

RACHEL D. THOMPSON

*"There's something out there. In the woods.
I've been it howling in the middle of the night."*

Demon's
WITCH

— PURPLE SWORD PUBLISHING —

Rachel D. Thompson

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By

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DEMON'S WITCH

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ISBN Not Assigned

Cover Art Designed By Anastasia Rabiya

Edited By Traci Markou

Published by Purple Sword Publications, LLC

www.PurpleSword.com

Greenhill, MA: 1692

“There's something out there. In the woods. I often hear it howling in the middle of the night.”

A chill crept down Allison's spine. She fingered the cross hanging around her neck and glanced out a nearby window. Dusk had just fallen, giving the day a creepy, shadowed look.

“Forget the ghost stories,” John Carpenter snapped at the man who had spoken, causing Allison to force her attention back to the front of the room. “Does anyone have any *new* business?”

The man that had first spoken stood near a window, staring out at the night as if hypnotized. Allison bent her head, her fingers slipping over her gold chain.

“Another witch was put to death yesterday,” someone else said. There were moans from some of the people seated near the front, and others made the sign of the evil eye as they shook back and forth in their seats.

Allison.

Wanting to cover her ears with her hands but not wanting to draw attention to herself, Allison settled for squeezing her eyes shut. It already felt as if too many eyes were on her. She tried concentrating on the voice she heard with her ears rather than the one she heard in her head.

Demon's Witch

"We still have one witch captive. After her sentence is carried out, Greenhill should be safe from demonic presences." There was a pause as the speaker let his words sink in before continuing. "Of course, we have to be cautious. There's always the possibility that we haven't rooted out all of them."

Allison opened her eyes enough to see several unfriendly stares aimed at her. Offering a weak smile, her grip on her cross tightened. She didn't even dare move her lips in silent prayer.

As an unwed woman living by herself it wasn't easy to avoid the suspicions of her neighbors, especially after what happened to her family not too long ago.

"Allison," a voice whispered.

Allison flinched, unable to stop the sweat from rolling down her back. Soon she wouldn't be able to hide her escalating craziness from anyone. *I'm going mad.*

"Allison," the voice persisted.

With a jolt, Allison realized this voice was *not* a figment of her imagination. Her gaze darted to the right, settling on the man near the window. Her memory drudged up his name now: Adam Baker. He still stared straight ahead; the voice had not come from him. The bench next to her creaked, drawing her attention.

"Allison, didn't you hear me?" Joseph Dresden demanded, pitching his voice low. He still drew disapproving scowls from

those nearby. In the background, John Carpenter's voice droned on with his explanations of how to spot a witch. Allison stopped paying attention, turning to face her friend.

"You want to get out of here?" Joseph asked. "You look a little pale."

"I'm fine," she replied, fanning herself a little with her left hand. This place was hot and uncomfortable. She *did* want to leave, but what would they say about her if she did? Would they name her witch? This constant fear gnawed at her, making her jumpy and paranoid.

The whispering began again in the back of her mind, a voice clamoring for her attention. It grew harder to ignore that voice. It promised such pleasant things.

Allison, I love you. I need you.

Allison, you belong to me.

Allison closed her eyes and leaned back in the hardwood bench, feeling sweat start to trickle down between her breasts, making her itch. She forced her hands into her lap and folded them together, determined to sit still through the rest of this meeting.

You belong to me! the voice shouted at her before falling silent.

She jumped, her eyes flying open. Thankfully no one noticed save Joseph, who only gave her a questioning look. Around them,

Demon's Witch

raised voices sounded out a triumphant, "Amen."

People started getting to their feet. No one clapped; this wasn't *that* kind of meeting. Allison hung back as people started filing out of the cramped meeting hall. Every familiar face bore a scowl. Some stared at Allison as they passed, but Joseph gripped her elbow and glared back, daring any to mutter one word. None did, but Allison imagined their hateful thoughts.

"Come on," Joseph said when most of the people had escaped into the night. He guided her after them.

Allison's house wasn't far, but after witnessing the open hostility in the faces of her neighbors she was glad for Joseph's company.

