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**OTHER FAMILIARS**  
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## OTHER FAMILIARS

Characters...

RUBY, a witch. Her familiar is Lidditz, a magpie.

FLOWER, a witch. Her familiar is Graymalkin, a cat.

VINE, a witch. Her familiar is Paddock, a toad.

LADY MACBETH, Queen of Scotland, briefly.

MACBETH, King of Scotland, briefly.

BANQUO, Thane of Lochaber.

ST. CASSIAN THE UNMERCIFUL, demon saint of Leap Year.

HECATE, chthonic Greek goddess of the underworld and the dead. Triplicate.

THE MORRIGAN, a Celtic battle goddess expressed as a triad of sisters.

HECATE'S ARMS

A MAN WITH A SWORD

A WITCH'S MUMMY

SHADE, a young witch

Other witches and puppeteers as needed

Note: The familiars can be achieved with puppetry. Lidditz, Graymalkin, and Paddock can all be simple. The tiger should (probably) be achieved using an abstracted sectional puppet: one actor manipulates the head, two other actors each manipulate one of the paws.

Setting: Various locations in the real world and the spirit world.

## OTHER FAMILIARS, ACT I

Thunder and lightning. Enter three Witches, FLOWER, VINE, and RUBY. They are dressed grimly but elegantly, earthy but not without style. There is warmth between them. They move slowly toward each other, and meet in the center. They hold hands.

Where the place?

FLOWER

Upon the heath.

VINE

There to meet with...Macbeth.

RUBY

From offstage, a cat loudly mewling.

I come, Graymalkin!

FLOWER

Flower gives each of the others a squeeze on the arm, then starts away. Ruby hangs her head and exhales loudly.

From offstage, A toad croaks loudly.

Paddock calls.

VINE

Vine squeezes Ruby's arm and starts to depart. Ruby's body is taken by sobs. She holds back at first, trying to contain herself, making no noise. But she is overwhelmed. She has trouble holding herself upright. Pained gasps escape her. She covers her face and breaks down. Vine and Flower return to her side to comfort her. She lets them for a moment, they silently hold her up, and she composes herself. She waves them off, like *I'm ok, I'm ok*.

Anon.

RUBY

Ruby walks away from them. Flower and Vine watch her go.

Awful.

FLOWER

She shouldn't be out with us.	VINE
True.	FLOWER
She's barely / there at all.	VINE
A shadow without a body, miming at it.	FLOWER
Wouldn't you be?	VINE
Didn't say otherwise.	FLOWER
(beat)	
Have you known / any others?	
Heard tell of it. Never knew one though. Always thought / it was...	VINE
Stories.	FLOWER
Fables, aye, to frighten.	VINE
Sadly no, it is a thing all too real.	FLOWER
Just...horrifying.	VINE
Aye.	FLOWER
Unnatural.	VINE
The poor girl.	FLOWER

Poor, poor girl.

VINE

From offstage, a cat loudly mewling, more insistently. A toad croaks loudly.

I come, Graymalkin.

FLOWER

Paddock calls.

VINE

They join hands and have a moment of knowing eye contact. They exit opposite each other.

Shift to a dark room. There is a repetitive thrum. Ruby sits, a blank stare on her face. Vine appears. They sit in silence a while, listening to the thrum.

Has there been any change?

VINE

Nothing hopeful. Worse, in fact.

RUBY

Worse? How can it be worse?

VINE

It can always be worse.

RUBY

It's spread?

VINE

They think so.

RUBY

So that means...?

VINE

This is the end.

RUBY

The end. Nothing left to do?

VINE

Ruby shakes her head.

VINE

Can he hear me right now, you think?

RUBY

He's...asleep, I'm pretty sure. His breathing slowed a few minutes ago, he seems more peaceful, so, I'm assuming it's sleep. A relief, he was in such a bad way earlier when Flower was here, he was ripping out his own feathers, screeching. Tremors were shaking his body. He kept making this odd movement like he was trying to hide under his own wing. Like he wanted to disappear. I've never seen him do that in all our time together.

VINE

And the necromancers say nothing new?

RUBY

Nothing new. They say we can't really do any more treatments. If his body can take it they may do another course of purification, see what happens. But it's hard to say whether there's even any point to it at this stage. They're certain there's nothing that will stave off death.

