

# **BADLANDS COLA - 107 - “MELINDA, MORE OR LESS”**

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## **SCENE 107.1**

**MUSIC THEME: “FEW COLOURS” BY OTON.** An ominous, building track featuring a wary electric guitar and the keens of a theremin.

**SUNNY:** Badlands Cola. Episode Seven: Melinda, More or Less.

**FADE IN.**

**EXT. PARKING LOT / INT. ELECTRONICS STORE - MORNING - D5**

*The BIRDS may be chirping and dogs may be barking, but this grey morning is slightly cooler than days past, the WIND winnowing through the exposed, empty parking lot. Wrapped up in insomnia and a hoodie, SUNNY waits outside the dark stores for their number one to arrive.*

**SUNNY:** *(To the audience)* From one parking lot to another, it seems.

This time, I’m posted in the narrow strip of cracked asphalt in front of the town’s one anemic little strip mall, the electronics store dark behind me. It was close enough to walk, but I’ve been sitting on the curb for half an hour, waiting for the shop owner to show up with my hoodie to keep the early morning chill at bay. I’m still not used to

how slow the Badlands are to warm in the mornings, and how quick to freeze at night.

Apart from a smattering of commuters putting along the quiet streets, it's a ghost town. My only company is the rusted metalwork sculpture of a goofy looking Brontosaurus that sits on the corner of the parking lot. Someone's scratched their initials into its long, crooked tail.

***STRATHCONA's Mustang PUTTERS into the parking lot, and he exits, SHOES scuffing on the pavement, exhausted. In his hands are COFFEES and a BOX of cheap Canadian doughnuts.***

**SUNNY:** Hey.

**STRATHCONA:** ...Hey. I brought coffee. No idea how you take it, so it's black.

**SUNNY:** Oh, I brought coffee. It's ice cold, though.

**STRATHCONA:** No, I need three coffees. Here, take this. Got some maple creams too...

***STRATHCONA passes some breakfast SUNNY's way; they stretch out to grab it. The two sip coffee.***

**SUNNY:** Thanks. Didn't sleep much either, eh?

**STRATHCONA:** Not even a little bit.

I keep thinking: what if she's here? You said the last tape was recorded in the house...

**SUNNY:** Wait, did you go back there?

**STRATHCONA:** After what happened last time? *Fuck* no.

**SUNNY:** Okay. Yeah. Look, we'll just get a couple new VCRs, watch the tapes, go from there.

Strathcona, we'll figure it out, okay? Eat a doughnut.

**STRATHCONA:** (*Grumbling, taking bite of food*) You eat a doughnut.

*Idle FOOTSTEPS approach from afar, along with jingling KEYS and idle WHISTLING: the STORE OWNER.*

**STRATHCONA:** That's our guy. (*Calling*) Hey, Bob! You're late.

**STORE OWNER:** Oh, Strathcona! That you? Are you loitering outside my shop? Ha!

**STRATHCONA:** You know me, forever replacing ancient tech at the station.

**STORE OWNER:** Well, come on in. Though I gotta warn you...

*The door to the electronics store unlocks with a CLICK and a CHIME. The interior is somewhat warmer, and the OWNER sets to opening the store, turning on the AIR-CON and the CASH REGISTER for another summer day.*

**STORE OWNER:** ...I'm a little low on stock at the moment.

**SUNNY:** Low on stock? Um. Your shelves are empty.

**STORE OWNER:** *(Flustered)* Well, not completely empty. If you need fax machines, I got plenty of those!

**STRATHCONA:** Bob, seriously, what happened to all your hardware?

**STORE OWNER:** It's been very busy! The dog groomer down the street had a flooding incident, had to replace all their electronic bits and bobs overnight. *Tsk tsk.* Had a big order of surveillance equipment for the paleontology centre. And of course fans are always in high demand this time of year!

