

The Witch Is Back (with bonus short story Be Witched): A Jolie Wilkins Novel

By H. P. Mallory

The witching hour has arrived in bestselling author H. P. Mallory's captivating and sexy new novel, starring the most dazzling denizen of the undead, Jolie Wilkins.

Funny and feisty witch Jolie Wilkins is back—or rather, she's back to her humble beginnings. Propelled into the past to her old Los Angeles fortune-telling shop, Jolie has no idea she possesses extraordinary powers, and she definitely doesn't remember becoming Queen of the Underworld. But at least she has two incredibly sexy men vying for her affection: Rand Balfour, who looks very familiar, though Jolie can't place his gorgeous face, and Sinjin Sinclair, who is tall, dark, and perfect . . . except for the fangs.

Yet despite her steamy love life, Jolie can't shake the sense that something is not quite right—like she's stuck in a déjà vu gone terribly awry. As both men race against time—and each other—to win Jolie's heart, the fate of the Underworld hangs in the balance. And Jolie's decision can either restore order or create an absolute, drop-dead disaster.

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The Witch Is Back (with bonus short story Be Witched): A Jolie Wilkins Novel Summary Details

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About the Author

H. P. Mallory is the author of the Jolie Wilkins series as well as the Dulcie O'Neil series. She began her writing career as a self-published author and after reaching a tremendous amount of success, decided to become a traditionally published author and hasn't looked back since.

H. P. lives in Southern California with her husband and son, where she is at work on her next book.

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Mallory / THE WITCH IS BACK

One

When the phone rang at ten minutes to seven, I wasn't surprised. Nope, I figured that Sinjin Sinclair, the most handsome and charming man who had ever stepped into my life, had probably just come to his senses and realized he didn't want to take me out for dinner after all. Maybe he'd suffered from a slight brain freeze the night before when he'd been awaiting roadside assistance at my tarot?card?reading shop, and that was why he'd asked me out.

So when he phoned to say he was lost, I was surprised—not so much that his navigational skills were lacking but that he actually wanted to go through with this. Okay, I know what you're thinking—that I must look like a troll, or something equally heinous . . . Well, I'm not a troll by any stretch of the imagination, but I'm also not the girl who stands out in a crowd. I'm more the girl next door—or at least I live down the street from the girl next door.

Okay, I'm probably being a little too hard on myself because I have been told that I'm attractive and I know I'm smart and all that stuff, but I'm still nowhere near Sinjin Sinclair's league.

But back to the phone call. After Sinjin said he would be at my door shortly, I hung up and then stood in the center of my living room for a few minutes like a space cadet, gazing at the wall until I'm sure I looked like a complete and total moron.

But while it might have appeared that nothing much was going on in that gray matter between my ears, appearances can be deceiving. Thoughts ramrodded my brain, slamming into one another as new ones were born . . . What am I doing? What am I thinking? What do I possibly have to talk about with a man as cultured and refined as Sinjin Sinclair? Moreover, how am I going to eat in front of him? What if I choke on an ice cube? Or I sneeze after taking a mouthful of salad and spray carrot chunks all over his expensive clothes?

Jolie Wilkins, calm down, I finally said to myself, closing my eyes and taking a deep breath. You are going to go on this date because if you don't, you're never going to forgive yourself. And, furthermore, Christa will most definitely murder you.

I inhaled another deep breath and forced myself out of my self-inflicted brain coma, starting toward the mirror as I took stock of myself for the umpteenth time in the last hour. Christa, my best friend and self-proclaimed fashion advisor, had left twenty minutes ago after chastising me about my current getup. Yes, she'd tried to force me into what amounted to shrink-wrapping, complete with stiletto heels that were so narrow, they could double as weapons. Then, after that attempt had failed, she'd tried to get me to go with a flame-red corset dress that was so tight, I couldn't walk—and breathing was out of the question. So yes, I'd defeated the raunchy-clothing demon but I couldn't say I felt very good about my victory.

I sighed as I took in my shoulder-length blond hair and the fact that the curl Christa had wrestled into it only minutes before was already gone. It could be described as "limp" at best. My makeup was nice, though—Christa had managed to talk me into a smoky eye, which accented my baby blues, and she'd also covered the freckles that sprinkled the bridge of my nose while playing up my cheekbones with a shimmery apricot blush. She'd lined my decently plump lips in a light brown and filled them with bubble-gum-pink lipstick, finishing them with a pink gloss called "Baby Doll."

