



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

# THE PLAINSBURN RESIDENCE

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During my time as a butler at the Plainsburn Residence, I had witnessed no shortage of peculiar occurrences. Nocturnal cries from the nearby forest to bloody hoofprints showing up around the estate, strange phenomena were commonplace to the point where they could no longer be explained through worldly logic. Yet, none of it could have prepared me for what I witnessed that cursed night of the winter solstice – an event that would cause even the most skeptical man to be rendered petrified.

The Plainsburn Residence had sat at the edge of a huge forest for generations, acting as its steward and protector. The manor was old, but well kept, with shiny windows overlooking pristinely maintained gardens on all sides.

The head of the house was Lady Eleanor Plainsburn, widow of the late Lord Franco Plainsburn, who lived alongside their ten children. The Plainsburn family were known for their wealth, wit, and striking emerald eyes, and were beloved by all townsfolk.

I had been hired by the Plainsburns only months before that horrible night. Ms. Linda Glendale, who was the chief housekeeper, was also hired along with me. She was a rather eccentric woman and I heard whispers she had been expelled from her previous lodging on account of some unspeakable deeds, though I was never a man to pay heed to baseless rumors.

The first few weeks went smoothly, with the occasional nightly animal cries giving me the heebie-jeebies but nothing a grown man couldn't handle.

We were treated very well, especially by Lady Eleanor, who took a particular liking to Linda and would spend much of her leisure chatting with her. Their relationship seemed more akin to friendship than that of employer-employee, to the jealousy of the other, more veteran staff members.

However, these peaceful times were not to last, and as time went on, certain peculiarities started occurring in the house and its surroundings. Some servants complained about hearing incessant footsteps around the house late at night. Others said they heard strange cries from the forest, while I was the unfortunate discoverer of bloody hoofprints – likely that of a goat. This was unsettling, as there were no goats on the property.

All while this was happening, Linda started acting strange – much more than usual. She was always in a jittery mood, suspicious of everyone, as if in a state of constant paranoia. Inevitably, rumors started spreading around the house – rumors that she was the cause behind the strange phenomena.

Some said she was a witch preparing for the winter solstice, others claimed she was a demoness who wanted to sacrifice Lady Eleanor. I considered myself a man of logic. I didn't buy into such nonsense, but deemed the situation strange enough that I would wait for the winter solstice

and investigate the matter myself. I did not let any of the other residents know of my plans, because to me, all of them were suspects, and I didn't want a target on my back. So, I devised my plan in secrecy, and awaited the winter solstice, which was coming in three days, in equal parts dread and intrigue.

As the fated solstice night came, it was finally time to put my plan into action, and find the mystery suspect behind the strange events. I had found a perfect hiding spot, a cabinet in the kitchen, with clear view of the main entrance and the dining hall, where most of the hoofprints on the ground floor were found.

I gathered my courage and hid inside the cabinet and waited for whatever mysterious entity that might appear before me. For an hour or so, the only horrors I experienced were the claustrophobia of imprisonment and the onslaught of fatigue. But as I waited, those familiar peculiarities started happening again – first strange cries from the woods. And then, footsteps. From the corner of my eye, I saw black, bloody hooves enter my line of sight. Only it was no goat, but attached to a body upright.

My heart sank – I could feel my muscles stiffen and blood congeal. As the figure moved forward, I started to make out its shape and features. A disgusting thing, a horror not of this world, an abomination only the depths of Hell could conjure up.

It had devilish wings protruding from its back like a bat, and horns of a bull.

It had the body of a woman, dressed in nothing but a skull around her neck and bones around her hips. My mind struggled to believe what my eyes beheld, yet the all-consuming terror left no room for doubt. I was now certain that the rumours were indeed correct. Linda was a demoness, and she was standing in front of me.

She didn't notice me. She was too busy carrying a lifeless body behind her. I dared not imagine who it could be. However, to my shock, the body bore a striking resemblance to the human form of the demoness. It was Linda herself. Dazed at the sight of such inexplicable horror, I had to restrain myself from calling out her name. If Linda was dead, who was the demoness?

These questions raced through my mind as I watched the slender, hellish figure drag Linda outside into the forest at inhumane speed. But that is not the memory which haunts me still. That is not the sight that made me run from the manor that night and never return. As the demoness went to close the door, I caught a glimpse of her eyes – dazzling emeralds shining in the darkness of the night, and behind her tens more glowing brightly from the distant forest.

*Rafid is busy dozing off every chance he gets. Wake him up by sending a notification at rafidkhandaker@gmail.com.*