

Firefly - "Safe"

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Teaser

CLOSE ON:

Rich expensive BRANDY as it pours into a rich expensive snifter. Pull back to see:

INT. TAM ESTATE - DAY

The room, tasteful, lit by candlelight, feels warm. SIMON holds the snifter. He swirls the brandy around a bit to warm it, inhales the aroma, looks up and smiles.

SIMON

This is a joke, right?

We see Simon's father, GABRIEL, 50, refined, used to having control, standing in front of him. At the moment, he seems warm and jovial.

GABRIEL

Yes. That's exactly right. Because brandy is funny.

SIMON

It's just, this is... this smells like New Canaan brandy.

Gabriel pours brandy for himself and for Simon's mother, REGAN, late 40s, elegant.

SIMON (cont'd)

Aged New Canaan brandy. How much did you pay for this? I thought business was slow.

GABRIEL

Pierre owed me a favor. Seeing how it's a special occasion.

SIMON

Is it?

Simon tries to read his father's grin. Then:

REGAN For god's sake, Gabriel. Just tell him.

Gabriel chuckles.

GABRIEL

Fine, spoil my fun.

(to Simon)

I had a talk today with Jerome Stuart. Seems he's about to take over as Head of Surgery at AMI. Said when you're done with your internship, there'll be an attending position waiting for you.

This is a huge moment for Simon. He's thrilled.

REGAN

(smiling)

Congratulations, son.

Simon stares into his glass, embarrassed.

SIMON

It's not a big deal.

GABRIEL

Oh. Well, all right then.

Playing along, Gabriel reaches for Simon's glass. Simon pulls it away, grinning.

SIMON

Okay, okay. It's an enormous deal.

AMI, that's, I can really do good work there--

GABRIEL

Good work, good pay. There'll be an announcement at the term-end ceremony.

REGAN

We're so proud, sweetheart.

SIMON

Is River coming back?

Gabriel and Regan stare at Simon.

SIMON (cont'd)

For the ceremony. Did she say she'd
be able to get away?

REGAN

We didn't...

(brightly)

We'll write to her immediately, tell
her all about it.

GABRIEL

I doubt she'll come. You saw the
schedule at that school of hers. I
took one look at it, had one of those
school dreams. You know, "I didn't
study"...

Gabriel chuckles to himself.

SIMON

I just... I haven't heard from her in
a while. I thought she'd come home
sometimes, or at least send a wave,
but there's only been the occasional
letter, and half the time she doesn't
sound like herself.

REGAN

She's changing. Finally starting to
fit in. You should be happy for her.

Simon forces a smile.

SIMON

Of course.

GABRIEL

Your position will still be there for
her to admire when she gets home,
Doctor Tam. Come on... let's have a
toast. I've been working on this all
day.

The three of them rise and lift their glasses...

GABRIEL (cont'd)
May your future always be as bright
as it is this very moment --

The three glasses meet... CLINK.

CUT TO:

EXT. JIANGYIN / CARGO BAY - DAY

Squish. Simon has stepped in cow poop on the ship's ramp. Future not lookin' so bright right this second.

SIMON
< cow poop >

JAYNE passes him, amused.

JAYNE
'Bout time you broke in them pretty
shoes.

Jayne takes us further, showing us that the crew is off-loading the cows (from ep 3) into an open prairie at the edge of the woods. We're on Jiangyin, a planet heavy on the nature -- woods and scrubby grazing ground.

Simon continues down the ramp, moving around cows, trying to keep out of the way of all the activity:

MAL leads a cow as Jayne SMACKS another steer on its rump, urging it to move.

JAYNE (cont'd)
Ha! Git along!

MAL
They walk just fine if you lead 'em.

JAYNE
I like smackin' 'em.

Simon looks down to see WASH AND ZOE, at the base of the ramp, where they are sending the cows off to the side, where BOOK directs them into a makeshift pen.

BOOK
Hope this corral's strong enough to

hold them. "Shepherd" is a purely figurative title, you know.

ZOE

Next time we smuggle stock, let's make it something smaller.

WASH

Yeah, we need to start dealing in those black-market beagles.

ANGLE ON: Simon again. He's made his way off to one side. He scrapes at his shoe with a stick. Mal approaches him.

MAL

What're you doing out here, Doc?
Besides the scraping.

SIMON

I thought perhaps I could help. With the cows.

MAL

I'll let you know, any of 'em start complaining of palpitations. 'Til then, not much call for a doctor.

SIMON

(off Book)

But there is call for a preacher?

MAL

I was surprised myself, but turns out he's converted five of 'em. Not easy, neither. Seems they got this natural inclination toward Hinduism.

The CAMERA STARTS TO MOVE off them...

SIMON

Captain, my sister and I have been on your ship for more than two months now. You haven't collected a fare from us in weeks. I don't much feel like a guest... I want to be of use.

MAL
Well, maybe you can finish what you
started.

SIMON
What do you mean?

MAL (O.S.)
That there on the bottom of your
shoe. Plenty more where that came
from. Only if you use a shovel,
might go quicker.

SIMON (O.S.)
Right.

The last off screen because by now WE'RE UP INTO THE TREES, where...
... a figure, STARK, scurries away across the branches with an almost inhuman skill.

EXT. TREETOPS - MOMENTS LATER

Stark lands on a branch. Two other shabby men crouch there.

STARK
Got a good look. They waitin' fer a
payment- Somethin' there worth
takin', too. They got precious cargo.

On Stark's crafty look, we --

BLACK OUT.

END OF TEASER

Act One

EXT. JIANGYIN / CORRAL - DAY

CLOSE ON RIVER and a cow. She's looking into one of its eyes and murmuring:

RIVER
Little soul big world. Eat and sleep
and eat...

Jayne appears, bringing another cow, sees her communing with the bovine. She's reaching back toward the animals.

RIVER (cont'd)
Many souls. Very straight, very simple...

JAYNE
(calling, re: River)
Captain! This one's in the way!

Mal appears, On his approach, trying to get to her:

MAL
Cattle on the ship three weeks, she don't go near 'em. Suddenly, we're on Jiangyin and she's got a driving need to commune with the beasts?

River looks at Mal very seriously.

RIVER
They weren't cows inside. They were waiting to be, but they forgot. Now they see sky and they remember what they are.

MAL
Is it bad that what she just said makes perfect sense to me?
(reaching for her)
Come on, now. Let's move you clear of the work.

River recoils from him. He's not Simon. Now Simon appears, approaching. Sees River backing away from Mal. Some cows might get agitated by this.

SIMON
What's going on?
(off Mal)
What are you doing?

MAL
I was fixin' to do some business. Buyers'll be along soon. I can't be

herding these steers and your sister,
too.

SIMON

I'll keep her out of the way. But
you don't need to say things like
that in front of her.

MAL

Yes, I've clearly upset her.

River is looking at the ends of her hair now, completely tranquil. Jayne, still nearby, snorts.
Simon bristles.

SIMON

She understands more than you think.
Anyway -- she didn't mean any harm.

MAL

Never figured she did. But when a
man's engaging in clandestine
dealings, he has this preference for
things being smooth. She makes
things not be smooth.

SIMON

Right. I'm very sorry if she tipped
off anyone about your cunningly
concealed herd of cows.

