

FIREFLY
"Objects in Space"

By
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TEASER

EXT. SPACE - NIGHT

WE see a small, lonely moon sitting in space. Serenity glides into frame, passing the moon and taking us with it. We are above and behind the ship, and we glide with it a bit, keeping pace.

CLOSE ON: the top of Serenity as the camera goes THROUGH it, into the labyrinth of wires and pipe and spaceship innards, moving about rabbit-fast, twisting and turning, ending up looking down through a grating at:

INT. RIVER'S ROOM - EVENING

RIVER, sleeping.

Cut to EXTREME CLOSE UP on River's closed eyes. There is talk, chatter from every shipmember, like static in her head, rising slowly. The noise builds until --

A MAN'S VOICE

We're all just floating...

--her eyes snap open. That voice could've been in the room with her.

She rises, sits on her bed. She wears a dress, no shoes, seems to be in a slightly dreamlike state.

(No huge change there,- but we may do something with the lens occasionally to accentuate that.) Laughter pulls her from her room.

INT. PASSENGER DORM - CONTINUING

She moves slowly, finds KAYLEE and SIMON on the couch. Kaylee is lying with her legs (her feet are also bare) over the sitting Simon, innocently intimate. Laughing.

KAYLEE

You couldn't possibly have!

SIMON

I wish I was lying. I just -- we'd all just made surgeon, that was it, we were the elite, the world was ours, you know --

KAYLEE

-- so you had to be naked.

SIMON

Naked, yes, and on top of the statue of Hypocrates, and -- Can you just picture me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KAYLEE

Naked? I'll have to conjure up --
it'll be tough.

He smiles at her, and she taps his chin with her toes playfully.

KAYLEE (CONT'D)

So the feds came?

SIMON

There were no feds. Until I started singing.

KAYLEE

(laughing)

Oh no! What'd you sing?

SIMON

This is not funny. This a morality tale about the evils of sake.

River has been watching them the whole time. They suddenly turn to her, the laughter draining from their faces.

SIMON (CONT'D)

(to River)

I would be there right now.

There is coldness in his voice, and Kaylee looks at her with an expression that matches.

And then, oddly, there's a JUMP CUT to the two of them laughing again, as though that moment never happened.

River looks mildly confused, then starts up the stairs.

SIMON (CONT'D)

It was either that or the national anthem. Reports vary.

KAYLEE

Do you remember any of it?

SIMON

I remember talking them out of telling my father... or paying them out of telling my father, I'm fuzzy on aspects...

INT. AFT HALL/DINING ROOM - CONTINUING

River comes into the hallway, touching the walls as she goes, looking at her hands. She finds BOOK and JAYNE, also in mid-conversation. Jayne is cooking scallion cakes on the griddle. Book is at the table.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAYNE

So, like... never?

BOOK

Well, no.

JAYNE

Not ever never?

BOOK

Some orders allow Shepherds to marry, but I follow a narrower path.

JAYNE

But, I mean, you still got the urge, right? They don't cut it off or nothing...

BOOK

(smiles)

No, I'm more or less intact. I just direct my energy elsewhere.

JAYNE

You mean like masterbating'?

BOOK

I hope you're not thinking of taking orders yourself...

JAYNE

That'll be the day.

During all this, River wanders unnoticed right between the two of them. She turns to look at Jayne, who looks back guiltily.

JAYNE (CONT'D)

I got stupid. The money was too good.

She turns, looks at Book, who is in her face, fiercely angry.

BOOK

I don't give half a hump if you're innocent or not! So where does that put you?

JUMP CUT back to reality -- the men are laughing, Book still sitting, and River has walked between them unnoticed. She heads to the foredeck hall as the men continue:

JAYNE

It ain't impossible! Saint Jayne, It's got a ring to it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BOOK

I'm just trying to remember how many miracles you've performed.

JAYNE

I once hit a guy in the neck at five hundred yards with a bent scope, don't that count upstairs?

BOOK

Oh, it'll be taken into consideration...

JAYNE

Well you make that sound kinda ominous...

INT. FOREDECK HALL/BRIDGE - CONTINUING

River moves into the foredeck hall, is about to turn right when she sees WASH and ZOE on the bridge. The door is half shut and they are a ways away, but she is suddenly awash in their energy.

Which is different than anyone else's, seeing as how Zoe is sitting on Wash's lap, facing him, smooching him.

Their clothes are on, (it's the bridge, already), but though they are playful, their energy is intense, their eyes locked. We see them as River feels them, VERY CLOSE up, wide angle lens roving around them, sweat and smiles and the sound of the ocean, waves breaking as River nearly staggers back with it, suddenly perturbed to be in that intimacy.

She moves away, hugging the wall, down into:

INT. CARGO BAY/INARA'S SHUTTLE - CONTINUING

And now she's coming down the steps as MAL and INARA are in quiet conference at the entrance to her shuttle.

INARA

I've put out a few waves to some old acquaintances -- I may even be able to find something in New Melbourne, if you need the shuttle free.

MAL

Only thing you're gonna find in New Melbourne is fish and fish related activities. Unless you got an overwhelming urge to gut sturgeon -- and who hasn't, occasionally --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

INARA

But it's a layover point for almost every planet this side of the system, and I could... I just don't want to draw this out.

MAL

You decided when you're gonna tell the others?

INARA

I... no. I appreciate your not saying anything.

MAL

I don't. So make up your mind.

River stops near the entrance. Inara looks at her, says:

INARA

I'm a big girl. Just tell me.

Pan over to Mal, who is looking away from us.

MAL

None of it means a damn thing.

That ocean noise again, and River looks pained, nothing is as it should be here, she stumbles down the steps in a jumbled series of jump-cuts...

She walks along the floor of the cargo bay, steps on something.

ANGLE: HER FOOT

Steps on a branch. She gingerly steps off it, then bends over to look at it, her head coming into frame, staring.

