

BADLANDS COLA - 111 - “THE MUD” PT. 2

Content Warning: Badlands Cola is intended for a mature audience. Content warnings for each episode are available in the show notes and on our website, badlandscola.com. We recommend you check them out to ensure your listening experience is fun *and* safe. Thank you.

Part 2 of Episode 11 “The Mud” continues now.

Slowly, the NIGHTTIME AMBIENCE of the world returns. SUNNY and STRATHCONA perch where we left them: silently atop a mesa, listening to the sounds of an eerily familiar speech far below...

SUNNY: Jasper. It's Jasper.

STRATHCONA: No. Not really. It's...Past Jasper.

SUNNY: What do you mean?

STRATHCONA: Where's Mel's beacon? Look how fresh those holes are. Sunny, this is...the *Sparville Incident*. All those years ago. The Mud brought us here.

SUNNY: You're right. Look, the van...

Wait. Someone's talking to Jasper. Who is that? I can't hear what they're saying.

STRATHCONA: (*Shaken*) It's *Levesque*.

SUNNY: What?

STRATHCONA: Doctor Levesque. From the centre.

SUNNY: No. No, he's an echo. Has to be. How else could he be here? This is all an echo of the night of the Sparville incident, just like you said, right?

Strath?

STRATHCONA: I have to do something.

SUNNY: *(Taken aback)* You...can't. Strath, you *can't*. He's...he's not...this isn't real. This is the Mud, looping things back in on themselves. Levesque isn't there.

STRATHCONA: You don't know that.

SUNNY: I absolutely do! The Moons can't bring back the dead. Strathcona, you can't save those people.

STRATHCONA: I have to try.

SUNNY: Stop. What are you doing? Strath!

STRATHCONA: I didn't try before. I screwed up. I have to try.

SUNNY: *(Strained whisper)* Strath. Stop, *no*. Stop, stop right now, STRATH!

Rocks and muddy grit TUMBLE and SQUELCH as STRATHCONA approaches the digsite and JASPER's gathering, SUNNY scrambling after him in speechless frustration. We near the digsite proper, the sounds of ECHOING VOICES become clearer.

JASPER MOON: Why the attitude, Doctor? This is a celebration. You should be more...I don't know...*jubilant*.

DR. LEVESQUE: If you think even for a moment that I'm capable of jubilation, you don't know a thing about me, Mr. Moon.

JASPER MOON: Then why are you here?

DR. LEVESQUE: Because from all I've seen, one of two things is happening here: either you're using misbegotten fossil specimens to cultivate a group of devoted followers, or you're leveraging the devotion of your followers to dig up expensive fossils for you in illegal excavations.

Either way, it's a horrific abuse of the sciences and the humanities, and I will not stand by and watch!

JASPER MOON: So you *are* curious about what we've built, Doctor.

DR. LEVESQUE: Not even a little bit. Because I know that your claims are utter nonsense.

JASPER MOON: Would you like to see the fossils? We don't have them all just yet, but enough to proceed, I feel.

DR. LEVESQUE: Whatever proceedings you have planned, it's all just cultic pageantry. This is a con, Mr. Moon, a con with very real consequences, and I'm here to prove that.

The crowd of followers at JASPER's back have been eerily silent, but a MURMUR of dissent ripples at the doctor's words.

JASPER MOON: To whom?

DR. LEVESQUE: I know better than to try to convince you to give this up, you charlatan. But I'm not so cynical to believe these poor followers you've accrued can't be helped.

JASPER MOON: Maybe. Maybe not. Let's find out. Go on, Doctor. Take a look at what we've assembled so far.

In a perfect mirror of the video SUNNY watched before, LEVESQUE turns towards the DIGSITE. FOOTSTEPS churn the mud as LEVESQUE walks to the edge, and gazes down at the collection therein...

DR. LEVESQUE: What...what is this?

JASPER MOON: A family's destiny made flesh, Doctor. Or should I say bone?

In unison, the crowd CHUCKLES knowingly at the tired joke.

