The Pitter-Patter of tiny feet in combat boots- Complete

by AusKitty

Summary

Set six weeks after the Serenity Movie's end we find the crew in stabilizing relationships, doing their best to keep the freshly refurbished Serenity in the sky. Secrets are discovered, The Alliance are being eerily quiet and a new player is in town.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
It had been six weeks since the revelation of Miranda, the Alliance seeking to keep the peace had stopped looking for River Tam and for once Mal felt that he could breathe. Reclining in the copilot seat he still had to keep Serenity in the sky, and that meant taking whatever jobs came their way- the better paying the better for all of them. The wave from Badger came just in time to distract him from talking to his second in command. Zoe was still visibly grieving, her face a gaunt shadow of the beautiful woman he had known for so many years. It pained him something awful to take the job he was about to, but credits are credits and the families of the Miranda settlers deserved closure and to bury their deceased in their own way. Closing the wave from Badger, Mal flicked on the shipwide intercom “Well Kids, seems we got ourselves a shiny new job, meet me on the bridge once you get your pants on, and Kaylee I mean You.” Rubbing a hand over his careworn face, Mal wondered how he would handle his crew with their obvious dislike and mistrust of the Alliance in general and the very specific grudge over their near deaths at their hands still fresh in everyone's minds.

The crew came filtering in from all over the ship, Jayne still cleaning his guns, Simon and Kaylee hand in hand, somewhat flushed. River ghosted her way into the pilot seat as Zoe slumped in. “You mentioned a job Cap’n?” Kaylee’s eyes sparkled at the opportunity to get off world again soon. To her mind there is only so much you can do before you need to give new engine parts a good run in and for her money six weeks was time and then some. “Hope it’s a good burn away, I want to see if the new primary buffers are worth the extra effort took to install ‘em.” Simon rested back against the hatchway, watching his lover become animated in the details of her work, something he never knew could happen. Love in the romantic sense was a foreign concept, once a remote and disturbing thing, now a reality that still gave him cause for sleepless nights. Of course whenever he woke these days Kaylee was right there beside him and everything seemed a little easier to deal with.

“They want to make them lay down and forget. We will never forget, they shouldn’t be allowed to forget either.” River’s small quiet voice shook the crew to their boots. The scowl on her face was fierce, then softened as she looked up into Zoe’s face. “We got to say goodbye, but they never did. If we do it for them, is that the right thing?” Zoe’s stony mask began to slip and her eyes teared up “What you talking about little one? Who didn’t get to say goodbye?” With pursed lips Zoe and the crew listened to Mal as he explained the job. Taking the bodies from Miranda and returning them to their families if any had been identified, each body, each corpse a chance for an unknown spirit to be laid to rest in the dirt of the family’s home planet. All unidentified bodies were being cremated and laid to rest in a central repository on Miranda. “According to Badger, the family of some of the settlers is some big name in the Alliance, retired to a cozy plantation on one of the inner planets. They especial requested ‘The heroes who made the atrocity known’ to deliver the bodies of their fallen. Offered to pay a pretty penny over the rate that the Alliance is giving. First run is to either accept or decline the job, the second is to fetch the bodies from the rim and return them.” Zoe looked from River’s soft features, etched with confusion, to Mal’s harder visage, cut deep with concern, “Looks Like we got work to do, so best do it” she said turning abruptly to leave, a wave of nausea flooding her from the pit of her stomach.
An hour out from Athos and Zoe was still hunkered down in the berth that she had shared with her beloved Wash. The thin sheen of sweat coated her body like a second skin, her mouth puckered from the bitter bile she had just ejected. Wiping a weary hand across her eyes she didn’t see the waiflike form of River Tam slip into the room. Stealthily picking up discarded clothing from the floor, carefully sorting the light from the dark, those that could be worn again from those that needed to either be spaced or burned or both. A worn leather vest still speckled with their pilots blood in her hands River smiled a sad smile. “He isn’t really all gone. A part of him is still here with us. Just ask Simon.” The girl’s voice broke Zoe from her reverie, snatching the vest from her and holding it close to her face “He’s gone River. He’s dead and he isn’t coming back, we need to believe it and move on. Standing still in this sky will get you killed.”

Chapter End Notes

Very Short teaser chapter
Strapped into her favourite leather vest, Zoe noticed the fit was a little snugger than usual. Climbing the ladder from her berth, the most recent wave of nausea quelled with a dry cracker and sip of water from her canteen. Mal had taken one of the shuttles to pick up Inara from the Mother House to act as escort for the crew of the Serenity. Leaving strict instructions for Jayne to leave his weapons behind, Zoe was to pat him down before Mal returned. Each member of the crew was to dress in their most respectable attire, which meant talking Kaylee out of donning her frilly ballgown, reminding River to wear shoes, or at the very least a pair of serviceable slippers. Simon was no issue at all, even the most careworn items of the doctor’s wardrobe were suitable to wear to meet whomever this family was. Hearing the locking mechanism snap into place Zoe walked away from her sanctuary and back into the reality of life without the love of her life.

“I just don’t know what I can do for her no more ‘nara. It’s like now he’s gone, she has nothing keeping her in the land of the living. She wanders about like a ghost, even got River worried enough to sneak in and check on her. It’s not like I can just order her to snap out of it. Not now, maybe never again.” Mal’s hushed tones had Inara more worried than her own observations of the woman in the days following the ordeal on Miranda. Losing her husband had seemed to hollow out the battle hardened veteran. “She has never been like this, not even after Serenity Valley. Not when Niska took us, and sure as hell not when we lost the Sheppard and all those souls on Haven.” The deep lines etched around his eyes and mouth made Mal look ten years older, his obvious discomfort at his friends grief was a positive in Inara’s eyes. Had he brushed it off as something that she had to deal with alone it would have made him not only less of a man, but less of a leader of men. If it weren’t for Mal taking a chance on River nobody would be any the wiser about the atrocities on Miranda. The Reclamation of the Deceased would not give families the closure they deserved. He was a good man, and a good captain. He lived his belief that ‘Love keeps a ship in the sky.’

“There may be nothing you can do Mal. Just wait for her to work through it. Zoe and Wash had a bond stronger than any I have ever seen. Stronger than even your battle bonding, it’s going to take her more than just a little while to come back to us. At least she is getting out of her cabin now, this Reclamation job may be what she needs to sort her head out. To see that she isn’t alone in her mourning.” Inara rested her pale fingertips on Mal’s arm, the slight pressure reassuring as it was intoxicating. The bruises and scars from the battle on (Mr Universes planet) neatly healing with thanks to the abundance of fresh clean air and medical interventions available at the Companion’s Mother House. Her gentle smile and warm eyes gave him hope that he could indeed make it through another hour, or perhaps even another day. Unfolding himself from the pilot chair of the shuttle, he brushed dangerously close to her, the scent of her perfume in his nostrils “mā de shén nín qiwèi liánghāo” he muttered under his breath as he made his way to the shuttle hatch. Shouting to his crew as he opened the shuttle door Mal felt the stirring in the pit of his stomach as he saw Zoe straightening from Jayne’s pat down. “Come on y’all, Inara’s flying and you know how ornery she gets if she’s kept waiting.”

The quick jump from the shipyard to the Mesa Paradisio plantation passed in what many would consider silence. Kaylee and Simon, lost in each other’s presence, Jayne mentally pouting about his lack of weaponry and Zoe lost in whatever maudlin thoughts were in her head. The only crew member who was not lost in thought was River, staring pointedly from Mal to Zoe and back again. It was becoming more and more obvious that there was something on the girl’s mind, but Mal was too afraid of what the reader may be seeing in his own mind to consider that she may be seeing something in Zoe that may be of benefit. As the landing gear touched down on the paved surface of the landing pad Inara flicked several switches and cleared her throat “We’re here, let’s not keep
the Donninger’s waiting.”
Chapter Four

Chapter Summary

Now its finished :)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The interior of the antechamber of the Mesa Paradisio Estate was more sumptuous than the ballroom of (shindig party). A series of floating chandeliers graced the hall spreading a warm multi-hued glow. Low chairs, overstuffed ottomans and side tables were scattered as though the room were used for entertaining, rather than as a waiting area. Inara perched on the edge of a high back polished wood chair, looking as though she belonged in the luxurious surrounds. Simon, seating Kaylee on a low sofa took his place beside her, Kaylee’s knuckles white as she gripped his hand. “Looks so shiny, like something out of one of those old holo-vids. Where the beggar goes to the castle and it turns out she’s really a princess ya know?” Her glance roaming over the room drinking in the abundance of plush fabrics. Jayne on the other hand was stalking around the room mentally tallying the re-saleability of the smaller items, not that he was a thief but sometimes things found a way of changing ownership in his presence.

Zoe and Mal stood side by side, well trained eyes quickly assessing the security of the room, seeking out any possible ambush points, exits and entry points. Nodding his acceptance of the room, Mal turned to Zoe “Keep your eye on the little one, she wanders too far we could have trouble. I’ll keep my eye on Jayne, we ain’t dogs to shit where we eat and this place screams purplebelly to me.” Zoe nodded and walked over to the girl who was staring up at a family portrait done in the Earth that Was style using pigments and tempera. “Don’t lick it, it won’t taste like egg even if it’s made from it.” River advised Zoe in hushed tones “It was supposed to be a duck, or a chicken maybe, but then someone made it into a picture of the people who eat the ducks and the chickens. Do you think the mother bird knew what was to be? If she did, why didn’t she fight them? You will fight for your baby won’t you?” The stream of chatter washed over Zoe before shocking her to the present “What did you say River?” but the girl had already skipped off to fixate on the velvet of the draperies. A liveried manservant appeared from behind a door “The Admiral and his wife, The Lady Countessa De la Palma-Donnager will see you now.” He turned stiffly and walked away not waiting to see if anyone followed.

Waving for Mal and the crew to follow Inara quietly reminded them all to stay standing until she sat, the rules of etiquette couldn’t be ignored here. “And for the love of fán zhūwèi huái bāo shénshèng don’t speak unless you are spoken to directly. Mal should be the only one who talks and even then he should keep it short and formal.” The Admiral and his wife, were quite possibly the most formal couple Kaylee had ever seen. Clinging to Simon she could not believe that this single room was just one of the informal entertainment areas available to the mourning couple. Dressed from head to foot in white, with a softly draped pashmina to cover her hair and throat, the Countess looked every one of her supposed 85 years. The Admiral, dressed in a severe suit with highly polished buttons the counter to her softness in every way from the stern look on his face to the creases in his trousers. His shoes, a remnant from his days in the Navy, were still polished to a high sheen. After sipping politely from the delicate porcelain cup Mal cleared his throat. “So what you mean to say is, your son that you disowned for being too much of a brown coat, went to Miranda to
make a life for his own and now you want him back because he is your dearest an’ most beloved child. Even though your other son followed in daddy’s bootprints and your daughter married a man with a belly as purple as an Alliance uniform. Is that what you are telling me?”

Gasping at the audacity of Mal’s statement Inara prepared to apologize for his rudeness when the Admiral cut in “That is exactly what I would expect from a Brown Coat such as yourself, Sargent Reynolds. In fact it is that very bitter and bull headed attitude that I am relying on to get our son’s remains returned to us.” The Admiral turned and looked into Mal’s eyes sizing him up. “I read the reports on Serenity Valley, I read what they had to say about you and after all that has happened. I feel that perhaps we have more in common than either of us could believe. I do not believe that anyone less than you and your crew are capable of retrieving my son’s remains and bringing them home.”

Leaning in towards the Admiral, a smirk playing on his lips Mal nodded his agreement and put a hand forward, “Half the payment up front and the rest on completion and it looks like we have an agreement Admiral,” Shaking the other man’s hand Mal noticed the tear in his eye and turned away quickly “Come on folks, lets blow this planet and get the job done.”