ANGLE: FROM HIGH ABOVE we see the entire cargo bay floor around her is littered with branches and leaves.

She picks up the branch. It's smallish, curved to fit well in her hand.

She studies it, uncertain.

RIVER

Just an object.

(looks up)

It doesn't mean what you think...

She smiles comfortingly --

Jump-cut to reality -- Simon and Kaylee are standing in front of her, yelling -- Mal yelling as well from above...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SIMON

River you know that's not to be touched!

KAYLEE

Everybody just be real calm already

--

MAL

Get it away from her --

SIMON

Just put it down!

River looks confused at the sudden cacophony. Looks down in her hand -- and there is a BIG DAMN GUN in it. Pointed at Simon and Kaylee, the latter of whom looks shit-scared.

River lowers the gun, looking grouchy confused, as Simon comes to take it from her. She looks over at Kaylee, who fades out to the passenger dorm, unable to deal.

RIVER

Kaylee...?

SIMON

What were you thinking? Where did you get ahold of this?

Mal is down with them by now, takes the gun from Simon, checks it.

RIVER

It was in my hand...

MAL

Fully loaded, safety off. This here's a recipe for unpleasantness, does she understand that?

She turns to him.

RIVER

She understands. She doesn't comprehend.

MAL

Well, I'm glad we've made that distinction. No touching guns, okay?

RIVER

No touching.

She moves off, quickly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

SIMON

River --

RIVER

It's getting very very crowded!

And she's out. Mal looks at Simon.

MAL

Thought she was on the mend.

SIMON

The medications are erratic,
there's not one that her system
can't eventually break down, and
you have to recalibrate --

MAL

I want a lot of medical jargon
thrown at me, I'll talk to a
doctor.

SIMON

You are talking to a doctor.

MAL

Yeah, okay -- point is, coulda been
you she mighta shot just then. The
doctor, as you just made note of.
And who exactly could fix you? Not
nobody. We're still in deep space,
Doctor, corner of No and Where. You
take extra care with her. 'Cause
we're very much alone out here.

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING

Serenity continues on, as the camera comes around to see that
there is another, smaller vessel RIGHT behind and above it.
Sleek, quiet.

They're not so much alone out here.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING

We move in on the smaller craft as it hugs Serenity's wake. Move in closer to see the windshield, and a single figure inside the cockpit.

(It's way too small to be called a bridge -- if Serenity is a family van, this is a Harley.)

INT. EARLY'S SHIP - CONTINUING

He's called EARLY, and for the next while, he will say not a word. He merely goes about his business with quiet, intense efficiency. His business is hunting.

He watches the ship below him as readouts come over the windshield 'screen'. Among them:

-- Serenity heat scanned with infrared, showing a small model of the ship with heat signatures indicating where everyone is.

-- A blueprint of Serenity that shows her layout, names the rooms, shows points of egress, lists components and operating systems -- A graph of two lines coming together that then flashes: TRAJECTORY SYNC COMPLETE. LOCKED ON TO FLIGHT PATH.

While he works the controls beneath these readouts, the camera pans over to see a picture stuck to the hull near his head. A picture of River -- the one the Blue hands sported in the Train job. Around it is a warrant showing River with the legend, FUGITIVE, and at the bottom, REWARD 200,000 CREDITS, Alliance Bond Standard. WANTED ALIVE.

There's also a picture of River and Simon, and a beat up picture of an older black woman with a dog on a lawn.

Early takes the first picture of River off the wall, stares at it a moment, returns it. Then slips out of his seat.

INT. BRIDGE - EVENING

Wash is at the helm, Zoe beside him. He's talking, but also concentrating on his readouts.

WASH

Little River just gets more colorful by the moment. What will she do next?

ZOE

Either blow us all up or rub soup in her hair, it's a toss up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WASH

I hope she does the soup thing.
It's always a hoot and we don't all
die from it.

ZOE

That poor kid...

WASH

(looking at screen)
Yeah, she's definitely... got...
funny.

ZOE

Something wrong?

WASH

I'm just getting a weird heat
bounce off our wake.

ZOE

Engine flux?

WASH

Sensor probably got turned around.
I'll climb up top when we hit land.

Over this last exchange, Jayne and Mal enter, talking.

MAL

The lockers were sealed. We both
know --

JAYNE

I don't leave my guns around, Mal.
And I don't leave 'em loaded.

MAL

Well somehow she got her hands on
your hardware. Suppose she took up
something with hull-piercing
bullets?

JAYNE

Bullets is soft lead, Mal. Even
Vera could barely breach hull and
she's the best I got! Anyhow, let's
direct this conversation in a not-
Jayne's- fault direction. I didn't
make her crazy. Hell, I didn't want
her on the damn ship.

MAL

(in his face, quiet)
Is that the direction you want this
conversation to go in?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Jayne looks guilty, covers...

JAYNE

I just don't like taking a lashing
for what I ain't the cause of.

ZOE

Where's River at now?

MAL

In her room, which I'm thinking we
bolt from the outside from now on.

WASH

That's a little extreme, isn't it?

JAYNE

Anybody remember her coming at me
with a butcher's knife?

WASH

(remembering fondly)
Wacky fun...

JAYNE

You wanna go, little man?

WASH

Only if it's someplace with
candlelight.

ZOE

Sir, I know she's unpredictable.
But I don't think she'd harm
anyone.

JAYNE

("Hellooo...")
Butcher's knife...

ZOE

Anyone we can't spare. I mean, far
as we know, the girl's never even
picked up a gun before.

KAYLEE

That ain't so.

She's standing in the doorway, looking upset. They give her
their attention.

MAL

Kaylee, you got something to say?

She looks at him, not sure where to start.