MAL

You know, I'm starting to remember
you asking if there wasn't something
you could "do." Think now I got a
notion regarding that. How about you
take your sister for a little walk?

Simon looks startled, worried.

SIMON

A walk?

MAL

Yeah. Someplace... away.

SIMON

Probably best if we stay close. The Alliance has us marked as fugitives--

MAL

You stop actin' like a fugitive, no one's apt to notice. Not in these parts, anyway.

(turns away, working)

Closest Alliance is the cruiser Magellan, hours out from here. And I promise you, they ain't coming to a backwater like Jiangyin.

SIMON

Still... I'm not sure it's such a wise suggestion.

MAL

Might not wanna mistake it for a "suggestion."

Mal continues with his back to Simon. Off Simon --

INT. "GENERAL SUPPLY" - DAY - LATER

A dusty local store. Mostly ranching supplies: feed and branding irons and horseshoes. Along one wall there are some local crafts. A bored-looking proprietor reads a Chinese- language newspaper at the counter.

KAYLEE and INARA browse among the crudely made items.

KAYLEE

Everything's dusty.

INARA

Does it seem every supply store on every border planet has the same five rag dolls and the same wood carvings of...

(looking at one)

What is this? A duck?

KAYLEE

That's a swan. And I like it.

INARA
You do?

KAYLEE
It looks like it was made with, you
know... longing. Made by a person
really longed to see a swan.

INARA
Perhaps because they'd only heard of
them by rough description.

Kaylee holds up a little painted souvenir dish with painted chinese characters on it.

KAYLEE
You think this'd make a nice gift?

INARA
A gift? For whom?

Kaylee just studies the dish.

KAYLEE
I just think it's nice. Kinda rich,
you know.

INARA
Oh. For Simon.

KAYLEE
I didn't say that.

INARA
Well, you don't do a very good job of
hiding your interest.

KAYLEE
He's just so < cute >. You wanna take
a bite out of him all over, you know?

Just then, Simon and River enter. Simon is nervous about being out and visible, a little frazzled
at having to watch River constantly.

INARA
(to Kaylee)
Careful.

KAYLEE

Did he hear? I don't think he heard.
(louder, maybe too
loud)
Mornin', you two!

Kaylee's over-bright greeting just makes Simon more jumpy. He forces a smile, nods.

INARA

We don't usually see you two out and
about planetside.

SIMON

(tense)
We're trying something different
today.

River immediately goes to the farming equipment, starts touching things.

SIMON (cont'd)

River, careful with that, that's...
(helplessly to Kaylee)
What is that?

KAYLEE

That's a post holer. You dig holes.
For posts.

SIMON

(to River)
It's dirty and sharp. Come over here.

He steers her over to the crafts section with the women. He picks up the little dish Kaylee was admiring.

SIMON (cont'd)

(reads the Chinese)
"Jiangyin, Prairie Paradise."
(then)
Good God. They ask money for this
< crap >?

Kaylee flinches, but recovers.

KAYLEE

Hard to believe, ain't it?

(then)
I'm glad you're out.

He smiles absently, politely. His focus on River.

KAYLEE (cont'd)
Give you a chance to loosen up a bit.

Tiny delayed reaction to Kaylee's perfectly innocent comment.

SIMON
What's that supposed to mean? Loosen
up?

KAYLEE
Nothing... I just... Well. You
never seem to have any fun, is all.

His attention's split. He moves to take something breakable out of River's hand-

SIMON
Fun. Right. I consider this "fun."
It's "fun" being forced to the ass-
end of the galaxy, get to live on a
piece of < garbage > wreck and eat
molded protein while playing
nursemaid to my < not entirely sane >
sister. "Fun."

Simon may not have noticed how that all stung. Kaylee just stares at him. He glances at her. Sees her looking at him. A beat.

KAYLEE
< Garbage >?

SIMON Sorry?

KAYLEE
Serenity ain't < garbage >.

SIMON
I didn't mean...

KAYLEE
You did. You meant everything you
just said.

SIMON

(trying to lighten
things)

Well, no... actually I was being
ironic. So in the strictest sense,
I didn't really --

KAYLEE

You were being mean, is what. And if
that's what you think of this life,
then you can't think much of them
that choose it, can you?

He's got nothing to say. She turns and heads for the exit. Inara falls in with her, walks out side by side. As they go:

INARA

(softly, to Kaylee)

You're getting better at hiding it.

Simon, already regretting the altercation, takes a beat, sighs a "god am I an asshole today" sigh. Then he turns to collect River.

SIMON

River?

But River is gone.

EXT. JIANGYIN / CORRAL - DAY

The ship's ramp is empty of cows now. But littered with that which cows leave behind. Mal stands at the base of the ramp, surveying the damage.

MAL

This is the last time. Last time
with cows.

Zoe approaches Mal.

MAL (cont'd)

I heard there was some idea regarding
beagles. They got smallish droppings?

ZOE

I believe so, sir. Also, the
disreputable men are here.

Mal turns to see the GRANGE BROTHERS standing near the makeshift corral, looking at the animals. Jayne stands nearby. Book is not far off, seeing to the fencing.

MAL
(to Zoe)
I better go take their money.

Mal heads toward the brothers. Zoe turns and heads into the ship.

ANGLE ON: THE GRANGE BROTHERS

There are two of them, shabby low-life types. They're looking over the cows critically now, examining their hooves, eyes, teeth. Mal approaches.

MAL
Good morning, Gents. You must be the
Grange brothers. Hope you're hungry
for beefsteak.

They say nothing. Continue to examine the cattle.

JAYNE
Attractive animals, ain't they?

OLDER GRANGE
They ain't well fed. Scrawny.

MAL
< Nonsense. > Hay and milk three times
a day. Fed to 'em by beautiful women.

JAYNE
It was something to see.

YOUNGER GRANGE
They ain't branded.

MAL
You boys're hitting all the selling
points. Unregistered. Claim 'em as
your own.

The Granges continue to look sour.

OLDER GRANGE
Twenty a head.

MAL

That's an amusing figure in the light
of you already agreed on thirty with
Badger.

OLDER GRANGE

That's afore we seen 'em. They're
atrophied, standin' 'round on a ship
for near a month.

MAL

My comprehension is, less muscle,
more tender the meat. Thirty.

The Grange boys step back to talk -- they look nervous, casting looks toward MAL and Jayne,
toward the surrounding woods...

Mal and Jayne eyeball them. A RUSTLING in the trees. Seems it could be the wind. Before Mal
can take much note, Book approaches.

BOOK

(off the brothers)
Problem?

MAL

Nope. Minute from now we'll agree on
twenty-five.

A NOISE. The Granges spin, hands go near their guns (they don't draw.) WASH is on the
loading ramp, dumping a bucket of water. The Granges relax. Wash re-enters the ship.

BOOK

They seem a mite jumpy to you?

Off Mal, watching the men, considering that...

EXT. "GENERAL SUPPLY" JIANGYIN - DAY

Simon, more than jumpy, standing in front of the store, just catches a glimpse of River's dress as
she disappears around a corner. He dashes after her. He rounds the corner to see...

LOCAL COPS, a group of five, heading toward him with some purpose. He freezes.