VINE

Horrifying...sorry...you're distraught enough without *me* being horrified.

RUBY

No, no. It's alright, really. It's fine. It is horrifying. Say it. That's exactly the word I would use.

Flower appears.

FLOWER

Ruby.

RUBY

Hi, Fleur.

FLOWER

Have you gotten any rest?

RUBY

Some. Vine watched him a little bit so I could shut my eyes a while, take a walk.

FLOWER

Ruby, I know this may feel strange right now, but I wanted to ask...would you be alright with Lidditz having some visitors?

RUBY

Visitors? I / don't know, Fleur.

FLOWER

Aye, it could help for him to feel others in the room, it / could give him strength.

RUBY

I don't know that he'd like to be seen that way. In his / current state I mean.

FLOWER

Graymalkin and Paddock have been asking. Pleading. Haven't they, Vine? They want to come. Many others do too.

RUBY

Other familiars?

VINE

No, not just familiars. Witches and warlocks, fey people, sprites, cunning folk. Lidditz was very well-liked, Ruby, you know / as well as anyone.

RUBY

Aye well, it's not a good time.

FLOWER

Dear, I don't mean to be indelicate, but there may be / precious little time left.

RUBY

I think I know what's best for my familiar. Yeah? Can we agree on that? Vine, do I tell you how to / handle Paddock?

VINE

No, you do not.

RUBY

And Fleur, the last time I said anything sideways to you about Graymalkin you cursed my feet and turned my ankles, so let's not pretend that suddenly with Lidditz at the end of his life that it's our custom to speak freely about the others' / spirit animals.

FLOWER

I'm not speaking about *your* spirit animal, Ruby. I'm speaking about *mine*. If Graymalkin does not get to say goodbye properly it will absolutely crush her. She and Lidditz were quite / fond of each other.

RUBY

Are. ARE.

FLOWER

What's that?

RUBY

Are. You said were. Lidditz is still alive. It's grotesque to speak of him / in the past tense.

FLOWER

I'm sorry, dear. I hadn't meant to.

RUBY

Have you even prepared her for what Lidditz looks like? Does she have any idea? Has she ever laid eyes / on a dying familiar before?

FLOWER

Graymalkin has lived a very, very long time, dear, she has been to some very dark places and been party to some nasty business. Seen lots of death. There is nothing in this world that could shock her.

RUBY

Prepare her. That's all I'm saying.

VINE

So they can come? Paddock, too?

RUBY

Wait until tomorrow. He's asleep and he needs it. Hopefully he'll be in less pain tomorrow. He's barely lucid, Vine, you do realize that? Paddock is very...

VINE

What?

RUBY

Emotional.

VINE

Aye.

RUBY

For a toad.

VINE

Now who's speaking freely?

RUBY

He may be...frustrated that Lidditz can't...communicate...as he normally would.



VINE

Understood. I'll speak to him, let him know not to expect too much by way of...chatter.

RUBY

Good idea.

FLOWER

Would you like me to send the word out?

RUBY

"Send the word out?" By Rhiannon, let's not / lose our heads here.

FLOWER

I mean: would you like me to inform a few key individuals that Lidditz may be fit to receive visitors starting tomorrow morning? Is that fair?

RUBY

Late. Morning.

FLOWER

Perfect.

RUBY

And Fleur, be discreet. There are certain ones I'd prefer not to receive, if it can be helped. (Which it probably can't be but still.) Discreet.

FLOWER

Aye. Of course. Aye. Aye.

VINE

She's talking about Cassian.

RUBY

Of course I'm talking about Cassian, who else would / I be talking about?

FLOWER

It's Leap Year, darling. He's preparing for his feast.

RUBY

So?

VINE

That's why the peasants / are so skittish. I couldn't figure it.

FLOWER

I won't tell him. And he'll be too distracted to pay attention to what anyone around him is saying.

RUBY

Aye. Let's pretend that's true.

VINE

I always liked Cassian.

RUBY

He's terrible.

VINE

He's far far less arrogant than he used to be.

RUBY

A mountain cut in half is still quite tall.

FLOWER

He's well versed in necromancy. He understands / these things.

