

The Demon Road



Rhonda Clark

is a freelance writer, book reviewer, aspiring novelist, and stay-at-home soccer mom. She and her family make their home in Memphis. Her articles have been featured in many webzines, and on a storytime radio show, WHBK, Marshall, NC. Her short, faith-based articles have won commendations from Faithwriters.com.

Warm whiskey bathed his throat, but did little to appease his internal demons. Jack tried to ignore them. He put all his attention into his work, but their cry only grew louder. The report in front of him had to be completed tonight. Mark, his business partner, warned if it wasn't mailed tomorrow, there would be tax fines to pay.

"Why can't you leave me alone? I'll have this done in 15 minutes and then I'll have a drink." He was surprised to hear the volume of his own voice, and thankful no one was in the building. The hell his personal demons put him through was not something he wanted on public display.

Before he could fully focus on his work, the unsatisfied demons took control of his hands. Unable to ignore his twitching fingers, he reached deep into his bottom desk drawer and pulled out another bottle. A long swig of the warm, amber colored liquid lulled his beasts to sleep. To be on the safe side, he took another drink.

And another.

Once he was assured the demons were settled, he turned his attention back to the stack of paperwork on his desk. Before he could give it his full attention, the phone rang.

Checking his watch, he let the phone ring again. He let out a small growl. No doubt the caller was his wife. He really needed to get his work done, but if he didn't answer there was no telling how long she'd allow the phone to ring. Since the phone was on its fifth ring, he knew it was her, so he opted to forgo the standard business greeting. "Hello, Carly."

"Took a while to answer the phone, were you passed out?"

His neck and shoulder muscles pulled taut, and his teeth clamped together so tight his teeth hurt. Her sharp tongue and hasty assumption soured his mood more. "No, darling, I'm working. I have paperwork to finish." He did his best not to be too caustic. He needed her in a good mood.

"Oh." The surprise in her voice told him that wasn't the answer she expected. "Dinner's ready, when will you be here?" The clanking of dishes and the squawking petty arguments of his three daughters in the background, threatened to drown out Carly's question.

He felt more relief than guilt from not being in the middle of the chaos. "Not sure. I've got to finish up here, and then I'm headed to the poker game. Did you pick up what I put on your list this morning?"

"No. You know I refuse to buy you liquor!" The background noise faded and her voice came through in a loud whisper. He heard a loud sliding sound, and then a bang. She was now in his den alone. He closed his eyes and waited for the real argument to begin. Her volume went up to a screech. "I know why you asked me that question. You're trying to distract me from arguing about that poker game."

He scrunched up his face. Usually a scheme like this worked, but not today. She was so angry he thought he could feel her spit

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landing on his cheek. After running his hand over his short beard, he softened his voice. "Honey, don't get so worked up. You know I play poker with Dexter every week."

"Yes, I know you do. I just don't understand why. The girls haven't seen you in almost a week, and don't try to sweet talk me. It's not going to work."

A little grin tugged at the corners of his lip. His sweet talk always worked, he just had to say the right thing. "It's only Tuesday, and I spent all weekend with you and the girls."

"I don't call you sequestering yourself in your den, watching ball games and getting drunk spending time with us."

Her words cut deep into his heart. "Sunday, I watched a few games and had a few beers. Leslie even watched some with me, and Saturday I took all of you to the motorcross."

"Ha! That was such a great time. You got drunk and I had to drive us home."

Jack's belly burned with anger. "Is there anything I do to your satisfaction?"

"Not really. While we're discussing your shortcomings, you know if you'd go to work at a normal time like other people, you'd be finished at a descent hour."

Jack flopped back into his chair and lit a cigarette. A thick cloud of white smoke filled the room when he spoke. "Have you forgotten I own this place? I have to put in more hours than the normal people who work here."

"Then maybe you should sleep at night instead of carousing so you can get to work before noon."

He'd had enough. "It wouldn't matter what time I get here in the mornings, I'd still be here until this time of night." His growl was deep and low. "You should be grateful I have a job that can pay your credit card bills."

"You jerk! I bet I could get along without those credit cards longer than you can go without liquor."

Jack rolled his eyes and flopped back in his chair. He took another long drag off the cigarette as he chose his words. "I've got work to finish. I'll be home when I get home." He slammed the phone onto the cradle.

