

FAMILIAR

by

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FADE IN:

INT. HEMLOCK'S BEDROOM - DAY

Darkness lurks beyond an ill lit doorway. MOTHER MALFIORE (50s) steps out. A window blind pattern streaks across her stark figure in amber lines. Feathers flutter behind her.

A tattoo adorns her left breast: a thorny flower cloaked in fire. Occult symbols creep down her arms.

MALFIORE

Sister.

Abigor, a raven the size of a hawk, swoops in from behind her and perches at the foot of a bed. His feathers are so dark, he resembles a living shadow. His green eyes glow.

HEMLOCK (O.S.)

(on the brink of death)

Mother.

SISTER HEMLOCK (20s), a veritable skeleton with skin, lies in the bed. A hideous scar mars her shriveled left breast. It resembles an exploding star. A vial of blood hangs from a chain around her neck.

MALFIORE

I came to watch.

Malfiore approaches a dresser covered in assorted pill bottles. She scoops up some loose pills off the top and closes them in her palm.

MALFIORE

I saw to it you'd suffer duly. But  
I never expected you'd claw as  
desperately as this on your way  
down. It's tragic even for me.

Malfiore opens her hand. Powder sifts through her fingers.

MALFIORE

Still, they were your own sisters.  
Even with that mark I left you, in  
your heart, nothing's changed. This  
is hardly more than you deserve.

HEMLOCK

I know. But...

Malfiore approaches the bed to better hear Hemlock.

HEMLOCK

Thistle.

MALFIORE

Don't you speak that name to me. I know I you loved her. But I loved her first.

Malfiore takes Hemlock's vial in her hand.

MALFIORE

She gave this to me first. And not in some trinket. I tasted it. When we made love.

Malfiore rips the vial from Hemlock's neck and shoves it in her pocket.

HEMLOCK

If you loved...

Hemlock chokes.

MALFIORE

I told you at your initiation. I'll grant you anything. But what's mine is mine.

HEMLOCK

But why... It was my fault.

MALFIORE

No. She loved you too. I had to do something. Sometimes a leader needs to keep the balance of things.

Hemlock blinks. She seems to understand.

MOMENTS LATER

Hemlock's dead. Malfiore strokes the scar on her chest.

MALFIORE

Now I can forgive you.

Abigor squawks. Malfiore proceeds to the foot of the bed. Abigor crouches on the floor with his feathers ruffled. His eyes fixate on something under the bed. Malfiore kneels down and lifts the bed sheet to see what it is.

MALFIORE

Your master is dead. My advice would be to find a new life. But if you want to do something about it, Abigor would be happy to oblige. He has quite the appetite.

Malfiore stands up. She signals Abigor to follow and leaves. The bird flies after her.

EXT. MALFIORE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A crescent moon hangs over an upscale suburban house surrounded by forest. Malfiore emerges from a black car and proceeds up a gravel driveway toward the front door. Abigor descends from the sky and lands on her shoulder.

Malfiore enters the house and flicks on a light. It illuminates a series of occult symbols etched into the door's threshold.

EXT. PATIO - NIGHT

A porch light reveals a fire pit surrounded by flagstone. Four porcelain urns sit on stone benches around it. Occult etchings encircle the pit's surface.

A glass door slides open. Malfiore steps onto the patio and approaches the urns. Tears trickle down her face.

She reaches into her pocket and tosses Hemlock's vial onto the flagstone.

MALFIORE

This wasn't your fight. I never wanted to involve you. I had so much more to show you. I wanted to see you reach your full potential. I just hope this is enough.

INT. MALFIORE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Arcane masks and tapestries adorn the walls.

Malfiore approaches an ornate wooden box atop a dresser. Candles and thistle flowers surround it. A framed photo of her and a younger woman in a grassy setting sits behind it. She holds an acoustic guitar. The other woman, drumsticks.

Malfiore opens the box and removes a charred shrunken hand. She kisses it and touches it against her cheek.

MALFIORE

It's finally over. Now I wish I  
could take it all back. I wish you  
were still with me. But love's a  
ruinous little curse.

EXT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Malfiore sits on a couch in a silk robe, fresh from a shower. She strums a melancholy folk riff on an acoustic guitar. She croons along in a whispery voice. Abigor bows his head and listens from a gnarled oak perch nearby.

Malfiore switches from words to a hum. Abigor perks up. Something's caught his attention.

Little by little, a faint second voice introduces itself and coos along with Malfiore. Abigor caws.

Malfiore hears it. She stops humming and listens but continues on the guitar. Abigor ruffles his feathers.

No voice. Malfiore shrugs and continues to sing.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

An ethereal wail echoes through the darkness. Soft and resonant like a violin.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Abigor screeches and flaps his wings. Malfiore stops playing the guitar and listens. She catches a slight trace of the voice. It seems to shift pitch then builds to a shrill whistle.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

A tea kettle boils on a stove top. Malfiore takes it off and pours hot water into a mug of valerian root.

INT. MALFIORE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Malfiore lies asleep in bed. Abigor erupts into a series of distressed cries somewhere in the house. Malfiore awakens. A rhythmic scraping sound resonates in the distance.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Malfiore enters. Abigor flies to her shoulder.