There was a knock on my front door, and I felt my heart lurch into my throat. I took another deep breath and glanced at my reflection in the mirror again, trying not to focus on the fact that I was anything but sexy in a black amorphous skirt that ended just below my knees, black tights, and two-inch heels. Even though my breasts are decently large, you couldn't really tell in my gray turtleneck and black peacoat.

Maybe I should have listened to Christa . . .

Another quick knock on the door signaled the fact that I was dawdling. I pulled myself away from my reflection and, wrapping my hand around the doorknob, exhaled and opened it, pasting a smile on my face.

"Hello," I said, hoping my voice sounded level and even-keeled, because the sight of Sinjin standing there just about undid me. A tornado was rampaging through me, tearing at my guts and wreaking havoc with my nervous system.

"Good evening," the deity before me spoke in his refined, baritone English accent. His eyes traveled from my eyes to my bust to my legs and back up again as a serpentine smile spread across his sumptuous lips.

"Um," I managed, meaning to add a How are you? to the end of it, but somehow the words never emerged.

Sinjin arched a black brow and chuckled as I debated slamming the door shut and hiding out in my room for the next, oh, two years, at least.

"You look quite lovely," he said, with that devilish smile as he pulled his arm forward and offered me a bouquet of red roses. "These pale in comparison."

My hand was shaking and my brain was on vacation as I reached for the roses, but somehow I did manage to smile and say, “Thank you, they are really beautiful.”

The beauty of the roses didn’t even compute, though— my overwhelmed mind was still reeling from the presence of this man. Man didn’t even do him justice; he seemed so much more than that—either heaven’s sent or hell’s emissary.

He was wearing black, just as he had been the night before. His black slacks weren’t fitted, but neither were they loose—in fact, they seemed tailored to his incredibly long legs. And his black sweater perfectly showcased his broad shoulders and narrow waist. Even though his body and intimidating height would have been worth writing home about, it was his face that was so completely alluring.

Sinjin’s eyes should have been the eighth wonder of the world. They were the most peculiar color—an incredibly light blue, most similar to the blue-green icebergs you might find in Alaska or the Alpine waters of Germany. They almost seemed to glow. His skin was flawless, neither too pale nor too tan, without the kiss of a freckle or mole.

His hair was midnight black, so dark that it almost appeared blue. Tonight it looked longer than I remembered. The ends curled up over his collar, which was strange considering I’d only met him the day before and I could have sworn he had short hair. But the strangest thing about this enigmatic man was that I couldn’t see his aura . . .

I’ve been able to see people’s auras for as long as I can remember. An aura is best described as a halo-type thing that surrounds someone—it billows out of them in a foggy sort of haze. If someone is healthy, his or her aura is usually pink or violet. If someone is unwell in some way, yellow or orange predominates. I had never before met anyone who didn’t have an aura at all or whose aura I couldn’t see. And what surprised me even more was the fact that I hadn’t noticed his missing aura the first time I’d seen him . . . Of course I had been pretty overwhelmed by his mere presence—and that dazed feeling didn’t seem like it was going to go away anytime soon.

“May I escort you?” he asked as he gave me another winning smile and offered me his arm.

I gulped as I tentatively wrapped my hand around his arm, trying not to notice the fact that he was really . . . built. Good God . . .

“Thanks,” I said in a small voice as I allowed him to lead me outside.

“Are you forgetting something?” Sinjin asked as he glanced down at me.

“Um,” I started and dropped my attention to my feet, attempting to take stock of myself.

Shoes are on, purse is over my shoulder, nerves are present and accounted for . . . the only thing I’d forgotten was my confidence, which was currently hiding beneath my bed.

Sinjin stopped walking and turned around. I followed suit and noticed that the door to my modest little house was still open—gaping wide as though it was as shocked as he was that I’d forgotten to shut it.

“Oh my God.” I felt my cheeks color with embarrassment. It had to be pretty obvious I’d completely forgotten how to function in his presence. I separated myself from him and hurried back up my walkway,

shaking my head at my inattention. Anxiety drumming through me, I closed and locked the door behind me.

“Shall we try this again?”