**STRATHCONA:** And that cleaned you out?

**STORE OWNER:** *(Nervous)* Supply and demand, you know! The invisible hand of the market works in mysterious ways!

**STRATHCONA:** *(Sighing)* Just tell me you have a VCR hanging around somewhere.

**STORE OWNER:** Oh! I don't keep many of those at the best of times. Let's check in the back...

**The OWNER TROTS away, irritated as he rummages around somewhere unseen. SUNNY leans into STRATHCONA.**

**SUNNY:** *(Quietly)* Getting some weird vibes off this, Strath.

**STRATHCONA:** *(Quietly)* Yeah, me too. Let me chat with Bob in the back, wait a sec.

**SUNNY:** *(Quietly)* Okay, I'll stay up front.

**STRATHCONA:** *(Calling out)* Hey, Bob? Let me give you a hand back there.

**STRATHCONA FOLLOWS** after the **OWNER** in the back of the store. Taking advantage of the moment alone, **SUNNY** takes out their phone and **DIALS**, listening to the **TONE**. It immediately goes to voicemail.

**PHONE:** If this is an emergency, please hang up and dial 9-1-1. You have reached DETECTIVE NICHOLSON. Voicemail is full. Please call at a later time, or dial the Calgary Police non-emergency number for further assistance.

**SUNNY:** *(Under breath)* Voicemail full?

**A hail of RAPID FOOTSTEPS** return from the back of the storefront.

**STORE OWNER:** *(Flustered in the extreme)* Strathcona, you're walking very fast!

**STRATHCONA:** Sunny, we gotta go.

**SUNNY:** Wait, why?

**STRATHCONA:** Someone cleaned this place out on purpose.

**STORE OWNER:** Please, you promised you wouldn't get angry!

**SUNNY:** One person bought all this? Who?

**The door CHIMES** as **STRATHCONA** exits.

**STRATHCONA:** I'll explain later. We have to go.

**SUNNY:** Go where?

**STRATHCONA:** I said I'll explain later! We have a long drive, come on.

**SUNNY:** Okay, okay! Right behind you!

*The Mustang DOOR slams, engine ROARING to life, wheels SQUEALING out of the parking lot.*

**FADE TO BLACK.**

**SCENE 107.2**

**FROM BLACK.**

**INT. CAR INTERIOR / EXT. BADLANDS - MORNING - D5**

The Mustang RACES down the road as it swerves through the hoodoos. The road is less traveled, dotted through with POTHOLES and gravel skids.

**SUNNY:** Is it Jasper?

*(Pause)* Hello? Strathcona?

*(Pause)* Strath, we're hurtling into the Badlands at mach 3 in apparent pursuit of a bunch of AWOL electronics, and you won't tell me where we're going or why. What happened to trusting each other?

**STRATHCONA:** Sorry. Sorry. Bob described the person who cleaned him out. Sounded a lot like Melinda.

**SUNNY:** What? How can you be sure —

**STRATHCONA:** I'm sure.

**SUNNY:** Holy hell. What is she doing buying up all that —

**STRATHCONA:** You tell me, gumshoe!

*(Long pause)* Where did you find the tapes? I didn't even ask you.

**SUNNY:** In the basement. Of the Moon house.

**STRATHCONA:** Jesus fucking Christ, Sunny, don't tell me you went in there.

*(Pause, disappointed realisation)* Sunny! Sunny, *no!*

**SUNNY:** Sunny yes. My case was going cold again, I had to try a new angle. Besides, I've already been in there once.

**STRATHCONA:** You *what?* Jesus...And nothing happened?

**SUNNY:** Well. Not...not nothing. But also not anything I can explain. You know, just forget it.

**STRATHCONA:** Trusting? Remember? We're doing the thing where we trust each other?

**SUNNY:** Okay. Okay, fine! It's like space...changes. Stretches. Twists. I...

Is that what happened when you were in there? Like the...like the house was looping on itself? Repeating its own architecture?