Chapter End Notes

Finished the chapter and of course I still need to remember to insert the corrected place names.
Chapter Five

Chapter Summary

Where we have a blatant question, but not yet an answer.

“No sense in beating round the bush Cap’n, there may be a period where I am unable to help on this one.” Zoe informed her Captain and closest friend “All depends on how long these tests take and what the Doc has to say about the results. Until then you are down two men and we both know River won’t react well to being back on Miranda. We need the extra manpower.”

Mal had known for some time that Zoe was still grieving her husband’s sudden and visceral death and was just waiting for the right time to mention getting a new pilot. He didn’t think however it would be this soon, and he didn’t imagine it would have been Zoe to make the recommendation. “We need someone who will help to keep the ship in the air, more muscle, preferably someone who can look death in the face on a semi-regular basis and not care too much ‘bout getting paid on time. Badger’s about the only contact we have left who can find someone, even just for this haul.”

The wave was an unexpected surprise, one which Badger expected to capitalize on. In addition to finding a capable pilot for a short haul job, Badger utilized his seedier mercantile intuition to convince Mal that a small load of protein and supplements for the workers on Miranda would be a good economic choice for cargo bound for the outer rim anyway. After haggling for a workable arrangement Mal felt like he had gone a few rounds with more ornery of Unification Day Supporters. Badger on the other hand, felt like a man with a new shiny hat.

Waiting on the loading ramp for the cargo and new Pilot Mal felt uneasy. Zoe wuld usually be there beside him, or somewhere in shouting distance, but these days she was distant as the core was from Miranda even when she was standing right at his side. He wondered what tests she would need the doc to perform, and what could possibly be wrong with her. Aside from an unhealthy dose of survivors guilt, the emotional and physical drain of her newfound widowhood rested heavy on her, like a cloak she didn’t want or need. Collecting his thoughts, Mal shielded his eyes from the sun and looked for his inbound cargo.

Zoe sat stock still on the sterile table waiting for the Doc to finish his examination. Quirking an eyebrow at her, Simon asked “What made you decide to have a full physical workup done? It’s not as if we are on the run anymore, you have no need to change your diet or immunisation supplements. You have no indicators for viral or bacterial infections, what symptoms have you been experiencing, and for how long?” Telling him about the bouts of nausea and vomiting, mood swings and short periods of thoughtlessness and forgetfulness, Simon was tempted to diagnose her with depression over her recent loss. Then she shared with him what River had said to her about Wash.

“She was looking through me, in the way she does when she reads someone, Simon. She told me he wasn’t gone and I should ask you.” Hands trembling the first few tears slipped by her unnoticed, then they fell like a dam had broken. “Simon, if River is saying what I think she is saying…” she petered out. Smiling reassuringly at the woman he had come to love like a sister, Simon pulled a small device out of a drawer. “Lay back pull that shirt up a little and we will see if our mei mei has been looking too closely where she shouldn’t.”
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

now using Google translate for all my crappy translation needs.
Short chapter because my meds are being difficult

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Glancing around the table at her friends, the ones she counted family, her stomach contracted.
“Mal, I gotta say some things, and you ain’t gonna like all of them.” Holding her hand up to silence
the Captain “I gotta say it now before the newbie gets here, and I need to say it once and have y’all
understand what it means for me and us.”

Shifting uncomfortably in his seat Mal nodded approval. Jayne picked his nails with a bowie knife,
seemingly uninterested while Kaylee held Simon’s hand and watched River as she wandered about
the mess. Shifting the weight from one foot to the other Zoe pulled out her chair and sat staring at
her hands. “Mal, Im gonna have a baby. I forgot my last booster and in that Shén de gǒu shǐ
biǎoyǎn before Miranda me and Wash got a little more frisky than usual. Needs to be known, now
I’m knocked up I aint giving this baby up.”

With a sudden squeal of excitement Kaylee jumped up and embraced Zoe, before turning back to
Simon in tears. Patting her back gently the doc nodded. “By my calculations Zoe is ten weeks
along, by standard calculations and non-invasive measures we should be able to tell if it’s a boy or
a girl in a few more weeks, that is of course if you want to know the gender.” Looking
dumbfounded Mal’s jaw dropped and he waited for his first mate to say something. Looking from
Zoe to Mal and back again, grinning, Jayne asked “This mean we gotta cut the rugrat in on the
take?”

Shaking his head Mal cleared the fog from his mind. “You gonna be a momma? That makes me,
what, his uncle or Jiàofū or something?” an easy grin spread over his face as he slowly rose to
embrace her. Zoe felt the warmth envelope her, not just from his body heat, but from the
understanding that she wasn’t alone. This crew- Her Crew were her family. And the family that
flies together is never lost in the black.

“New Pilot’s here. It wont last, he’s not a leaf on the wind, he’s a Yǒu yīgè fāguāng de màozi de
āishāng de xiǎo rén” River informed them as she slipped from the room smiling.

Chapter End Notes

Shén de gǒu shǐ biǎoyǎn- god damn shit show
Jiàofū- Godfather
Yǒu yīgè fāguāng de màozi de āishāng de xiǎo rén- sad little man with a shiny hat
Yān fēiyú- pickled herring
Chapter Seven

Chapter Summary

River learns a new skill, Zoe gets some closure.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

River’s description didn’t just fit Hildebrand Beauregard, it was a second skin. The twitchy little man in a greasy jumpsuit and plaid trilby hat bore a passing resemblance to Badger, when seen from a reasonable distance. The distance was a given since the little man smelled like Yān fēiyú and stale sweat. After introducing himself somewhat hurriedly he insisted that they take off immediately, and to hell with the disembarking protocols. Mal shook his head and followed, breathing through his mouth, though it didn’t make much difference.

River was perched in the cargo nets on top of their legally acquired load, watching the forms below her. She didn’t like the new pilot, and Mal looked like he couldn’t wait for this haul to be over. She wondered how the rest of the crew would react to him, sourly she thought they would be less likely to dislike him if he bathed.

“An that there is the mess, you can help yourself to whatevers in there, but the other crews quarters are off limits as is the cargo bay for the duration of the trip. Need anything mechanical doin, y’ask Kaylee. Anything of a medical nature you see the Doc. Five percent of the net haul and your own bunk for the trip out- that’s my standard for all who come on my boat.” Mal leaned against the dining table waiting for Hildebrand to either accept or reject the offer. A tic in Hildebrand’s left eye presaged his acceptance, hauling his bag closer he made his way to the bridge, Mal’s voice trailing after him “You make any action against me or mine and you wont see the next planet, deal or no deal. You are here to do a job. You do the job, you get paid. That’s my way of doin things.”

Levering himself off the edge of the table Mal massaged his temples. This guy was in some kind of trouble, and he didn’t want any part of it. He didn’t care that he graduated with honours from his flight school, or that he had flown in more classes of ship than Mal had, there was just something about him that reeked of desperation. And not the kind that a few hot meals, a shower and a warm bed can fill. Mal retreated to his cabin for some solitary reflection on the news Zoe had broken, a mere half hour before.

It wasn’t like he was opposed to her becoming a mother, just without Wash in the picture, who would help her to raise this kid? Would it be ok to find her some nice sunny beach somewhere and have her settle down away from him and Serenity? Mal hated the idea of separating her from Kaylee, and thought there would be a pretty good chance that Kaylee would mutiny if the suggestion were ever made. That left only one viable option. As he waited for clearance to lift off, Mal started looking on the cortex for baby furniture that could be converted to use on a ship.

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Half way to Miranda River made her presence known to Zoe. Sitting on top of the mess table with her legs crossed Indian style River hummed a merry tune as Zoe prepared a mug of Jiāng chá to soothe her still nauseated stomach. “So, you were right” Zoe began, waiting for the tea to cool, “There is a little bit of Wash left here after all. Question is, how do we stop everyone from fretting
every time we hit a snag, which seems to be as often as not?” Wrapping her hands around the mug Zoe slid into the closes seat facing the young woman on the table.

“Could sit it out, but that’s not you. You are his Warrior Woman, his Amazon brought to life; kill him with your pinky finger. When he dreamed he called you his sun and his moon. He was the leaf and you were the wind.” Staring off into space River let the memories of Wash cradle her. The warmth and vivacity of his smile, the light in his eyes when he got some harebrained notion in his head. Blinking away tears River opened up a channel to feed him through.

Reaching out with tender fingers, brushing a stray hair from her cheek, Wash spoke through River's voice “Shì shíhou shuō zàijiàn, dàn wǒ rènwéi gàobié shì bēishǎng, wǒ gèng yuànì dâzhāohū. Nǐ hǎo, yīgè xīn de màoxiǎn.” Blinking back her tears River swallowed a knot in her throat. “Just be who you are, and don’t take no gorram Lā shǐ from nobody. Your body, your baby. They still gonna worry, but only you know what’s happening in your body best.”

River jumped from the table and ran from the mess, tears flying from her cheeks in her wake, Zoe, with fingers pressed where her hand had been let the tears fall. She didn’t know that River could channel the dead as well as read the living and for those few fleeting seconds, Wash was with her again… this time to say goodbye.

Chapter End Notes

Quote from some random guy on a list of quotes about love and time... I liked it and it felt like something Wash would say to Zoe

Yān fēiyú- pickled herring
Jiāng chá- Ginger Tea
Shì shíhou shuō zàijiàn, dàn wǒ rènwéi gàobié shì bēishǎng, wǒ gèng yuànì dâzhāohū. Nǐ hǎo, yīgè xīn de màoxiǎn.- It's time to say goodbye, but I think goodbyes are sad and I'd much rather say hello. Hello to a new adventure. Ernie Harwell
Lā shǐ- shit
Sitting up in the cargo webbing River let the tears flow. She didn’t know she could do that. Let him through so much that it hurt to put him back. Hiding her face in her knees the reader felt another presence in the room. Wiping the tears away with the heel of her hand she saw the new pilot enter the cargo bay. Something about the way the little man moved had her on edge. There was a dirty bag in his arms and he carefully selected a tool from it, sliding the tool into the cargo webbing and pulling it tight. The device looked like a pry bar, but had mag lock straps that held to the floor. Gingerly he extended a series of arms and wedged them into the crack between the second and lowest crates. In the course of minutes he had opened and raided three crates on the lowest level and replaced the contents with packages from his bag.

With his hat tilted back on his head Hildebrand thought the job was an easy one. Swap out the contents and get the goods to his contact on Miranda. Simple and easy, just the way he liked it. The crew on this ship were mostly soft inner core types or women and he could take any of them in a fair fight- hell he could probably get into the little ones pants if he played his cards right, get her to do the drop for him. Sniggering quietly to himself he never heard River drop to the floor from the cargo net behind him. Too preoccupied with his misdeeds and daydreaming of doing things to her that she would NEVER agree to Hildebrand Beauregard didn’t hear when River clipped a shackle to his belt and pulled the webbing attached to it hoisting him into the air attaching it to the bar he had set up.

Slamming her fist against the intercom button River barked out to the Captain “Mal, we got some shenanigans in the cargo bay. Little man here looks like he wants to take what ain’t his and get himself a shiny new hat.” Knowing the ship wide coms would alert everyone River slouched back against the cargo, arms crossed over her breasts sneering up at the pilot. “Just you wait til the Cap’n gets here, he don’t take too kind to folks that try an’ rip him off. If you’re lucky you’ll get tossed out the airlock, if not…” here she shrugged “…maybe my Jayne will get me ‘nother ear.”

Mal strode into the cargo bay mouth agape at the sight of little River leaning back against the crates they were shipping, arms barred across her chest, a sneer that Jayne would be hard to beat plastered on her face. “What the good gorram hell is goin’ on here? I thought I told you no more stringing the help up, he falls and bleeds on my floor, you be cleaning him up after, you hear?” The flustered Captain stared hard at River for some kind of answer before turning to see Jayne in the catwalks with Vera locked and loaded to bear.