"I didn't kill my family," Allison stated and Joseph looked at her in surprise as they crossed the gravel road.

"I didn't say you did."

"They all think I did." She flung an arm out, encompassing the town with her gesture. It didn't take long for the street to empty. Allison and Joseph reached her front door and stopped outside it.

"They're fools," Joseph said quietly. "Self-righteous, ignorant people. I know you had nothing to do with their deaths."

Allison knew this was true, but sometimes even she had difficulty believing it. Her father died in the spring of last year, his

head kicked in by his own horse. An accident. Her mother died later that month, the victim of a vicious snake bite. Allison's invalid sister had lived only a little longer. She died that same summer of the 'wasting' disease. Her parents' deaths alone might not have cast suspicion upon Allison, but more than one loose tongue proclaimed that Allison just hadn't wanted to put up with her crippled sister any longer. She'd be dead already if anyone could prove she had been behind the accidents, regardless of her innocence.

Allison shivered and pulled her shawl tighter. Only Joseph would even talk to her anymore. Once she lost his support, she might as well resign herself to her fate. She knew it was only a matter of time. Joseph would soon realize she was going mad, and then she would have no one. The only reason she hadn't packed up and left town was that she had nowhere else to go.

Allison! This thought seemed to be a cue for the voice in her head. It clamored for her attention.

"Good night, Joseph," Allison said hastily. She wanted to escape into the dark safety of her house – the only place she could talk to herself without fears.

She pushed her way into the house, shutting Joseph's earnest face out. Taking a moment to relax, she leaned back against the door and drew a deep breath.

Demon's Witch

Allison!

"Leave me alone, demon," she whispered aloud. Hot tears squeezed out beneath her lids.

Allison, you need me.

"No." She shook her head back and forth, denying the claim.

"Leave me be!"

Pushing away from the door, she moved through the room, guided only by the moonlight spilling in through the windows. She made her way to the stairs leading to the second floor. They were steep. She clutched the railing, her knuckles white, dragging herself up the stairs.

You can't deny me forever.

She collapsed at the landing, breaking into sobs. No, she couldn't deny him forever – demons were hard to resist and her resolve weakened. A few more months of this would drive her completely insane. Her hand went to the cross at her throat. A gift from her parents, the golden symbol brought her comfort. Forcing herself to her feet, she stumbled to her room. Moonlight lit the bed with a silvery glow. Allison crossed to the window and drew the heavy drapes, blocking out all light.

Allison, come to me. Let me love you.

Ignoring the voice, she crossed to her bed and threw the cold sheets back. She shivered, but slipped beneath them without

bothering to change into her nightgown. Once settled, her hand folded back over her cross. She closed her eyes and moved her lips in silent prayer, hoping that God had not forsaken her and would soon deliver her from her inner demons.

* * * *

Allison stood in her front yard the next morning, contemplating whether or not she wanted to head to the general store. There were a few things she needed, but she didn't know if she could stand any unfriendly stares this morning. Standing at the edge of the yard, with her hand at her throat, she stared at the dirt road in indecision.

A huge commotion drew her attention to the west where a wagon was just coming into view. Jeering townspeople walked on either side of it, shaking their fists at the cart being dragged behind the wagon. Some spit on the ground as the cart jounced along the road.

Allison shrank back, staying well out of the path of the oncoming crowd.

"Witch hanging today!" someone called out.

As the cart drew closer, Allison saw the cage atop it and the woman hunched within. She wore a plain woolen dress. Her hair

Demon's Witch

hung about her face in greasy strings, making her look half-mad.

One woman reached out and grabbed Allison's arm to drag her along, despite Allison's protests. She didn't think she could stomach another witch hanging, but the woman's grip was like iron.

"Please. Let me go!" Allison clawed at the woman's fingers.

"All citizens must attend the hanging," the woman replied, ignoring Allison's feeble attempts to extract herself.

The wagon drove on, ending its short voyage at the town square where a huge oak tree grew tall and proud. The woman would be hanged from a lower branch. Allison had sat through enough of these witch hangings to know what to expect. Feeling uneasy, she managed to break away from the woman who had grabbed her and moved to stand at the back of the crowd. Her departure now would surely be noticed, so she resigned herself to stay.