EXT. SPACE - LATER

We are close on Early's ship, near the bottom as a door slides open and he glides out. Pushes a few keys as it shuts, then looking down, steadies himself a moment --

And pushes off, floating down toward Serenity. We pull out wide to show the three objects: The big ship, the smaller ship, and the tiny man floating rapidly from one to the other.

Close on the top of Serenity as he hits the top, landing gently as possible. He walks, slowly and deliberately, pulling his feet up with the slight effort of disconnecting magnets. Walks to the window. Very slowly, looks in.

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUING

We see his head -- briefly -- by the fore window, looking in at the group that contains everyone save River.

KAYLEE

It was when... when the Captain and Wash got took by Niska.

MAL

Ain't like to forget that any time soon.

KAYLEE

Well, we all went in, me too... Didn't make much account of myself, I'm afraid.

MAL

(touches her head)

I got no problem with the notion of you not killin' nobody, Kaylee. Take it as my own fault that you were put in such a spot.

SIMON

What's this got to do with River? She wasn't even in that fight.

KAYLEE

Well, no, she was. I got pinned down, there was three guys and I couldn't... and then River comes up and she looks out, sees 'em all. They was spread out, you know, had some cover, but she just looked for a second and... She took my gun. Closed her eyes. Killed 'em.

SIMON

She shot them?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KAYLEE

All three dead in an instant. With her eyes still closed.

JAYNE

Well that's < a baboon's ass-crack > [FAY-FAY duh PEE-yen]. You saw it wrong.

KAYLEE

Not a jot. And it weren't autofire, or luck... she just... she just did the math.

ZOE

You understand how that sounds...

JAYNE

What? She killed them with mathematics, what else could it have been.

KAYLEE

You couldn't've done it, Jayne. Nor you, captain; not nobody can shoot like that that's a person.

SIMON

So River's not a person?

As they continue, the camera moves suddenly down to the floor, THROUGH the floor, pipes and wires visible, to the ceiling of:

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

Where River is standing directly below them, feet on the railings of the catwalk, ear as close to the ceiling as she can get, hearing every word. Or sensing them.

KAYLEE

(O.S.)

Please don't be mad...

SIMON

(O.S.)

I just want to understand what you're saying here. I thought River was your friend.

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUING

KAYLEE

She is. But Simon... the way she... right after, she looked at me and smiled, like nothing was wrong. Like we were playing.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KAYLEE (CONT'D)
 (to the group)
 Scared me.

There's a moment, as the group takes this in.

BOOK
 Could be she saved your life,
 Kaylee.

KAYLEE
 I'm all aware of that, I'm not
 trying to --

SIMON
 She probably didn't even know what
 was going on! Thought it was a
 game.

JAYNE
 Later on you can explain to me how
 that's a comfort. Might have to use
 some'a that math we been hearing
 about...

MAL
 (running over Jayne)
 What we got here to deal with is
 the larger issue. And the larger
 issue is we got someone on board
 this ship might be a danger to us.

Now the camera moves UP, again through pipes and wires,
 through hull, to:

EXT. TOP OF SERENITY - CONTINUING

Where Early kneels, holding a listening device to the hull.
 The voices are coming through, somewhat static-y.

MAL
 (O.S.)
 It's not a question of whether we
 like her... some of us have grown
 attached...

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUING

MAL
 Kaylee, I know you have or you'd've
 spoken up sooner, which by the by
 you should have. I find River
 pleasant enough myself. But she's
 got an oddness to her, and it ain't
 just her proficiency with fire-
 arms. Girl knows things she
 shouldn't. Things she couldn't.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAYNE

Are you saying she's a witch?

WASH

Yes, she's a witch, Jayne. She has had congress with the beast.

JAYNE

She's in congress?

WASH

How did your brain master human speech? I'm just so curious.

INARA

< Shut up, you inconsiderate schoolboys >! [BEE-jway, neen hen BOO-TEE-TYEH duh NAN-shung!] This isn't a joking matter. This is about your -- about our lives. And River's.

MAL

Thank you.

SIMON

She's deeply intuitive, it's true she has a --

MAL

I don't think she's just intuitive, Doctor. I think she's a reader.

ZOE

Psychic?

WASH

Is that even remotely possible?

MAL

(to Simon)

You tell me. You been studying what they did to her.

SIMON

They've definitely altered the way she reacts to things, even the way she perceives... but I'm not...

WASH

Psychic, though? That sounds like something out of science fiction!

ZOE

You live in a spaceship, dear.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WASH

So?

JAYNE

(suddenly more uncomfy)
Back up a sec. You're saying she
might really read minds?

MAL

Or near enough. Am I the only one
thinking along those lines?

BOOK

No.

JAYNE

I don't like the idea of someone
hearing what I'm thinking.

INARA

No one likes the idea of hearing
what you're thinking.

BOOK

The alliance could have any number
of uses for a psychic. Any
government would.

ZOE

A psychic or an assassin...

SIMON

She's just a kid.

His voice is quiet, but it stops them.

SIMON (CONT'D)

She just wants to be... a kid.

MAL

I wish it were that simple.

JAYNE

Yeah, and if wishes were horses
we'd all be eatin' steak. What do
we plan to do about this?

MAL

Well, that's the question.

SIMON

I don't think she'd ever hurt any
of us.

MAL

Maybe you're right.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

He looks around, at all of them.

MAL (CONT'D)

Well, I ain't making a decision on anything till I've thought on it awhile. It's late.

Looking at Inara:

MAL (CONT'D)

We hit New Melbourne in three days time. We'll see who... we'll think of what to do by then. Let's get some rest.

Simon turns and goes quickly out the back. Kaylee follows.

INT. AFT HALL - CONTINUING

He is rounding the corner as she stops him.

KAYLEE

Simon --

SIMON

I gotta go check on my assassin.

KAYLEE

Simon please don't be mad at me. I had to say something.

He turns to her.

SIMON

I'm not mad at you. I just... she loves this ship. I think it's more home to her than any place she's been.