The doors and windows to the outside emit a fiery red light. The scraping sound is closer now.

The faint reflection of Hemlock's gaunt face appears in a nearby window. In a second, it's gone. Malfiore looks to the window. A swirl of ashes blows across it.

EXT. PATIO - NIGHT

Malfiore opens the door and steps outside. Occult etchings burn bright in the threshold.

The four urns lie shattered before the fire pit. The wind carries off their contents. A curved piece of porcelain lies on the ground. It rocks back and forth with the wind and scrapes against the flagstone.

The light from the etchings on the fire pit cast a faint glow upon the distant trees. Malfiore narrows her eyes. She lifts Abigor off her shoulder with her forearm and casts him off. He soars toward the forest.

EXT. MALFIORE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Malfiore lies awake in the dark.

A distant branch cracks. Abigor crows.

In seconds, a cacophony of animalistic shrieks and snarls erupts in the night. It persists for an extended period of time then ceases as quickly as it started. Silence remains.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Malfiore enters. The room has returned to normal. She opens a nearby window and exits.

INT. MALFIORE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Malfiore lies asleep.

Leaves crunch outside. Metal squeaks. A muted thud follows. The pitter-patter of feet scamper off into the house.

INT. MALFIORE'S BEDROOM - DAWN

A wisp of smoke floats through the air. Malfiore catches a whiff and awakens. She sits up. A red light emanates from the doorway.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAWN

The windows and doors are alight once again. Malfiore enters and gasps.

Abigor's charred corpse lies on the floor. Smoke rises up from the tips of his singed feathers. Faint blue symbols flicker on his chest and splayed wings.

Malfiore falls to her knees. Her face contorts in agony.

A black shape scurries behind her and disappears down the hallway she came in from. She hears it and snarls.

INT. KITCHEN - DAWN

Malfiore opens a draw and removes a hefty meat cleaver.

INT. HALLWAY - DAWN

A trail of ashes snakes down the infernal hallway. Malfiore follows it toward the light of her room.

BEDROOM

Malfiore halts in the doorway. Thistle's shrunken hand sits on the bed. Malfiore raises her weapon. She snatches the hand away and places it on the dresser beside her.

Her eyes flick down. The bed sheet flutters.

She crouches down and readies the cleaver. She extends her fingers and takes a deep breath. She swiftly snatches up the bed sheet and casts it open.

A huge cat as black as Abigor bursts out with a shrill caterwaul and collides with Malfiore's chest. The force is almost human. Malfiore flies backward and crashes into the dresser. Its contents topple over.

The cat hooks onto Malfiore's robe and attacks her with its teeth and claws. Deep fissures open on her face and chest and weep blood.

Malfiore swipes at the cat with her cleaver but to no avail. She throws herself forward and attempts to crush it under her. The cat wriggles out onto her back. It sinks its claws into the back of her neck and gnaws at her flesh.

Malfiore screams. She drops the cleaver and attempts to grab hold of the cat. It nips at her hands and draws blood.

Malfiore scrambles to her feet. She throws herself backward blindly against the walls. The cat hisses and yowls with each impact. Objects tumble from their hooks and shatter on the floor.

Finally, Malfiore collapses against a tapestry. She takes it down with her as she slumps to the floor.

Malfiore wraps the fabric tight around the cat's head and grabs hold of its neck with both hands. She rips the beast off her back and hurls it through the air. It slams against the opposite wall and falls behind the bed.

Malfiore stands up, shaken. Slashes and flecks of blood mar her robe. Her eyes scan the debris on the floor and lock on the meat cleaver. She picks it up and rounds the bed.

The cat twitches on top of the crumpled tapestry. It doesn't react to her presence. Malfiore growls and lifts up the cleaver.

MALFIORE

I told you to go away! She's dead!



Malfiore brings the cleaver down upon the cat. The moment it touches, an unseen force jettisons Malfiore through the air. She hits the wall so hard, it cracks. The cleaver slams against the wall above her. The blade burns red hot.

Malfiore lands on a sheet of debris flat and stiff as a board. She struggles to move but can't. A blue symbol burns on her chest.

A similar symbol dissipates from the cat's pelt. It shakes its head and gets to its feet, completely unscathed. It turns to Malfiore and creeps toward her.

She sees its eyes for the first time. Bright blue. Human.

MALFIORE (V.O.)

Thistle.

The cat climbs onto Malfiore's chest.

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. MALFIORE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Malfiore's mutilated body lies on the floor. No flesh remains on her face, neck, or chest. Hollow eye sockets and mouth gape. Bones glisten with blood.

THISTLE (20s) crouches beside her. Vernix and mucus coats her naked body. She has the cat's eyes. The tattoos on her chest and arms are Malfiore's.

Blood glistens on her hands and mouth. She licks some from her wrist like a cat.

Footsteps approach. Thistle turns.

A bony foot comes down on the smashed picture of Thistle and Malfiore. Hemlock's skeletal form approaches Thistle and strokes her hair lovingly. Thistle purrs.

FADE OUT.

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