Simon and Kaylee, confused by River’s language, followed behind Zoe who had her shotgun in hand, stalking out to the cargo bay floor. “Well? Someone going to tell me what the Shíxiàn diयु is going on here? Or are Zoe and Jayne getting to play piñata with this here sack of Lā shǐ til something spills?” Motioning Jayne down Mal turned to River, “Why you go string him up mei mei? He be aiming to misbehave?” Mal’s voice lowered and softened as he stepped into her arms reach. Jayne closed in on the pair with a look of questioning on his face and Zoe, gun and eyes still focused on the dangling pilot, closed the quartet.

River’s eyes glazed then glistened. “Came out here and found him getting into the cargo. Knew I didn’t trust him, he feels like he smells. Slimy and gross. He was thinking things, bad things, gross bad things… to do to me… to do…” Mal touched her arm, reassuring her silently he was there. Looking back up at the captain she squared her shoulders and continued. “Let him get the last of
what he wanted to get, felt Jayne close by and just let it go. I got him like a fish on a hook.”
Looking to Jayne she continues “Thought he could take us all, do things, bad things. Thought you
were weak and have a small thing in your pants. Thought the captain deserved to be robbed. Said if
he was lucky that you would space him, if not, you’d give him to Jayne.” She looked at each of the
men in turn, eyes flashing with fire as the change came on her again.

Moving towards the dangling feet River pushed the pilot into lazy circles. “Tā āishāng de xiǎo de
màozi de āishāng de xiǎo rén , squirming like a fishy on a hook, got caught doin’ misdeeds and
now he’s gonna cook.” In a sing song voice River taunted the pilot “Never gonna know how a real
woman feels, never gonna know cause he goes and steals.” Wandering over and releasing the
tether to let him drop to the floor before walking directly over to Jayne, River slid the bowie knife
from its accustomed place on his thigh up his body and pressed it into his chest.Grinding herself
against the big mercenary she kisses him hard on the lips “Make sure it’s a left ear, you already
gave me a right one Xīn’ài ” She winks and slaps his ass on her way out of the cargo bay passed the
incredulous faces of her brother and his lover.

Chapter End Notes

Again, crappy translations by Google, spelling mistakes by me,

Shíxiàn diyù- actual hell
Lā shǐ- shit
Chapter Nine

Chapter Summary

Sad short chapter before a few larger ones. I'm still working on.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“Medicines, Protein bars, immunization boosters and a shiny set of jam spoons, must say that’s quite some haul you got Hilly.” Mal struggled to keep a straight face with that last addition. “Seems you an’ me gotta have that little talk I warned ya ‘bout when you first got on my ship.” Lining up the pilfered items along the mess table Mal shook his head. “Seems I could let Jayne do the interrogatin’ but I think his Àirén may want a new piece to add to the collection, and you can’t hear too well with just one working ear.”

Jayne straightened up from his position in the doorway, squaring his shoulders before smirking at the trembling pilot. “My Měilǐ de nǚhái does like her some souvenirs. Be a mighty shame iffen I didn’t get her at least a nose or somethin’” His physical presence, not to mention the practiced way he handled the bowie knife, convinced the pilot to share his story. The demands of his fence grew monthly and the protection offered for his elderly mother would cease if he didn’t deliver. The jam spoons were a thoughtful gift from a loving son he said.

Looking from the trembling pilot to the mercenary and back, Mal shrugged his shoulders “Man has a right to look out for his family, an’ that’s what I am doin’, looking out for me and mine. Pack your gorram berth, you’ll be leaving us on Miranda, see if you can find a better offer. What you tried to take, you forfeit that, and your stake which would have been a lot more. The spoons your mother can have when you tell her what a poor job you done.” Turning to Jayne, Mal raked his fingers through his hair. “You gonna have to tell mei mei she doesn’t get her new toy.”

Jayne’s face blanched at the thought of talking to the girl he thought of as Little Crazy. He thought to himself that her behaviour today reminded him of some of the girls he used to know as a kid. A little too hard for most to want to see beyond, a little too damaged to ever live easy. She said she felt him nearby when she caught the thief, but he was half way across the ship. Either Little Crazy was getting stronger with her mind reading, or there was something else she wasn’t saying.

He found River sitting in the cockpit with Zoe, each distracted by their own thoughts. Miranda loomed large in the front view and Jayne felt a tingling in the pit of his stomach. Wasn’t hunger, that felt different, Might be sadness he thought, they did lose their last pilot to this gorram planet, despite it not bein’ his fault. Bèi zǔzhòu de māmā yǐqǐ de shén shè qǐ liǎo er zi de mùgǒu got that leaf and pinned it to the seat. No more soaring for Wash, no more barn swallows or Crazy Ivans either. Before he knew it River had her arms wrapped around his waist, head tucked into his shoulder, mumbling something about not really wanting an ear.

Zoe turned her head and unshed tears glazed her vision. Standing straight as a die she squared off her shoulders “Best go tell the Captain we are here. Time to be the good guys” nodding to Jayne as she left.
Crappy translations by google, all mistakes by me.

Měili de nǚhái- Beautiful girl
Bèi zǔzhòu de māmā yíqǐ de shěn shě qí liǎo er zi de mǔgǒu- goddamned motherfucking gods forsaken sons of bitches
Mal took stock of the docks area of Miranda, bustling now with transports and cargo haulers, not to mention the fleet of Alliance ships docked for Protective Detail for the planet. Folks from all over the ‘verse had come to collect their loved ones remains, or to forge ahead in a bold new enterprise-the re-colonization of Miranda. “You would think they would have learned the first time- Alliance gonna meddle as long as they have breath in them.” Looking to the docking and cargo manifest he simply shrugged “Some folks will never stop to think for themselves, others just want to be rid of their past. Don’t rightly know that I can blame ‘em.”

River climbed down from the stack of cargo being carefully unloaded onto the mule for delivery, “They only see the sky, can’t see the Pax, can’t hear the screams. These ones wont lay down, they wont be Reavers either.” Her supple, bare feet touched down on the concrete of the docking station, firm and whole beneath her. Mal looked over to her in confirmation “Alliance guaranteed the Pax had been circulated out of the atmosphere, said it was Earth-That-Was pure. No added inhibitors.”

Stacking the last of the cargo boxes on the mule, Jayne secured the webbing and mounted the vehicle ready to go. Mal tossed the manifest in the mule and called out to Zoe he was leaving her in charge. Looking at the young reader he tossed his head back toward the cargo bay “You headin’ in or coming with little one?” A bright smile lit her face as she replied “Staying here Cap’n, Zoe has something in mind.” Skipping and twirling back up the ramp River stopped suddenly, her face falling “Cap’n I want to go shopping later, just me and Jayne, you bring him back in one piece ok?”

Jayne swore he would never understand Little Crazy. Him? Shopping? Not anytime soon, and especially not with her. Keeping one eye on the dockside as they maneuvered the mule and its cargo to a nearby storage facility Jayne wondered if the girl had really lost the plot, or if her latest brand of crazy was an improvement. Her whole mastermind plot of getting rid of the new pilot was something he could imagine one of the girls from back home pulling. He really should write his Ma again, thank her for the latest hat and scarf he tucked away in the corner of his berth.

What really got Jayne thinking was the way she had felt against him, all supple and smooth, her silky hair tickling his ace as she pressed her lips to his. Without realizing, Jayne lifted his fingers to his mouth touching the skin that felt dry and rough to him. How would she have felt it, would she feel the stubble of his beard against her pretty mouth? Breaking from his daydream Jayne notices the signage of the storage facility and shuddered “Big Sun Mal, We really going to deal with these Guòdù hu zhùàng báiè fùbù fú zhā xípán? They pay less than 10 on the hundred and blow the re sell out to fifty times what they should get. Closest things to pirates the Alliance allows, so I guess they get their cut too, but I thought today we were being the good guys?”

Mal looked sideways at his companion and grunted “Legal cargo on a legitimate trip to a legitimate business is about as close to bein’ good guys as we got lately. Still need to find us a new pilot, and they better be more honest than the last one. Can’t believe what the little Albatross did for us with that one.” Mal noticed the hand still fingering Jayne’s mouth “An’ you get any funny ideas about her, I will personally see you to the preacher man’s special hell, Nǐ mínghái ma?”

***

Zoe was in the midst of a giant mess, assorted clothing tossed into piles, nick-knacks and assorted
plastic dinosaurs scattered over the floor at her feet. There were cartons of Wash’s belongings already labelled and waiting, but each of his loud print shirts made Zoe want to bury her face in it and breathe what little of her husband’s scent remained. In the middle of the heap, garish and bloodstained was the shirt he had been wearing the day he died. River swiftly picked it up and hid it inside a jumble of shirts, each louder in style than the man who wore them. Smiling shyly at Zoe she held the bundle up “Can I have them?” Zoe, tears in her eyes nodded and River slipped out again as silently as she had entered the room.

Tears silently falling as she neatly folded the remaining clothes and stored them in a cargo box to be shipped off to his family, they may have need of some newer clothing as his cousins grew up and reproduced quicker than jackrabbits. Family had been important to Wash, not as important as a long and healthy life free from the damp lung that took so many of his childhood friends before their time, but important none the less. And his cousins deserved to know a little piece of him was still alive.

Putting her hand to her stomach Zoe smiled. Her first day free of the miserable morning sickness that robbed her of her usual strength and she felt like she could take on the ‘verse, or at least Jayne in a fair fight. Thinking of Jayne she recalled the argument about the pilot they had picked up. Time to make sure he was well and truly gone before the Cap’n got back with their special cargo. Sealing the last box Zoe made sure that she had the transit details for the next ship back to Wash’s family and that she had enough platinum to pay for the cargo to get where it was going.

Outside her berth Zoe bumped into a very distracted Simon before she made her way to the bridge. Checking for any tampering Hildebrand may have done to spite them Zoe spent the rest of the morning happily checking systems, updating logs and generally doing what Wash had done when they were planet side. She had never really appreciated just what a genius Wash could be with his repair work. Much of the circuitry under the panels looked like a rats nest, but he knew just what to do when Serenity needed to get out of a tight spot, if she needed a little more tlc than she was getting. It was like Serenity was his mistress because, heaven knows, he never would look at another woman the way he looked at her.

There were no signs that Hildebrand had ever taken up residence by the time Zoe finished and wandered back to the mess for a bite to eat. Her appetite had come back recently too, which was a good thing. Tea and crackers can only carry a body so far in the black and Zoe was glad to be eating the bland protein bars again. She fervently hoped that the coin they got for the cargo haul would have enough for fresh fruit and vegetables. Unlike Sheppard Book, she could not make the protein bars more palatable without adding more than some condiments.

***

Mal and Jayne sat in the stark minimalist office of the Regional Supervisor for Supplies and Refurbishment for Blue Sun Corporation on Miranda. The bland faced man behind the desk looked over the documents Mal had provided. “Legal transport ship with supplies for Blue Sun Corporation from Shinnon. Very well Mister Reynolds, you just need to sign here and I can transfer the funds to your account with Blue Sun.”

Mal looked confused, sitting forward in his seat, “I think you may have misunderstood. This is a cash only transaction, assured to me by my good friends back on Shinnon. I deliver the goods, you give me the money. I don’t deal in accounts.” Resting his elbows on the arms of the chair, Mal looked sideways at Jayne, raising a steadying hand “It seems to me that you got your orders wrong there, you need to make whatever calls you need to get me my shiny and then we will be going on our merry.”
Jayne shifted subtly in his seat, moving to release the holster of his hand gun and stalled as Mal raised his hand. Diplomacy it seemed was over rated in most transactions Mal made, but this time it was the path he was taking. Jayne relaxed and thought back to what River had said when they left, bring him back in one piece, seems Little Crazy may have had some idea his trigger finger would be itchy. And if she saw that, maybe she foresaw some kind of trouble with the transaction as a whole.

