know I mentioned earlier that I make a good living, and I do. The shit apartment is due to the fact that I'm saving all my money to retire from the A.N.C. Then I can focus on my writing full time.

It might sound strange that one as magical as I would need to work nine-to-five weekdays and some weekends, but there it is. There are strict laws that disallow those of us who can, to create money out of thin air. I guess the powers that be thought about it and realized all creatures who can create something from nothing—fairies, witches and warlocks, just to name a few—certainly would be at the top of the food chain...something bad for the less fortunate creatures and humans, too.

That, and money created from magic turns to dust after a few days anyway.

So, I have to work. I've accepted it.

I stepped under the less-than-strong flow of water, which was more like a little boy peeing on my head, and grabbed my gardenia-scented soap, lathering my entire body. I repeated the process four more times before I could actually say I felt any semblance of clean.

After toweling myself off, I plodded into the living room with a towel wrapped around my head and body. Then I noticed the blinking red light on the answering machine beckoning to me. I had three new messages.

I hit play. Bram's alto voice, the pitch reminiscent of his English roots, filled my living room.

"Ah, I've missed you, Sweet. Come by the club. I have information for you."

The arrogant bastard—he never bothered saying, "It's Bram." As to the information he had...that could be meaningless. Bram had been trying to get into my pants since I became a Regulator—about two years ago. And just because he had my home phone number didn't mean he'd succeeded—I used to be listed in the phone book.

I deleted the message. I'd have to pay him a visit tomorrow. The next message was from my dry cleaners—my clothes were ready to be picked up. The third message was from my boss.

"Dulce, it's Quillan, Sam told me what Fabian did to you. Just calling to make sure you're okay. Give me a call when you get in."

I hit delete. Quillan was a good boss; he was the big wig of Headquarters, and an elf.

Elves are nothing like you're imagining them, although they are magical. Whereas I have the innate ability to create something from nothing (all it takes is a little fairy dust), Quillan is magical in his own way. He can cast spells, control his own aging and he's got the strength of a giant. Fairies and elves are like distant cousins—sprung from the same magical family tree but separated by lots of branches.

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Quillan is tallish—maybe five-ten or so, slim, and has a certain regality to him. He’s got a head of curly blond hair that would make Cupid envious, bronze skin, and eyes the color of amber. And he’s also the muse for the hero in my romance novel. But, he doesn’t know that.

I wasn’t in the mood to call Quillan back. I’d add him to my long list of visits for tomorrow. Even though it was Saturday, it looked like I’d be working.

Sometimes working law enforcement for the Netherworld is a real bitch.