But River is there, a block ahead of him. He bravely heads toward her. As he passes the cops:

SIMON
(comes out way too
loud)
MORNING, OFFICERS.

The cops pass him harmlessly. We stay with him as he winces. He continues on, spots River going around a corner. Follows.

EXT. JIANGYIN / CARGO BAY - DAY

Mal and Jayne are talking with the Grange Brothers again. Book is visible in the b.g., tending to the corral fencing.

MAL
See, the problem we got with twenty-
three is that it ain't thirty.

YOUNGER GRANGE
These cows ain't as young as you said.

JAYNE
They're babies. Half of 'em born on
the trip.

OLDER GRANGE
I'm thinking maybe we walk away
entirely.

MAL
I'm thinking you do that and we got
ourselves trouble -- morning,
ladies...

Kaylee and Inara, returning to the ship, walk right past the group. The Granges's eyes follow the women. This isn't lost on Mal who steps into their purview with:

MAL (cont'd)
(without a break)
... serious trouble. Of the you-owe-
us variety.

OLDER GRANGE
We can go to twenty-five.

Mal and Jayne exchange a look. The transaction is coming to a close.

MAL
Well, we'd be takin' a loss, but you
seem like clean and virtuous boys...
done.

The elder Grange takes out a little cloth bag, starts counting money into Mal's palm. But freezes
when he hears:

HEAD COP (O.S.)
Marcus and Nathaniel Grange!

They all turn to look -- A COP, one of the ones Simon saw in town, stands nearby, gun drawn.

HEAD COP
You are both wanted in connection to
the illegal killing of Rance Durban.
You are bound by law to stand down!

The other four cops emerge variously about the scene. As Mal puts his hands in evidence,
surrounded:

MAL
(aside to Book)
Yes, Shepherd. Now that you mention
it, they do seem a mite jumpy.

Off that --

INT. CORRIDOR / INT. TENT - DAY

Simon enters a low ceilinged long corridor/hallway. He catches a glimpse of River up ahead, she
disappears around a bend in the corridor.

WITH SIMON

moving down the dark, scary corridor- Moving... River is nowhere to be seen, but Simon speaks
to her anyway--

SIMON
River. Please...

He turns a dark corner which opens into --

TENT

An open, beautiful airy space. A decorated tent.

Music plays.

Local women fill the floor, dancing an intricate folk dance.

River stands on the edge of this, not seeing Simon. Never taking her eyes off the dancers.

EXT. JIANGYIN / CARGO BAY - DAY

The cops, guns drawn, are moving in on the scene. They disarm the Granges and also Mal and Jayne. Firearms are dropped into a neat pile on the dirt.

Another cop is rousting Book nearby. No gun.

MAL

Appears we have ourselves a
situation...

HEAD COP

Who are you?

MAL

Just a bystander.

HEAD COP

This your beef?

MAL

No, sir.

(re: the Granges)

You're looking at the proper owners
right there.

HEAD COP

Like to see some paper on that cattle.

The Younger Grange suddenly lunges at the cop who is frisking him. Wrestles the cop's gun away from him, turns to kill, but suddenly BANG!, the gun is shot out of his hand by --

ZOE

who is on the ramp at the ship, never far from her captain's back.

And now all hell breaks loose. The Elder Grange pulls a concealed gun that the cops hadn't yet got to. More gunfire.

Mal and Jayne drop to the ground, reach for their guns from the pile...

JAYNE
Here we go.

MAL
It never goes smooth. How come it
never goes smooth?

Now Mal notices -- THE CLOTH MONEY BAG in the dust. Just a little more than arm's length away. Mal reaches for it, fingertips brushing the edge of it. Reaching... reaching... MAL grabs it

--

-- just as a BULLET kicks up dust. Mal rolls clear, but has the cash as

Fire fight!

INT. TENT - DAY

River watches from the sidelines. She watches intently, studying. Simon tries to make his way to her. But she DARTS INTO THE DANCE.

SIMON
River!

She works her way into the pattern, mimicking the others' steps perfectly. She dances.

EXT. JIANGYIN / CORRAL - DAY

The fire fight continues. Mal and Jayne are on the ground between the other parties. The Grange boys fire at the five cops.

The cops return fire.

Mal and Jayne keep low, bullets sailing over them.

MAL
I < hate it > when this happens.

The Granges make a break for it, disappear into the corral. Still firing --

Mal looks back to Zoe on the ramp, she indicates where the Granges have gone.

Mal nods back. Mal and Jayne use the cows for cover as they do a mini-pincher move around the Grange boys --

INT. TENT - DAY

River continues to dance. As Simon watches, she throws back her head. We see what Simon sees: she wears a huge grin.

Simon notices, a look of amazement, wonder, on his face. He is in awe of her. Even Simon's starting to smile now, loosening up. The music continues, and so does...

EXT. JIANGYIN / CORRAL / INT. TENT - INTERCUT

The gun battle.

We're INTERCUTTING now. Between River as her dance gets more and more frenzied and...

...the gun fight. Chaos and confusion. The cops firing into the herd. The Granges firing back. And Mal and Jayne closing in on the Granges.

IN THE TENT. River dances...

AT THE CORRAL. The Younger Grange is hit! He goes down, but he's only wounded. He reaches for his gun.

The Elder Grange comes to his aid, firing back at the cops. But suddenly --

-- Mal appears, sailing at him, taking him down. The cops swarm in. None of them hit.

Mal sighs as the cops take the Granges into custody. He looks around. Reacts to something, as...

IN THE TENT. River stops dancing suddenly. Reacting to something as well. Sensing something terrible, as...

AT THE CORRAL. Mal and Jayne rush to find...

BOOK

on the ground. Hit. Blood blooms on his shirt. His eyes roll up. He blinks at Mal, confused. It's bad.

INT. TENT - CONTINUED

Simon grows concerned, seeing River through the undulating crowd. Sees she is caught up in one of her premonitions.

Simon strains to see her...

She is covered by the crowd, then revealed again, getting a bit jostled. Simon starts to move toward her when --

A HOOD is pulled down sharply over Simon's head. Stark and his two MEN are there. They spirit him off. Silent and fast. Off River, alone among the dancers --

BLACK OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

Act Two

EXT. JIANGYIN / CARGO BAY - DAY

Book lies in the dust of the corral, staring up at the milling cows. And also Mal, who is perched over him, trying to stem the blood flow. Jayne is there, too. Looking at something off screen.

MAL

Stay with me, Shepherd.

Book tries to focus, bleary-eyed. He looks down his body, tries to take it in...

BOOK

That's... that's quite a lot of
blood, isn't it?

MAL

Just means you ain't dead.

BOOK

'fraid I might be needin' a preacher.

MAL

That's good. You just lie there and
be ironical.
(to Jayne)
Stretcher.

But Jayne's looking off toward --

-- the COPS taking away what they came here for: the Grange Brothers in rough custody.

MAL (cont'd)

Jayne.

JAYNE

They're goin'

MAL
'course. Got what they came here for.

JAYNE
(after a beat)
You get the cash?

Mal flashes him a look.

CUT TO:

INT. CARGO BAY - DAY

Mal and Jayne, along with Zoe carry Book onto the ship. Kaylee appears as they move through, toward the infirmary.