**STRATHCONA** says nothing. Once again, the **QUIET** shared between them thins under the pressure of some terrible truth...

**SUNNY:** I wish you'd just tell me what happened to you. I realise it was nothing good. But I've seen some shit in this town, too. It's like places just go *wrong*. If there's a rabbit hole, Strath, I'm already down in it.

**Music:** A deep, slowed reprise of the *Badlands* guitar motif, the bassline yawning like a roar.

**STRATHCONA:** (*Almost painfully reluctant*) Yeah. Places do go wrong here. They...loop. Not true duplicates, more like...I don't know. Faded versions of what's real. That's...that's what happens here.

**SUNNY:** (*Shaken*) Okay.

**STRATHCONA:** It's rare. Usually it doesn't last long: the hallway to the bathroom is just a little longer than normal, or the turnoff street you're looking for doesn't show up until the third or fourth time you'd circled past. But in that house, Sunny...that *fucking* house. Whatever the wrongness is, it's strongest there.

**SUNNY:** So you were trapped. In the loop.

**STRATHCONA:** You keep moving, going up stairs and opening doors. You keep looking for that shred of daylight that says you're out. But as the hours start to tick by... Look, there's a point you get to...you start to wonder if...

**SUNNY:** Oh god.

I saw your face when I first found you. You looked scared. You looked *hunted*.

**STRATHCONA:** I felt like I was. Like I knew exactly what I was running from. But when I'm out here...it's all distant, like getting blackout drunk and losing time.

Listen, Sunny. You made it out without getting hurt. Twice. Don't push your luck.

***The MUSIC fades.***

**SUNNY:** Pfft. You're not my real dad.

**STRATHCONA:** No, but I am the only guy watching your back out here.

**SUNNY:** Well. yeah.

**SUNNY:** *(To the audience)* We drive. The mesas race by and the deep blue shadows of morning shrink as the sun pulls high. I can practically taste the tension rolling off Strathcona, but for the first time, it's not directed solely at me.

The minutes drag by; even though the scenery looks identical to the same old Badlands we've been bumping through for an hour, Strathcona suddenly gears down.

**STRATHCONA:** Do me a favour and turn on the radio for a second. Just flip through the channels.

**SUNNY:** ...Okay?

**SUNNY flips through the car RADIO to a well of quiet STATIC.**

**SUNNY:** Strath, what am I doing?

**STRATHCONA:** Testing my hunch.

**The channels continue to FRITZ plaintively as STRATHCONA coasts through the hoodoos. For a moment, this feels like an exercise in futility. Until the static RISES, rapidly gaining power...**

**SUNNY:** What the — ?

**STRATHCONA:** I hate being right.

**The car GRITS to a sudden halt in the sandy dirt.**

**SUNNY:** Strath, this is still just the middle of nowhere, I don't...

**STRATHCONA:** You'll see in a second. Sorry in advance.

**Music: An ominous jangling guitar strum.**

**SUNNY:** *(Here we go again)* Shit...

**The doors OPEN and CLOSE as the two exit. Their shoes GRIND on the hard-packed sand and gravel, and they shield themselves against the hot WINDS.**

**SUNNY:** *(To the audience)* At first, everything is just Badlands. Blank, scorching, wind-ripped desert, the hoodoos towering all around us like a stone maze. The soil is darker here, moted through with specks

of black sediment. I blink through the sun, through the sand, and then my stomach drops.

Dead ahead, so close I can hardly believe I didn't see it before, is a white van. Upside down. Half-buried in the earth. There's a tarantula creeping along in its harsh shadow. The van is surrounded by dozens, and dozens, of *holes*.

**SUNNY:** Oh my god. The Sparville incident.

**STRATHCONA:** Like I said, sorry for bringing you here.

**SUNNY:** "Sorry?" Are you *kidding*? This is like, the rosetta stone of the Moon case! I would have *killed* for a crime scene this well-documented three months ago. Do you think they cleaned the bloodstains off that one rock?