DR. LEVESQUE: *(Dazed)* It's not...this isn't...
Moon, this isn't like anything I've seen—

JASPER MOON: It's not even finished. Not that we're going to let that stop us. Let's get started.

A ripple of CONFUSION and ANGER moves through the gathered crowd.

STRATHCONA: STOP!

STRATHCONA ERUPTS from the shadows of the mesas to reveal himself fully in the worklamps of the DIGSITE.

STRATHCONA: If anyone starts *anything*, I start punching indiscriminately.

JASPER MOON: Ah, Strathcona! Sticking your nose where it doesn't belong and acting a fool. I missed you.

STRATHCONA: Shut the absolute fuck up, Jasper! Doctor Levesque, please, you have to listen to me.

DR. LEVESQUE: *(Still dazed)* Strathcona? The park warden...?

STRATHCONA: I — Sure, yes. You need to come with me, we need to get out of here.

DR. LEVESQUE: No. I don't understand. Look, look at what he's gathered here. It's not...this can't be real! Moon is lying, and these people need help...

STRATHCONA: I know. Doctor, trust me, I know that better than anyone.

SKITTERING down a nearby steep cliff, **SUNNY** finally catches up and bursts onto the scene. The crowd's **ANGER RISES**.

SUNNY: *(Out of breath, stumble-running down the mesa)* Strathcona! STRATHCONA! Strath, stop, you can't fix this.

STRATHCONA: You don't know!

SUNNY: You have to trust me, please. Levesque is an echo, Jasper is an echo, this is all just loops on loops on loops. Come on, let's *go!*

STRATHCONA: *(Barely audible)* I can't.

JASPER MOON: Sunny, too! What a reunion. Although you're looking a little worse for wear, baby.

SUNNY: What? No...you haven't...you haven't met me yet, I don't—

JASPER MOON: Oh, dear. If anyone should recognise the *real* me, it's you.

SUNNY: *(Disbelieving)* No...How — ? No!

JASPER MOON: A little too late, as always. You're about to find out what really happened on this night. Just what you've always wanted.

The RINGING begins, rapidly picking up as JASPER'S cultists notice the disturbance.

CULTIST: Wait...can you hear that?

STRATHCONA: But you didn't have all the pieces that night! You didn't even have the beacon!

The RINGING intensifies as the FOSSILIZED begin to CLICK and CLATTER with terrifying, impossible life.

JASPER MOON: No, I surely didn't! Mel lost her stomach for ritual and fled. She forced this mistake, and look at the mess it made.

CULTIST: The fossils...they're moving...

CULTIST: I see it. *I see it!*

SUNNY: *(Quiet, distracted, terrified)* Oh my god. Strath, the fossils. We have to go.

CULTIST: It's finally here!

STRATHCONA: These people trusted you! And you *fed* them to it!

Music: *A deranged droning synth, building as the Thing In the Mud takes shape.*

JASPER MOON: Mm. Turns out building a funny little cult of believers is much more cost effective than funding a mine. But let's not ruin this moment. Now, what was it I said? Hm. It's been so long...I think it was something like: behold, the Mud in the flesh!

STRATHCONA: No. No!

SUNNY: Strath, RUN!

Awed SILENCE claims the digsite for a split-second, the breath before the shatter, then the THING IN THE MUD unleashes a terrible, shaking ROAR, furied by the agony of its brittle, unfinished skeleton.

ALL CULTISTS: *(Screaming)*

SUNNY and STRATHCONA: *(Crying out in pain at the sound)*

JASPER MOON: *(Laughing)*

A single, awful THUMP: the footstep of something massive and otherworldly. The CULTISTS scatter as the THING IN THE MUD begins to tear the digsite apart. Splattering FOOTSTEPS, panicking SCREAMS, overall CHAOS.

DR. LEVESQUE: Stop! Everyone stop, this is madness!

Another eldritch ROAR.

STRATHCONA: Don't look at it! Doctor!

DR. LEVESQUE: Oh god. Oh god. Jasper, what have you DONE?!

A FOOTSTEP, SQUELCHING heavy in the Mud...

