

ALIENATION

Written by

Cait Ballard

Address: 833 Montlieu Ave., High Point, North Carolina 27268
Phone Number: (202) 494-9868

FADE IN:

EXT. RIVER'S APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

Vision of a tall, graffitied building in the heart of the city. The complex is adorned with broken windows. Loud HONKS are heard from zooming cars as a man walks past the front of the building, walking his dog.

INT. RIVER'S BEDROOM - DAY

STILL SILENCE. The outside world ceases to exist in the bedroom of RIVER, a young 20-something year old woman. The lamp sitting on the bedside table can't compete with the sun's brilliant rays outside. Frail and pale lays River in her bed. The sheets are a intense shade of gray. Her hair is brown and covered with flyaways. Her face is draped with dark eye bags and her figure is slim. Her hands are lined with veins. River shifts in her sleep and groans. Something is clearly bothering her. We are guided toward her forehead...

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. WAITING ROOM - MIDDAY

We open on a brightly lit room, in stark contrast to River's bedroom. River's MOM, a woman in her early 50s, is talking on the phone in the corner. Her DAD, a man in his late 40s, sits silently next to her. River stares at the space around her. The windows are overwhelmingly long and the chairs are uncomfortably close to each other. Across the hall is a daycare. River stares at a woman and a child playing with toys on the ground. She smiles faintly. She is shaken out of her state when she hears the phone RING. The RECEPTIONIST answers.

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)
Dr. Winthrope's office. How may we
help you?

River turns and stares at the Receptionist, focusing on her mouth.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)
(salivating)
Yes sir, we can definitely make you
an appointment for that day. Can I
just start with your name?

As the Receptionist continues her conversation over the phone, River turns and stares at her Mom.

Her Mom, still in the corner, is standing 5'5" with long black hair, the color of coal. She has visible crow's feet and wrinkly hands. She paces back and forth, with no signs of stopping.

MOM

Yes...Yes. I know, but what am I supposed to do? She's not saying anything. I don't know who she is. Who is she?

Immediately, River focuses intently on the mouth of her Mom.

MOM (CONT'D)

(in response to the person on the other end)

She doesn't speak, but what can I do? Where did we go wrong? What happened? I just...

The two distinct voices of her Mom and the Receptionist fight for dominance in River's mind. She continues to focus on the mouths of both women, jerking her head back and forth. No one seems to notice.

RECEPTIONIST

Yes sir. You can call and cancel anytime...

MOM

I am trying! I am her mother! It is my job to...

RECEPTIONIST

We are located on...

MOM

(whispering)

I DON'T UNDERSTANDING!

The voices increasingly overlap, leaving no space for understanding. The voices also begin to sound MUFFLED, as if they are underwater. River's heavy breathing dominates. We focus on her face. A tear appears and slowly drips down her face, stopping as it reaches her chin. She stares straight ahead. Her breathing intensifies until...

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF FLASHBACK.

INT. RIVER'S BEDROOM - MORNING

River JOLTS out of her restless sleep. Sweat has formed a "V" shape on her pajama shirt, starting from her neck down to her chest. She looks over and checks the time. 9:24 AM. She places her hands on her head, CRYING. The crying grows LOUDER.

INT. RIVER'S KITCHEN - MIDDAY

River fries an egg over the stove. Her eyes are bright red and puffy. She SNIFFLES and squeezes her nose tight, as to avoid a sneeze. The television plays in the background. River turns the stove off and walks over to the television. A SPOKESPERSON starts to talk.

INT. RIVER'S LIVING ROOM - MIDDAY

ON THE TELEVISION

SPOKESPERSON

The product of the century! Only
\$14.99!

BACK TO RIVER'S LIVING ROOM

River changes the channel. A sitcom plays. A CHARACTER speaks.

ON THE TELEVISION

CHARACTER

(in response to a laugh
track)

OK...so now what?