Flicking his eyes from Mal to the shiny suit behind the desk and back a thought struck Jayne out of the blue. “Mal, mebbe we could go collect Mister De la Palma-Donnager’s son’s remains while this here upstanding citizen clears the situation up wth his bosses. We know that Mister Donnager and his Lady wife want their boy back asap, could save time and credit all round.” Jayne’s hand moved from his gun to the arms of the chair he sat in, levering his body up from the chair, stretching the fabric of his tshirt over his flexed pecs and biceps, clearly demonstrating his far better muscled body to the Supervisor as he moved to the door.

Mal, smiling a little to himself, nodded his head in agreement. “You’re right Jayne, Admiral De la Palma-Donnager and his lovely wife are our primary clients in this particular arrangement. The rapid retrieval of their son’s remains should be our utmost concern.” Mal placed strategic emphasis on the Admiral’s title and their intent to reclaim the remains of their son in hopes that the name would open the Supervisor to the possibility of a cash exchange for the goods.

Whatever it was that Jayne had thought of, it was prompt enough to get the supervisor opening a wave to the Planetary Financial Services office and a payment in clean, unmarked credit chips to be made to Serenity within the hour. Shaking hands with the Supervisor as they left Mal murmured to himself “We did the job, we got paid, this was suspiciously smooth.” Mounting the mule, Jayne looked sideways at the troubled face of his Captain and had a shiver of premonition- today was going to get harder the longer they were here.

***

Simon couldn’t find River anywhere. The girl had secreted herself off somewhere with a bunch of medical supplies and he was afraid of what his sister may want with sutures, shears, cotton wadding and a bunch of splints. Its not that he didn’t trust her, but his sister was a genius- the theft of the med supplies made no sense to him.

Kaylee wrapped her arms around Simon’s waist “You know River, she could hide right under our noses and we wouldn’t see her. She’s been so good since…” Kaylee swallowed a lump and faltered with tears in her eyes “…You know, since all that happened. She’s probably somewhere inventing a new way to map out our flight plans or something.” Rubbing her sturdy hands over Simon’s soft ones Kaylee pulled his hands and led him back to the berth they were currently sharing. “River is smart, she isn’t in trouble- You’d feel it if she were, so just relax and come with me.” Kaylee’s smile spoke volumes to his heart and Simon reluctantly followed her to bed.

Maybe not under their noses, but above their heads, sure why not? River smiled to herself cocooned in her secret hiding space as she sorted her purloined goodies. Not only had the girl taken supplies from the med bay, but she had also absconded with some washers, nuts and bolts from Kaylee’s stash of extra spare parts, some superfluous wiring from inside Serenity’s cockpit and the shirts she had from Zoe’s clean out of Wash’s belongings. She had plans for the Xiǎo tiānmì de dōngxi very first gift. And with the last parts she would purchase with Jayne later the gift would be from ALL the baby's family.

Chapter End Notes
as always, mistakes are mine, translations are from google.

Guòdù hu zhuàng báisè fùbù fú zhā xīpán- overfed pasty white bellied scum suckers
Nǐ míngbái ma- do you understand?
Xiǎo tiánmi de dōngxī- tiny sweet thing
Mal and Jayne rattled their way along the wide curving road towards the co-ordinates provided to
them by the Admiral’s assistant back on Shinon. The housing precinct was fading behind them and
Mal had a sudden urge to turn tail and run. The same sense that tickled him back in the war had
saved his skin on several occasions, saved Zoe too more than once. Shaking his head clear he
noticed the look of consternation on Jayne’s face.
“Where’s your head at Jayne? It ain’t here where I need it.”
The clipped tone in Mal’s voice plucked Jayne back from his reverie. “Think we need to head back
to Serenity, something don’t feel right to me, never did trust too much good luck. “ Nodding his
approval of the decision Mal swung the mule in a graceful arc and headed back home- to his
Serenity, his Ship and his crew, called Family.
***

The uniformed guards standing at the hatch could mean only one thing- Alliance was here to take
what wasn’t theirs to give. Zoe ran her trembling hand over her rounding belly and adjusted the
guns on her belt. River stepped up beside her, silent like a ghost and smiled her winsome smile.
“They want something we don’t have, something that they can’t have even when we do get it. He
didn’t lay down, but he didn’t become one of them either. He is the key, and we don’t want them to
unlock that secret.”

Nodding to the girl, Zoe stood square in the middle of the ramp’s upper edge waiting for their
guests. River hit the door lock and the ramp descended to allow the soldiers their first glimpse of
the interior. Marching in their purple liveried cookie cutter uniforms the four soldiers surrounded a
tall, gaunt man and his equally chilling assistant, both men in black suits, black ties and hats,
stinking of bureaucracy. Just as the gaunt man stepped forward, a sound behind him caught his
attention- the roar of a land vehicle’s engine.
Mounting the ramp at speed, without thought or care for the intruders standing on his deck Mal
brought the mule to a standstill in its accustomed place in the cargo bay.

Dismounting the mule and striding to his second-in-command, Mal tossed the keys to River
commenting over his shoulder as he walked “You wanted to go somewhere? Be back before dark
and don’t let Jayne get into any trouble mei mei.”

River grinned at Mal as she wrestled with Jayne over the keys, knowing that Mal wanted her out of
the picture was reassuring. Knowing that she had given Zoe the relevant information in time was
heart-warming… and now she had Jayne to take her shopping as well. River finally relented and
gave Jayne the keys and they rolled at a far more sedate pace out of Serenity’s hold. Watching the
changing expression on River’s face, Jayne felt at ease with the situation. “So, where to Little
Crazy?”
***

Mal stood beside Zoe, his feet casually planted shoulder width apart, hands on his hips, turning
slightly at the waist to appraise the situation. “Malcolm Reynolds, Captain of this here ship. And
you are?” He left the question hanging, looking directly into the face of the gaunt man. For a count
of five heartbeats Mal waited breathing slowly in through his nose and out through his mouth. “I
guess you gentlemen might have the wrong co-ordinates there seeing as you aint delivering my
Credits and you aint got a cargo to pick up. Legal-wise we got a good right to be here and we
intend to do what we got paid for.”

Looking to Zoe, Mal tipped his head towards the door lock and looked back at the two men in suits “I do believe that the Alliance looks poorly on those who commit trespass on legally docked ships in this here region, any man left standing on this deck when the hatch closes will be considered a trespasser, and all manner of hell will break over his Shǎn liàng de màozi tóu.”

Shifting his weight from one foot to the other as he turned, flashing more than a little of his packed gun holsters Mal tossed over his shoulder “And I wouldn’t want to upset my very lovely companion, she’s been a tad ornery since she got a bun in her oven.” Zoe shot a withering look at her captain before sliding her guns from their holsters and levelling them at the intruders. “You heard the man. Trespassers will be treated with extreme prejudice, now get off our damn boat!”

***

Jayne grinned as he pulled the mule in to the service vehicle entry. The post wasn’t something he always relished getting, but today there was a big parcel and it had his name written all over it. Well perhaps not his name exactly, but it did have the name of a highly reputable arms manufacturer in the central worlds splashed all over its lables. Surely it was something new and shiny for him to play with.

River smiled as they loaded the crate into the bed of the mule, leaving plenty of space for the other pickup that she wanted to make. River looked strangely happy to Jayne and her happiness was infectious, slipping his arm around her into a quick half- hug Jayne planted a kiss on the top of her head and disengaged just as quickly as he had started.

“You tell anyone that happened and I will kill you, you hear?” She looked up at him with wide shining eyes and smiled even brighter. Just as she was about to get back in the mule, something caught River’s eye, two men in black suits, with black ties and hats were standing at the corner of the postal depot watching them with keen eyes.

Something stirred in River’s memory, one that she knew for certain was her own. “Èr, èrshǒu, lán sè,” shaking her head to clear it of the visions she looked to Jayne and began to cry, crawling into his lap and wriggling between his body and the steering wheel, clinging to him as if she were drowning. Jayne’s arms wrapped protectively around her as she tucked her head into his shoulder, he shushed and tutted and stroked her glorious mane of hair until she eventually stopped crying, and mournfully muttered “Èr, èrshǒu, lán sè. Èr, èrshǒu, lán sè” into his collarbone.

Peeling her arms from around his neck and dragging her chin up to see her face Jayne didn’t stop to wonder what had brought on such a display of emotion. To his mind, Little Crazy did what she did because she was still broken in some places. Those places were easy to understand if he thought of her like one of Inara’s fancy teacups- fine and delicate and oh so very beautiful, but once broken the teacup could be glued back together, but it would never hold water the same way again. The two men on the corner struck a chord with Little Crazy and that was her way of dealing.

Sniffing lightly and rubbing her eyes dry River looked up at Jayne. He didn’t like her, but he understood her in his own way, and that was just fine with her. Wriggling and squirming uncomfortably against him to get back into her seat, River shrugged her panic and discomfort away and steeled herself for what was to come next. “Change of plans, we go get the key and make sure he can’t be used. You may need to be mean, but please don’t kill anyone.”

Chapter End Notes
as always, poor translations by google, all mistakes are by me.

Shǎn liàng de màozi tóu- shiny hatted head
Èr, èrshǒu, lán sè- two by two, hands of blue
Chapter Twelve

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Miranda’s Reclamation building was across the town from where Jayne and River had had their moment in the mule. Jayne couldn’t understand why two men in suits would bother them now, but he didn’t care to find out either. “Moonbrain, you give me a nudge when it comes down to it yeh?”

Nodding her affirmation River scooped her hair back into a neat chignon, sliding a pair of deadly looking silver chopsticks in to hold it in place. Grasping the papers given to them by the Admiral she painted her best smile on and gracefully descended the mule and strode into the building, Jayne following in her wake. Lifting her chin and flowing into her most officious and relentlessly beaurocratic persona, picking tidbits of information form the minds around her, River was nothing if not the consummate Core Worlds Daughter by the time she reached the desk of the senior most Reclamation Agent in the building.

“Agent, I require my contracted collection to be immediately seen to. The family of this young man are quite influential in all the right ways and they have tasked me with the honour of retrieving their precious son.” Slapping the file down in front of the Agent as he stared at River she felt a frisson of tension roll off his body. “I do mean IMMEDIATELY Agent, the family has suffered enough and my associate and I are here to rectify the situation.”

River peeked behind the surface thoughts of the Agent and suppressed a shudder. Someone had warned him that they would be coming; someone didn’t want them to take the boy home, not without first taking samples and test biopsies. Narrowing her eyes she raised her hand to Jayne motioning him forward. “Mister Cobb, our contract is for the collection and retrieval of one James De la Palma-Donnager, son of Admiral De la Palma-Donnager and his lovely wife the Countess. This contract stipulates the Total and Complete remains be returned for the contract to be validated, correct?”

Jayne grunted to clear his throat, “Yep, that’s the one Boss.” Lowering a hand to the gun at his hip Jayne casually and yet somehow theatrically unclipped his firearm and checked the magazine before settling it back in its accustomed place, without removing his hand from the butt of the gun. “Also said that there is a shiny bonus if we don’t have to kill anyone to do it, I guess the Admiral likes things neat and tidy, not splashy and messy. Makes no difference to me, so long as I get my cut of the fee.”

The Agent quelled and hurriedly opened the file to process the information. His self- preservation mechanism overriding his training as he tapped the keys to file the reclamation order and have the body brought up to the dispensary level, allowing River and Jayne to collect their contract cargo. Casting her mental net wider River learned several interesting facts about the various Agents in the Miranda Centre, including that each had washed out of Operative training for one reason or another.