KAYLEE
What's going on -- ?

She stops asking, sees it.

KAYLEE (cont'd)
Oh God, Shepherd! Shepherd can you
hear me?

They carry the stretcher across the cargo bay toward the infirmary.

INT. SERENITY / INFIRMARY - DAY

They move Book from the stretcher onto the operating table. Zoe rips open Book's shirt, revealing the wound -- gunshot high in the chest.

JAYNE
Don't look good.

Mal shoots him a look that says both "duh" and "shut the fuck up." Mal hits an intercom:

MAL
Wash! Get down to the infirmary!
< Now! >

Mal moves with a purpose.

MAL (cont'd)
(to Zoe)
We gotta try and stop this bleeding.

Mal moves for the cabinet. As he does he tosses the cloth money bag onto the infirmary counter -
- it leaves a bloody smear. He grabs more blood rags and bandages, like that.

Kaylee has drifted closer and closer to Book, tearing UP.

KAYLEE

You don't worry now, shepherd Book.
Cap 'n Zoe got lots of experience
with this kinda thing. Seen lots
worse in the war.

(beat)

Shepherd? Shepherd Book?

(then, closer)

He ain't breathin'!

Book starts to CONVULSE VIOLENTLY.

ON KAYLEE, tears brimming as she backs away from the horror. Zoe rips open the package of
a disposable styrette and hands it to Mal, who plunges it into Book's arm.

Finally the convulsions subside. Mal turns away from the scene. Looks to Kaylee.

MAL

(calm down, be brave,
I haven't the time)

He ain't dead. But he is bad off.

Now we gotta see what we can do to
help him.

Wash appears now. Takes in the sight before him.

WASH

< Oh, god, no. >

MAL

Wash, I need you to go into town, see
if you can find that < consistently
useless > doctor.

Wash nods, heads off. Mal rejoins Zoe at Book's side. Kaylee stares at her dying friend...

KAYLEE

Hurry...

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Simon is dragged through the woods by Stark and his men. Stark moves ahead, the Shabby Man drags Simon, stumbling, by the arm.

STARK

Faster. Gotta go faster. Wanna get there afore dark.

SIMON

Get where? Where are we going? Are you with the police?

STARK

Shut up.

SIMON

Please. If it's ransom you want, I... I can arrange something.

STARK

No talking.

SIMON

You don't understand. My sister...

Stark turns and shoves him hard and he falls. On impact --

INT. TAM ESTATE - NIGHT

Our second flashback. [Note: this scene takes place several weeks after the previous flashback, so wardrobe should change.] Simon stands facing his mother. It's tense.

REGAN

Your sister is fine, Simon.

SIMON

She's not fine. Didn't you look at the letters? Look at the letters!

Gabriel is at his desk, looking over a sheaf of papers. He stands up, bringing the papers with him.

GABRIEL

They seem perfectly normal to me.

Simon points at the pages frantically, pointing things out:

SIMON

She talks about last summer at the
lake.

GABRIEL

So?

SIMON

We weren't at the lake, we were in
the mountains.

REGAN

Oh honey, I'm sure there's a lake up
there.

SIMON

No. These phrases... they don't
sound like her. And look here --
some of these words, they're
misspelled.

(off parents' blank
looks)

She started correcting my spelling
when she was three. She's trying to
tell us something. I think there's
a code.

Regan and Gabriel share a look -- that just sounded nuts.

GABRIEL

A code?

SIMON

Yes.

GABRIEL

Simon... have you talked to anyone
about this?

SIMON

What? No. What do you mean? I'm
talking to you.

GABRIEL

Good. Don't mention this anyone
outside the family.

SIMON
What?

GABRIEL
You don't hear what you sound like,
Simon.

SIMON
I don't care --

GABRIEL
You should. Because it sounds
insane.
(then)
Look, Son, if your sister was in
danger, we'd be right beside you.
You know that.

SIMON
Then let's go and find out.

GABRIEL
Government schools don't allow
visitors.

SIMON
And why do you suppose that is?

GABRIEL
You can't go charging in there
ranting about 'spelling codes' and
nonexistent lakes.

REGAN
It'll hurt your future at the
hospital. It'll hurt River in the
school.

GABRIEL
Your mother's right. Think about the
consequences.

Simon takes a breath, tries not to sound anything but rational and dispassionate as he says,
plainly:

SIMON

Something is going on at that school.
Something is happening to your
daughter. She's trying to tell us.

Gabriel's look is unreadable.

GABRIEL

Yes. Yes, I believe she is.

He looks at his father.

GABRIEL (cont'd)

Right here in this letter, Simon.
You see? She talks about making new
friends. Having a wonderful time.
Were you so busy trying to crack the
secret "code" that you missed that
part?

He's starting to feel unsure.

SIMON

No. I did... I mean, I don't
think...

GABRIEL

(then, not without
affection)

I always thought it was River who was
lost without her big brother... now
I'm starting to wonder if it isn't
the other way 'round.

Now Simon's really confused.

GABRIEL (cont'd)

You miss her.

SIMON

Yes...

GABRIEL

You want to see her.

He nods. Gabriel puts a paternal hand on his boy's shoulder.

GABRIEL (cont'd)
You will, son. Just be patient.

Simon, his anger dissipated, looks uncertain.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

SUNLIGHT GLARES through the trees. Simon squints against it as he is still being forced along in front of Stark and his men. He's a little dizzy from the earlier fall. He blinks through the glare up ahead... sees...

A FIGURE

Feminine, fragile, a nearly angelic vision up ahead.

SIMON

Blinks again. Slows.

Stark gives him a mighty push that sends him stumbling ahead... but he doesn't take much note of the violence, he's still looking toward the figure that stands among the trees, looking at him now.

SIMON
No... Oh, no...

Stark and his men are noticing the figure now, too. It's River. And she's smiling.

SIMON (cont'd)
Oh, god...

The men exchange looks, grow wary --

RIVER
Found you!

SIMON
River! River, no! Run, RUN!

Her smile fades into confusion.

RIVER
Found you?

Simon manages to tear himself away by sheer force of will, the sight of sister giving him sudden strength. He bolts toward her.

But Stark and his men chase him down. Simon is nearly to her, now. In desperation Simon PUSHES RIVER away roughly.

SIMON
RUN! Go!

River looks at him, tears in her eyes. She doesn't know why he pushed her.

And then one of Stark's men has her by the arms- She's caught too.

STARK
Bring her.

And now they're both being forced forward, Simon utterly defeated now as --

INT. CARGO BAY - DAY

Kaylee paces in the cargo bay. Inara and Jayne are nearby. They both react to the SOUND of the MULE. Kaylee perks up.

KAYLEE
(calling)
They're back! Doctor's back!

Mal appears from the infirmary area as Wash drives up in the mule. Alone. The others register this. Wash parks the Mule, climbs off.

KAYLEE (cont'd)
Where's the doctor? Why isn't he
with you?

WASH
He wasn't in town. Wasn't anywhere.

KAYLEE
He was in town. We saw him there.
Him and River. I can show you --

WASH
Town's not that big, Kaylee. Believe
me when I say he wasn't there.

JAYNE
Knew it. Probably saw them cops,
turned tail.