KAYLEE

What about you?

SIMON

I'm... I thought the hospital was home. I was really making a difference there... and embarrassingly large stacks of money, and I could've... I would be there right now if she hadn't... if they had just left her alone.

KAYLEE

Is it so bad here?

SIMON

I don't even know if the captain'll let us --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KAYLEE

No, but, isn't there anything about
this place you're glad of?

He looks at her. Something passes between them, something
that draws them closer --

BOOK

G'night, you two.

He passes right through the moment and blows it completely.
Simon and Kaylee go back to being awkward.

SIMON

Uh, I --

KAYLEE

No, yeah --

SIMON

Good night.

KAYLEE

Don't let the space bugs... bite...

He goes. She looks after him, feeling like the queen of Lame-
donia. A beat, and she heads into the engine room, muttering:

KAYLEE (CONT'D)

Space bugs...?

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

It's later, and the Captain sits alone. He thinks a moment,
then exits, killing the lights.

INT. FOREDECK HALL - CONTINUING

He goes to his door and kicks it in, starts climbing down.
The camera moves away from him to the exterior hatch Simon
and River used in Bushwacked.

It opens.

Early comes quietly down, looking about him. Pulls off his
helmet. And pulls out his gun.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. RIVER'S ROOM - NIGHT

River is lying in her bed. She senses something, pulls the covers over her head.

INT. FOREDECK HALL - CONTINUING

Early looks around the hall. No one around. He holsters his gun, moves back to the hatch, puts his helmet in there and seals it shut.

He comes back into the hall and Bumps into MAL, who's headed back to the dining room. Mal is completely taken by surprise - and Early is a blur, a little bit ninja as he pops Mal in the throat to keep him from screaming, gets in close and punches a nerve cluster in Mal's back, Mal pushes him off and swings, connects only glancingly --

INT. WASH AND ZOE'S ROOM - CONTINUING

Zoe stirs - - is something going on upstairs?

INT. FOREDECK HALL - CONTINUING

Early slams his foot into Mal's face, slamming the back of his head into his own ladder, Mal starts to drop -- and Early shoots forward, GRABS him by the shirt, keeping him from falling.

INT. WASH AND ZOE'S ROOM - CONTINUING

Zoe rolls over. Nothing.

INT. MAL'S ROOM - CONTINUING

Early lowers Mal gently into the room, letting him drop the last of the way, unconscious. Closes the door from above.

INT. FOREDECK HALL - CONTINUING

He goes to the com and locks the rooms from the outside -- this involves punching buttons by the com and hitting some graphics, the legend PRIVATE QUARTERS LOCKED coming up and a little red light appearing over each door. Except Kaylee's. He comes to Kaylee's room and the door is open.

He listens a moment -- nothing - then looks down the length of the ship.

INT. ENGINE ROOM - LATER

Kaylee is lying on her back, working under the engine. She yawns, goes back to work -- hears something.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She sits up, looks out into the dark of the hall. Maybe a little unnerved. It's dark in here, most of the light comes from the lamp she's working by, and the hall itself is pitch.

KAYLEE

River...?

She stands, looks. Nothing.

She turns back to the toolbox, squats down to toss in a part, comes back up and Early is RIGHT behind her, she spins to see his face staring impassively inches from hers.

She gasps, stumbles back. She's up against the wall here.

EARLY

I like this ship.

She says nothing. Looks frantically around.

EARLY (CONT'D)

Serenity. She's good-looking. I mean she looks good.

KAYLEE

How did you get on...?

EARLY

It strains the mind a bit, don't it? You think you're all alone... Maybe I come down the chimney, Kaylee, bring presents to the good girls and boys. Maybe not, though.

He comes closer to her. She shrinks closer to the wall.

EARLY (CONT'D)

Maybe I've always been here.

KAYLEE

What do you want?

He looks at the turning engine, mesmerized.

EARLY

That's her beating heart, isn't it? You pull off any one of a thousand parts, she'll just die. Such a slender thread...

(still looking at the engine)

Have you ever been raped?

A small beat --

KAYLEE

The captain's right by --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

EARLY

The captain's locked in his quarters. They all are. There's nobody can help you. Say it.

KAYLEE

There's... there's nobody can help me.

EARLY

I'm gonna tie you up now. And you know what I'm gonna do then?

(she can't answer)

I'm gonna give you a present. Get rid of a problem you've got. And I won't touch you in any wrong fashion, nor hurt you at all, unless you make some kind of ruckus. You throw a monkey wrench into my dealings in any way, your body is forfeit. Ain't nothing but a body to me, and I can find all unseemly manner of use for it. Do you understand.

KAYLEE

(tiny voice)

Yes.

EARLY

Turn around and put your hands behind your back.

She slowly does, terror on her face, as he pulls out a thin roll of tape. Pulls a strip out, says:

EARLY (CONT'D)

Now tell me, Kaylee... where does River sleep?

INT. PASSENGER DORM/SIMON AND RIVER'S ROOMS - NIGHT

Book exits the bathroom, in his sleepwear, towel over his shoulder, kit in hand. It's dark here as well, though there are safety lights enough to keep one from bumping into shit. Book heads for his room, hears something at the top of the stairs. Turns back that way, looks up.

ANGLE: up the stairs -- is complete blackness.

BOOK

Hello?

Nothing. He turns to go, hears another sound. Starts up the stairs, merely curious.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Early SLIDES down the handrails on both hands, shooting down at Book with both feet out, catching the shepherd in the face at two steps up, sends him flying back as Early lands gracefully by him.

ANGLE: SIMON

Wakes, hearing the thumps. There is silence after, but he's not satisfied. He climbs out of bed (he's just wearing drawstring pants) and opens his door, looking out at:

ANGLE: the hall where Book got slammed -- is now empty. Simon looks 'around for a sec -- then crosses to River's room to check on her. He slides the door open --

ANGLE: RIVER'S ROOM is empty.