RUBY

HA! I'd just as soon Cassian be throttled by his own eyebrows, and here you think I'd want, what? Counsel from him? Thanks, but no, Lidditz is getting fine care. Best in the realm. And I'm...

VINE

(pause)

What?

RUBY

I'm reconciled to...the notion that nothing really can be done anymore. Other than to just get him to a peaceful enough place.

VINE

(quietly)

Goddesses help us.

RUBY

So...no second opinions. No experimental treatments. No necromancy or horomancy or any other —mancy. I just want to take what time there is left.

FLOWER

All the more reason to invite friends. We should be celebrating him.

RUBY

Well, if they can look at Lidditz and still feel much like celebrating, I / won't stop them.

FLOWER

He's sick, Ruby, no one will expect him to look like himself.

RUBY

Sick? No. This isn't sick. He's being destroyed, Fleur. Devoured. And it's gruesome. It shouldn't happen. To anyone, least of all to a spirit animal, and one as beautiful as him. It's hideous, it's a consumptive terror is what it is. Call it that. You better warn them.

FLOWER

I will. I said I will.

VINE

Ruby, I know this isn't a good time.

RUBY

I can't imagine...

VINE

Hecate wants to see you.

RUBY

Hecate.

VINE

Aye, she asked that I deliver the message to you. Hecate wishes to speak with you in her chamber ere the moon's rising.

RUBY

"Ere the moon's rising." Is that what she said? She phrased / it that way? So pretentious.

VINE

Aye. She said ere the moon's rising. Or maybe / just the moon's rise?

RUBY

She can't come here? I have / to leave the side of

FLOWER

You know she can't.

RUBY

my dying familiar so that old lizard / can condescend to me?

VINE

SHHH!! She could be listening.

RUBY

So what / if she is?

FLOWER

Just go. Lidditz is asleep, like you said, no better time to see what she wants.

RUBY

He's asleep but.....he still has enough strength...if I put my finger by his foot, even if he's asleep he...he closes his toes around it...the sharpness of his talons is.....it's...

FLOWER

We know.

RUBY

Vine, you'll stay here? Call to me / if anything happens?

VINE

Aye. I won't leave him for even a moment.

RUBY

Thank you.

Ruby goes back into Lidditz' room.

VINE

She looks well enough.

FLOWER

She looks like death.

VINE

Well, when you put it like that.

Ruby comes back, now wearing a magickal cloak.

RUBY

He's sleeping. I'll hopefully be back soon, but with Hecate / whoooo knows.

VINE / FLOWER

Whoooo knows.

RUBY

Actually, Fleur, those invitations...

FLOWER

Mm?

RUBY

Don't invite anyone east of Bavaria.

Ruby closes the cloak around herself and the lights and scene change around her. There's a powerful sound of slashing wind.

She opens her cloak and is now in a dark cave. A MAN WITH A SWORD stands guard. The sword is huge, ceremonial looking. He has a nightmarish, heavy looking helmet covering his head and obscuring his face.

RUBY

You're new. I don't recognize you.

SWORD

State your purpose.

RUBY

I'm here to see the big lady.

SWORD

Dark Hecate, great and fearsome, is at rest and not receiving anyone at present.

RUBY

Oh, please. She called me here.

(beat)

That is, I have an appointment.

SWORD

She did not tell me she was expecting anyone.

RUBY

I see. Well, I don't know what to tell you. She forgot.

SWORD

My mistress Hecate does not make mistakes.

RUBY

I'm sure she loves that you think that.

What are you? SWORD

I'm a witch. Obviously. RUBY

What is your name? SWORD

Ruby. I'm one of, she calls us the "Weird Sisters." Even though we aren't / sisters. But regardless. RUBY

Ruby. Ruby. A red stone. SWORD

Aye. RUBY

You have red eyes. SWORD

I do. RUBY

Red is a deceitful color. SWORD

And yet, knowing that, she called me here. It's a real gamble. Trust me, I'd much / rather be somewhere else. RUBY

I do not trust you. I do not know you. SWORD  
(they stare at each other)

It's unwise to cross a witch. RUBY

I have heard that. SWORD

Ok, look. My familiar spirit is dying. Dying. Fading away. Do you know what that means? Do you have any idea how that feels? RUBY

SWORD

I know very little about “familials.”