The pairs of Agents she had seen around the city centre, and more notably near Serenity’s docking berth, were there for the De la Palmer-Donnager body. They wanted him for some reason, and they meant to get him whatever they had to do. They didn’t now why they had to retrieve him, just that he was key to a medical procedure that could save millions of lives. Believing that they were doing the right thing in retrieving him rather than allowing his body to return to his family, the Agents would stop at nothing to get him back.
As River walked to the dispatch level Jayne moved the mule to a closer location, shorter distance for them to move the body and an easier getaway if things turned sour as he seemed to feel was more likely. Jayne reversed the mule into position and relocated the packages in the rear to accommodate a coffin sized container. Resting uneasily against the tail of the mule he waited patiently.

River had told him that they had to burn the body, and fast, it was his responsibility to let Mal know they needed to be ready to lift the second the mule was in the cargo bay, don’t wait for the hatch to lock, just GO. He was to tell Mal they needed to find a place nearby that still practiced the funerary ritual known as Cremation. Somewhere with a Hindu or early Anglo-Saxon base population would be a good place to start. Jayne didn’t know much about the hereafter, but he was pretty sure that cremation meant burning, and burning was something he could do pretty much anywhere. The rattle of the radio brought him back to reality as Mal confirmed that the pre-flight check had been done, and they were cleared to go whenever they needed to go.

River strode boldly along beside a box on a gurney float, presumably holding the body they had come to collect. Nodding sternly at Jayne she continued to the side and seated herself in the mule, leaving the bewildered Jayne and a pale faced attendant to load the precious cargo into the flatbed space. “Mister Cobb, with some alacrity if you will.” River snapped as he fastened the box and seated himself in the driver’s seat.

“We got him and now we go right?” He motioned to the box in back as he started the ignition and the mule lurched forwards before finding her traction and setting a steady pace back to Serenity, Back to home.

***

Zoe had arranged everything in the cargo hold so that the second Jayne hit the top of the ramp he could secure the mule in place without moving anything except his ass out of there. The ramp was still sealed shut, but Zoe was ready for the call to open and close it and to keep it clear of anyone or anything wanting to stop them. She had liberated some grenades from Jayne’s stash to compliment her two pistols and of course her favourite lever action shotgun. There was something soothing about the sawn off shotgun, perhaps it as the fact her dearly departed husband gave it to her for their fifth wedding anniversary.

Zoe stroked a hand over her slightly rounded abdomen and decided it was time to put the body armor back on. She had a bundle to protect as well as her ship and her crew.

***

River picked up the radio and talked in circles until Mal broke in edgeways. “River… Little Albatross… hush now and let me think.” Jayne had picked out maybe one in ten words, he was getting better at understanding his little Moonbrain, but he was a long way off what she and the Cap’n shared. He didn’t mind as long as her babbling didn’t escalate to stabbing like it did that time in the mess.

River, tears flowing down her cheeks, clutched the radio with white knuckle fury. “Cap’n they wanted to use him to fix things with PAX. He is the key to the lock and they want to unlock it and use it to control people!” Her breathing was as ragged as the tear streaks on her cheeks. “Read ‘em and that’s what they want. DNA sequencing to unlock immunity to Reaver Syndrome and Miranda Lethargy Illness, they gave it a Shèn bèi yíqì name, like it was a natural occurrence to be overcome! The Qūchóng yīgè yuè sīwáng de luòtuó are treating it like a common cold!” River’s indignation was justified, and it was also contagious.
Jayne gritted his teeth and powered the Mule a little faster towards their home. Serenity was a beacon and Jayne felt the burning urge to be there rather than out here in the open. He could feel the eyes on him as he imagined pairs of suited men in the street. River was in a turbulent hell and all he could do to calm her was think out loud that when the time came, he would kill them all. Every Lán sè de hòuwèi, yīgè wèizhī mǔqīn de érzi. They had no right to keep hurting her like this, not after all this time.

***

Zoe punched the lock and the ramp descended for Jayne’s perfectly timed entry and skidding halt. Punching it again while holding her rifle at the ready Zoe could tell right away that something was wrong with River, the body armour fit too snug around her as she reached for the girl. “River? Talk to me meimei. Where are you, where’s your mind?” Zoe knew by the look in her eye that River was gone for the foreseeable future; she would have to rely on Jayne for information and while he wasn’t the greatest soldier, he did care about River and that may be enough to rouse him round to a report.

Looking over to the mercenary she saw him drag the heavy cargo nets over the mule without a second thought and secure them tightly to the floor. Dragging River’s feather weight body out of the mule he scooped her up and carried her gently to the med bay without so much as a backwards glance at Zoe. Placing her tiny, emotionally exhausted body on the bed Jayne finally looked around and to his surprise Zoe was standing by with a blanket in her hands. Spreading it carefully over her before securing her with loosely adjusted security restraints Zoe radioed the bridge. “Take us out of here Cap’n, Jayne and River are in the med bay and the cargo is secure.”

The slight change in internal pressure assured Jayne they were taking off from this Dìqiú shàng dì diyu planet, leaving its toxic atmosphere behind for the clean and pure black of the ‘verse. If anything, at least now they were making their way off world and River might come back to them enough to tell them what the hell was going on.

Chapter End Notes

As always, the mistakes are mine, the translations are googles... I would love to hear from anyone reading give me the good the bad and the ugly- help me to improve my writing.

Shén bèi yíqí- gods forsaken
Qūchóng yīgè yuè sǐwáng de luòtuo- maggot infested carcass of a month dead camel
Lán sè de hòuwèi, yīgè wèizhī mǔqīn de érzi- blue handed backberth son of an unknown mother
Dìqiú shàng dì diyu- hell on earth that was
They were twelve hours off Miranda when the wave came. Mal refused to acknowledge and shut all the communications off both internal and external. He punched in the co-ordinates for a tiny asteroid he once stashed some goods on and let the autopilot engage before making his way to the med bay where the rest of the crew seemed to be congregated.

“What the hell happened Jayne?” He demanded as he walked in the door, looking from the unconscious girl on the bed to the mercenary and back. “You were supposed to take her shopping and then come right back so we could go retrieve the package. What the Shījì dìyù were you thinking?” Mal’s face dropped as he noticed the lines etched deeply into Jayne’s usually passive face.

Jayne took a deep breath and told the story right from the beginning when River and he had left to pick up the post and get the things she wanted dirtside. The look on his face deepened into absolute sorrow when he recalled how River slumped in her seat, tears streaming from her face babbling about keys and fire of greater than a thousand degrees Celsius for one hour per fifty pounds of weight.

“Last thing she did Mal, made me promise…” Jayne swallowed hard and looked back to the girl on the bed “… greater than a thousand degrees C for one hour per fifty pounds. Like he was a gorram recipe.” Simon broke in at that point, shooing the crew from the room insisting that River would recover, she was sleeping not comatose and he could possibly explain better in the mess over a hot cup of tea.

***

“Cremation,” Simon began “Is the post funerary rite of burning the body of the deceased until all that remains is gasses, ashes and dust. River’s suggestion of a temperature in excess of one thousand degrees Celsius suggests that the ashes require a higher degree of dissolution. I would attribute this to the desire to destroy or at least degenerate the DNA structures that may still be present in the ashes.” Sipping his tea Simon looked from Mal to Jayne and back again. “River did mention burning something didn’t she, when she contacted you on the radio before? Well this would be it. River knows something we don’t, and the key to that is the deceased’s DNA, she doesn’t want the Alliance getting a hold of his genetic sequence, so we would need to destroy everything in the casket with him.”

Jayne nodded, slugging back a mouthful of hooch. “Yep, she said to burn him, I understood that much.” Passing the bottle to Mal with a questioning look Mal shook his head and Jayne took another slug. “What I don’t get, is why she wants someone religious to do it. I can make a fire hot enough to do the job.”

Simon smiled a little and put on his Time-to-teach-the-children-something-new look “Jayne, it’s not about making a hot fire, its making a fire that is hot enough for long enough and then gathering all the dusty remains without leaving a trace behind unburned. The suggestion to fine a religious sect that utilized cremation is really quite understandable. They have special places that do exactly what we need, and for a small donation we can make it happen before the Alliance catches up to us.”
Nodding his head Mal stood up and headed for the bridge. “When you find a suitable place, come let me know. Let’s get this Gǒu hé xiǎo mǎ xiù over and done with and collect our money.”

***

“Bernadette,” Simon said with a decisive nod “Bernadette has a large enough population of Hindu and other faiths that all use cremation to send of the earthly remains, we should head there, but just in case we may want to drop a few hints that we are headed straight back to the family. Just in case anyone is listening.” Meeting Mal back in the bridge Simon felt a tingle of apprehension. “If what River said is accurate, I am fairly certain that someone will try to follow us, or at least try to detain us at any port we decide to call on.“

The little reader was still out cold and with both Jayne and Kaylee looking over her, Simon felt a little superfluous, nominating a planet to fly for was just one thing he could do to relieve the frustration of not knowing what was going on. “Mal, if River doesn’t pull through this, I may need to consider finding some quiet little town to settle in. I can’t keep dragging her all-round the ‘verse chasing freedom and the next pay check, no matter how much we love Serenity.”

The captain’s grunt of acknowledgement was more than he expected, so when Mal spoke in low tones it surprised the doctor to no end. “Can’t rightly say I blame ya Doc, she’s your kin and all, but don’t ya think she may want to have some say in how her life gets played? She’s been doin’ alright since Miranda and even pulling her own weight some, she may just outsmart you yet.” Flipping some switches and re-setting the auto pilot with the new navigation co-ordinates Mal grinned “Now why don’t we go see how our girl is doin’?”

***

Kaylee sat cross legged on the floor, her hair a mess of tangles around her shoulders, a swipe of grease across her nose. While waiting for River to wake up she thought she would service all the moving parts on the med bed, swing light and the scanners. “Hey Cap’n, she still ain’t awake, but her eyes are moving like she’s dreamin’, that’s a good sign right Simon?”

Simon crossed to his sister’s bedside and watched as her eyelids fluttered and her vital signs hummed a constant pipping drone on the machines, feeling for her pulse anyway Simon felt the muscles in her wrist tense then relax. “She appears to be in the midst of a normal REM sleep cycle. With her average sleep cycle lasting 90 minutes I expect to see her rousing in approximately forty minutes. We should leave her to her rest, best she gets some now before we have to wake her to tell us whats going on.”

Kaylee looked up from her lap full of spare parts and grease gun to smile at her beloved doctor. “I’ll just put these back together and be right out, best River don’t wake to spare parts littering the floor.” Squeezing a healthy heaping of the lubricant into the base of the table, Kaylee slipped the covers back on the pedestal and gathered her tools, slipping them into various pockets in her favourite overalls. “Sides which, we could all use a little time to breathe now she’s goin’ to be alright.” Kaylee smiled a little tremulous smile, waiting for the reassurance of her Airen or her Cap’n.

Chapter End Notes

as always the mistakes are mine, the translations are google
Shíjì dìyù- actual hell
Gǒu hé xiǎo mǎ xiù- dog and pony show
Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Notes

Just a short one as I have hit a wall and cant seem to write anything worth reading right now
As always the mistakes are mine, the translations are by google

Lā shǐ- shit
Xiǎo shù yǒnghéng de kuàilè- Tiny bundles of eternal joy
Tā suǒyǒu de yīqiè dōu shèngjié hé zhèngquè de- all that he held holy and right
Zài qī diǎn diyù lǐ- the seven hells

Unhitching the mule from the combined restraints in the cargo hold Jayne and Zoe worked in near silence. Stretching and popping his shoulder joints Jayne hefted the purchases that River had made into the crook of one arm while topping the pile with the post that they had collected. Looking towards the long cargo crate containing the hermetically sealed remains of the ‘De la P.D.’ boy as Jayne personally thought of him, he couldn’t help but wonder what secrets his body may hide… and what if there was cashy goodness involved?