BACK TO RIVER'S LIVING ROOM

River changes the channel again, obviously frustrated. The local news channel is next and River turns up the volume. She sighs, satisfied with the new station. A NEWS REPORTER now speaks.

ON THE TELEVISION

NEWS REPORTER

Breaking news. The burning of a
building in the industrial park
across town has occurred earlier
this morning and police now say
they are searching for a suspect.

(MORE)

NEWS REPORTER (CONT'D)

This comes only minutes after they reported the original causes...poor building structure and electricity issues. There are still no confirmed deaths.

BACK TO RIVER'S LIVING ROOM

River stares blankly, seeing the News Reporter at her desk. River has a confused look on her face but tries to ignore the broadcast.

INT. RIVER'S KITCHEN - MIDDAY

Instead of paying any more attention to the noise, River turns her attention back to her egg, picking up a metal spatula and fiddling with the white blob and its yellow center. Until...

ON THE TELEVISION

NEWS REPORTER (O.S.)

This just in. Authorities have arrested Dr. James Winthrope, a trusted doctor residing in the community.

BACK TO RIVER'S KITCHEN

River drops her spatula with a loud PING.

INT. RIVER'S LIVING ROOM - MIDDAY

River slowly and somewhat precariously walks over to the television, and sits down on her couch, motionless.

NEWS REPORTER

(pointing to a screen on set)

The renowned doctor can be seen here, being arrested and put into the back of a police vehicle. Happening live.

The voice of the News Reporter suddenly sounds MUFFLED. We have seen this before. River's heavy breathing, again, takes center stage. Her heartbeat THUMPS and grows intensely. The voices begin again...

VOICE 1

(in a childlike voice)

RIIIIIIIIVER? RIVER!

VOICE 1 (CONT'D)
 (in the tone of her
 mother)
 Speak up! Why aren't you saying
 anything? I am your mother!

River's eye twitches. She continues to stare.

VOICE 2
 What's happening? What are you
 doing?

DEAFENING SILENCE, except for River's breathing. The silence is broken when she SCREAMS, but there is no sound. The scene is stale. A constant STATIC HUM noise is heard instead. The same noise heard during an alert test on TV. She sits there, mouth agape. We are guided closer to her face, but we stop before her face is too close. River readjusts herself and gets up. She paces around...without signs of stopping. We've also seen this before. The STATIC HUM stops.

The voices begin to walk River through an event.

VOICE 2 (CONT'D)
 River don't cha remember? That
 day...

VOICE 1
 IT'S YOUR FAULT!

River places her hands on her head and collapses to the floor, not sure which voice is telling the truth. She is BREATHING heavily, twitching and her eyes are filled with pools of water that quickly escape to her cheeks to hit the floor.

VOICE 2
 (in sharp response to
 Voice 1)
 Shut up! River listen. Your mother,
 remember? She was...

VOICE 1
 (ignoring Voice 2's
 frustration)
 It doesn't matter! Nothing matters!
 You learned that a while ago.
 Patient zeroooooo.

River freezes. She hones in on the broadcast again, no longer crying or twitching, as if a spirit has overtaken her.

NEWS REPORTER

Dr. Winthrope has been tied to several cases of malpractice. Police are trying to connect the dots.

INT. RIVER'S KITCHEN - MIDDAY

River runs to the phone, dials 911, and waits.

INT. RIVER'S BEDROOM - MIDDAY

River's cellphone DINGS and 9 new messages appear on her screen. She's not there to read them.

INT. RIVER'S KITCHEN - MIDDAY

911 answers. River stands still, breathing.

911 OPERATOR

911. What's your emergency?

Eerie pause.

911 OPERATOR (CONT'D)

(more aggressively)

911. What is your emergency?

River hangs up. She walks over to the television and turns it off. It is evident that she knows something the police don't...