SUNNY: Strath! Get the fuck over here!

STRATHCONA: Doctor, wait! Please!

SUNNY: Get under the van, hurry!

And ANOTHER...

SUNNY and STRATHCONA hit the ground, CRAWLING through the mud.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* Time compresses. This moment is all I have ever known, is all I ever will know.

Vision sucks down into a pinprick, and I watch the world change in a parade of tableau. Strathcona's mask of anguish. The confusion that seeps up like blood in the faces of Jasper's faithful. A woman standing, and then she's gone.

A muffled CRY OF TERROR, followed by a THUMP.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* A worklamp that topples, smashes, the exploding bulb illuminating shards of rib that rise and quiver into place twenty feet above the ground.

A low bellowing ROAR, unsatisfied.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* Bones — human — plucked and thrown and made soft against the mesas. A single bloody sandal.

SUNNY scrambles under the meagre safety of the VAN, joining STRATHCONA in the dirt. The CHAOS unfolding above is only somewhat muffled by the vehicle. Distantly, the THUMP of the THING IN THE MUD's footsteps comes closer.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* I squeeze under the van, shredded back screaming as I smash it against the undercarriage. In a mad rush I realise that Strathcona is right behind me. I jam up against him, pull my limbs in tight. The mud is everywhere. It stings our eyes and coats our throats.

It doesn't block our ears. I wish it would.

And then I remember.

SUNNY: The van flipped.

STRATHCONA: What?

SUNNY: Strath, the van fl —

A nearby THUMP of a footstep, way too close, then the UNHOLY SHRIEK of the van being TORN away and THROWN into the air.

SUNNY and STRATHCONA: *(Both scream)*

The sounds of the scene fall away, almost becoming peaceful as SUNNY takes in the full scale of the impossible horror...

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* Blood. Mud. For a heartbeat, all we see is the night sky, studded with stars and soil. And then the echo fragments into a hundred pieces.

But it doesn't fall away like the hotel. No. I watch the van as it soars through the air like a toy, eyes unblinking as reality loops on itself, again and again and again; the world becoming an impossible kaleidoscope of slices and repetitions; the van and the cultists and Levesque all echoing like the living fractal shell of an ammonite; looping, screaming, splitting.

A hundred vans soaring through the air, coming down to crush a hundred Levesques.

DR. LEVESQUE: *(Screaming)*

MULTIPLE SMASHES as many vans CRASH into the earth.

JASPER MOON: *(Laughing)*

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* There is only one Jasper. He laughs, and then the final van, maybe the real one, comes down on us too.

The VAN comes CRASHING down. All is silent.

Darkness. Humming, terrible, choking silence. Nothing.

SUNNY: *(Coming to, breathing heavy, trying to calm herself)*

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* I don't know where the van lands. On me? On Strath? I...I feel nothing. I see nothing. The Thing in the Mud is gone. The laughing is gone. I can't even feel the press of the Badlands beneath my spine. Everything is pitch black, a darkness so deep it's almost solid.

SUNNY: *(Whispering, realisation dawning)* Strath? Strath? Are you here?

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* The worst possible thing. Separated in this liminal, impossible place, severed from reality; lost in the Mud.

Music: A slow, sleepy guitar refrain, becoming mournful as SUNNY speaks.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* Shock seeps through my veins, carving out space for the terror that rushes in after it. Every instinct screams at me to curl up, to shut out this nightmare, but I squeeze my teeth, fight it, *reach out.*

My fingers grasp at emptiness, going cold in the frigid dark. Nothing. I try to sit up and reach again on hands and knees. Feel for something, anything.

SUNNY: No. No...

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* My eyes are numbed by the lack of light, and I begin to see scraps of memory flashing in the blackness.

Dinosaur silhouettes carved out of the dawn sky. Bars of clean morning light streaming in through painted bus windows. A hotel pool that doesn't exist. Cherry milkshakes.

I think of a...dusty cola bottle. I want to grasp it, pull the memory in close, but it slips from my grasp, shatters on a featureless desert as vast as a mind. I can see it so clearly: the jutting glass shards, the cola seeping into the cracked earth, churning, becoming thick, syrupy mud.

