

BADLANDS COLA - 103 - “MUSTANG”

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.

Pre-Roll: Hi, everyone, this is Renee, the creator of Badlands Cola. Hi, how are you doing! Just popping in real quick to say two things. First, thank you all so much for tuning into this strange little audio drama, the response has just been amazing. If you’ve enjoyed the show so far, and would like to help us out, we would love if you left us a review. Just wherever you get your podcasts, leave us a review! That would be absolutely amazing, thank you.

Second, you’re gonna want to listen all the way through to the end of this episode because we have a treat for you: a trailer for *Where The Stars Fell*.

Where The Stars Fell is a supernatural fantasy surrounding the inexplicably immortal Dr. Ed Tucker’s study of the town of Jerusalem, Oregon—where what doesn’t kill you is just another mystery.

If you’re looking for a story with cozy smalltown vibes, characters you just can’t help but fall in love with, or just a good supernatural saga to sink your teeth into, *Where The Stars Fell* is the podcast for you. Check it out!

And without further ado, let’s return to the Badlands...

SCENE 103.1

MUSIC THEME: "FEW COLOURS" BY OTNO. An ominous, building track featuring a wary electric guitar and the keens of a theremin.

SUNNY: Badlands Cola. Episode Three: Mustang.

EXT. CREEKHOM NEIGHBOURHOOD - EVENING - D2

In the cab of SUNNY's truck, the now familiar BEEP of the PI's faithful recording device sounds, signaling the beginning of a report.

SUNNY: *(To the recording device)* Hi Detective. Sunny here again, PI on case number two-two-dash-nine, 7:04 PM on Sunday, August 1st. The following recording will serve as supplement to my existing reports and notes, blah blah blah. Audio log 02.

Back at what I'm almost entirely certain is the Moon House. I was here this morning, as per my last audio recording. Its exterior has not changed, but its story definitely has. I've been waiting here for — uh, couple hours now — to make contact with a possible Moon family informant named...Strathcona. I guess? An earlier attempt to reach this person was unsuccessful, but I was able to make contact with a second individual, name of Hawthorne: not sure where she fits into all this yet. But at least I got a cool walkie-talkie out of it.

So, yeah. I'm just...waiting here now. Waiting to make contact. With someone named Strathcona.

The recording device BEEPS off.

SUNNY: Like an idiot.

SUNNY roots about in their truck, **SHUFFLING** through various papers, organising, until the **STATIC** on the radio momentarily intensifies, then fuzzes out completely...

SUNNY: Oh, for the love of god —

A VOICE IN THE HOUSE: (*Muffled yell*) HEY! OVER HERE!

Music: Hungry, rolling percussion.

SUNNY: (*Gasps*) What the fuck was that? Oh my g...

The truck door is **THROWN OPEN**, followed by rapid footsteps **POUNDING** the pavement as **SUNNY** races towards the house.

SUNNY: Hey! Hey! Oh god. Are you okay? Yes, I see you!

A man is pressed up against the windows of the Moon House; his movements and vocalisations are **MUFFLED** and distant. His fist **POUNDS** the glass.

A VOICE IN THE HOUSE: Stay there. Don't move. If you move I die. Please just...Shit. SHIT.

SUNNY: What are you doing in there? Just...just come out! Oh...is that blood?

Stay right there, I'm coming in to get you —

A VOICE IN THE HOUSE: (*Muffled*) No!

SUNNY: What? Okay! Okay, not coming in, staying right here. This is fucked...

The man's fingers SQUEAK along the glass as he appears to trace something.

SUNNY: Why...why aren't you just talking? Buddy, I can hear you!

...You want me to...follow you? To the door. Follow you to the door?

A VOICE IN THE HOUSE: YES!

SUNNY: Okay! Following your lead.

SUNNY WALKS slowly along the side of the house, tailed by the sound of hands SMEARING on the glass, as if dragged by someone injured or extremely tired. At the door, the handle FUMBLES, as if failed to be opened from the inside, then SQUEAKS open fully. The music abates. This can only be the mysterious missing DJ, STRATHCONA.

SUNNY: What the hell was all that? Who are you? Why are you in stealth mode? What is going on with this house?!

STRATHCONA: *(Exhausted whisper through clenched jaw)* Please. Stop. Shouting.

SUNNY: What is happening right now?