INT. RIVER'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

River JOLTS up in bed, panting. She wipes her forehead and looks down in disgust at the sweat that accumulated over night. It's been days since she's left her room. Cups and food wrappers from days earlier are still sprawled across the bedside table. Flying dust is illuminated by the sliver of sunshine rearing its head through the blinds. River's alarm clock suddenly RINGS and she GASPS. Frustrated, she leans over in bed and throws the alarm clock across the room and it lands with a CLANG. River grudgingly gets up, and we are left staring at the empty bed, left a wrinkly mess.

INT. HALLWAY - EARLY MORNING

River storms toward the kitchen but is stopped by old family photos on the table in the long passageway.

She stops and scans. A photo of her and her mother at the ballpark. Her dad drinking a beer on the boat. Herself smiling awkwardly in a hospital bed. Just as she attempts to relax, the voices start to push.

VOICE 1

Walk! Run!

River winces, as if feeling a sharp pain.

VOICE 2

Smash them. Get rid of them all.

VOICE 1

Look what he took! Look at you.

The hospital photo seems to haunt River, as her eyes slowly lay themselves upon the ancient memory once more.

Tears well in River's eyes. Her lips are quivering as if she's about to throw up. She finally explodes with fury, destroying every picture. When she's done, her face grows cold and lifeless, at it was before. She relaxes her shoulders and sits in the center of her mess in silence. She stares at a photo of her dad with another man at a golf course. She gazes lifelessly into the distance, staring us down. We move back and forth, back and forth...between River's eyes and the eyes of the "mystery" man in the photo.

River's quick shaky breathing dominates what we hear. She shuts her eyes. Her agape mouth quickly flashes on the screen. Then, her breathing stops. We see that she has fainted on the floor, landing on her side. Her head is surrounded by glass shards. The picture lays a few inches away from her.

INT. - RIVER'S LIVING ROOM - MIDMORNING

River is seen bandaging a cut near her cheek. The television blares in the background. River tries to drown it out.

ON THE TELEVISION SCREEN

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)

Up next, we have new developments in the mysterious burning of esteemed doctor, Dr. James Winthrope's, practice in the business park here in town.

BACK TO RIVER'S LIVING ROOM

River snaps her head toward the noise box.

ON THE TELEVISION SCREEN

NEWS REPORTER

Officials have ruled this an arson case. Police say that though Dr. Winthrope has been named a suspect, he is cooperating with the investigation.

BACK TO RIVER'S LIVING ROOM

River turns the television down. She then turns to her computer, which is sitting on her coffee table and opens the folder on her desktop titled "photos - childhood." She clicks through each photo, scanning them with her eyes.

She clicks "View" from the menu bar, and selects "Show Status Bar." She sees that there are 78 photos in the folder. She sighs, selects all the photos and mass prints them.

She turns the floor light on and begins to move furniture around to create a huge space on her living room floor. She pushes her couch all the way back so that it is touching the wall, she folds the rug and tucks it away in the corner, and she moves the coffee table over toward the window.

River then spreads all the photos out in the space she created. She ties her hair up while pacing over to the coffee table to grab a red marker.

With all the photos spread out, River picks up the photo closest to her. We've seen this one before. She circles the "mystery" man. She takes her time to analyze each photo and eventually circles this same man when he appears in them.

When she is done, we see her hands are covered in smeared red marks. We get an aerial view of River overlooking all of the photos at once with their new markings, which all of them have.

River looks satisfied at her efforts.

INT. RIVER'S KITCHEN - NEXT MORNING

River is drinking a cup of coffee at her kitchen island and stares at her laptop intensely. The PELTING of the rain outside is hard to ignore, and casts over the kitchen a sense of gloom. The laptop is on full brightness and illuminates River's face. Like a lantern in a dark cave.

River types aggressively.

ON THE LAPTOP SCREEN

A Google search has been made and it reads "Dr. James Winthrope."

BACK TO RIVER'S KITCHEN

River CLICKS on her trackpad.

ON THE LAPTOP SCREEN

An article from an online blog reads "Dr. James Winthrope: Professional or Monster?"

BACK TO RIVER'S KITCHEN

River tries hard to ignore her shaking hand. The voices take notice.