For a few minutes, he sat there and finished his cigarette. How dare she speak to him that way? Daily, she nagged him to go to work, "as the breadwinner of any family should." He'd heard that speech enough he could quote it in his sleep. Now that he's working, she wants to know why he isn't home. Could she make up her mind? He couldn't be in both places at once. A bit of guilt niggled at his mind. His den could be his home office. The demons began to cry out again, distracting his thoughts. He outlined the black label on the bottle, and tried to overpower them, but his will was too weak. With a quick flick of his wrist, he turned the bottle up swallowed all the liquid he could stand. Angry at his non-existent self-control, he chunked the bottle across the room. CRASH! Shards of clear glass dusted the ratty, orange plaid sofa that rested just below where the bottle impacted. A glossy sheen appeared on the outdated paneling where the liquor concentrated itself. Tiny streams of whiskey began to meander down the wall, reminding him of the tears he knew his wife was shedding at the moment. Guilt over his uncontrollable habit overwhelmed him. He should go home instead of the poker game. His wife needed him, and so did his children, but right now, he couldn't face his family. Just the thought of staring into Carly's red-ringed eyes made bile rise to his throat. Guilt ate at him from the inside out. He pounded his fist on his desk to jar her image from his mind. Even though he should, there was no way he could go home now. He couldn't face his family. Soon, his demons would cry again, and Dexter would have the calming tonic to quiet them. He grabbed his keys, and headed out. Tomorrow, he'd come up with a strategy to defeat the demons for good.

Jack's eyes popped open. He blinked several times to clear his double vision. Fatigue rested in his muscles like wet sand, and his mouth was as dry as sawdust. Several times he smacked his dry lips together before he scraped his thick tongue across them. The thud of a rubber mallet was thumping inside his head. After a minute, he forced his legs to support his weight, and twisted body to shake the wet sand feeling. A radiant moon bled through the sheer curtains bathing Dexter's living room in soft shadows. The grandfather clock startled Jack as it chimed three times. He had no idea he was out so late. He walked to the poker table where he found two aspirin and glass of water. A smile filled his face as he picked up the generous poker winnings lying next to the glass. Not bad considering he couldn't remember the game and that his brother always shorted him, calling it "the house's take." He shoved the cash in his pocket and pulled out the motorcycle key.

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The early morning air was crisp and carried the scent of damp pine needles and fresh asphalt. Dew rose up just about the earth, giving it a slight Moorish haze. Jack took in a deep breath and slipped on his helmet. Being quiet so as to not disturb Dexter's in-laws living 100 yards away, he walked the bike to the road before he started the engine. When the bike's engine roared to life, Jack's senses came to life, too. "Ah, nothing like the sound of a new engine."

The recently resurfaced highway was desolate and smooth. A half moon hung overhead and several stars dotted the dark sky. Sounds of the engine hummed inside his helmet and sent vibrations through his body. His jeans flapped against the wind, and cool air used his long shirt sleeves and fluttering shirt tail as a ventilation system. These were the sensations Jack lived for.

"Let's see what this baby can do."

He accelerated and his heart took on the rhythm of the bike. Once again, he felt free. No nagging wife, no whining kids, and no business partner complaining about his drinking or work habits. Nothing in life existed but him and this open road.

With constant acceleration, he banked easily into a gentle curve. What he saw was not open road, but an object, with two glowing eyes. As soon as his mind registered the object, it morphed into a deer.

"Nooooo!"

His attempt to avoid the animal sent the bike sideways. Searing pain ripped through his knee and up his body as he made contact with the asphalt. The smell of tar filled his nose, and loose gravel cracked against his teeth. With every breath, his lungs felt ready to explode. His helmet repeatedly smacked the road, sending reverberations through in his head. Sparks lit up the night as the bike frame scraped down the highway. Over and over he rolled across the ground and then came to rest in the dew soaked grass. He knew he should be in a great amount of pain, but for some reason, he felt nothing. Even his lungs no longer ached. While his breathing returned to normal, he spit dirt, rocks and blood out of his mouth. The sound of the bike smashing against a tree echoed against hills and houses. For Jack, everything went black.