Watch closely, Allison, a voice whispered in her thoughts.

She shuddered, but watched as men stepped forward to pull the witch from the cage. Allison knew the woman's name: Elizabeth. She used to be good friends with her when they were children, but Allison didn't think anyone would look too kindly on that revelation now. She wished there was some way to stop this. She knew Elizabeth couldn't possibly be a witch, but the crowd had

worked itself into a frenzy. Intervening now would only introduce her to a noose as well.

Nothing can be done for her. She's as good as dead.

Allison watched as the wagon moved forward, carrying Elizabeth to a stop beneath the large tree. Allison stood too far away to hear the words John Carpenter spoke to the crowd. The people didn't stop jeering. With a stern look on his face, John accepted a length of rope from someone and climbed into the cart to affix it to the tree. He tied the other end into a noose and tightened it around Elizabeth's neck before jumping to the ground and giving the order to roll the cart forward. The cart lurched, the rope yanking Elizabeth off, her feet dangling above the ground.

Sickened, Allison turned away so that she couldn't see the body swaying in the wind. Around her, the people fell silent.

Stop, Allison. Can you feel it?

"I don't feel anything," she said. A few people standing near her turned to stare at her. She offered them a weak smile and clutched at her stomach, feigning illness as she stumbled away.

A dark power stirs.

"Leave me alone," she hissed. She wanted to shout it, but remembered to keep her voice lowered at the last moment.

Allison. There's a real witch among you.

She reached her front door and escaped into the darkened

Demon's Witch

interior of her house without looking back. She feared what she might see if she did.

“Why won’t you just leave me alone?” she moaned, leaning back against the door and sinking to the floor. She clutched at her head as if she could force the voice to stop speaking, but it went on relentlessly.

“Do you know who the witch is, Allison?”

It took her a moment to realize that the voice was no longer in her head; instead it came from a point in front of her. She lowered her hands to peer over the tips of her fingers.

A man stood before her.

She gasped and tried scooting backward, in her fright forgetting that her back was already pressed firmly against the door.

With an amused glint in his eyes, the man stepped forward, closing the short distance between them before crouching down in front of her. His long, black hair fell to his shoulders, and he was bare to the waist. He wore a nice pair of slacks.

“I really am going crazy,” Allison whispered.

The stranger shook his head. Something about him struck a familiar chord deep inside her although she couldn’t put her finger on it.

“Who are you?” she asked.

Rachel D. Thompson

"You can call me Daemon," he told her.

"Demon," she said, dropping a letter and altering the sound of his name.

"You see?" He spread his hands. "You're really not crazy, Allison."

"What do you want with me?" she demanded, shrinking back against the door.

He reached out, moving slowly, and touched a strand of her long, blonde hair. "I only want you to love me."

Allison's fingers lowered further to caress the golden cross around her neck. "I walk with God, so that no demon can corrupt me."

His eyes narrowed, and he jerked his fingers back as if burned. "You belong to me, Allison."

She met his gaze, her faith giving her strength. "Begone, demon!"

He stood and looked down at her sadly from his towering height. "I'm here to save your life. I only need your cooperation."

"No! They'll hang me if they even suspect I talk to demons."

"I can protect you."

Her anger flared. Why wouldn't he understand? "I don't want your protection. I want you to go away, and leave me alone!"

He sighed and looked away from her, pursing his lips in

Demon's Witch

silent thought. "I will leave for now," he said finally. "You're upset. Things have been difficult for you lately. But we are linked. I *will* return." Without another word, he disappeared. One moment he stood before her, and the next he simply wasn't there.

Allison rubbed her eyes, wondering if she'd imagined the whole encounter. Being diagnosed insane wasn't any better than being labeled a witch.

* * * *

That evening Allison stood in her darkened bedroom, trying to forget the sudden snap of the rope that stilled Elizabeth forever. She had managed to convince herself that Daemon was merely a figment of her imagination, but no matter what she did, she couldn't get Elizabeth's haunted eyes out of her mind.