MAL

Doctor could be called a lot of things -- coward wouldn't be one of 'em, though.

INARA

You don't think they were arrested, do you?

WASH

Worse than that, probably.

They all look at him.

WASH (cont'd)

Looks like maybe they got snatched.

INARA

Kidnapped?

WASH

I went to the sheriff's office. Seems if we'd looked at the posted alerts for this rock we mighta known it. Settlers up in the hills take people sometimes. Usually tradesmen and the like. Looks like maybe they got themselves a doctor.

MAL

And now we don't.

Mal moves to the controls that work the doors. Kaylee reacts as the ramp starts to rise, closing up.

KAYLEE

What are you doing? What about Simon and River?

MAL

Forget them. We lost two people today. If I can help it, we won't lose a third.

THUNK! The ramp door closes.

MAL (cont'd)
Wash, get us in the air.

Wash obeys, heads off. Mal moves off, too. We hold on Kaylee, registering what's happening, surprised, devastated --

EXT. WOODS - DAY

As SERENITY RISES UP over some trees in the distance, then takes off heading for space --
CAMERA TILTS DOWN TO...

SIMON

Pausing in his trek, watching as he and River are left behind. Stark appears.

STARK
You just keep movin'.

And with a helpful shove from Stark, he does. He keeps moving. Moving and looking back for a moment, until the SOUNDS of Serenity hitting atmo and getting fainter cause him to turn forward, stumbling toward whatever awaits him --

END OF ACT TWO

Act Three

EXT. SERENITY - EFFECT

The ship moves through space, fast.

INT. SERENITY - INFIRMARY

Book is laid out on the examining table, apparently unconscious. Zoe stands over him, cleaning the wound. He opens his eyes, watches her for a moment before she's aware he's awake. She looks grim.

BOOK
(re: her expression)
That bad?

She looks at him, a little caught.

ZOE
Battle wounds are nothing new to me, preacher. Seen men live with a dozen holes in 'em that size.

BOOK
That right?

ZOE
It surely is. Knew a man with a hole
clean through his shoulder once. He
used to keep a spare hanky in there.

BOOK
Where's the doctor? Not back yet?

ZOE
We don't make him hurry for the
little stuff. He'll be along.

Book's losing it, starting to drift away again.

BOOK
He could hurry a little...

INT. SERENITY - BRIDGE

Wash is piloting. Mal leans over his shoulder. They're looking at a star chart on a display.

WASH
Well, there's Greenleaf. They'd have
med help there.

MAL
Too far, more'n ten hours. Man's
worse off'n that.

WASH
Only place we can get to real fast is
back to Jiangyin.

MAL
And we don't have time to go lookin'
for a doctor dumb enough to get
himself grabbed in broad daylight.

WASH
Yeah. You'd think a guy that
paranoid of the Alliance --

MAL
You'd think. Keep looking.

Inara has just entered, overheard that last line.

INARA
You know where to find what you need.

MAL
Don't recall inviting you onto the
bridge.

INARA
You didn't. Mal, you know what you
have to do.

MAL
This isn't a discussion I much want
to have at the moment.

INARA
It doesn't matter what you want.
He's dying.

He looks at her. Off that eye contact --

INT. SERENITY - INFIRMARY

Kaylee enters the infirmary, joining Zoe, who is watching Book -- genuinely unconscious now.
Kaylee makes a move to hold his hand.

KAYLEE
(re: holding hand)
Can I?

ZOE
Sure. He's out, though.

KAYLEE
He did this for me once. How's he
doing?

ZOE
I cleaned it out, wrapped it up.
Best I could do. I don't know.

KAYLEE

But we're headed for help, right?

ZOE

Captain'll come up with a plan.

KAYLEE

That's good, right?

ZOE

Possible you're not recalling some of
his previous plans.

After a beat:

KAYLEE

We left 'em back there.

ZOE

Yeah.

KAYLEE

Don't seem right.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS / BACKWOODS SETTLEMENT - DAY

River and Simon struggle along through the woods. Stark and his men march behind them, keeping the pace up. Simon stares down at his own feet. River is calm, almost cheerful.

SIMON

They're walking us faster. We must
be almost there.

RIVER

Almost there!

SIMON

I suppose there's an outside chance
we'll be revered as kings. But it
seems unlikely.

RIVER

Almost home.

He looks at her. Was that a premonition or gibberish? The procession comes to a halt. Simon looks up to see that they're indeed, here.

It's a small community. Falling down gray wood shacks. A frontier town that lost the battle with the forest, and was overrun. The general look is Appalachian village.

A few beaten looking people sit in front of the shacks: thin men cooking on crude clay ovens, grim-faced tattered women tending to dirty children in sack-dresses.

Stark pulls Simon roughly by the arm, out into the center of the cluster.

STARK

Look at what we got! It's a doctor!
Got ourselves a doctor!
(proud, relieved)
A doctor. A real doctor.

Simon looks to Stark who suddenly seems less threatening -- because he's smiling and not malevolently, but with a kind of relief.

Simon looks back to the village as more and more. TOWNSFOLK begin to emerge...

STARK (cont'd)
(nudging him, sotto)
Stand up straight.

Simon does, as many of the townsfolk draw nearer, tentative, curious.... some in awe...

INT. BRIDGE

Wash is looking with some awe himself at a thing just outside the cockpit window.

Mal looks less awestruck and more or less just grim.

WASH
You sure this is where you wanna be?

MAL
Oh, I'm fairly certain it ain't. Be
they're gonna have what we need.

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUOUS

SERENITY moving (slowly now) through space. CAMERA PANS with Serenity, revealing just what it is she's moving toward...

AN ENORMOUS ALLIANCE CRUISER. A GRAPHIC comes up over this image: Alliance Cruiser, Magellan, Outer Rim.

INT. BACKWOODS SICKHOUSE - DAY

A DOOR is pushed open. Dusty SUNLIGHT pours into this dark place. Simon and Stark are silhouetted against it.

STARK
In here.

He ushers Simon inside.

STARK (cont'd)
Don't figure it's near as fancy as
you're used to, but it's what we got.

River enters with them. Simon tries to make his eyes adjust to the dimness. It's dark in here, and there are eight or nine people inside, all ages. There are a few cots around the edges, but mostly people sit on the dirt floor. Everyone is thin, haggard, hopeless. They look at him with dead eyes.

SIMON
What... what is this place? Am I in
prison?

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

Mal and Wash looking out at the imposing Alliance Cruiser which fills the entire bridge window.

MAL
(to Wash)
Be sure to ask nicely.

Wash nods, he's already got his hand mic poised to speak into:

WASH
Alliance Cruiser Magellan, this is
Firefly transport Serenity,
requesting permission for docking.

As Wash says this, Mal moves to exit the bridge, passing...

...Inara who stands there. He doesn't even look at her. Off Inara, and before Wash's request can be answered...

STARK (V.O.)
T'ain't a prison...

INT. BACKWOODS SICKHOUSE - DAY

The sad, dark place.

STARK
...it's the sickhouse.

There is some COUGHING and MOANING. Simon looks to River, who gazes with sadness and compassion on those there. Stark calls out to a young woman, DORALEE.

STARK (cont'd)
(to Doralee)
Got yer doctor.