SIMON

River...

He comes back into the hall, stands between the two bedrooms, not sure what to do... and the camera finds Early PERCHED on both ladders above him, almost spider-like.

Simon almost has time to look up as Early drops, lands straddling Simon's head, holding the ladders and swinging the doctor up and SLAMMING him to the ground.

Simon's in pain, but Early comes over him and Simon GRABS him, throws him as he himself gets up, ready for a fight -- but Early comes up with his weapon pointed at Simon.

EARLY

Doctor Tam, why don't you sit yourself down?

SIMON

Rather die standing.

EARLY

The intention is not for you to die. The warrant doesn't specify any particular need for you to be alive, but...

Early waves the gun. Backed into the curved corner of the hall, Simon sits on the steps. Early peers into the rooms.

EARLY (CONT'D)

Where's your sister?

SIMON

Are you Alliance?

EARLY

(not understanding)
Am I a lion?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SIMON

What?

EARLY

I don't think of myself as a lion.
(smiles)
You may as well, though: I have a
mighty roar.

SIMON

I said "Alliance".

EARLY

Oh. I thought --

SIMON

No, I was...

EARLY

That's weird.
(beat)
Where's your sister?

SIMON

I don't know. Who do you work for?

EARLY

This is her room.

SIMON

Yes.

EARLY

It's empty.

SIMON

I know.

EARLY

So is it still her room when it's
empty? Does the room, the thing
have purpose? Or are we... what's
the word...

SIMON

I really can't help you.

EARLY

The plan is to take your sister,
get the reward, which is
substantial. "Embue". That's the
word.

SIMON

So you're a bounty hunter.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

EARLY

That ain't it at all.

SIMON

Then what are you?

EARLY

I'm a bounty hunter.

SIMON

That's what I said.

EARLY

Yeah, but you didn't say it well.
I'm named Early. I'm known to some -
- probably not your set, though.
She sleep with anybody?

SIMON

River?

EARLY

Yeah, she grapple with any of the
crew? Might be in their quarters?

SIMON

No!

EARLY

Maybe she does that you don't know
about.

SIMON

This is insane. I'm not gonna help
you find her in any case.

Early holds up his gun -- not pointed at Simon, just
observing it.

EARLY

I think this is very pretty. I like
the weight of it.

SIMON

I thought the intention was not to
kill me.

EARLY

You're missing the point. The
design. Of the thing. It's
functional. The plan is not to
shoot you, the plan is to get the
girl. If there's no girl, then the
plan... well, it's like the room.
You are gonna help me look for her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

SIMON

I don't think my last act in this 'verse is gonna be betraying my sister.

EARLY

You're gonna help me because every second you're with me is a chance to turn the tables, get the better of me, and it's the only chance your sister has. Maybe you'll find your moment. Maybe I'll slip. Or you'll refuse to help me, I'll shoot your brain out, and then I'll go upstairs and spend some time violating the little mechanic I got trussed up in the engine room. I take no pleasure in the thought but she will die weeping if you cross me.

SIMON

(quietly)

You're out of your mind.

EARLY

That's between me and my mind. Let's start with these rooms.

ANGLE ON: BOOK, whose unconscious form is slumped in the other hallway. Simon (having grabbed a shirt) comes upon him quickly, checking to see he's not dead.

EARLY (CONT'D)

He's not killed. Be a while before he comes to, but he'll mend.

SIMON

And which part of your plan dictated the necessity of beating up a Shepherd?

EARLY

That ain't a Shepherd.

Simon looks at Early, unsure if this is just more of his off-centeredness. Early is looking down the hall.

EARLY (CONT'D)

Open the rooms.

INT. INFIRMARY/PASSENGER DORM - A BIT LATER

The infirmary doors open. Simon steps in, Early behind, gun still held on the doctor.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SIMON

She wouldn't come in here anyway.
She hates this room. You see,
Early, the people you're planning
to sell her to cut up her brain in
a lab like this. Tortured her. Teen-
age girl. Not some bandit on a
murder run, just an innocent girl --

EARLY

You ever been shot?

A small beat.

SIMON

No.

EARLY

You oughta be shot, or stabbed,
lose a leg... to be a surgeon. You
know? Know the kind of pain you're
dealing with.

What seemed like a threat becomes more like a distant
observation -- not that Simon is particularly comforted by
this.

EARLY (CONT'D)

They make Psychiatrists get
psychoanalyzed before they can get
certified, but they don't make
surgeons get cut on. That seem
right to you?

Simon has no answer.

INT. CARGO BAY - MOMENTS LATER

The two of them enter the big, darkened bay. Early pulls out
a small, powerful flashlight, shines it about. The locker
with the spacesuits is near him, and the door is ajar. He
moves to it -- swings it open, gun at the ready. It's empty
(except for a couple of spacesuits).

Early steps into the middle of the room, looks about at it.

SIMON

Come on out, River, the nice man
wants to kidnap you...

EARLY

Shhh.

He looks at the walls, holds his arms out, moving them up
parallel to the slanted walls.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EARLY (CONT'D)

I like the way the walls go out.
Gives you an open feeling.
Firefly's a good design.

He motions with his gun for Simon to go upstairs. Heads up after.

EARLY (CONT'D)

People don't appreciate the
substance of things. Objects in
space. People miss out on what's
solid.

They reach the landing as he speaks, and he looks out over the room. Simon stands by him, unnoticed. He could just give a little shove --

-- and Early's gun is in his face, Early not even looking at him.

EARLY (CONT'D)

It's not your moment, Doctor.

Simon takes a step back. Early points his light at Inara's shuttle.

EARLY (CONT'D)

Companion lives there?

SIMON

Yes.

EARLY

(pointing at both shuttles
in turn)

We'll try the empty first. Then
we'll pay her a visit.