VOICE 1
Stop moving!

VOICE 2
Professional or...

VOICE 1
(cutting off Voice 2)
Monster? He's a monster!

VOICE 2
Monster!

VOICE 1
(jokingly)
Monster!

VOICE 2
(overlapping with Voice 1)
Monster!

River SLAMS the laptop shut. With bright red cheeks and clenched fists, River EXHALES, looking defeated. She is startled by POUNDING on her door.

INT. RIVER'S LIVING ROOM - MORNING

River scrambles to the window and gazes below. She sees a car parked outside that she has never seen before. She backs away slowly.

INT. RIVER'S KITCHEN - MORNING

River is back at her research station after being taken aback by the scene outside her window.

River fiddles with her laptop, moving it around on the surface of the kitchen island. She jumps as the POUNDING continues. She immediately turns and grabs a knife from the counter and then walks over to the foyer.

EXT. RIVER'S FRONT DOOR - MORNING

A man is seen with dark, gray hair with dark, gray pants to match. He stands around 6'2" and wears a leather jacket with a navy button up underneath. He seems to not have shaved in a while. He patiently taps his foot, which is enveloped in a heavy black boot. He SIGHS and checks his watch.

He POUNDS on the door again.

INT. FOYER - MORNING

River walks right up to the door, knife in hand. She slowly unlocks the bottom and top locks, but leaves the chain still clasped. Half of her body is visible to the man on the other side of the threshold.

DETECTIVE BRITTON
(showing his badge)
Detective Britton, local police. Do
you have time to talk?

River is silent. Knowing now that the man is a DETECTIVE does not seem to lower her guard.

DETECTIVE BRITTON (CONT'D)
I'm here to speak to you about Dr.
James Winthrope...

River remains silent but her eyes widen a bit. Detective Britton notices.

DETECTIVE BRITTON (CONT'D)
This will only take a few minutes.

The voices SCREAM at River.

VOICE 1
Tell him to gooooo away. He's not
wanted here.

VOICE 2
Think about it. He may be able to
help.

VOICE 1

Do it! Think about what you're
risking...

River, somehow successfully ignores the voices. She, instead, closes the door and we hear the chain PING off its holder. The door is now wide open.

DETECTIVE BRITTON

Thank you.

INT. RIVER'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Detective Britton walks in and immediately makes his way to the living room. He notices the pictures laying across the floor. But, he pretends not to...at least for now.

DETECTIVE BRITTON

Like I said at the door, I'm only
here to talk.

River is at the window, looking down at the entrance of her apartment complex again. She turns to the Detective, not responding to his comment...simply staring.

The parallel between River's attire and Detective Britton's is astounding. River is draped in a long white cardigan with a white shirt to match underneath, coupled with light gray pajama bottoms. Detective Britton stands in River's space in his dark color scheme.

River sits down on her couch. The BLARE of car horns are heard outside, briefly interrupting the DEAFENING silence.

DETECTIVE BRITTON (CONT'D)

I promise you I am up here alone.
My partner is downstairs.

River continues to stare blankly.

VOICE 1

He's lying! Don't listen! They're
gonna blame you.

VOICE 2

Answer him!

River holds back tears. She quickly wipes them away so she doesn't appear weak in front of this guest in her home.

DETECTIVE BRITTON

As you know, there are folks in trouble and I just want to hear what you know so we can prevent anyone else from getting hurt. Do you want to tell me about these photos?

Detective Britton walks closer toward the pit that River created just the day before.

DETECTIVE BRITTON (CONT'D)

Let's backtrack. Can I get your name? Tell me a little bit about yourself. Do you live here alone?

River tilts head and rubs her neck, trying to dodge the question.

Detective Britton picks up one of the photos and flips it to show River, as if she has not already seen it before.

DETECTIVE BRITTON (CONT'D)

Do you know this man?

River nods her head.

DETECTIVE BRITTON (CONT'D)

Can you tell me how? Be as specific as possible.