...What?

**STRATHCONA:** People died here.

**SUNNY:** Well. Yeah. I'm — I'm not glad it happened or anything.

*(Changing the subject)* What was that stunt back there with the radio?

**STRATHCONA:** All right, bear with me for a second here: Jasper was arrested a week ago, right?

**SUNNY:** Okay...?

**STRATHCONA:** And he was sending fossils to Mel somehow. That's what you said, right? But something interrupted them before she

could retrieve all the pieces. What if Jasper's arrest is what cut that process short?

**SUNNY:** Which would put Mel in town and digging as recently as a week ago...

**STRATHCONA:** You said she built a beacon, whatever that means. What do you want to bet *that* was only a week ago, too?

**SUNNY:** Oh, shit.

**STRATHCONA:** Not only that, I noticed our radios starting to fritz around the same time. I've been trying to figure it out, but then our conversation last night and Bob today...I only just put two and two together.

**SUNNY:** You think whatever Melinda built is causing the interference around town?

**STRATHCONA:** Around town, yes, but it's stronger the closer you get to Sparville; always has been.

**SUNNY:** You mean, the Beacon is *here*?

**STRATHCONA:** (*Grim, awed, seeing something...*) I don't know Sunny, you tell me.

**STRATHCONA** *points to something in the middle distance, and SUNNY shields their eyes to follow.*

**SUNNY:** (*To the audience*) Strathcona has a solid ten inches on me, which means Strathcona sees it first. He points into the distance, to

what seems like a particularly twisted-looking hoodoo. I follow his hand, confused and bleary in the sun, and then I see it too.

**Music:** *hazy, roiling ambient synths.*

**SUNNY:** *(To the audience)* At first, it just looks like a heap of junk. But as Strathcona and I approach and its huge shadow falls over us, I realise it's been carefully arranged that way, wrapped in miles of connecting wire, piercing the blue sky like an anarchist's monument to outdated tech after the nuclear fallout's settled.

And then we hear it.

**A staticky BUZZ fills the air, beginning distant but coming steadily closer as the pair TREK across the desert...**

**SUNNY:** *(Awed)* It's a radio tower.

**STRATHCONA:** *(Annoyed)* That is not a radio tower.

**SUNNY:** No, like, a literal tower of radios. Melinda *built* this?

**As they approach the tower, an unsettling magnetism seems to PERMEATE the air.**

**STRATHCONA:** I have no idea, but I bet there's enough retro frequencies here to completely scramble the town's airwaves. *(Under breath)* Some beacon.

Stay back, I'm going to get a closer look.

**SUNNY:** Be careful.

**STRATHCONA** *approaches the monolith.*

**SUNNY:** Does it look like it all came from Bob's shop?

**STRATHCONA:** Eh. Hard to say. Maybe? Not sure where else you find this much shitty old tech. It's definitely Mel, though.

**SUNNY:** ...How do you know that?

**STRATHCONA:** This is exactly the type of radio she and I used to tinker with when we were kids. And...she left a note.

**SUNNY:** *(To the audience)* Rule number something of private investigating, keep your cool.

I barely manage it as I come up behind Strathcona and see what he sees: the yellow square of paper, duct-taped to a HAM radio wedged into the bottom of the tower. Such a tiny scrap of paper, but Strath is staring at it like he's trying to make it burst into flames with his mind.

The words on it are so casual, I almost burst out laughing from nerves and sheer incredulity: "CALL ME."

My instinct is to catch Strathcona's eye for some kind of temperature gauge on the situation, but part of me is suddenly afraid to. Strathcona is so calm. Why is he so fucking calm?

The desert heat is unbearable, my back itches with sweat, and still I feel a chill come over me as Strathcona picks up the handset.