DORALEE
(joining them)
Praise The Lord!

STARK
Doralee here'll show you what's what.

Stark turns and exits. Simon looks around, moves closer to the patients.

DORALEE
What's your name?

RIVER
(appearing)
Simon.

Doralee looks over, sees River.

DORALEE
Well, hello there. Who're you?

SIMON
That's River.

River tries to move toward the sick people. Simon holds her back.

SIMON (cont'd)
River.

(indicates chair)
Just... sit down over there.

She does. Doralee looks to River; Simon looks to the assembled.

SIMON (cont'd)
(to Doralee)
Has there been... is there a sickness
here?

DORALEE
Nothing especial. Just, people get
sick. Or injured. Mostly people
heal on their own, but sometimes...

SIMON
Sometimes you need a doctor.
(then)
Bring me light and any supplies you
have.

As Simon rolls up his sleeves --

OMITTED

OMITTED

EXT. SERENITY - EFFECT

We dock with the huge ship Magellan.

INT. SERENITY - AIRLOCK

Mal and Jayne carry Book on a stretcher from the infirmary area into the cargo bay where Zoe
waits for them.

JAYNE
(re: stretcher)
How we gonna do this?

MAL
Put him down here.

They carefully lower Book onto a large crate in the cargo bay that's near the sliding airlock
doors. Mal takes off his gun, hands it to Jayne.

MAL (cont'd)
Take this.

JAYNE
You sure?

MAL
Go.

A beat. Jayne does. Mal moves to the controls, starts rolling back the inner airlock doors.

ZOE
You sanguine about the kinda
reception we're apt to receive on an
Alliance ship, Captain?

MAL
Absolutely.
(then)
What's sanguine?

ZOE
Hopeful. Plus, item of interest, it
also means bloody.

MAL
Well, that pretty much covers the
options, don't it?

Mal moves to the smaller inner door on the ramp, hits a button -- WHOOSH, it opens, and MAL finds himself facing a PMALANX OF GUNS held on him by Alliance Soldiers.

OMITTED

OMITTED

INT. BACKWOODS SICKEOUSE - DAY

Doralee has brought a hurricane lamp and a wicker box presumably with medical supplies. Simon kneels in front of a child with a bandaged arm. He unwraps the bandage. As he examines the child --

SIMON
This all seems pretty minor. There's
no epidemic? Nothing more serious?

I was brought here just to tend to
these people?

DORALEE

They need tendin', don't they? Last
year, the place needed builders. Got
two men. Five years ago, they
decided they needed a teacher.

SIMON

So they... went and took one?

DORALEE

Went and took me.

Simon looks up from his work.

SIMON

You're... are you a prisoner here
too?

DORALEE

I just live here now. Teach the
children their sums, their Bible
lessons, how to live the Lord's way.
Don't choose to leave.

SIMON

And you think they'd let you?

DORALEE

(shrugs)

Never thought to try. They needed a
teacher. That's what I do. Teach.

Off Simon's incredulous reaction we return to...

INT. SERENITY AIRLOCK - CONTINUED

Mal, Zoe and injured Book face an array of guns. There are three soldiers, a COMMANDER in
charge, and an ENSIGN.

Mal and Zoe are not wearing weapons and keep their hands in evidence as the Commander and
his team moves into the cargo bay area. Regard the injured Book.

MAL
We're requesting aid. No other
purpose.

ZOE
We got papers.

She carefully pulls a little folder of papers from her vest, hands 'em over the Ensign. As he looks
at them...

COMMANDER
What's your business?

MAL
We're a supply ship. Freelance. Had
an accident this morning. Crewman
got injured...

Mal indicates with his head -- back toward Book.

ZOE
We need medical help.

Mal's getting twitchy -- Book might be dying.

MAL
Fast'd be better'n slow.

The Ensign looks up from the papers. He hands them to the Commander. He looks at them.

COMMANDER
(to the Colonel)
Official seal's out of date,
Captain...
(checks paper)
Harbatkin?

Book opens his eyes, looks up at the Commander.

MAL
We ain't been through a checkpoint in
a while, Sir. You gonna see to my
man?

COMMANDER
How did this happen?

ZOE
He was --

MAL
(preemptively)
Bystander in a gun fight. Back on
Jiangyin. You can check. Not he nor
any of ours were the aggressors.

COMMANDER
We aren't an emergency facility,
Captain. Our services aren't simply
available to any--

BOOK
(weakly)
Commander...

The Commander looks at Book, startled.

BOOK (cont'd)
My ident card... pocket...

Book tries to reach into his own pants pocket, winces...

The Commander nods to the Ensign. He helps Book, comes up with an ident card... a square of
electronic paper.

Mal and Zoe watch with interest -- weren't expecting this and don't quite know what to make of
it.

The Ensign takes the card, slides it into a reading device (size of a credit card imprinter) which
overrides its privacy code, and takes in secured information on it. He hands it to the Commander.

WE CAN SEE information scrolling across the card. The Commander looks at it. Then, to the
Ensign:

COMMANDER
(no nonsense)
Get this man to the infirmary at
once.

The soldiers carry Book off to the infirmary. Zoe and MAL exchange a look.

INT. BACKWOODS SICKHOUSE - NIGHT

Simon has brought in even more light. Some of the people, having been treated, have left. The few remaining ones seem happier, livelier... Simon is making a difference.

Simon is treating a woman's infected hand when another woman approaches him. As Simon finishes treating the first woman, Doralee enters and approaches him. She has River with her.

DORALEE

I found her. She wasn't far.

SIMON

Thank you. She's... It's important
she stay close.

River wanders to a corner of the room, sits among some small children.

DORALEE

She's not quite right, is she?

Simon finishes what he's doing...

SIMON

(to the patient)

You keep that bandage clean now, you
understand?

Simon sits back and looks toward River.

SIMON (cont'd)

(to Doralee)

River's been through some trauma.
She's recovering though.

DORALEE

She in a restful situation these
days? Getting a chance to get better?

SIMON

Not... well. We're trying. But
It's... difficult.

They watch as River looks at a little girl, age around seven, we'll know as RUBY. The little girl looks back at her, apparently unresponsive.

DORALEE

She won't get a good conversation out

of Ruby, I can tell you that much.
That little girl's mute.

SIMON

Do you know the cause? Was she born
deaf?

DORALEE

No. She was fine until two years ago
when she stopped talking.

ANGLE ON: River and the little girl.

DORALEE (cont'd)

Place like this might be good for
your sister. Quiet, safe. Place
where folks-take care of each other.

SIMON

Yes, it seems like a lovely little
community of kidnappers.

DORALEE

You shouldn't be so quick to judge.
The Lord says 'judge not.'

SIMON

They took us off the street.

DORALEE

I know it. life sometimes takes you
places you weren't expectin' to go.

SIMON

Life didn't bring us here. Those men
did.

DORALEE

So where were you headed?
(off his look)

My experience is that folks comin'to
Jiangyian are usually just passin'
through, on their way to someplace
else. So what about you two? Where
were you goin'? Home?

We linger on Simon as he considers that, looks at his sister for a long beat.