STRATHCONA: We're getting out of here. *Quietly.* Is that your truck?

SUNNY: Yes. Can you not drive on your own?

STRATHCONA: Yes....P...Probably.

SUNNY: No no no. You have blood pouring out of your head, dude. We'll take my truck.

As the two approach SUNNY's truck, a frantic STATIC pours from the open door.

SUNNY: Ugh, the radio...

SUNNY turns the keys...to no effect.

SUNNY: What the hell? My engine...?

STRATHCONA: We have to go, *we have to go.*

The truck door SLAMS shut, muffling the STATIC.

STRATHCONA: Get in the Mustang.

SUNNY: Yeah, I'm not "getting in the Mustang!"

The scene is frozen in place by a single distant, subsonic BOOM. It hollows out the neighbourhood, and ushers in a quiet RINGING in its dreadful wake. The music returns, twice as frantic.

SUNNY: ...What was that?

STRATHCONA: *Get in the Mustang.* Do you drive stick?

KEYS JINGLE as they're tossed through the air — and caught.

SUNNY: Yes, obviously, but — wait!

A second sub-sonic BOOM sounds, closer...?

STRATHCONA: No time, get in!

SUNNY: Shit!

The doors of the Mustang SLAM shut, the engine ROARING to life and tires SQUEALING as SUNNY and STRATHCONA make their hasty getaway.

FADE TO BLACK.

SCENE 103.2

FROM BLACK.

INT. MUSTANG INTERIOR / EXT. BLUE DUNES / INT. HAWTHORNE'S HOME - EVENING / NIGHT - D2

Pedal to the metal, SUNNY wrings their hands on the Mustang wheel. Beside them, Strathcona says nothing, even as the tension within the car mounts.

SUNNY: *(to the audience)* And...um...and just as quickly as the chaos arrived, I careen out of the Creekhorne neighbourhood...and it's suddenly just another Sunday evening.

My nerves are so shot that it takes me a few minutes to realise where I'm even going. Blue...Blue Dunes. I'm supposed to bring this guy — Strathcona? — to the Blue Dunes Campground. Back to Hawthorne. And then someone will make sense of all the shit I just witnessed, right?

If this man *is* Strathcona, he doesn't respond to his name. He looks nothing like the shiny-haired 90s DJ I was envisioning, more of an older ranch hand type, all faded flannel and filthy workboots. Big, maybe, but exhaustion keeps him slumped back in the passenger seat of his own car. His face is a bandit mask of bruises, blood already crusting on a nasty cut that carves one bushy eyebrow in two. He swallows like it hurts him, but otherwise says nothing.

It's hard to look at, so I just stare at the empty highway that I hope is leading to Hawthorne's campground.

SUNNY: Um. Listen, I know your head's wrecked but you have to talk to me here. Do you know someone named Hawthorne? She told me to bring you to a place called Blue Dunes, but I don't know where that is. Where do I turn off? Hello?

STRATHCONA: *(Unfocused, struggling)* Just follow the signs.

SUNNY: *(Frustrated snort of ironic laughter)*

SUNNY remembers the walkie-talkie given to them by HAWTHORNE. They rummage around until they find it, then hold the BUTTON and speak into it.

SUNNY: Hawthorne? Hawthorne, this is Sunny. I have, uh...Strathcona.

HAWTHORNE: *(Over walkie-talkie)* Damn right, you do! Well done darling.

SUNNY: Where is Blue Dunes? Where do I turn off?

HAWTHORNE: You're on the highway? Just follow the signs, kid!

SUNNY: That's not helpful!

STRATHCONA: *(Distracted, hoarse)* It's...it's coming up. Here.

SUNNY: Thank you! Hawthorne, we're *rapidly* incoming.

HAWTHORNE: Aye aye.

Music: *A strumming, reverb-heavy guitar, almost relaxed. Almost.*

SUNNY: *(to the audience)* Blue Dunes Campground. RVs and tents looming in the cherry glow of sunset. Campers are sparse. There's a horse pasture to our left, and a mobile home covered in Christmas lights to our right. I don't know how I park Strathcona's Mustang, but I manage it somehow, and suddenly we're safe again.

The Mustang halts.

SUNNY: Here, let me help you out...wait!