Behind him he felt the air stir as Zoe leaned in menacingly “Don’t you so much as think of it, River says he has to burn, so burn he will. All of him whole and complete.” The mere mention of River was enough to change his mind, he didn’t want the Moonbrain angry with him, she’d as likely kill him with her brain as she would a knife or gun… hell even her bare hands were deadly, not to mention her feet. Those slender pointed toes, beautiful high arches and well defined ankles… Jayne shook his head roughly colouring from the neck up “As if I would! We got the payment coming for this one already, no need to go lookin’ for trouble.”

Carrying River’s goodies and post to the mess before sorting it into piles for Mal, Kaylee and Zoe, Jayne noticed a small but bulky package addressed to him. Immediately he snatched the package up and raced to his bunk to open the much awaited care package from his Ma. Carefully opening the brown paper wrapping and sitting it to one side Jayne took the dry paper folded in two from the top of the pile, gently opening it and slowly reading the messages from home.

His Ma, the old fashioned woman that she was, was concerned over the welfare of his friends and added a small ‘Welcome to the ‘verse’ gift for the new arrival. Reading the letter slowly he sorted through the straw until he found what she was referring to. A tiny pair of booties, lovingly knitted in the same rust and orange shades as his hat. “A very cunning gift Ma, a baby wears these they know no other baby’s momma gonna say Lā shǐ. Not that Zoe would let them anyway.”

Taking out a single sheet of paper from the limited stash he kept to write his Ma, Jayne began scrawling to his mother… ‘Dear Ma, Thanks for the care package, you and the little ‘uns should have some coin coming this time, sorry it’s not more…’ losing himself to the deep concentration of writing his missive Jayne didn’t hear anything until the cocking of a pistol by his ear.

“You missed one, boys should put their toys away properly before they start drawing pictures for their mamas.” River’s voice floated down to him from behind, quiet and hesitant despite her usual assured tone. The pistol dropped butt first onto his shoulder as she slid it down his chest by the barrel. “Mamas are important, but so are Xiǎo shù yǒnghéng de kuàilè, no matter how big they
grow, they will always be their mamas little baby.”

Walking to his bunk River lay down and stared at the mercenary with tired eyes. “Wanted mine to be the first gift, but now it wont be, and the baby will be cursed.” Yawning and curling into the foetal position River ordered Jayne not to give his gift to Zoe just yet, not at least until they had finished the job.

***

“Moonbrain done gone stole my bunk, orderin’ me around in my own berth Mal, it aint right!” Jayne complained heartily at the mess table nursing a mug of something that was supposed to be soup, but in reality was just ground protein bar in boiled water. “Man should know his berth is his own, not the Moonbrain’s play area.”

Mal smiled into his mug and tried to sound serious “Jayne, she was exhausted by whatever happened while you two were out, just let her sleep it off and then shoo her out. She won’t hurt nothing in there, not like she could just now anyways.”

***

Late into the ships version of night, Jayne made his way back to his berth, hoping to Tā suǒyǒu de yìqiè dōu shì shèngjié hé zhèngquè de that the reader had woken up and had the good sense to leave his bunk before he got back. Unfortunately for him, River had other ideas.

His berth, much to his disgust, had been taken over by what could only be described as a teenage girl’s crafting dream. There were swatches of fabric in Hawaiian print covering almost every flat surface, wires and cables and bits of extender bars made a strange contraption in the middle of the floor and sitting in the middle of his bunk was River. She sat cross legged in the center of his bunk, head bent over her hair forming a curtain to each side of her face, carefully stitching together two different swatches of fabric, stuffing it with the packing straw from Jayne’s parcel.

“Moonbrain” he started “just what in Zài qī diǎn diyù lǐ do you think you’re doing?” looking in horror around his normally tidy berth Jayne walked over to the contraption in the center of the room. Looking at its skeletal frame and arched arm it reminded him of the mobiles he saw when his siblings were young, looking to the reader he asked gently “You gone an’ used bits of Serenity to make this?”

Without looking up from her task River recited a list of components and where she had sourced them from, including Kaylee’s secret stash of nuts and bolts and the Captain’s last shipping crate as the base. Looking to the mercenary from beneath her lashes she continued “Dinosaurs made from Daddy’s shirts, stuffed with straw from your package, sewn with sutures from Simon’s infirmary. Made by my hands, with parts and love from us all as its family.”

Jayne grinned at the girl and laughed. “So you thought you would use my berth to hide in while you made it?”

“Secrets stay secrets with Jayne, he knows I could kill him with my brain.” Shrugged the girl in the center of the bed “And I couldn’t make a mess in my own room. Simon wouldn’t like it.”
Gifts and Deliveries

Jayne looked thoughtfully at the girl half reclined on his bed. She had finished the mobile and continued on to sew a brightly patched quilt from the remnants of Wash’s shirts. Several days had passed since River had made camp in his berth and he now looked forward to seeing what the girl would work on next. She helped him write to his mother and in return he didn’t say a thing about her projects, not to anyone, most especially not to Mal and Simon when they asked him what was going on.

“Mal, not my business to tell, Moonbrain wants you to know, she will tell you.” Jayne still called her names, although in his head the pet name Moonbrain she had quickly progressed to mean Girl Genius. He didn’t need to tell anyone he was softening towards the strange teen with telepathic abilities, it showed in his behaviour, the way he looked to her before retiring to his bunk or served her food before his own.

Simon, reticent in his approval of the friendship, noted that it had a stabilizing effect on his sister. Her mood swings were less frequent and less violent when she spent time with the mercenary. They sparred together in hand to hand combat, teaching each other new moves, River frequently showing him manuals on War and Combat. Jayne’s ability to read and write improved as her lucidity increased, the pair feeding off each other’s strengths and working in symbiosis.

“Hey Moonbrain, Zoe’s starting to show her bump. Maybe we should think about giving her the gifts sometime soon?” Jayne watched as River’s hands stitched delicate seams with the curved needle and suture. Lifting her head a thoughtful look crossed her face, nodding once, she smiled at the big mercenary.

“Zoe needs to see a doctor, a good baby doctor not just Simon. I’m sure the De la Palmer-Donnager’s know of one she can see when we return their cargo.” Thinking quickly River set her sewing aside and gracefully rose to her feet. “Time to go to work, the paid with shiny cash kind.” Kissing Jayne on the top of his head she left via the air duct beside the bunk.

***

“Mal, I need to be the leaf now.” River stood in the hatchway and surprised Mal with her sudden appearance. He rolled his shoulders and stretched cracking and popping joints that had stiffened with the combination of age, abuse and inactivity. Gazing back over his shoulder at the slip of a girl he trusted to fly his beloved ship he grinned.

“You look as though you have something on your mind Albatross. Care to share?” Slipping almost silently to the co-pilot chair River sat, turning to look at her Captain with a slow grin.

“We are close enough to wave the Family of the Boy Who Didn’t Lie Down. Zoe needs to see a baby doctor…” she hesitated, measuring her words carefully “There are things she needs to do for the baby and she needs to be told by someone who isn’t family.”

Nodding acceptance of his little reader’s summation of the situation Mal flicked the cortex on and set up a wave for the De la Palmer-Donnager’s, letting them know that their expected arrival planet side was six hours, forty two minutes. A further one hour thirty six minutes to unload and deliver the cargo to their family estate, the cargo was secure although a change to the format had to be made due to circumstances that needed to be discussed in private. Oh, and could they please have the names of a few good, honest, obstetrics and paediatrics doctors for them to call on?
Shutting off the wave, Mal stood and stretched his long legs for a moment before turning to leave. “You let me know the minute you hear back from them ok? Even if I’m sleeping, you call.” River smiled at her Captain and shooed him off the bridge.

***

River liked being on the bridge. The way the controls felt against the palms of her hands, the complex mathematical computations required to safely pilot the ship to the ground, or dock in space. In the last six hours she had convinced Kaylee to fake an emergency in the engine room, demanded Simon accompany Mal and Zoe to the estate with the remains of the De la Palmer-Donnager boy and convince Mal that Jayne was too ill to go with them. It was exhausting, but in the end it was worth it. As Serenity touched down and settled to the ground, River set the security and raced to the cargo hold to oversee the packing of the cargo.

Admiral De la Palmer-Donnager surprised them all by appearing at the cargo lock, accompanied by two obvious security personnel and a half dozen household help weighted down with fresh fruits and vegetables, staple grains and actual meat from their own private reserve. The household staff marched up the ramp to deposit their loads in neat rows before silently leaving to follow their master home. Zoe and Mal, completely bemused by the overt display of wealth, shared a private grin before taking the small airtight cargo crate to the waiting transport.

The ride to the Estate was quiet and uneventful, despite the look of obvious interest on the Admiral’s face, Mal insisted that they only speak when both he and his wife were present. “This news should only be shared once Admiral. It may be of interest to you that we were not without our share of opposition during this retrieval.” The clouds on Zoe’s face grew darker as her brows drew close. “Admiral, what the Cap’n is trying to say is, you may have visitors of the undesirable type soon, and you may not thank us for it.”

***

Being ushered into the smaller of the two sitting rooms Zoe looked around, discomfited by her separation from Mal and Simon, but tentatively trusting that the Lady of the House could be trusted in her claims to have the best Obstetrics/Gynaecology and Paediatrics Doctors in the Core waiting to examine and update her on the health of her unborn child. The two, well dressed individuals that met her were much like Simon in their manner. They set forth with diagnostics machines, testing everything from her bold and tissue samples to hair and finally, reclining her on a chaise lounge one of the Doctors placed a large screen over her lower abdomen, pressing a few buttons before the steady rapid eat of a heart broke the silence.

Zoe gasped as the screen showed a tiny, perfectly formed child, hand to its mouth as though sucking a thumb.
Thanks for hanging in there readers, I have had quite a brutal few weeks since my last update. This one is a short chapter as River and Jayne keep wanting to do things I am not yet ready for this fic to explore- if you want that take a look at my other Firefly fic "I could kill you with my brain: A love story" A longer chapter is on it's way I promise.

As always, Kudos are nice, Comments are delightful (and keep me writing)

Translations by Google, mistakes are all my own.

Tiàowù kǒnglóng hé yèzi zài fēng zhōng- dancing dinosaurs and leaves on the wind
Yúchūn de wàngjìle- stupidly oblivious

River shot a glance to Jayne before a slow grin spread over her face, “It’s time” she said, nodding to her co-conspirator before they both disappeared into the ship, Kaylee watched in confusion as the girl and her large mercenary friend walked away. The reader and the mercenary made their way first to Zoe’s berth, River tidying and Jayne rearranging the sparse furniture to accommodate the new crib and mobile before both retreating to Jayne’s berth to collect the gifts they had been storing.

“You take the Tiàowù kǒnglóng hé yèzi zài fēng zhōng and I will take the quilt. Captain is picking the crib up on the way back from their appointment.” River glanced around Jayne’s berth thinking of the quiet nights she had spent sitting on his bunk sewing as he sat cleaning his guns or rearranging their order in the hidey hole behind the fabric screen behind her.

The familiarity was calming to her often chaotic mind, he never seemed to notice if she had her hair out of place, or spoke out loud in riddles. Simon was often upset when she became dishevelled, causing River to seek solitude and confinement within the many ducts of Serenity. Admittedly, she enjoyed the mercenaries company when she was working on her projects, it was pleasant to not be alone with her thoughts.

Bundling the precious quilt into her arms River scooped up the tiny knitted booties Jayne’s Ma had made for the baby and tucked them into her pile smiling. It would be good for the baby to have gifts when Zoe returned. She knew Mal had the crib to collect and Kaylee had been working on something in the privacy of the engine room that just left her Yúchūn de wàngjìle brothe to gift the babe and expectant mother.