INT. ALLIANCE CRUISER - INFIRMARY/VIEWING ROOM

Mal, Zoe and Jayne in an observation room just off the big, hi-tech Alliance cruiser infirmary. Within we see ALLIANCE DOCTORS working on Book. This has none of that E.R. urgency -- it's all very staid and antiseptic.

ZOE

So what do you figure -- Shepherd's got some sort of Alliance connection?

MAL

Have to say, all evidence to the contrary, that would surprise me.

JAYNE

Surprised me you droppin' us right in the Fed's lap. Something we sure as hell wouldn't be able to do with two fugies on the boat.

(smiles)

But then we don't got that problem no more, eh Cap?

Jayne starts to kick back, have a seat. Stops as:

MAL

We don't sit. This ain't a place to make yourself comfortable.

Jayne's about to protest, but before he can:

MAL (cont'd)

We don't sit.

Jayne stands awkwardly. Off Mal, looking into the infirmary --

INT, BACKWOODS SICKHOUSE - NIGHT

Simon pulls a blanket over a patient who is asleep. He stands. Work done for the day. He turns. River is not there. Nor is little Ruby.

SIMON

River? River?

Doralee appears.

DORALEE
What's wrong?

SIMON
River's gone. So's the little girl.

DORALEE
Ruby --
(then, as she goes)
I'll check out back.

Simon nods. Doralee moves off. Simon moves to the entrance. He pulls open the door --
-- and there's River. Alone. She's using her dress as a pouch for something.

SIMON
River, don't... what is that?

RIVER
Berries. For you.

She reveals a skirt full of BERRIES.

SIMON
Oh.

RIVER
I picked them.

SIMON
Thank you...

He looks around, finds a bowl, starts helping her to transfer the berries.

SIMON (cont'd)
This is... thank you.

RIVER
You're my brother. I know I make it
hard for you.

SIMON
No...

RIVER

I made you be here. I remember everything. But... more. I remember more, Simon. Too much. I'm confused all the time. Don't mean to be.

SIMON

I know.

RIVER

I wanted you to have berries. Because they're good. And they're sweet. And you make me better.

He looks at her. Smiles. As he puts one of the berries in his mouth:

RIVER (cont'd)

They're not poison.

He almost chokes as he laughs. Hugs her. Now Doralee appears with Ruby.

DORALEE

(relieved to see
River)
You found her.

Ruby moves off to her makeshift bed, one of the many mats.

SIMON

Yes, she... there are berries.

DORALEE

Fruit of the ground. God's reward
for a hard day's work.
(to Ruby)
You get to bed, now.

SIMON

(re: he and River)

We should probably think about doing the same. It's been a big day, what with the abduction and all.

DORALEE

Ya'll don't have to sleep here.
There's a house set aside for you.

We've been looking for a doctor for
a good while. So things are ready.

SIMON
Really...

RIVER
(mouth full of
berries)
Her sister got killed. Her mother
got crazy. Killed the sister. That
one lived.

DORALEE
Ruby talked to you, honey?
(to Simon, excited)
It's true what she's saying. Poor
woman went out of her mind, tried to
kill her two girls. Ruby lived.
(to River)
Sweetheart, you are an angel! No
one's been able to get Ruby to speak
even a peep! It's a miracle! That's
what it is!

RIVER
Ruby doesn't talk. Her voice got
scared away. I hear crickets.

DORALEE
I don't understand... if Ruby didn't
talk, how do you...?

RIVER
I pulled it out. I looked in her
head and I pulled it out. She talks
in there.

SIMON
My sister is...

DORALEE
(soft, stunned)
A witch....

SIMON
What?

DORALEE
(reciting)
'And they shall be among the people,
and they shall speak truths and
whisper secrets... and you will know
them by their crafts.'

SIMON
No, you misunderstand --

Doralee takes a troubled, horrified step backward...

DORALEE
Witch. She's a witch! You brought
a witch to us!

He's been moving steadily toward her; she's been backing up to the doorway. He reaches for her

--

SIMON
No... Doralee, please...

DORALEE
'Thou shall not suffer a witch to
live.'

She runs into the night. Simon is, understandably, alarmed.

OMITTED

END OF ACT THREE

Act Four

INT. TAM ESTATE - NIGHT

We're in Simon's third and final flashback. [Note: again, this is on a different night, new wardrobe.] We're in the same room. Regan looks out the window, alone. Face etched with worry, drink in hand. It's POURING RAIN outside. She hears the front door open O.S. Simon enters wearing an overcoat, walking briskly, followed by his father-

REGAN
Simon! Thank god! I was so worried.

SIMON
I'm fine.

REGAN
Then what were you doing in a police
holding center?

GABRIEL
Your son was caught in a vice unit
raid. Downtown, in a red-light
tenement bar;
(to Simon)
Never expected I'd be dragged out of
the house in the middle of the night
for something like this, Simon.

SIMON
Weren't you even listening? I had to
go there! It was the only place the
man would meet me.

REGAN
Man? What man?

SIMON
Someone with information about the
Academy. Someone with the contacts
we're going to need. Other children
have disappeared into that school,
mother. And the ones who do come
out, they're... wrong... aphasic or
psychotic...

She just stares. Gabriel looks more annoyed than worried.

GABRIEL
Can you believe this? This is what
I've had to listen to for the last
two hours.

SIMON
I've been working on her letters.
There is a code. She says someone is
hurting them.

Gabriel goes to the phone-screen, starts to make a call.

GABRIEL

I'll call Johan. He should be able
to scrub this off his record, with a
small transfer of funds...

Simon slams the shut-off, stopping the call.

SIMON

Dad! Forget my record! River is in
trouble!

GABRIEL

River isn't here!

Simon looks like he's been slapped across the face. Stunned.

GABRIEL (cont'd)

We are. And we have to be very
careful what we do. This is a
government school, Simon. People in
our position... it's important that
we show support for this government.

SIMON

You're talking about politics? This
is about your daughter!

GABRIEL

This is about our lives.

Simon stares at them both for a beat, taking this in. He leaves the room, exits to --

EXT. TAM ESTATE / ENTRYWAY - NIGHT

Simon steps out into the rain. Gabriel follows.

GABRIEL

Where are you going?

SIMON

To get her out.

GABRIEL

This isn't something you want to do.

SIMON

You're right. This isn't something
I want to do. But if I don't, then
no one will. So I'll do it. I'll
take care of her. Just like I always
have.

Simon moves out into the RAIN. Gabriel takes a step after him --

GABRIEL

That's < bullcrap >. We gave both of
our children everything they could
possibly want.

Simon turns back, rain beating down on him.

SIMON

But you never gave us anything we
needed.

GABRIEL

How can you say that? Look around
you! Look at this life!

SIMON

You had rooms to fill. That's all.
You used us like furniture.

GABRIEL

Not true. We love you.

A beat as Simon sees the pain on his father's face. Wants that to be true. Rain streaming down his
face, he softens for one last plea.

SIMON

Then show me. Show River. Come with
me, dad. We can save her.

A long beat as Gabriel just stares at his son.

GABRIEL

Believe me, Simon... if I thought
even for a moment...

SIMON

(hardens, starts to

turn)
Forget it.

GABRIEL

If you do this thing, they will find you, and they will put you away. And know this: when they do, I will not come for you. If you leave here, if you do this... I will not come for you.