Doors POP open and the airy ambience of a desert campground rushes in: CAMPERS chat and laugh over crackling CAMPFIRES; in the distance, the whickering of PONIES and homey WINDCHIMES. Every footstep CRUNCHES in the ubiquitous gravel.

Here, HAWTHORNE awaits...

HAWTHORNE: *(Distant, running up)* Strathcona? Oh, thank God! Are you hurt?

STRATHCONA: Hawthorne, I'm fine, I'm — *(Cut off by HAWTHORNE's strangling embrace)*

HAWTHORNE: *(Enthusiastic auntie hugging)* Oh, no, your forehead!

STRATHCONA: It looks worse than it is.

HAWTHORNE: Oh, oh, *oh*. No, you come here, let's get that cleaned up. Look...I hate to admit, but I was worried. I'm sorry sweetheart, I know you can handle your own, but with the news and all, it seemed like there might be more trouble than you can chew all of a sudden...

STRATHCONA: Yeah. It's getting bad again. We need to talk.

HAWTHORNE: *(Kindly)* Hold still.

A plastic water bottle is uncapped, water SLOSHING over STRATHCONA's headwound.

STRATHCONA: *(Yelps in pain)*

HAWTHORNE: *(Less kindly)* Hold still!

(Assessing damage) I don't think you need stitches, but I'll clean it up best I can. And yes, you should talk. In fact, our friend Sunny here wants you to do just that.

There, now don't pick at it.

STRATHCONA: *(Hissing in pain)* Sunny...?

HAWTHORNE: Oh, hell. They just saved your skin and you didn't even introduce yourself?

SUNNY: I'm, uh, fine, by the way. Thanks for asking.

HAWTHORNE: Yeah, 'course you are.

(Walking on eggshells.) Strath, Sunny was looking for you. Wants to talk to you about the Moons...

STRATHCONA: Well, that's too bad for "Sunny" because I don't talk about the Moons.

SUNNY: I'm told you knew them well, Strathcona?

STRATHCONA: Excuse me? ...Hawthorne, you *didn't*...

HAWTHORNE: Oh, don't you glare daggers at me, young man! I didn't tell them anything.

...Well, nothing they wouldn't have found on their own, anyways. I found them rooting around in the Raptorbus.

SUNNY: Ah, "Rooting around" isn't really fair, I —

STRATHCONA: *(Defensive)* How did you find my bus?

SUNNY: You know what? Forget you, and forget the Moons for a second, actually. Is anyone going to explain to me what just happened?

STRATHCONA: No. Literally no one is, and you should leave immediately.

HAWTHORNE: That...*is enough*. Dinner's gonna get even colder if you two don't quit your yipping.

SUNNY: Dinner? How can you even think of eating right now?

STRATHCONA: Exactly. "Sunny" is leaving. Like, right now.

HAWTHORNE: Do I have to tell you twice?

SUNNY: Hawthorne, I can't —

HAWTHORNE: *(Interrupting SUNNY) A bup bup bup!*

SUNNY: ...Okay? Fine. Thank you.

STRATHCONA: *(Unintelligible swearing under breath)*

The **WINDCHIMES** grow louder as **HAWTHORNE** leads the two wayward escapees to her quaint mobile home on the campground. The bang of a **SCREEN DOOR** brings the interior sounds of a small but cozy home: an oscillating **FAN** chugs away in the corner, while **HAWTHORNE** toys with table **CUTLERY**, roots around in her **MINI-FRIDGE**, and fusses over a pot of something mysterious **BUBBLING** away on the stove.

HAWTHORNE: *(Sweet)* Have a seat, Sunny.

SUNNY: Oh, um, thanks.

STRATHCONA: *(Deftly stealing the chair)* That's my seat.

SUNNY: Guess I will sit over *here*, then. If that's allowed.

PLATES are set down on the table with gentle **CLUNKS**.

HAWTHORNE: Alright, there you go: prime rib roast with potatoes. It's a little cold, but that is your own damn fault for taking so long. Oh, Strath, do not wolf it all down like that, you're gonna get sick!

STRATHCONA: *(Through a mouthful of food)* Mmppff.

SUNNY: Um. Thank you.

*The trio eats in tense quiet, forks **SCRAPING** awkwardly on plates.*

SUNNY: So, how do you know the Moons —

HAWTHORNE: Ah-ah! No talking business at the dinner table.

SUNNY: I — Sorry, Hawthorne.