Sighing, she pulled her dress over her head and picked up her white cotton nightgown. Holding the simple garment before herself, she turned, a strange feeling sweeping over her. When she lifted her gaze, she noticed a dark figure standing in front of the window, blocking the moonlight.

Allison screamed and clutched her nightgown to herself in a vain attempt to cover her nudity. The figure was little more than a silhouette, and Allison couldn't imagine how he'd snuck into her

second floor bedroom without her noticing.

“Listen to me or you will die,” he said.

The voice sounded familiar and in a rush, that morning’s events came back to her. The demon was real. She stood frozen to the spot as he stepped forward into the fluttering candlelight. She caught her breath as his features came fully into view. She hadn’t taken the time to notice how handsome he was. Now his gray-eyed gaze captured hers, and she felt a strong stirring in her body.

“Demons are the essence of sin,” she whispered to herself. “Please, God, protect me.”

He stepped closer, reminding her of a giant cat, the way his muscles bunched and moved in his chest and shoulders. Reaching out, his fingers trailed over her bare shoulder. His touch left a burning line of heat along her sensitive skin. Something inhuman lurked in his eyes, but his skin was so warm Allison wanted to drop the meager bit of cloth that separated them.

Be strong, she told herself. She raised a hand to caress the gold cross always about her neck. Right then it was hard to remember why she should resist this creature. His closeness intoxicated her, making her realize how in control he really was. When he glanced away, his hold on her weakened and she could breathe easier, but then his gray eyes would refocus on her and she’d lose her train of thought.

Demon's Witch

"Can't you feel the connection between us?" he asked. "Just being near you—" he broke off, sighed, and continued the thought. "It makes me feel complete."

"There is no connection," she mumbled. She held her cross so tightly the gold metal dug into her fingers, bringing a pain that centered her. Her faith was being tested. She would not fail.

"Deny it all you want." He smirked. "I can smell the want on you." He cocked his head. "I can hear how fast your heart beats. You are scared, yes, but you also desire."

"You're wrong," she protested, but she couldn't slow her rapid pulse as he reached out and trailed a finger down her cheek, following the line of her neck, tracing her collarbone. Shuddering under his touch she tried pulling away, but her body wouldn't obey. She stood as if bewitched and his fingers continued their merciless exploration. They tickled along her side until his hand settled on her bare hip.

"You belong to me." The words caressed her much as his hand had done.

Unable to help herself she closed her eyes, her posture relaxing, giving in to the seductive tone of his voice.

"Let me show you how much I love you," he whispered, shifting around to stand behind her, his hand never leaving her hip.

In the next instant she felt warm breath caress her neck, quickly followed by his lips and the heat of his tongue. Stifling a moan she tilted her head to allow him full access. Her hand dropped away from the cross to rise and bury itself in his hair. The nightgown in front of her was forgotten. She let it drop to the floor so that she could place that hand over his on her hip. He smiled against her neck.

“What is it you want most in the world?” he asked.

“Love.” She spoke without thinking and hadn’t even realized how lonely she’d been since the deaths of her family members. She missed them.

He moved around to stand in front of her again. “If that’s all you want, then you have it.”

Reading the truth in his eyes was easy. He didn’t bother hiding his emotions. Love, desire, need, they were all there. They overwhelmed her. She reached for him and he came, gathering her up into his arms, his demonic heat warming her skin, driving away the chill of the room. He sighed into her hair.

“All mortals want to be loved. It drives them, fulfills them, defines them.” His hands drew lazy circles on her back. “I need your help with something.” Reluctantly, he released her.

Free of his touch she realized what she’d almost done. If he’d asked she would have given in to him. He seemed to realize

Demon's Witch

this as well; he didn't look happy. A hard resolve filtered into his eyes.

"You must come with me, Allison," he said.

With great effort, she forced herself to drop her gaze. Her head cleared even more, giving her time to think. She would not let this demon drag her down to hell. "Why? So you can sacrifice me on an altar somewhere?"

Disappointment filled his voice when next he spoke. "I knew you in a former life."

"What?" Finding it hard to follow the change in subject, she glanced up and then found herself unable to look away.