SUNNY: *(Determined)* No.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* The bottle is NOT broken. It's whole. Stays that way. I won't let it break this time.

I reach out.

SUNNY: *(Gasping, disbelieving, weak)* Strath?

STRATHCONA: *(Breathless)* Sunny.

They EMBRACE. The guitar music FUZZES OVER into an overwhelming peak, then ebbs away into a thin melody of relief.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* Familiar arms lock around me, and I drag him close, grasping at his shirt, at anything I can. His ribcage swells against mine, the same panicked breaths racking our bones, burning the backs of our throats. He presses his bloody, stubbled mouth into my temple; not a kiss, but an anchor of truth in the insane dark: *You're here. I'm not alone. You're here.*

SUNNY and STRATHCONA: *(Both breathing heavy, weak with relief, saying nothing)*

STRATHCONA: I thought I lost —

SUNNY: *(Interrupting)* You didn't.

The music fades, leaving them ALONE in the nothingness.

SUNNY: Are we dead?

STRATHCONA: No. We're alive. I think. This is the Moon house.

SUNNY: How can you...?

STRATHCONA: The smell. I wouldn't forget how the Moon house smells in a thousand years.

Just then, a TV FLICKERS to unsteady life nearby: ancient, staticky, the exact same model as the one SUNNY found in the basement.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* Somehow, he's right.
Just then, not ten feet away, a television shocks to life.

Quietly: RINGING begins.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* The static is violent, lashing us with stabs of alien blue light, ruining our vision. We're in a space, somehow windowless, wall-less...a basement? Stretching madly out in every direction, endless, a chasm of oilslick darkness that yawns around us.

There, huge and heavy and curling like a curse on the floor at our knees, dull ridges of teeth gleaming through caked mud, is the jawbone.

FOOTSTEPS echo out from the impossible distance, slow but assured. The **STATIC** on the TV flares, as if in response to this new, foreboding presence.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* Then a figure moves from behind the set and comes to stand in its fitful glow. Her body is rigid with muscle and rage, taller than Strathcona and solid as a mesa. Her eyes are hunting, and she's the strongest, most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

Melinda.

MELINDA MOON: *(Calm)* This was already so difficult, Strathcona. And you chose to make it worse.

STRATHCONA: Mel? Fuck, Mel, listen to me —

MELINDA MOON: No, you listen to me.

STRATHCONA: Okay. Okay. I'm listening.

MELINDA MOON: I asked you to join me, and you showed up late. I asked you to come alone, and you brought a stranger. I asked for your help, and you refused.

STRATHCONA: You asked me to rig my radio station for your cult—

MELINDA MOON: *(FURIOUS)* I gave you a chance to survive this!

(Calming down again) That's all there is, Strathcona. It doesn't matter how far we run, this will always have its teeth in us. Do you understand? Survival is all I can offer to you. It's all that was offered to me.

STRATHCONA: *(Desperate)* There is more than just survival, Mel. Please, I can still help you get out of this.

MELINDA MOON: You can't. Open your eyes, it's already —

STRATHCONA: Goddammit, Mel, please!

Suddenly, a VOICE echo through the darkened space, seeming to come from too many angles at once, untrackable in the dark.

JASPER MOON: And still he refuses your generous offer, Melinda. I told you.

SUNNY: Jasper — ?

JASPER MOON: Fossilis: latin, translating literally to "obtained by digging." What have you two dug up in each other, hm? Was it worth it?

STRATHCONA: Where are you?! Come on, you son of a bitch, stop hiding and show your face for once.

JASPER MOON: I know I promised I'd *break* your legs, but I tend to prefer practical solutions these days.

A rifle GUNSHOT splits the air: the simplest sound in the world.

STRATHCONA: *(Screaming in pain, collapsing)*

SUNNY: STRATHCONA!