INT. CARGO BAY - A BIT LATER

Simon steps out of the empty shuttle, Early behind, moving a little faster.

EARLY

That room's not saying a damn
thing.

They get halfway to Inara's -

EARLY (CONT'D)

Hold it.

He stops by one of the catwalk's support beams - looks very closely at it. Sticks out his tongue and touches the end of it to the pole. Pulls back thoughtfully, as though he has learned something profound.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He motions for Simon to go on.

INT. INARA'S SHUTTLE - LATER

Inara is sitting up in bed. Simon stands near the entrance of the room, looking tense. Inara, vulnerable and more than a little confused, looks from him to Early, who is peeking in the back room, gun trained steadily on Inara.

INARA

This is pointless, you know that.

EARLY

Two hundred thousand seems fairly pointed to me. Money like that, I could retire, not that I would. What's life without work?

INARA

Serenity is a smuggling ship. I've been here a year, I couldn't name all the places she might hide.

EARLY

I don't have a year.
(to Simon)
Your sister's becoming a real annoyance.

SIMON

I feel for you.

He heads to the exit, herding Simon ahead of him, talking to Inara.

EARLY

I'm not gonna waste my time threatening you, because I think you believe that I will kill people if someone upsets my plan. I'm gonna seal you in, though. You just sit.

INARA

You can still walk away from this.
I know you're tired.

He violently pistol-whips her, pointing the gun back at Simon as she feels the blood on her lip.

EARLY

Don't go visiting in my intentions.
Don't ever.

He moves to the entrance. Before he shuts the door:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EARLY (CONT'D)
 (to Inara)
 Man is stronger by far than woman.
 But only woman can create a child.
 That seem right to you?

He shuts the door on her.

INT. BRIDGE - LATER

Simon comes up the stairs from the front of the bridge while Early stands at the very front, looking down into the space, gun trained on Simon. He steps over to the middle with Simon, his manner tenser and the gun held with both hands at arms length.

EARLY
 (calls out)
 All right! That's all the hide and
 seek I got time for!

INT. MAL'S ROOM - CONTINUING

Mal stirs, the voice barely reaching him.

INT. WASH AND ZOE'S ROOM - CONTINUING

She does the same.

INT. JAYNE'S ROOM - CONTINUING

He's sleeping right through it.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

EARLY
 Now I know you're on this ship,
 little girl, so here's how this
 goes!

He points the gun at Simon's temple.

EARLY (CONT'D)
 You show yourself, and we finish
 this exchange, or your brother's
 brains'll be flying every which
 way.
 (to Simon)
 You understand, I'm sort of on a
 clock here, it's frustrating --

RIVER
 (O.S.)
 You're wrong, Early.

He looks around, what the fuck -- but realizes she's just coming over the com.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He speaks in a more normal voice, knowing she can hear him.

EARLY

I'm not wrong, dumpling. I will
shoot your brother dead if you
don't --

RIVER

(V.O.)

Wrong about River. River's not on
the ship. They didn't want her
here, but she couldn't make herself
leave, so she melted. Melted away.

INT. MAL'S ROOM - CONTINUING

He is hearing this also, and is more than a mite confused.

RIVER

(V.O.)

They didn't know she could do
that... but she did.

INT. WASH AND ZOE'S ROOM - CONTINUING

Even Wash is waking up... as Early's voice also sounds on the
general com.

EARLY

(V.O.)

Not sure I take your meaning
there...

The two of them look at each other.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

RIVER

(V.O.)

I'm not on the ship. I'm in the
ship.

Simon looks almost as perturbed as Early.

RIVER (CONT'D)

(cont'd; V.O.)

I am the ship.

SIMON

River...

RIVER

(V.O.)

River's gone.

EARLY

Then who exactly are we talking to?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RIVER

(V.O.)

You're talking to Serenity. And
Early... Serenity is very unhappy.

Early looks over at Simon, a bit freaked. Simon just shrugs.
What are you gonna do?

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. ENGINE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Kaylee is sitting in the corner, hands tied behind her back, legs tied together. She hasn't moved since Early left her, she's so scared. After a moment...

RIVER
(V.O.)
Kaylee?

The voice is quieter, more intimate - this is not being broadcast for the public.

RIVER (CONT'D)
(cont'd; V.O.)
Kaylee, can you hear me?

KAYLEE
River...?

RIVER
(V.O.)
You're afraid.

KAYLEE
(near tears)
He tied me up... I don't know where he came from, he just...

RIVER
(V.O.)
It's okay. Gonna be okay.

KAYLEE
Is he gone?

There is a small beat.

KAYLEE (CONT'D)
(panicked)
Is he coming back?

RIVER
(V.O.)
He's not gonna hurt you, Kaylee; He's only visiting.

KAYLEE
I told him where you were, I'm sorry, I didn't know what --

RIVER
(V.O.)
Sshhhh... I'm fine. Only I need you to do something for me. Gotta be brave.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KAYLEE

I'm tied up, I can't --

RIVER

(V.O.)

Got tools. something sharp. Don't be scared. I'm right here.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Early and Simon are very still. After a beat:

EARLY

Where'd she go?

SIMON

I can't keep track of her when she's NOT incorporeally possessing a spaceship, don't look at me --

EARLY

That's some nonsensical crap! Ain't nobody can do that.

(to the air)

You're somewhere on this boat
Somewhere with a com, playing
games.

Her LAUGHTER filters over the com. It's somewhat unsettling.

EARLY (CONT'D)

That's somewhat unsettling.

RIVER

(V.O.)

Early, Mister Jubel Early, bounty hunter.... can I call you Jubel?

Okay, freak time. How'd she know that?

EARLY

Ain't nobody calls me that.

RIVER

(V.O.)

Your mother does. I'm sorry. Did. She's gone now.

EARLY

That supposed to scare me? Bringing up my mother?

RIVER

(V.O.)