RUBY

Familials. Your familiar is your spirit guide, your “spirit animal.”

SWORD

So it is like a pet?

RUBY

WHAT? Ok, look. A familiar is a being, an entity, that follows you, guides you, keeps you from harm. “You” if you’re a witch. It takes the form of an animal, yes, but it’s not an animal like any other animal. It’s a part of you, it knows your thoughts and feelings, and you know theirs, and it’s a very special thing, ok? You don’t always feel the exact same thing at the exact same time, but you feel each other’s feelings. Feel each other’s joy, each other’s pain. The bond between witch and familiar is unique in nature. Like a child, sibling, best friend, and advisor all rolled together in one and linked to you. Attached to your mind, your blood, to your very essence. We rely on them for comfort, fellowship. They help us with our mischief, we send them out on errands. And most importantly, our familiars show us the way to magick. We are chosen by them, and they are utterly devoted to us. In my case, as is the case with many witches, my familiar saved my life.

SWORD

I see. So it is not like a pet.

RUBY

Just let me in to see Hecate.

SWORD

No.

RUBY

She summoned me!

SWORD

I have no reason to believe you are telling the truth. I am not susceptible to your wiles.

RUBY

Listen to me. I am frayed and tired and I’m really not in the mood to stand here and be questioned by you. Any patience I would normally have has been shredded by worry and stress for weeks upon weeks and I haven’t slept either. In days. That makes me very volatile. Quick to anger. And when I get angry you know what I do? I start reciting curses in my head. I know a lot of curses. Some of them are really ugly curses. In seconds I could weave a curse that would have you pissing glass for a year.

(beat)

RUBY (cont.)

And a day.

(beat)

Broken. Glass.

SWORD

I will check and see if my mistress / is available.

RUBY

Could you?

The Man with the Sword disappears a moment, then returns.

SWORD

She has been expecting you.

RUBY

What a surprise.

Ruby goes in.

Shift back to the waiting room, Flower holds a mirror in front of herself and speaks to someone through it.

FLOWER

If you're going to come, come now. The decline has been alarming to say the least.

MAN (IN MIRROR)

How is Ruby?

FLOWER

She's doing no better or worse than anyone can do in such a circumstance, and she's been with Hecate for awhile now, I can't imagine how that's going. Or...I can imagine it. Vividly.

MAN (IN MIRROR)

Hecate is no sentimentalist.

FLOWER

Far from it. She's incapable of empathy.

MAN (IN MIRROR)

She's a goddess, Flower. Deities, they are like petulant child.



FLOWER

Not all of the time. And still, it seems plain to any being, mortal or otherwise, when someone is losing their closest companion, it's only right to give them / time to recover.

MAN (IN MIRROR)

We agree, but it's a waste of time to hope Hecate will empathize with Ruby. Hecate has seen far more death than any of us.

FLOWER

At least three times as much.

MAN (IN MIRROR)

Sorry?

FLOWER

I said at least three times as much.

(pause)

She has six eyes.

MAN (IN MIRROR)

Ah yes. Very funny, Flower.

FLOWER

Are you coming?

MAN (IN MIRROR)

Does she want me to?

FLOWER

Of course not, at least she says she doesn't, but I thought you should / know what was happening.

MAN (IN MIRROR)

Thank you, Flower, for telling me, but if Ruby doesn't want / to see me...

FLOWER

Cassian, is there anything you can do for her?

MAN (IN MIRROR)

Do for her...you mean...

FLOWER

Aye.

MAN (IN MIRROR)

That depends. I would need to see him. See what's happening.

Exactly. FLOWER

Yes, I understand. MAN (IN MIRROR)  
(sighs)  
I'll come. (pause)

Good. Soon, please. FLOWER

Flower puts down the mirror. Vine comes out of Lidditz' room.

Who were you talking to? VINE

No one. A warlock. Of the north. FLOWER

His accent sounded... VINE

What? FLOWER

Of the east. VINE

You're imagining things. FLOWER  
(beat)

What's this Scottish errand we're going on anyway? The Thane of Glamour? VINE

Glamis. FLOWER

Glamis. I know nothing about him. VINE