Jayne simply nodded and carefully picked up the freestanding mobile the girl had laboured over, taking all the hanging toys in his large hand to prevent them tangling until they were back in Zoe’s berth. “Lead the way Moonbrain” he rumbled low in his chest following close after her petite footsteps.

Watching her willowy hips Jayne wondered what he would do now that River had finished making a mess of his bunk, the mercenary had become accustomed to her quiet presence in his berth after the others had gone their separate ways. Her quiet musings and odd ramblings had once irritated
him to no end, but now he felt that he would miss her presence. Not that he would ever admit that to her or to anyone else on board this ship. It was bad enough that the Doc and little Kaylee were boning and Mal and Inara were in the constant throws of unresolved sexual tension. Now that’s something he won’t miss- the constant bickering between the two reminded him of his Ma and Pa when his Pa had still been around to give them all hell. Shaking his head the big mercenary grinned and followed the graceful girl with her fully laden arms into the Second Mates berth.

Positioning the mobile base in the exact spot River pointed out Jayne let the tiny plush toys drop and dangle on their thin wires. Straightening his back Jayne watched the toys circle with a gentle swaying motion. Somehow the girl had created a motor to turn the arms in gentle arcs in opposing directions, the leaves spinning clockwise and the dinosaurs counter. Smiling up at the girl Jayne noticed a strange look in the girls eye before breaking the contact.

River watched as the arms swayed in their dance, the bright toys moving in a delicate dance around the stand. Watching Jayne as he straightened River felt a surge of something foreign, unknown, and disturbing. The look that clouded her vision was a haze of soft pink mist, softening Jayne’s harsh features and lending him an air of gentility. She shook her head as Jayne broke the eye contact and River sighed not knowing why the feeling had come, or where it had gone. Jayne stood abruptly and turned, striding to the hatch without a word he left River alone.
Zoe couldn’t believe what the doctor said, a perfectly formed baby, no signs of any genetic abnormalities or congenital diseases, a strong healthy baby despite her grief and loss. She still had a tiny portion of her Xin'ai de zhàngfū to hold onto. The tiny data chip with the baby’s image and heartbeat sat close to her own heart, slipped inside the front of her shirt. Walking to the next room to meet with Mal she smiled beatifically, a changed woman from the one the Admiral had first met.

“Mrs Washburn, I do hope you are in good health and better spirits now, these last few weeks have been rather distressing for all concerned, especially you I wager.” The Admiral smiled sadly, the honesty of his statement clear to her as the excitement poorly hidden on her Captain’s face. Turning to properly greet both the Admiral and his wife Zoe’s smile faded but did not disappear entirely. “Admiral, Countess, I am indeed blessed with good health and spirits now I know exactly how my baby fares. I cannot begin to thank you for arranging for the doctors to see me.” Zoe spoke clearly and passionately without causing any distress or offense to the elderly couple.

Sitting quietly as Mal and Simon reported their recent actions to the couple, Simon gravely handing over a beautifully carved urn with the last remnants of their son settled deep inside. Explaining that his remains were cremated for safety purposes Mal looked at the Admiral with a knowing stare, nodding slightly before continuing. Nodding sadly the Admiral stroked the urn, hermetically sealed for travel, and took it to a side table. The Countess, tears welling in her eyes thanked the Browncoats and the Doctor, shaking each hand in turn and hugging Zoe before retiring to her room for some privacy.

Before explaining the interference of the Alliance, Mal shared that in the course of the pickup and delivery of their son, a crew member had suggested a post funerary service for their son, so his spirit could find peace, he didn’t mention keeping the Alliance off their back until after the Countess had left the room.

“Admiral, we encountered some…” Mal searched for the right words “…opposition to our recovery. One of my crew discovered that your son had a genetic thing, Doc can explain it better than me. We didn’t have a choice but to burn him and all he came in contact with.” Looking at his hands Mal felt uneasy waiting for either a response or Simon to take up the tale, when neither were forthcoming he continued “We have crew on board with us, kinda a genius at a some things, one of which is seeing people that don’t mean any good for us and ours. If it weren’t for her we would never have gotten your son off Miranda let alone in one piece. She pointed out the nefarious types and when she examined your son, she discovered why they wanted him so bad. The genetic thing that the Doc will explain to you soon, what I need to tell you, for your safety and ours, these folks are worse than just bad news. They mean to take whatever is left of your son and turn it into a cure for what they did on Miranda. They want to use his remains to control whole planets full of folks just trying for freedom and to make a better life for themselves.”

Seating himself in a plush armchair the Admiral looked Mal in the eye and motioned for him to be seated. Taking seats in a semi-circle of chairs Mal, Simon and Zoe waited while the Admiral digested the information already given to him. “You are saying, Captain Reynolds, that an organization wants my son’s genetic material to create some sort of cure for the Reaver Contagion?”

Mal slowly shook his head, his face falling into grim lines deepened by his weather beaten face.
“No Sir. What I am saying is that whoever this organization is, they want to take your son and make him into a shot they can give folks to settle on planets like Miranda and control them with the Pax. Reavers can’t be cured, not without a well-placed bullet to the brain. Simon here can tell you all about it. Doc is better versed in this stuff then me.”

The Admiral nodded slowly to Simon who continued to give him an in depth report of the encounter with the Black Suited Men, the troubles getting the body released and the decision to cremate before going any further to decrease the likelihood of more attention. His analysis of the most likely reasons for the Black Suited Men’s interference was not unfamiliar to the Admiral and discussion on the likely organizations was narrowed to three possibilities before Simon stumbled on the Blue Sun Corporation.

“Blue Sun have been instrumental in the advances in many of the genetic and military applications of the Alliance Corps. They have almost unlimited funds, the best technicians and researchers and frankly son, I wouldn’t be surprised if they didn’t have you on their radar before all this.” The Admiral sat back and thought for a moment before levering himself out of the chair. “Captain, Doctor, You have given me a good deal to consider. I assure you that I will make contact if anything untoward should occur here.” Turning to Zoe he continued, “My wife insisted that you use our home as a base for all your specialist doctor’s appointments my dear. It’s the very least we could do for you after all you have done for us.” Handing Mal a large package the Admiral turned to leave, aged by the sorrow of his son’s demise and the possibility of more trouble.

Chapter End Notes

wow, this took a lot longer than I anticipated, thanks for sticking with me thus far :)

Had a lot to deal with this last month, so the updates should begin to become more regular, I'm aiming for Thursdays or Fridays at present, but who knows when that could change.

As usual, the translations are googles, the mistakes are mine

Xīn’ài de zhàngfū- beloved husband
Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The jar wasn’t deep enough, Jayne thought with a sour look to the empty containers next to him. Four jars of Kaylee’s engine rotgut had barely touched the sides and Jayne was still in need of… well hell he didn’t know what it was, but it wasn’t at the bottom of this jar either. In his half drunken state Jayne decided if it wasn’t booze, it must be either trim or a fight he needed to make this feeling go away. The strange emptiness that sat in his chest was more disturbing the more he thought about it. Time to go fill that hole with something he could understand.

Making his way to the closest cathouse Jayne looked around at the proffered beauties and selected a petite blonde to fill his needs. Buying her a drink and negotiating a price right quick Jayne took her along to a back room to seal the deal. It wasn’t long before the young lady was looking elsewhere for a patron, some reason he couldn’t fathom Jayne couldn’t perform. Hell he never had the problem before, no matter how far gone in his liquor he was, he always managed to get up, even if it was just a quick few pumps til he was spent. Sliding the girl a little extra he paid for her silence as he left the cathouse despondent and sadly near sober again.

Making his way back to Serenity, Jayne didn’t notice the mule as it passed him, nor the voice of his captain demanding that he get in before he made him get in. Jayne walked past the mule twice more before his head finally cleared enough to feel Mal’s hand connect with the back of his skull. “Gorram it Mal, I was thinkin’” he growled before climbing into the rear of the mule next to the doctor, noticing the large crate tucked neatly in the back Jayne smiled. “That what I think it is Mal?” he nodded to the crate with a small grin.

“Mayhap it is, will have to wait and see.” The two men shared a knowing grin that left the doctor and the first mate in confusion. “Hafta wait and see when we get on board.” Mal’s smile shifted from a twirk at the corners to a full face smile beaming. “Alls I’m gonna say is, it better be worth all the shiny, ‘cause I ain’t getting another one.”

***

Steering the mule up the ramp and securing it Zoe looked quietly radiant, “I better go make sure everything is ready for takeoff, see if we got a job and if Kaylee and River want to see this.” She pulled the data chip out of her shirt smiling sadly. “I got a picture of the little one from that fancy core doctor.” Jayne grinned at the first mate and made a shooring motion with his hands as Zoe turned to leave, taking the steps a little slower than usual. “Be at the dining table when you are ready to look boys.”

Zoe made her way to the bridge to check the cortex for any waves or job offers they may have had while docked, the slim chip in her hand felt warm to the touch. She couldn’t understand the complex series of initials and numbers that ran down the side of the screen, but what she did understand was that the baby was healthy and beautiful and the very last piece of Wash she had left. She considered sending a wave to Wash’s family but decided against it as there were so few of them left that even remembered him, if his mother was still alive she would have reached out before now. No, the real family that this baby would have were all on this ship.

Zoe thought that she should consider names for both boys and girls and names that would suit a boy or a girl should be high on the list. The only name that came to mind was Leif.

Shaking her head she checked and double checked the cortex, no waves, no job offers, so her mind
turned to the pre-flight check, making her way mechanically through the process her beloved had once done with such flair she could find no peace on the bridge. Seeking the solitude of her bunk Zoe didn’t notice that Kaylee was hovering around the bridge doorway, almost bumping into the smaller woman on her way out.

“Zoe, Cap’n said you have a picture of the baby, can we see it?” Kaylee bounced on her toes and River peeked out from behind her before handing over Simon’s portable reader with a sly grin. “Can you show us Zoe? Babies are so adorable I just want to eat them all up!” professed Kaylee excitedly.

Zoe, shaken from her reverie, could not resist Kaylee’s enthusiastic request. “Told Captain and the boys I would be in the mess if they wanted to see the picture, why don’t we all go down and have a cup of tea while we wait for them? Captain picked up a delivery on the way back, Jayne seemed to know what it was, but I didn’t which is unusual.” Taking the reader from River, Zoe inserted the data chip and the baby’s picture lit up the screen.

***

Zoe was tired. No scrub that she was exhausted as she finally got to make her way to her berth. While they were waiting for Mal to finish whatever he was doing the girls had made and drunk their tea, answered a wave from Inara, closed negotiations on a job with a legal and good sized cargo bound for Beaumonde and then River had explained what all the letters and numbers on the side of the screen meant. She assured Zoe that everything was within normal parameters and that the fancy core doctor had indeed been telling her the truth- the baby was perfect in every way.

After showing off the picture to the rest of the crew Zoe felt the excitement fade and the lethargy set in. Levering herself up from the chair she made her excuse and headed down the gantry to her berth. Kicking open the hatch and descending the short ladder Zoe pondered how hard it would be to get up and down into her berth with a huge belly in the way, the indignity of needing help to do the simplest of tasks like tie her boots of a morning. As she turned a look of shock shattered her usually stoic façade.

A crib stood at the foot of her bunk, a mobile with tiny padded cloth dinosaurs and quilted leaves hung over it rocking gently. Her bunk, made with fresh sheets, had a hand quilted blanket folded over the foot and a tiny set of booties in bright orange and brown sat on top. Before she could say anything she turned and fell into Mal’s arms crying silent tears. Holding his first mate close, without saying a word, he let her cry until the tears ran dry.