You're a liar. I don't think your intentions are honorable.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EARLY

Well, no, I'm a bounty hunter, it's not generally considered honorable so much as... I live by a code, though, which I think is worth --

RIVER

(V.O.)

You hurt people.

EARLY

Only when the job requires it.

RIVER

(V.O.)

WRONG. You're a bad liar. You crawl inside me uninvited and you hurt my crew, I see everything that passes --

EARLY

I only hurt people 'cause they keep getting in the way of finding you!

(to Simon)

Tell her!

SIMON

What am I, your advocate?

EARLY

(thrusts out gun)

You are starting now.

SIMON

(to River)

He's really very gentle and fuzzy, we're becoming fast friends.

She giggles again.

EARLY

You folk are all insane!

SIMON

Well, my sister's a ship, we had a complicated childhood.

EARLY

Does anybody care that I have a finely crafted gun pointed at this boy's head?

RIVER

(V.O.)

I care.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

EARLY

Then are you gonna come out, stop
me from doing what I don't want to?
You gonna be smart here, River?

There is no answer.

EARLY (CONT'D)

River?
(beat)
Serenity?

INT. MAL'S ROOM - CONTINUING

He's shaking off the beating he took, pulling himself up.

MAL

(groggy)
What in the hell is going on here?

RIVER

(V.O.)
I need you to do me a favor,
Captain.

MAL

There was a guy, he was very
blurry. You gotta be careful....
how come there's a guy on board and
how come you're all of a sudden the
ship?

RIVER

(V.O.)
I know you have questions...

MAL

Yeah, that would be why I just
asked them --

RIVER

(V.O.)
But there isn't a lot of time.
Captain, I need you to trust me.

MAL

Am I dreaming?

RIVER

(V.O.)
We all are.

The captain rolls his eyes.

RIVER (CONT'D)

(cont'd; V.O.)
Don't make faces.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He looks around. That was creepy.

INT. ENGINE ROOM/AFT HALL - CONTINUING

Kaylee has cut her hands free, is finishing her feet. Tentatively, she stands.

RIVER
(V.O.)
Are you ready?

The door opens slowly and Kaylee peers out, still very afraid. A moment, then she starts down the hall, hugging the wall.

INT. BRIDGE - A BIT LATER

Early is getting a little more hyper. He moves to the computer screen, working it with one hand while keeping the gun loosely on Simon.

EARLY
Just gotta think here... These
older models got locators at all?

SIMON
Won't help...

EARLY
(turns to Simon)
You know, with the exception of one
deadly and unpredictable midget
this girl is the smallest cargo I
have ever had to transport and yet
by far the most troublesome. Does
that seem right to you?

Early turns back to the screens.

SIMON
What'd he do?

EARLY
Who?

SIMON
The midget.

EARLY
Arson.
(beat)
Little man looved fire.

INT. FOREDECK HALL - CONTINUING

Kaylee peeks out around the corner. She can just see a piece of Early. She ducks her head back, then braves it, comes around and works the console.

The red light over MAL'S room goes out.

Kaylee bolts down toward the cargo bay.

INT. WASH AND ZOE'S ROOM - CONTINUING

They are talking with River's voice.

ZOE

I can take this guy out.

RIVER

(V.O.)

He's faster than you. All of you.
And he's wearing armor.

WASH

What about his face? Is his face
wearing armor?

RIVER

(V.O.)

No touching guns. You just have to
sit and be good. He'll leave soon.

Wash looks at Zoe.

WASH

This is all very surreal. I hate
surreal.

INT. MAL'S ROOM - CONTINUING

He is standing right under his ladder, waiting.

RIVER

(V.O.)

It's soon now. Are you ready?

MAL

How do you know what this guy's
gonna do?

RIVER

(V.O.)

I'm very close to him. He doesn't
even see it.

MAL

Okay, but --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RIVER
 (V.O.)
 Go now.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

The lights go completely out in the bridge and the hall. We may or may not see Mal scrambling up his ladder and disappearing around the corner in the far background as Early looks around, NOT seeing him.

Now Early's very freaked.

RIVER
 (V.O.)
 You're not welcome here anymore,
 Early.

EARLY
 And you think I'm gonna leave here
 empty handed?

RIVER
 (V.O.)
 I know it.

EARLY
 Yeah, you know me real well.

RIVER
 (V.O.)
 Wish I didn't. You like to hurt
 folk.

EARLY
 It's part of the job.

RIVER
 (V.O.)
 It's why you TOOK the job. Not the
 chase, not the money... Power.
 Control. Pain. Your mother knew.
 Sadness in her when she waved
 goodbye, but she's relieved. Saw
 darkness in you. You're not well.

EARLY
 You'll be wanting to shut up now.

RIVER
 (V.O.)
 Big golden retriever, sitting on
 the lawn. Never took to you. Smell
 on you, the neighbors pets, you did
 things to 'em... cleaned up after.
 Shined and polished. Everything in
 here gleams.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Realization dawns on Early.

EARLY

Well I'll be a son of a whore.
You're not in my gorram mind.
You're on my gorram SHIP!

EXT./INT. - EARLY'S SHIP - CONTINUING

We push in on River, who is in fact sitting in the pilot's seat of Early's ship, spacesuit on and helmet off. She is giggling again.

RIVER

It's very interesting. All these buttons...

INTERCUT THE TWO
LOCATIONS:

EARLY

Okay, we're not touching those, okay?

(to Simon)

How the hell did she get on my ship?

SIMON

At this point, I'm as lost as you.

RIVER

Can see everyone from here. Wave to mommy. Put the gun away.

EARLY

(not putting it away)

Okay, I'm putting it away...

SIMON

No he's not.

He glares at Simon. Puts it away.

EARLY

I'm putting it away 'cause we're all reasonable people, don't want to be doing anything rash, fiddling with any dials.