The authority pulls out a notepad from his back pocket and a pen out of his inner jacket pocket. He then looks up, anticipating an answer from the still figure on the couch that stares, wide-eyed, back at him.

Detective Britton has not noticed but River has yet to break eye contact with him since he walked through the door.

River refuses to answer.

VOICE 1

You've done it now! Stupid.

VOICE 2

River answer him! He has haunted you enough. Think of me...

VOICE 1

Have I?

Detective Britton cuts through the noise.

DETECTIVE BRITTON

(sharply)

Do you know this man? I need you to work with me here.

River still does not answer. Instead, she delves into a flashback.

BEGIN FLASBACK:

EXT. GOLF COURSE- DAY

River and her family are out at the local golf course that her father frequents often.

River and her BROTHER, a tall, scrawny brunette with freckles and acne, are sitting in the golf cart. Meanwhile, the pair's Dad, a surprisingly short, rounder man who we've been introduced to before, and DR. WINTHROPE, a very tall, slim-fit man with thick black hair and large white teeth, size up a golf ball. River's mom did not attend the outing.

DR. WINTHROPE

Bet you \$20 bucks I win this hole.

DAD

You're a doctor. I'm sure you can bet more than that

DR. WINTHROPE

(slyly)

Hey I'm a doctor, not a millionaire.

DAD

That's funny. Thought those words were interchangeable. I've been using 'em synonymously for years.

DR. WINTHROPE

Yeah, yeah whatever. Stop trying to distract and let's play.

DAD

(jokingly)

You started it bud.

River and her brother listen to the meaningless banter and sigh. Golfing has never been an outing either of them enjoy.

River stares at Dr. Winthrope. As her dad focuses on his shot, Dr. Winthrope's eyes meet River's. He winks. River shutters.

Her brother notices but doesn't do anything overtly. Instead, he grabs his sister's hand and squeezes it. The siblings look blankly ahead, waiting for the day to be over.

END OF FLASHBACK.

INT. RIVER'S LIVING ROOM - MIDDAY

River returns to reality.

DETECTIVE BRITTON

Ok, well this man is Dr. Winthrope, the man I am here to talk to you about. I know that your parents were close to this man. Your parents aren't co-operating and your brother...well I'm sorry.

River snaps and tears fall down her face. She is crying because she knows that she will have to answer to the Detective. She is defeated.

RIVER

Yeah...they were.

Shocked, the Detective eyes widen. We, too, are also surprised, for we have never heard River speak before.

DETECTIVE BRITTON

Alright, well can you tell me more about your parents?

RIVER

(off topic)

Sorry I just...I go quiet in uncomfortable moments.

DETECTIVE BRITTON

It's alright.

RIVER

(motioning to the photo in the Detective's hand)

He's been a part of my life since I was little. He was a family friend. My dad met him at a business conference before I was born.

DETECTIVE BRITTON

I see. Can you tell me why you have him circled in all these photos?

RIVER
Because...because. I was just going
through pictures one night and...I
heard the news and...

River is trying to fight back tears that are forcing
themselves down her face anyway.

DETECTIVE BRITTON
It's alright. Be honest with me. I
am here to help.

RIVER
(calmly)
I have a feeling he was the one who
burned down his practice.

DETECTIVE BRITTON
And why do you say that?

RIVER
Because he's a monster.

VOICE 1
Stop it.

VOICE 2
Do it!

DETECTIVE BRITTON
And why do you say *that*?

RIVER
Because, I'm pretty sure he made me
this way and wants to get away with
it.

DETECTIVE BRITTON
Made you what way? What did he do?

RIVER
Made me numb to the voices. One of
them is him. The other is my
brother.

DETECTIVE BRITTON
Does Dr. Winthrop have something
to do with your brother?

RIVER
Yeah. I'm pretty sure he had
something to do what happened at
the golf course that day.

Before the Detective has time to respond...

FADE OUT.

THE END