**SUNNY:** *(Whispering)* Wait. Strathcona, you're not...

**STRATHCONA:** I am.

**SUNNY:** You have got to be kidding me!

**STRATHCONA:** Let me do this.

*The sound equipment is coated in dust and looks to be from as far back as wartime, but it blooms to STATICKY life at STRATHCONA's touch. For a long moment, he's greeted only by an endless desert of STATIC.*

**STRATHCONA:** Hello?

*The word is devoured by the static, echoing into obscurity, hope fizzling with it...*

**MELINDA MOON:** *(Over the telecom device)* I knew it wouldn't take you long.

**STRATHCONA:** Mel.

**MELINDA MOON:** You know, I was worried I wouldn't recognize your voice. Your real voice, not the one you make up for the radio. But there it is: you're still in there, somewhere. I can hear it.

**STRATHCONA:** I...

**MELINDA MOON:** Take your time.

**STRATHCONA:** Mel, are you...are you okay? Where are you?

**MELINDA MOON:** Nowhere you can find me. But now I know where you are. Do you like my work?

**STRATHCONA:** Seems like you've piled up every piece of radio kit in town for the sole purpose of ruining my job. So no, not a fan.

**MELINDA MOON:** Mm, no. Not quite. Can you figure it out?

Glad to see you don't always know everything. It's a beacon. For my brother, and everything that he's about to bring with him.

This was my role. I did my part — in the end. A little shoddy, I admit, but not bad for a hobbyist two decades out of practice.

**STRATHCONA:** Mel, what role? What are you talking about? Jasper's locked up, the cult is dead, the whole thing—

**MELINDA MOON:** Oh, you haven't heard? Jasper escaped. He's almost home.

**STRATHCONA:** ...What?

**SUNNY:** *(To self)* Shit.

*(To STRATHCONA)* She's telling the truth. Jasper's been missing since Saturday.

**STRATHCONA:** You knew?!

**SUNNY:** I...

**MELINDA MOON:** Sounds like you've both been keeping secrets. Tell Sunny I say hello, by the way.

**STRATHCONA:** How do you even know —

**MELINDA MOON:** Strathcona, focus. It doesn't matter, do you understand? This...is all ending soon. Finally, after all these years. (*To self*) I should be feeling triumphant.

**STRATHCONA:** *Wait, what is ending?*

**MELINDA MOON:** (*Grim*) The work, Strath. The work. The pain. The lessons, the digging. *The Moon legacy*. And, if my brother's right, the tired old world we know is going to go with it.

**SUNNY:** (*Under breath*) Jesus.

**STRATHCONA:** Why are you telling me this? Why did you want me to find this...this "beacon"?

**MELINDA MOON:** I want you to help me. Not Jasper. Just me.

**STRATHCONA:** (*A bitter chuckle*)

**MELINDA MOON:** Not Jasper. Just me.

**STRATHCONA:** You actually want to have something to do with me again? After you left? After everything...?

**SUNNY:** Wait, what —

**MELINDA MOON:** Maybe I don't know what I want anymore. Maybe I'm running out of time to figure it out. Do you want to help me or not?

**STRATHCONA:** Yes! Yes, Mel, *I want to help you.*

**MELINDA MOON:** *(Genuinely relieved)* Good. I'm glad. Because once my brother reassembles the skeleton, he needs one hell of a Beacon to send out the signal and finish the job, and this hunk of junk is only getting us halfway.

**STRATHCONA:** Wait...what?

**MELINDA MOON:** Your radio station, Strathcona. The Raptor. It's everything I need...and you, of course. With you at the helm, we can spread the Beacon's signal. Please. I don't want to be the only one who can hear it.

**STRATHCONA:** No, that's not —! Mel, please. Please, just tell me where you are.

**MELINDA MOON:** If I tell you where I am, I need to know it'll just be you. I need Sunny gone.

***The MUSIC cuts.***

**SUNNY:** *Excuse me?*

**MELINDA MOON:** I don't mean gone in a philosophical way, either. Put them in the trunk of your Mustang and get them out of the picture for good.