I jumped, shocked that he was suddenly right beside me. I shook the feeling off, figuring that he must have been trailing me all along. But still, there was something . . . uncanny about it, something that set off my “Spidey” senses. I blamed it on my already overwhelmed nerves.

“Yes,” I said with an anxious laugh as he offered his arm again and I, again, took it. This time we made it to the curb, where a black car awaited us. So angular it almost looked like a spaceship, it was the same vehicle he’d been driving the night before when he’d gotten a flat tire and had asked to use my phone. He opened the door for me and I gave him a smile of thanks as I seated myself, glancing over at the steering wheel where I recognized the emblem of a Ferrari.

A Ferrari . . . seriously?

I had to pinch myself. This just wasn’t real—it couldn’t be real! I mean, my life was composed of TV dinners and reruns of *The Office*. My only social outlet, really, was Christa. Men like Sinjin Sinclair with their impeccable clothes and stunning good looks, driving their Ferraris, just didn’t figure into the Jolie Wilkins equation. Not at all!

“I hope you do not mind that I made reservations at Costa Mare?” he asked with a boyish grin.

Costa Mare was renowned for its Italian food and even more renowned for the fact that it took months to get a reservation. “You were able to make a reservation there?” I asked in awe, my mouth gaping in response.

Sinjin shrugged. “As a rule, I never take no for an answer.” Then he chuckled as if he was making a joke. But you know what people say about jokes—there’s always an underlying element of truth to them. It would not at all have come as a surprise to me to learn that Sinjin Sinclair was accustomed to getting his way.

For the next fifteen minutes, we made small talk—discussing things like the weather, his flat tire, and the history of my friendship with Christa. Before I knew it, we’d pulled in front of Costa Mare and Sinjin was handing his keys to the valet. Sinjin shook his head at the doorman who attempted to open my door, insisting that he would do it himself. I couldn’t remember the last time a man had opened a car door for me. The guys in LA weren’t exactly gentlemen.

I took Sinjin’s proffered arm and allowed him to escort me into the restaurant, where the staff seemed to fuss over him like he was some great messiah. They led us through a weaving path of tables, sparkling marble flooring, and dim candlelight, finally designating us to an isolated table in a corner of the room. Potted bamboos acted as a screen from the rest of the restaurant.

“Where would you prefer to sit?” Sinjin asked me with a polished smile.

“It doesn’t matter,” I answered as I waited for him to pull out my chair. He chose the seat with the best view of the restaurant, but I hadn’t been lying—I really didn’t care.

The host, a rotund, short man, who was probably in his late forties, offered us our menus, placed our napkins on our laps, and left us to our own devices.

“A man should always choose his seat wisely,” Sinjin commented, glancing at me with a smirk.

“Why is that?” I asked, wondering what he was getting at.

He nodded as if he was about to divulge a long and interesting story. “In times long past, it could mean death if a man’s back was to his enemies.”

“And you’re still practicing that, I see?” I asked with a smile, suddenly feeling comfortable with him. It was strange because I wasn’t a person who was, in general, comfortable around anyone I didn’t know.

“It is my duty to ensure your safety, poppet.”

I wasn’t sure why, but the word poppet seemed so familiar to me, even though I was pretty sure I’d never heard it before. It was a sudden moment of *déjà vu*, of that feeling that somewhere, sometime, I’d experienced this exact moment. It made no sense, but I couldn’t help but feel haunted by it all the same.

“Well, I’m sure things are safer in this day and age,” I said, trying to shake off the weird feeling. It wouldn’t budge. There was just something so . . . familiar about all this. I took a deep breath and started perusing the menu, hoping to banish my wayward thoughts. Feeling as if Sinjin was staring at me, I glanced up and found his eyes fastened on me. He didn’t even try to hide the fact, and when I caught him, he smiled.

This one was smooth.

“Have you selected your supper?” he asked, his mouth spreading into a wide smile as if he was in on some inside joke that I wasn’t privy to.

I swallowed hard, suddenly more than aware that this whole date might just be the setup for a one-night stand. That was when it struck me—that’s exactly what it was. Sinjin was traveling from Britain, and he probably wanted to taste everything the United States had to offer, including its women. Well, unluckily for him, I wasn’t on the menu. I felt my lips tightening into a line, and I tried to keep my cool. But inside I was fuming—mainly at my own idiocy. Had I really been out of the game so long that this hadn’t dawned on me from the get-go?