"In fact, I've known you in many lives. And every time I meet you, you're more beautiful than I remember." He leaned closer to her, using her confusion as an opportunity to test her defenses. His lips brushed against her forehead, leaving a smoldering heat behind. "You need to trust me now, Allison. Your friends and neighbors are in trouble, and you're the only one that can save them."

"Why me?" she asked with difficulty. "If anyone finds out I've even *talked* to a demon, they'll name me a witch."

He cocked his head to one side, regarding her with amusement. "My dear, you *are* a witch."

She opened her mouth to argue, but he didn't give her the

chance.

“Listen carefully to me, Allison. I am not the only demon here. There’s a demon named Balek out in the woods right now, about to be borne forth into this world. I need your powers to stop him, because once he’s loose, only mayhem will result.”

“How can I trust you?”

His gray eyes darkened, his gaze darting to her lips; the only warning she got before he dipped his head and kissed her. He moved slowly, deliberately, letting her decide for herself what she wanted. His unnatural heat sent a tingle through her, making it hard to think. When he pulled away, he was breathing hard, but he collected himself quickly.

“Trust your instincts, Allison. I would never do anything to hurt you.”

“I must pray for forgiveness,” she said, her fingers going to her lips. They burned from his kiss.

He huffed his impatience. “There’s no time for that. Do you want to save the town or not?”

Allison lifted her head. “I don’t see how I can help.”

He held his hand out to her. “Let me show you.”

* * * *

Demon's Witch

He let her get dressed and then led her out into the woods a couple miles from town. The closer they got to their destination, the more uneasy Allison felt. There was definitely something out here. Daemon walked next to her in silence, the unnatural heat of his skin warming her.

"Do you feel it, Allison?" he asked, coming to an abrupt stop and turning to her. "Do you feel the evil in the air?"

She nodded. The little hairs on her arms and the back of her neck stood on end. She didn't like being out here in the middle of the woods on this moonless night with a creature not quite human.

"Is this the place?" she asked, glancing around.

They stood in a small clearing. Unmarked stones littered the ground, but Allison didn't feel like inspecting any too closely.

"It is. Balek is tied here, but not for long."

"What do I have to do?"

"Stand here in the center, and I'll tell you what to say." He took her hand and led her to the middle of the clearing, positioning her the way he wanted. "You have to say the words exactly right. Understand?"

Again she nodded, fear filling her. What if she messed up? What if she wasn't who he thought she was?

Daemon radiated a grim excitement. He smiled at her, winked, and then disappeared, leaving her standing alone in the

dark forest. The night around her remained completely still; not even an owl hooted. She didn't like this one bit. She'd been wrong to trust him.

"Daemon!" she screamed.

Calm down, Allison. I'm still with you. I need to focus my attention, and I can't do that very well on the physical plane. Don't move.

Allison froze where she was, her heart thumping. Waiting for him to speak again was hard. Time dragged on, leaving her to wonder if he'd abandoned her for good this time.

Okay. Are you ready? Repeat after me: Fajis jisaf daki oake kellos nvka. He spoke slowly, making sure she repeated each word correctly.

Silence fell after the last syllable escaped her lips. Wind moaned through the trees and Allison shivered, realizing how cold it had become. "Is that it?" she asked, unsure of what was supposed to happen. She didn't feel any different. If the words she'd spoken were magic, shouldn't she feel something? If she really was a witch as Daemon claimed, shouldn't she know?

I'm not really a witch. I'm only –

Only what? She couldn't finish the thought so she left it. "Shouldn't something happen?" she asked crossly.

Daemon rematerialized beside her. Without thinking she moved closer to him, enjoying his warmth. "Give it a moment."

Demon's Witch

A howl sounded from somewhere deeper in the forest. Allison jumped, clutching at Daemon in her panic. The howl rose into a roaring shriek, increasing in volume as it drew closer to the clearing. She shuddered and fumbled for her gold cross, starting to pray.

Daemon's lips lifted in a grim smile. "That won't help you now."

The howling thing entered the clearing and disappeared in a bright flash of light before Allison could even see what it looked like. Silence fell over the forest once again.