MELINDA MOON: *(Disbelieving)* Jasper —

STRATHCONA: (*Cries of agony, breathing heavy*)

SUNNY: (*Trying to staunch the bleeding, keep STRATHCONA conscious, anything*) Okay. Okay. Okay. Strath, Strath — Hold on. Just hold on, just —

JASPER's voice resolves from the shadow, and the man himself appears. All the while, STRATHCONA flickers in and out of consciousness as SUNNY tries to keep him awake.

JASPER MOON: Oh, the *drama*. He still has one good kneecap left, I deem.

Now. Melinda, baby, can we please consider this matter settled? Or shall we allow this sad little radio jockey to disappoint you yet again? Hm? So that you can *really* learn your lesson?

Oh, don't make that face, you knew the risks of inviting him in.

...Give me something, baby. Aren't you glad to see me again?

MELINDA MOON: (*Deadly calm*) This wasn't our plan.

JASPER MOON: I know we've had different perspectives on the past few weeks, but you'll notice that very little has gone to plan.

MELINDA MOON: (*Through grit teeth*) No. The plan worked, because I made it work. Because I scavenged, and stole, and hurt people. The last fossil is here. The beacon has already begun calling.

The Thing in the Mud is on its way. I did everything you asked, unflinching. *You didn't have to do that.*

JASPER MOON: Strathcona forced the issue! In fact, he forced *two* issues, dragging that shameful investigator in here. Speaking of...

MELINDA MOON: You promised me this would be the end of it. If we did this, then the suffering would end. You *promised*.

The RINGING grows, twists and writhes like something alive. Something approaches from a distance that shouldn't be possible, the tension almost painful until it finally emerges from the sickening shadows...

JASPER MOON: Look at me, Melinda. This is the moment. The jaw is the last piece, and then our family's mission is complete. A hundred years boiling away to seconds. Seconds!

From above, from below, and from within, a great grinding ROAR shakes the house: the Thing in the Mud is coming.

SUNNY: Oh, god...

STRATHCONA: *(Barely here)* Sunny...go...get...get out of here.

SUNNY: What? No! I am *not* leaving you —

A great rippling ROAR, distant and muffles. It's followed by the only thing that could possibly be worse: great BOOMING footsteps and the CRASHING of the MOON HOUSE as something tears its way through.

MELINDA MOON: It's here...

JASPER MOON: Yes, it is! YES, IT IS!

SUNNY: *(To the audience, terrified)* The darkness is thick. The fever-blue light of the TV-turned-beacon barely carves into it. But it's enough to see *it*: bones that tower in the distance, black as mined coal, long and thin and trembling as it comes. No muscle, no sinew; it is bound by crude calcification, joints fused and grinding as it staggers forth, breaking and reforming with every step. Countless limbs stretch almost gracefully from a shivering wrongness of spines, its skeleton blossoming endlessly, endlessly around twin skulls: one with a jaw, one without. It bobs, sightless, hungry...and speaks.

Another ROAR, this time truly shaking the house.

JASPER MOON: Beauty, beauty, BEAUTY!

STRATHCONA: *(Nearly gone)* Sunn...don't...Mel...

SUNNY: No, Strath, stay with me, stay with me. Strath. Strath? Fuck!

Mel! What are you *doing*? Stop this!

JASPER MOON: *(Fanatical!)* Sunny, you two are in the wrong place at the wrong time. Time for final goodbyes.

SUNNY: Shut up!

Mel. MEL. Look. Look at me. Please. *Please*. I know both of these men have hurt you. I know that. They...they used you, and they broke what was good, and stripped away every part of you that didn't fit their fantasies. But only one is sorry for what he did to you. Only one would do anything to help you heal again. Only one came here for *you*.

The BOOMING footsteps enclose, wood now SPLINTERING and bricks EXPLODING nearby.

JASPER MOON: Do you hear that? In their voice? That's a *lie*, Melinda. It's all lies, it's all ever been lies. It's time to shut them up.

SUNNY: (*Desperate*) Mel, I get it. I've seen it a thousand times, over and over. Lives get ripped apart, all because someone somewhere was hurting. That pain just echoes, and echoes, forever if you let it! But it can end with you. *Let it end with you!*

The ROARS and the FOOTSTEPS: all impossible horrors are almost on top of them; the house is COMING apart, debris CRASHING down, furniture SMASHING.