“I think so,” I muttered and concealed myself with my menu.

“What is on your mind?” Sinjin asked as he pushed my menu down with his index finger, forcing me to look at him. I could feel my cheeks coloring. He had nerve . . .

“Nothing,” I answered and dropped my eyes.

“Please, Jolie, do not insult my intelligence.”

I took a deep breath. If he wanted to know what was on my mind, he was about to get an earful. “I’m not into one-night stands,” I said stiffly.

Sinjin narrowed his eyes, but the smile on his lips revealed the fact that he was amused. “A wise policy.”

So he was still playing this game, was he? “Well, I think you should . . . be aware of that . . . in case you . . . in case you . . .”

“In case I what?”

I could feel sweat breaking out along the small of my back. He was forcing me into a corner, and that damn smile was still in full effect. “In case you . . . were, uh, looking for that . . . that sort of thing.”

He didn’t drop his attention from my face. If anything, his eyes were even more focused, challenging. “Is that what you imagined I was in search of?”

So he was going to make this tough on me, was he? He was going to make me spell it out for him and embarrass myself? Well, I might not be in his league, but I wouldn’t be made a fool of. I was way too smart for that. “Without a doubt.”

“And what, pray tell, gave you that impression, if I may be so bold as to inquire?”

“I . . . um.” I cleared my throat and forced myself to look him straight in the eyes. “I couldn’t figure out why else you’d be here with . . . with me tonight.”

Sinjin took a deep breath, and it seemed to take him forever to exhale it. “I see.”

“So, if you are . . . expecting that, you might as well take me home now . . . no harm done,” I finished and held his gaze for another three seconds before I picked up my ice water and began chugging it.

“Very well,” he answered, and his voice was tender.

I dropped the menu and reached for my purse, feeling something icy forming in my gut as I readied myself to leave. I wasn’t angry, no, but I was humiliated. Strangely enough, though, relief was beginning to suffuse me . . . relief at the fact that I could end this farce and lick my wounds in the comfort and serenity of my house. After collecting my things, I stood up and noticed that Sinjin hadn’t moved an inch.

“What are you doing?” I demanded.

“Perhaps I should ask the same of you?”

I swallowed hard. “I thought we were leaving?”

“Why would we be leaving? We have not even ordered yet.”

“But I thought,” I started before my voice was swallowed up by the fact that I was at a complete loss.

Sinjin smiled up at me and shook his head, pulling out my chair. “Please have a seat, love,” he said. “You misunderstood my intentions.”

“But you said ‘very well,’?” I started, even as I sat down and pulled myself to the table again.

“I was simply agreeing with your assessment of the fact that you are quite opposed to ‘one-night stands,’ as you so fittingly termed them.” He smiled again, cocking his brow. “And while I find you to be quite a delectable package, poppet, I am afraid I quite agree with you regarding the more intimate side of our association . . . for the time being, at least.”

So he wasn't looking for a one-night stand? Or maybe he was so smooth, he was just faking it and he'd put his plan of attack into action once I was no longer suspicious. I took a deep breath and lifted my menu again, wishing I'd never agreed to this date in the first place. "Oh."

"Would you be averse to the notion of . . . starting over?" he asked and leaned back into his chair as he studied me.

I felt an embarrassed smile pulling at my lips even though I still wasn't sure what his intentions were. Well, either way, it took two to tango and my tango shoes were in a box in my closet, covered with dust. "No, that sounds good."

"Very well," he said again and called the waiter over. "Ms. Wilkins," he started.

"Please, it's Jolie."

He smiled languidly. "Jolie, what would you care to drink?"

I faced the waiter and smiled. "Do you have any Rieslings?"

The waiter nodded. "Yes, ma'am."

"A glass of that, then," I finished.

"And you, sir," the waiter asked, turning to face Sinjin.

"The same please," he responded.

"Are you ready to order?" the waiter asked us both, his pen poised above the pad of paper as if he were about to start a race or something.

Sinjin glanced at me and I nodded, having already figured out what I wanted. "I'd like the sea bass, please."

The waiter scribbled down my order before facing Sinjin. "And you, sir?"

Sinjin shook his head. "Nothing for me, thank you."