"What was that?" she asked her demon companion.

"Balek's spirit. His hold on this world was stronger than I thought." He frowned. "You did well, Allison. We should return. They'll be waiting for you."

Chills raced down her spine. "What are you talking about?"

"Damned if you do, damned if you don't." He looked at her with his soulless gray eyes. She could see a spark of red in each one, reminding her of the pits of Hell. "People thought that killing all the witches would rid themselves of Balek and all the problems they've had lately. Ironic, isn't it? That witchcraft actually saved their lives."

"They're going to kill me." She could read her fate in his despairing eyes.

“Yes. But that doesn’t have to happen. All you have to do is choose me.”

“Choose you?” she repeated. “My loyalty belongs with God.” She turned and started heading in the direction she thought Greenhill lay. They hadn’t gone too far into the woods and it wasn’t long before she could see the blaze of numerous torches ahead. She walked out of the trees with her head held high and when she looked around for Daemon, she realized he had left her to face her future alone.

“There she is!” someone cried out. “The last witch. Send her to her eternal rest and the howling thing won’t attack our town.”

“Did you think you’d get away with it, witch?” A man grabbed her arm, squeezing hard enough to bruise, but Allison remained silent. “Did you think we wouldn’t know that you go into the forest to summon demons to do your evil bidding?”

“I didn’t...” She could see there was no use trying to reason with them. Bloodlust filled their eyes, demanding to be sated. All of the townspeople talked at once, drowning out her useless words. “Please, don’t do this!”

She picked out Joseph’s face in the crowd. He was the only person she could trust; surely he’d put a stop to this madness. Pleading with her eyes, she took a step forward. That one step was all they allowed her. Looking both disappointed and betrayed,

Demon's Witch

Joseph shook his head and turned away.

John Carpenter stepped forward, separating himself from the crowd and moving to stand between her and Joseph. "You will not corrupt anyone here with you're witch's magic. Allison Hanson, I hereby find you guilty of witchcraft and of conspiring with demons. I hope you haven't doomed us all." He turned and began marching toward the center of town.

Another man stepped forward to grab Allison's free arm and together, the two men dragged her after John Carpenter. People lined the streets, jeering and booing. No one could hear Allison's shouts over the noise of the crowd. The walk to the center of town was too short, and soon Allison found herself standing on a stool with a noose around her neck.

John stepped forward again. He held a burning torch high for everyone to see. It illuminated his face in an odd shifting of light. "Good people! We are here to hang the last of the witches and therefore free ourselves from evil! Who here can testify that Allison Hanson is truly a witch and therefore a consort of the devil?"

Many people raised their hands, and Allison knew all hope for her was lost.

"Then I hereby sentence Allison Hanson to death by hanging!" He stepped away from her.

She knew what came next and closed her eyes, waiting for

the sudden drop that would either break her neck or choke the air from her.

“Allison!”

Her head whipped up at the sound of her name. Daemon stood before her. A blazing halo of fire wrapped itself around him, but Allison found her attention on the anguish in his eyes. On either side of him, she could see the townspeople still screaming, but an eerie silence had fallen all the same.

“It’s not too late. I don’t want to watch you hang. Choose me or choose death.”

The noose was too tight around her throat and tears of pain and fear sprang to her eyes. “I will not condemn my immortal soul to Hell. You are a demon and therefore evil itself. I pray for strength. I pray for God’s forgiveness! I choose death, demon!”

“No!” He moved forward and the crowd surrounding him parted without seeing him, allowing him to stand directly before her. “Don’t do this!”

“You said you knew me in a former life,” she whispered. “But even if I live a thousand lives, I shall never choose you.”

She threw herself forward before the stool could be kicked out from under her. Daemon’s rage was the last thing she saw before the last of her breath left her. The streets would run red with blood as the demon vented his anger and frustration.

Demon's Witch

About the Author

Rachel D. Thompson enjoys writing fantasy, science fiction, and paranormal romance. *Demon's Torment* is her first published book. She likes the thought of unleashing her demons on the world. Currently, she resides in South Dakota with her husband and the many characters that fill her head.

Visit her on the web at:

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