All the while the RINGING wails, until...the TV cuts DEAD. The THING CRIES OUT in confusion. Everything halts.

Music: Simple piano chords cut through the chaos.

SUNNY: (*To the audience*) Three events occur at once. The TV's glow cuts. The ringing stops. The Thing in the Mud roars in dismay. All this, because a woman named Mel pulled the cord.

The music swells with the sustained, keening notes of a guitar: strange, powerful, and grimly triumphant.

JASPER MOON: Oh, Melinda. Mom always said you'd ruin things if I let you.

JASPER STRIKES MELINDA. As usual, he shocks her with his violence, but this time she's ready for him. MELINDA shakes the fog

of the strike from her head, once, sharpened, then HURLS her full weight at him, sending the rifle SKITTERING across the floor. JASPER is unsteady, and the two go CRASHING bodily to the ground. MELINDA gains the upper hand quickly with a heavy elbow, but her brother fights dirty: GROWLING, BITING, SNARLING like a wounded animal in a cage. MELINDA CRIES OUT as he sinks his teeth into her arm...

The ROARS strike a different chord now: less hungry, more confused, angry. The house is still BURSTING at the seams, reality not far behind...

MELINDA MOON: SUNNY! The rifle!

SUNNY: I... *(Scrambling to the rifle)*
Got it. Here!

MELINDA catches the rifle, then AIMS it at her brother, awkward atop him, off-balance and hurt.

MELINDA MOON: Jasper! Stop this!

JASPER MOON: What are you going to do? Shoot me? The only family you have left? *(Struggling, amused)* You're a Moon, Melinda. You belong here. RIGHT HERE!

MELINDA MOON: *(Struggling, furious)* No. You're wrong. *(Striking JASPER with the butt of the rifle, grinding out a word with each strike)* I. Don't. Belong. ANYWHERE.

The music fades away, leaving the four alone amidst the CRUMBLING house.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* Mel's wrath makes craters. Four strikes, and Jasper slumps away, as motionless as Strath feels in my arms. Then she looks to me.

MELINDA MOON: Sunny.

SUNNY: Mel — ?

MELINDA drops the rifle with a resolute CLATTER and APPROACHES.

MELINDA MOON: Strath's still alive. There's no time. We have to go. *(Lifting STRATHCONA's legs)* Take his legs, best you can, I've got the bulk of him.

SUNNY and MELINDA grunt and groan as they lift STRATHCONA's unconscious form.

JASPER MOON: *(Coughing, struggling to rise)* Oh, Melinda. Don't you do this to me...

SUNNY: Mel —

MELINDA MOON: *(Calm, ignoring JASPER)* The Thing is distracted and the place is coming down. *Hurry.*

JASPER MOON: Melinda! *(Effort: hacking cough)* Melinda!

SUNNY: But your brother — ?!

MELINDA MOON: We can't save them both, Sunny! Come with me, NOW!

With the last of their strength, **SUNNY** and **MELINDA FLEE** with **STRATHCONA** in their arms.

JASPER MOON: Melinda fucking Moon! Ruiner! RUINER!

*The house finally **GIVES WAY:** wood, brick, furniture, all coming to ruin as the floor **COLLAPSES**, the roof **CRASHING** down on top of it.*

FADE TO BLACK.

CREDITS: "Badlands Cola" is written, directed, and produced by Renee Taylor Klint. Episode 11 in its entirety was sound designed and mixed by Russ More, and featured the voice talents of Elvis Barkdale II, Liz Morey, Briggon Snow, Dustin Vuong Nguyen, Ron Guan, Newton Schottlekotte, and Aryn Rozelle. Special thanks to our Artists' Representative, Giancarlo Herrera. Visit badlandscola.com and follow BadlandsCola on Twitter for show notes, announcements, behind the scenes content, and more.

Good night.

(Whispered) ...It's not over yet.

END OF EPISODE

© Renee Taylor Klint