Simon stares at his father for a beat, then turns and walks away into the night.

EXT. BACKWOODS SETTLEMENT - NIGHT

Simon and River watch as Doralee rings the town bell. It's at the side of the little street, rigged to a pole. She pulls repeatedly at the cord that swings the clapper. Townspeople, about a dozen, emerge onto the streets. Stark among them. Doralee yells to them as they appear.

DORALEE

Witch! The girl's a witch!

SIMON

This is lunacy. You're supposed to be the teacher here. What exactly is it you teach?!

An older man, an official known as the town PATRON, comes to Doralee, puts a hand on her arm, makes her stop ringing the bell. He's got a long coat over pajamas, an air of authority, and he seems completely rational and comforting.

PATRON

What's going on, woman? Why are you knocking us out of our beds this hour?

DORALEE

That girl, the new doctor's sister... she read Ruby's mind. She said she pulled the thoughts out.

River is clinging to Simon, confused and scared.

SIMON

River's not a witch. She's just a troubled girl--

The Patron smiles at the brother and sister.

PATRON

I'm sure that's true-

(to River)

You're not a witch, are you, < young one >? I'm the Patron here -- do you know what that means? It means I'm in charge. You can tell me.

River stays silent. The Patron continues to look at her intently. Simon gets uncomfortable.

RIVER

(to the Patron,

pleasantly)

The old Patron died. He was sick and you were alone in the room with him.

The Patron slaps her across the face.

SIMON

No!

Simon makes a rush for him and is restrained.

PATRON

This girl reads minds and spins falsehoods! She has had congress with The Beast!

The Patron motions to two men who step forward, take River.

PATRON (cont'd)

We will purge the devil from her.

She KICKS... struggling to break free. This isn't delicate squirming, but an all-out fight.

She lets out a horrible long SCREAM -- as if she's being killed. It's shocking. It doesn't help.

SIMON

No! She didn't mean anything!

PATRON

Bind her. She must be purged. With fire.

INT. SERENITY / INFIRMARY - NIGHT

We're back on Serenity. Book is on the recovery table. Comes around. Sees Mal hovering over him.

BOOK

Well. That's not a face I expect to see in heaven. Guess I survived.

(then)

Thank you, Captain. It was very resourceful of you.

MAL

Had no reason to think it'd work. Just took a chance.

BOOK

Reckon that's how you do lots of things.

MAL

Majority of the time it turns out bad. I may want to rethink my governing principle.

BOOK

Well, it worked out this time.

MAL

Yeah. They let us come and they let us go. What kind of ident card gets us that kind of reception and send off?

BOOK

I'm a shepherd. Folks like a man of God.

MAL

No they don't. Men of God make everyone feel guilty and judged. That's not what I saw. You like to tell me what really happened?

BOOK

I surely would. And maybe someday I

will.
(then)
It's good to be home.

Zoe appears.

ZOE
Captain?

Mal moves to join her just outside the door.

ZOE (cont'd)
Wave come up on the cortex -- Badger
heard we left Jiangyin. Wants to
know why we're not on our way back to
Persephone with his share of the
cattle money.

MAL
You indicate to him we had a medical
emergency?

ZOE
The point was made.

MAL
How'd he take it?

ZOE
Not real well.

MAL
(moves off)
Guess we better hurry, then.

EXT. BACKWOODS SETTLEMENT - NIGHT

The villagers are constructing a witch-burning set-up... vertical pole, kindling... you know how it goes.

Men SCURRY UP TREES, like Stark before. They go into the high branches, drop down dry, dead kindling.

River, being held, is calm again. But Simon is losing it. Stark is there now, too, looking regretful.

SIMON

Don't do this. There has to be
another way...

STARK

You asked for time, Doctor. The
Patron give you that. But you don't
offer him nothin'.

The Patron says something to the men holding River. They spirit her over to the stake. The men start to tie River to the stake. She doesn't struggle. They're piling kindling there. One of the men fires up a small TORCH.

Simon manages to rip free, rush over, shoves that guy aside.

SIMON

Get away from her!

He gets hit. Hits back. More of the men come at him. He stands between them and River. Sees that he's woefully outnumbered.

SIMON (cont'd)

If you must have a sacrifice, will
you not take me instead?

PATRON

God commands us to destroy this evil.
She's a witch. There is no other way.

Simon sees the odds. Nothing to do now. He looks to River, gently brushes the hair from her eyes.

RIVER

(re: stake)

Post holer. For digging holes. For
posts.

SIMON

(small laugh)

That's right.

She smiles at him. Doesn't seem frightened. He smiles back, tries not to explode with the emotion. He puts his arms around her. Then, all defiance, he turns to the mob.

SIMON (cont'd)

Light it.

The Patron nods to the man with the torch. He brings it up. Is about to touch it to the pile...

RIVER
(clear and still)
Time to go.

Then the wind picks up and it gets darker, as

SERENITY RISES UP

huge and gray. THUNK. The BOMBAY DOORS open on the belly of Serenity and there's Jayne, hanging out of them, big ass rifle with a flashlight strapped to it aimed down on those assembled. He could pick off any of them at any time. THE VILLAGERS back away, stunned.

MAL (O.S.)
Say there, doc --

MAL AND ZOE, fully armed, emerge from the trees behind the crowd. Guess who's surrounded now?

MAL
Now don't you think you're takin'
this persecution complex of yours a
mite far? Why don'tcha just... step
down off the pyre.

ZOE
It's a stake, sir. Not a pyre.

A few of the men make a move. CHA-CHUNK. BLAMM! A burst of buckshot at their feet from Zoe's gun convinces them that might not be a such a great idea.

MAL
(to Patron)
Cut her down.

PATRON
The girl is a witch

MAL
Yeah. But she's our witch.
(cocks his gun)
So cut her the hell down.

Off Mal's won't-take-no-for-an-answer look...

INT. SERENITY - INFIRMARY / COMMON AREA

Mal comes into the common area, glances into the infirmary, notes that it's empty. He turns and there's Simon.

SIMON

I've moved him to his room.

MAL

How's he faring?

SIMON

He's going to be fine. They took good care of him.

MAL

Good to know.

Mal starts to go. Simon hesitates, then:

SIMON

Captain -- ?

Mal turns, looks at him.

SIMON (cont'd)

You... you came for us.

MAL

You're on my crew.

SIMON

Right. I just, I guess I didn't..
you don't even like me.

MAL

You're on my crew. Why we still
talking about this?

(his back to him, as
he goes)

Chow's in ten. No need to dress.

As we, hold on Simon:

INT. SERENITY / DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The crew gathered for supper. Everyone's there except for Book. Simon appears, ushers in River. He pulls a chair for her, but she goes across the table, takes a seat in between Jayne and Wash.

Kaylee appears carrying a bread basket, sets it on the table.

She glances at Simon. He smiles at her. She smiles back. He holds a chair for her. She sits.

There's lots of chatting and laughing and arguing.

WE FOLLOW the serving dish as it's passed around. Jayne takes a big hunk of bread, puts it on his plate, passes the dish. He looks back -- the bread is gone. River's got it, is eating it.

Simon takes in the communal experience happening around him. And as we pull back on this milieu --

FADE OUT:

END OF SHOW