"Sinjin," I started, shocked that he wasn't ordering anything. "You aren't going to make me eat alone, are you?"

He smiled. "I apologize, love, but my stomach is a bit finicky at the moment. Would you mind terribly?"

How was I going to say no to that? I shook my head and the waiter nodded, disappearing into the kitchen moments later.

"We can go if you aren't feeling well," I offered.

Sinjin waved away my concern with his long fingers. "I have a bit of a stomach condition, and it plagues me every now and again. Nothing to concern yourself with, love." He studied me for a moment or two and smiled again. "Where were we?"

“Um, I think we had agreed to start over.”

He chuckled. “Ah, yes, starting over.” His voice trailed as he apparently searched for a new topic. “Tell me about your tarot?reading business.”

I sighed and glanced down at my ice water. The ice had melted into tiny lumps, and I submerged each one with my straw as I thought about his question. “Well, as you know, I’m a psychic,” I said. Whether he even believed in that sort of thing was anyone’s guess—it wasn’t something we’d established the night before.

“Have you always known this about yourself?” he asked, just as the waiter returned with our wine. Sinjin raised his glass. “Prost!” he said and brought his glass to his lips as I downed a swallow of my bitterly sweet wine. Before he took a swig, he set his glass back on the table and glanced over at me again. “Well?”

I smiled. “Um, yeah, for as long as I can remember. I could always see things and I just seemed to know things about people. Stuff that I shouldn’t know.” I wondered if I’d said too much. Usually men didn’t react well to my day job—thinking I was either a charlatan or a nut job.

But there was no sign of judgment on Sinjin’s handsome face. Instead, he just nodded. I couldn’t tell if he thought I was full of it or not.

“I know the feeling.”

I faced him, my eyes wide, as I wondered what he was admitting. “Are you psychic?”

He shook his head. “No, but I have had my dealings with the otherworldly.”

So he didn’t think I was a liar or a Looney Tune. I breathed out a sigh of relief. And as the relief washed over me, a feeling of disappointment surfaced. Sinjin might understand me, but it wasn’t like he was going to stick around. I mean, he was traveling here on business or vacation or something.

“What about you,” I started. “You’re here for work?”

His eyes were still fixed on mine and there was something in their depths. Something untold, something hidden. I could tell that this man had his own skeletons hanging in his closet. “Yes, quite so.”

“What do you do?”

He shrugged and finally averted his eyes, lifting his glass of wine as he trailed the rim of the glass with his finger. “I own my own company.”

“Ah, what type of business?”

“Finance,” he said quickly, somewhat dismissively, and then leaned forward, seemingly uncomfortable about discussing the specifics.

“And you’re here for just a little while, then?” I hoped I didn’t sound apprehensive. Still, I was all too aware that this charade probably wouldn’t last longer than tonight. Not when he had a whole life waiting for him in Britain.

God, what if he's married?

He didn't respond right away, just continued looping his finger around the rim of his glass. "I am considering opening an American branch of my company. That is why I am currently here." He stopped talking for a few seconds and then smiled at me. "Perhaps I will not return to Britain—for the foreseeable future, at any rate."

I felt something happy burst within me even though it made no sense. If Sinjin decided to stay, that didn't mean we'd necessarily see each other again. And if we did see each other once, twice, or even multiple times, he'd still have to return to Britain eventually. And where would that leave me?

I shook the feelings of elation right out of me. I was getting way ahead of myself. And truly, I was just being silly, setting myself up for disappointment.

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Funny and feisty witch Jolie Wilkins is back—or rather, she's back to her humble beginnings. Propelled into the past to her old Los Angeles fortune-telling shop, Jolie has no idea she possesses extraordinary powers, and she definitely doesn't remember becoming Queen of the Underworld. But at least she has two incredibly sexy men vying for her affection: Rand Balfour, who looks very familiar, though Jolie can't place his gorgeous face, and Sinjin Sinclair, who is tall, dark, and perfect . . . except for the fangs.

Yet despite her steamy love life, Jolie can't shake the sense that something is not quite right—like she's stuck in a déjà vu gone terribly awry. As both men race against time—and each other—to win Jolie's heart, the fate of the Underworld hangs in the balance. And Jolie's decision can either restore order or create an absolute, drop-dead disaster.

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