***The silence stretches long between STRATHCONA and MEL, between SUNNY and STRATHCONA. Too long.***

**SUNNY:** Hang up. Hang up right now. Strath.

**STRATHCONA:** *(Effort: Breathing heavy)*

**SUNNY:** Strath? Look at me. Strathcona. *Strathcona.*

**STRATHCONA:** Mel...Mel, I — AGH! (*A cry of extreme pain that devolves into agonized hacking, coughing, groaning.*)

**STRATHCONA SLUMPS** against the tower before **LANDING** hard. *The only thing less sympathetic than the ground is SUNNY, who now GRIPS the handset...*

**MELINDA MOON:** Strathcona? Strathcona, are you still there...?

**SUNNY:** Strathcona is chewing on a face-full of pepper spray, and you are so next.

**STRATHCONA:** (*Groaning into the dirt*) Fuck!

**MELINDA MOON:** See, this is exactly why you need to go in a trunk.

**SUNNY:** Just you *try*. Your charges would dovetail so nicely with your brother's. I'm not sure how you know my name, or why you're hellbent on putting me in a trunk, but this radio prophetess act won't work on me like your friend here. I've been in your house, asshole. Twice. I watched your tapes. And you know what I saw? You're terrified, Melinda. You're tired, and scared, and worse than all that? You're still missing the final piece of your little prehistoric puzzle, aren't you? You're still missing that jawbone.

**MELINDA MOON:** (*Almost amused*) You think you have it all figured out, Sunny? This case? This town? You're a tourist. You don't have a clue.

(*Emotionless*) How many room number eights do you think there are at the Comfortina Motel?

**SUNNY:** *(Hissed, frightened)* Shut up.

**MELINDA MOON:** It's already too late. Jasper is coming, the skeleton is nearly complete, and I am so close to finally seeing this through. You're already seeing my work with your own eyes, and this is only the beginning.

Of course I'm terrified. You should be too.

*(Pause, collecting self)* I'm done speaking with you, Sunny. Strathcona can still find me on his own, if he so desires. But for now, take him and run.

**SUNNY SLAMS the handset back down.**

**A strange, horrible sound splits the day: a long, grating ANALOGUE TONE shakes the air, though it seems to be sourceless. It does not stop.**

**SUNNY and STRATHCONA:** *(Both scream in pain)*

**SUNNY:** What the hell?! What is that!?

**STRATHCONA:** *(Groans, coughs)*

**SUNNY:** Strathcona. Get up. Strathcona, get up now!

**STRATHCONA:** *(Groans, lucid enough to be angry)* You pepper-sprayed me!

**SUNNY:** We'll unpack that later! *(Struggling under STRATHCONA's weight)* Come on, lean on my shoulder. Come on!

***STRATHCONA's arm thrown over their shoulders, SUNNY hauls him back to the car. The Mustang door OPENS, the leather seats GROANING as SUNNY barely manages to HEAVE STRATHCONA into the sweltering vehicle.***

**SUNNY:** Get in the car, there you go. Yes, that leg too. Shit, shit, shit...

***CLOSING the passenger door, SUNNY snatches the car door SHUT behind them on the driver's side. Their hands shake as they bring the car ENGINE to life and TEAR AWAY into the desert.***

***Music: A hideous synth song, mocking and cruel.***

**FADE TO BLACK.**

**CREDITS:** "Badlands Cola" is written, directed, and produced by Renee Taylor Klint. This episode was sound designed and mixed by Russ More, and featured the voice talents of Liz Morey, Briggon Snow, Ray O'Hare, and Aryn Rozelle. Special thanks to our Artists' Representative, Giancarlo Herrera. Visit [badlandscola.com](http://badlandscola.com) and follow BadlandsCola on Twitter for show notes, announcements, behind the scenes content, and more.

Good night.

**END OF EPISODE**

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