RIVER

You're not right, Early. You're not righteous. Got issues.

EARLY

No! Or, yes, I could have that, you might have me figured out, that...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EARLY (CONT'D)
 good job, I'm not a hundred percent
 -- Are we gonna be reasonable?

RIVER
 Talk too much.

EARLY
 I'm flawed in that way, I sometimes
 go on, it's been said --

RIVER
 It's okay, Early. I'm going with
 you.

Now it's Simon's turn to be unhappy.

SIMON
 River, what are you --

RIVER
 Don't belong. Dangerous. Like you.

INT. WASH AND ZOE'S ROOM - CONTINUING

They listen in, somber.

RIVER
 (V.O.)
 Can't be controlled. Can't be
 trusted. Everybody could just go on
 without me, not have to worry.

INT. PASSENGER DORM - CONTINUING

Where Kaylee is tending a groggy Book, also hearing this.

RIVER
 (V.O.)
 People could be who they wanted to
 be, could be with the people they
 wanted... could live simple. No
 secrets.

We move in on Kaylee, the words clearly effecting her.

INT. BRIDGE INTERCUT WITH EARLY'S SHIP - CONTINUING

The realization of what she's saying truly hits him.

SIMON
 (quietly)
 No...

RIVER
 And I'll be fine. I'll be your
 bounty, Jubel Early. And then I'll
 just fade away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Early smiles. Heads for the door.

EARLY

Well, finally something goes
according to --

Simon throws himself at him, they clatter to the ground,
tussling --

RIVER

Simon?

Early throws him off, pulls out his gun -- and fires. Simon's
eyes go wide.

River starts screaming.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Early stands, looking at Simon, who's shot in the upper thigh. He holds his hand over the spilling wound, face blanching.

EARLY

See? That's what it feels like.

He takes off --

INT. FOREDECK HALL - CONTINUING

Takes a moment to make sure no one is waiting in the hall --

EARLY

You just hang tight, Darlin'...
Early's on the move.

Come down the steps just as Simon launches himself at him, flying, knocking them both down, getting a couple blows in before Early recovers enough to ninja his face.

Early takes off, rounding the corner --

EARLY (CONT'D)

Spirited boy...

ANGLE ON SIMON trying to shake it off.

RIVER

(V.O.)
Simon...

SIMON

River don't let him.... don't let
him do this...

RIVER

(V.O.)
Have to.
(quieter)
Have to.

EXT. TOP OF SERENITY - CONTINUING

Early comes out the hatch, helmet on. He looks up to see his ship following perfectly, smiles.

EARLY

You made the right move, darlin'.
Best for you to go with old Early.

MAL

You think so?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Early turns awkwardly (magnetic boots) to see Mal, suited up and cabled to the ship, right behind him.

MAL (CONT'D)

Some of us feel differently.

Mal double palms him in the chest, an inelegant move, but the force of it sends Early flying off the ship, gone, just like that, long gone.

Mal watches him go a moment, then looks up. After a long beat, River floats down to him. He steadies her as she lands. Looks at her affectionately.

RIVER

Permission to come aboard?

MAL

You know, you ain't quite right.

RIVER

It's the popular theory.

MAL

Get on in there. Give your brother a thrashing for messing up your plan.

RIVER

(going down)

He takes so much looking after...

INT. INFIRMARY/PASSENGERDORM/CARGO BAY - LATER

(This is possibly a one-er.)

Simon is on the table, talking Zoe through pulling out his bullet. He watches her progress on the screen...

SIMON

To the left -- your left. Now, very gently, pull that aside.

ZOE

This is really not my area of expertise, Doctor. I tend to be putting these into people more than the other thing.

WASH

(to Zoe)

Can I mop your brow? I'm at the ready with the fearsome brow mopping.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SIMON

You got the bullet. Okay, I'm gonna pass out for a minute, but you're doing great.

We find Mal and Inara at the entrance, watching.

MAL

So we live to fight another day.

INARA

Any chance that < violent lunatic > might survive?

MAL

Air he had left... chance'd be one in about... a very big number. Ain't odds I'd play. How's your lip?

He touches her face to look and she pulls away. They look at each other a moment, and she goes off, into the cargo bay, where we find Book and Jayne coming downstairs to do some weights. (Jayne going first, Book spotting.)

BOOK

I just feel such a fool.

JAYNE

Yeah, all those years of priest training and you get taken out by one bounty hunter.

BOOK

Don't get me wrong -- I gave him a hell of a fight.

JAYNE

Epic, I'm guessing.

BOOK

There'll be poems and songs, you just wait.

JAYNE

Hey, at least you got some play. I missed every damn thing.

We are moving off them to find, in the corner, the girls, Kaylee and River, sitting in the corner. They are playing, of all things, jacks. It's Kaylee's turn, and she's tellin' a tale, the ease between them returned...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

KAYLEE

And then his folks come by to fetch him, and it turns out he's fourteen years old!

(they both laugh)

I mean, he must have been some kind of genetic experiment, 'cause I swear he was... my daddy whupped me so hard...

She misses --

KAYLEE (CONT'D)

Dyah! I'm at fours. Let's see you match that.

RIVER

(seriously)

--I can win this.

KAYLEE

I'm hearing a lot of talk, genius. Come on. Show me what you got.

River looks at the ball in her hand.

CLOSE ON the ball, as she contemplates it. The solidity of the thing. We might notice it has a similar coloring to the moon we saw at the beginning of the show.

CLOSER STILL as she throws it down, camera goes slowly with it, it hits ground but the camera keeps going down, through the ship one last time, and out the bottom to:

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING

Looking up at Serenity and panning left as she rockets away into the distance.

EXT. SPACE - ELSEWHERE - LATER

We see him, floating, turning slowly in place.

His helmet comes into view, his face amusedly resigned.

EARLY

Well... here I am...

Tiny, alone, he floats.

END OF SHOW