Chapter End Notes

Starting to pick myself back up, got some inspiration today after meeting another writer... Loving the fact that some people feel comfortable enough to give me feedback- it makes my life a lot easier/nicer when I do get some. thanks again my dear consistent readers.
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Zoe Cries.
Mal is surprised.
Yes, I went there.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Mal wasn’t used to seeing Zoe cry. In fact he couldn’t recall a singular occasion where the woman had shed tears from anything including excruciating pain. Her warm body, slightly rounded at her lower abdominals, was still lithe and muscular, her arms, while clinging were still holding her weight. It was not the kind of situation Mal fancied being in, but if his first mate needed him to lean on, then gorram it he would be there.

Slowly rubbing his hands up and down her back, Mal manoeuvred their bodies so she could see the crib in her peripheral should she open her eyes. “I got the crib, Simon set up all the monitors an’ suchlike, River made the mobile and the blanket and I believe the booties are from Jayne, but as to whether he sacrificed his hat, or just had his ma make them I don’t rightly know.”

The tears welled again in Zoe’s eyes as she struggled to straighten herself and step back from the Captain’s embrace, wiping the last stray beads of moisture from her cheeks the woman once again controlled her face. “Looks to me like Kaylee gets to add the finishing touch, she can paint the baby’s name on the end of the rib here.” Zoe’s fingers trailed over the end of the crib before she examined the mobile to find each dinosaur and leaf had a name neatly printed in River’s handwriting; the largest of the leaves had two names- Hoban Washburn and Daddy.

With her tears a recent memory Zoe turned back to Mal, a tired smile playing on her lips, “Sir, permission to adore my gifts while you all go wait for the cargo delivery?” with a brusque nod Mal turned and left the berth as quickly and as quietly as he had entered it.

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“I do believe that I mentioned it once, but in all seriousness, I did not believe you when you said it.” Mal looked incredulously at the breeding pair of Dachshunds. Kaylee sat cross legged in the center of the cargo hold scratching the dogs behind their ears. “I dunno Cap’n, they look all soft and cuddly to me, but I’m pretty sure the girl one is about ready to drop her puppies any day now. You sure the guy said she was ok to fly?” Kaylee was concerned for the heavily pregnant dog, which was understandable. What Mal couldn’t understand was the reason they were transporting breeding pairs of assorted dogs to Beaumonde. The Dachshunds were accompanied by a pair of fierce looking Rottweilers, a matched pair of Chocolate Point Chihuahuas and a litter of ten week old Maltese Terriers as well as all the bedding, feed and other requirements for the trip.

Jayne had set up the enclosures for each of the dogs individually except for the pups who were to remain together as they were too young to be separated from each other despite being weaned. Kaylee wanted to keep the puppies in her berth but Mal insisted that they stay in the cargo hold while in transit. “But Cap’n, the little babies need to be with someone, they’re too little to go out in
the black alone.” Kaylee insisted. Mal did not respond, simply raised an eyebrow and turned away expecting that she would find a way to take a puppy or two to her berth anyway.

The trip to Beaumonde was uneventful and blessedly short, the barking and howling of the dogs had everyone’s nerves straining by the end of the second day. By the end of the first week Zoe kept to her bunk, Mal rarely left the bridge and Kaylee was cursing the teething puppies for ruining perfectly good wiring in her berth. The only ones who seemed unfazed by the dogs were Jayne and River, regularly walking the large Rottweiler’s around the cargo hold, playing with them and continuing the obedience training set out for them by the owners.

River was dozing in the enclosure with the puppies when a strangled yelp came from the Dachshunds enclosure waking her with panic and sudden clarity. The puppies were coming early and the mother was in distress. Racing to fetch Simon and his med kit River could feel every panting breath, every tortured contraction and knew that if something wasn’t done quickly they would lose both the pups and the mother. She found Jayne first and clung to him in shared agony with the mother dog, unable to speak she panted against his chest, whining in tiny moans.

Jayne looked down at the wild girl and petted her hair back from her forehead, holding her upright with one large hand in the small of her back. “Dogs ok?” he grunted as she shook her head wildly his eyes narrowed “Momma dog in trouble?” he asked, as her head slumped to the side, her mouth slightly open and panting. River clutched at Jayne’s chest nodding her head before panting out “Puppy stuck, pressure going to kill them both, need to get Simon.”

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Simon woke to the rough shaking of his sister’s hands and the madness began. Stumbling to the medbay Simon continued to insist he ‘wasn’t that kind of doctor’ and he had no clue as to how he could possibly help. Flicking up the portable cortex Simon kept in the medbay, River found an article on veterinary science and emergency caesarean sections for canines before prepping a holding station for the newborn pups, lining it with as many soft towels as she could find.

Jayne carried the labouring dog into the medbay as Kaylee and Zoe arrived to help with the newborns, the fear of losing even one of their precious cargo showing plainly on their faces. Laying the dog on the table Simon got to work, instructing Jayne on the placement of the dog and the use of the gas mask to keep her comfortable as he prepared her for the surgery.

Three hours later the new mother was sleepily feeding four new puppies as her mate waited and howled mournfully from the cargo hold. Jayne and River shared an exhausted smile as Simon instructed the Captain that the dogs were not to be moved for a minimum of 24 hours so he could monitor their progress. Shooing everyone back to their own berths or duties Simon looked down at the puppies as they suckled on their mother’s milk. “Better than a hamster.” He muttered under his breath as he settled in to keep watch over his new charges.

Chapter End Notes

ok... so Jayne and River are starting to get a very slow burn happening. I have no intention of letting them get together before the baby is born, so no fear of that overshadowing the birth. I also haven't decided on the gender of the baby, so surprises are still in store.

Please let me know how I am going- feedback is my lifeline.
Timing and Birth

Chapter Summary

Time Jump- Simply because I have no idea where the next several months took the crew and I want to get to the baby’s birth.

Chapter Notes

I'd just like to say a huge thank you to all of you who continue to read my fics. It is always great to get feedback from you all and I really enjoy seeing what you think.

Mal was red faced, the shock of his First Mate naked from the waist down in the middle of his berth was unsettling, though not so unsettling as the glinting wetness between her thighs, reaching a growing puddle at her feet. “Gorram it Zoe! Couldn’t you have waited I dunno, a couple more days? We coulda made it back to somewhere that has a fully stocked birthing center or something!”

Her face was flushed and the sheen of sweat made her entire face glow despite her stoic expression. “Can’t make these decisions for ‘em Cap’n, babies come when they are ready, not always when we want them to.” A contraction washed over her at that point and Mal jumped to take her by the arm, supporting her weight against his body as River ghosted in behind her to silently wrap an arm around her waist. Supporting the First Mate up the ladder from the berth was interesting; she insisted that she could make it between contractions and her hard headdedness proved to both the captain and herself that she was right.

A few moments later River sent Mal to get some clothes on then wake the Doc, not that she thought they needed him just yet, but it would reassure Zoe that everything was alright. She stripped the bed and covered it in waterproof cloth before arranging pillows and sheets specifically for the birthing mother. Smiling she settled her friend back into the bed and sat holding her hand. Zoe sat quietly as another contraction washed her awareness away, she wanted her husband, the father of this soon to be born miracle. She missed his smile and the light in his eyes when something amused him. She missed his hands, so loving and strong on her body when they sparred or made love.

She heard River sigh and her hands suddenly tensed. “I miss you too sweetheart, but you are the strongest, bravest most Fēicháng yūkuài woman I have ever had the honour of knowing, and I don’t just mean in the biblical way. Our baby is going to be raised knowing all about me, who I was, what I meant to each and every member of our family. Serenity is where they will be born and raised and they will grow strong.” River shuddered as Zoe’s eyes began to water. In a tiny voice, completely her own she offered to keep channelling him for the duration of the labour. So that both mother and child could know that he was there for them no matter what the cost.

Zoe let the tears fall as she became aware of Simon and Mal in the doorway, shaking her head sadly she squeezed Rivers hand before stroking the girl’s cheek. “River, mei mei, I know he isn’t here, I know he loves us, but you are. I think I need my littlest sister more than I need my dead
husband right now. Tears filled the readers eyes as she pressed a soft kiss to Zoe’s cheek. “Right now you need hydration and sustenance, labour is long and draining. Mal and Simon will take care of you for now and I will get what you need.” As river stood she smiled. “But first I need to tell the others.”

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Kaylee didn’t like being woken up. Especially if the ship wasn’t about to blow up, the engine wasn’t about to die or it wasn’t Simon doing the waking. Contrary to popular belief, Kaylee was not always the happy chipper eager beaver upon waking. River shook her shoulder regardless and stepped back to let the mechanic rouse herself. Once the mechanic’s eyes focussed River smiled a bright grin and promptly informed her that she was going to be an aunt.

“Baby’s on its way, want to help me in the kitchen?”

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Jayne rolled off his bunk the second he heard the light tap on the door. He hadn’t been sleeping too well and never as deeply as he had before Miranda. Scrubbing his broad hand across his naked chest and face he unlocked the door and stared at the pale round face of the ships albatross. Her smile was too wide and too serene for him to misunderstand. It was the same smile his sister got when his ma went into labour with little Mattie. Grunting he made his way up the ladder and towards the kitchen. He knew he wouldn’t be of much use anywhere else, but at least here he could keep the others fed and watered, and of course offer a shot of Kaylee’s rotgut to any who may need it.

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Zoe’s labour seemed to drag, the first eighteen hours were a continuous rode of contractions and then the endless waiting for the next. The crew floated in and out, each taking a turn at sitting with the First Mate before revolving to the next task. It wasn’t until Zoe broke and ordered everyone out to their usual tasks that she noticed River smiling to herself, a smile that wasn't purely her own.

Making her way over to the side of Zoe’s bed River stroked the first mate’s hair back off her face. Reaching for a comb she gently pulled and teased the hectic mess back into some semblance of normality, twisting the locks deftly into a braid that sat in the curve of her neck before tying it off and putting the comb back on the shelf. Curling up by Zoe’s side River lightly rested a hand on her rounded stomach and sang quietly to the baby within.

“It's not time to make a change
Just relax, take it easy
You're still young, that's your fault
There's so much you have to know
Find a girl, settle down
If you want you can marry
Look at me, I am old, but I'm happy

I was once like you are now, and I know that it's not easy
To be calm when you've found something going on
But take your time, think a lot
Why, think of everything you've got
For you will still be here tomorrow
But your dreams may not
How can I try to explain
‘Cause when I do he turns away again
It's always been the same, same old story
From the moment I could talk I was ordered to listen
Now there's a way and I know that I have to go away
I know I have to go”

The tears in Zoe’s eyes were not from the contraction that had built and ebbed, but the soft sweetness of the song the tiny girl sang. Placing her work scarred hand on top of the one laying on her stomach, Zoe asked if she knew the rest. River smiled up at the woman as another contraction built under her hand. It was a silent revelation that the baby wanted to meet the voice. Each contraction building swiftly after the previous as River and Zoe moved in accord. River preparing the towels and blankets of receiving as Zoe positioned herself more comfortably to give birth.

“It's not time to make a change
Just sit down, take it slowly
You're still young, that's your fault
There's so much you have to go through
Find a girl, settle down
If you want, you can marry
Look at me, I am old, but I'm happy

All the times that I cried
Keeping all the things I knew inside
It's hard, but it's harder to ignore it
If they were right, I'd agree
But it's them they know not me
Now there's a way and I know that I have to go away
I know I have to go”

As the final words of the song drifted into the black, Leif Washburne made her entrance into the world, two weeks three days early.
After a recent message I have decided that this story is as complete as I can possibly make it. I have tried for over a year to find inspiration and have failed.

To all those who read, gave kudos or commented I thank you, I was writing this at a particularly difficult time in my life and your support made a lot of difference.

End Notes

This is my first real attempt at a fanfic. I generally write BDSM themed erotica or poetry. I thought trying something new may make my creative juices flow again. I havent edited any of this as yet, just thought I might try this out before I go ahead with editing.
Translation program used for bad translations:
http://www.thepurelanguage.com/englishtranslationfree.aspx

Thank you to Sarran for showing me the wonders of AO3.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!