The truce almost holds...

STRATHCONA: I want to know how you even found my bus —

HAWTHORNE: Now what in the hell did I just say?

STRATHCONA: ...Sorry.

HAWTHORNE: Apologies accepted, both of you. Now, let's try for some polite table conversation, shall we?

Sunny! Where are you visiting our little dinosaur town from?

SUNNY: Um. The city

STRATHCONA: *(Caustic)* Really. Strange news coming out of the city these days, eh?

SUNNY: (*Pushing back*) No stranger than what's going on here.

HAWTHORNE: We get plenty of tourists from the city, especially this time of year. It's too bad they closed up the paleontology centre all of a sudden. I'm sure folks are gonna be chapped about that!

SUNNY: Yeah, yeah, I saw that. I was hoping you could tell me why, Strathcona.

STRATHCONA: Couldn't if I wanted to. They just tell me when the place is open, and when it's not.

SUNNY: Yeah, about that...

HAWTHORNE: Oh, someone at the grocery store was talking about it, who was it? Was it Donny? You know what, it doesn't matter. What does the centre have to do with your work, Sunny?

STRATHCONA: And what "work" is that, exactly?

SUNNY: ...I'm a private investigator.

STRATHCONA: (*Scathing*) Ha! Oh, good. *Great.*

HAWTHORNE: (*Heavy sigh*) Pass the horseradish, please.

Absolutely no one passes the horseradish. Windchimes fill the seething silence best they can.

HAWTHORNE: All right, I will get it myself, seeing as you two are busy glaring at each other.

Oh, come on kids, this is silly! Sunny stuck their neck out for you, so maybe they can help again. Ever think of that, mister?

STRATHCONA: Help with *what*?

SUNNY: Yeah. I think I've helped enough.

STRATHCONA: Agreed.

HAWTHORNE: All right, enough "chit-chat." Give me those plates.

Sunny, you have been very helpful today, but may I ask for one last favour? Strathcona usually gives the ponies their dinner, but with the state he's in...

STRATHCONA: I can do it.

HAWTHORNE: Nonsense. Sunny, you'll give Strath a hand, won't you?

SUNNY: (*Worn down*) Um, yeah. Sure.

HAWTHORNE: Oh, marvelous! You two have fun. Give Triton a scratch on the withers for me.

The BANGING of the screen door behind SUNNY and STRATHCONA almost seems to cement the distance between them: they're as chilly as the NIGHT AIR that's seeped in while they ate dinner. The CAMPERS are fewer, but the ones that remain outside are rowdier, their LAUGHS and drunken SHRIEKS punctuating the otherwise calm evening. Somewhere, someone blasts a bassy COUNTRY JAM from a speaker.

STRATHCONA: Thanks for dinner, Hawthorne.

HAWTHORNE: *(Distant, sing-song)* You're welcome!

SUNNY: Listen, Strathcona —

STRATHCONA: Let's go.

SUNNY: Wait —

STRATHCONA: *(Walking away)* I said, *let's go*.

SUNNY: *(Sighing)* Right behind you.

The light is sparse this far out of town, so SUNNY follows STRATHCONA based mostly on the GRAVEL-CRUNCH of his footsteps as they approach the BARN. The sounds of the two PONIES are closer now, their BREATHING and shifting HOOVES somehow calming.

STRATHCONA: Hey, gorgeous.

SUNNY: Uh —

STRATHCONA: Talking to the pony. Yes, you. Hello, Triton, my sweet beautiful angel...

TRITON THE FEARLESS PONY whickers gratefully as STRATHCONA rubs her velvety nose.

SUNNY: *(Awkward, trying to make conversation)* Are these Hawthorne's horses? Ponies? Whatever?

STRATHCONA: Yep, they're retired, just like her. The park wardens used them to patrol some of the nastier parts of the Badlands. Trucks can't navigate mesas like a pony can.

SUNNY: How long was Hawthorne a park warden?

STRATHCONA: Not talking about that with you.

SUNNY: So we're just not going to talk about *anything*? Not Hawthorne, not you, not the house —

STRATHCONA: Absolutely not.

They get a hay bale and a scoop of bran each. Careful with the spotted one. He's nippy.

SUNNY: *(Uneasy noise)*

HAY is thrown over the fence, SUNNY struggling with each toss.

SUNNY: Are you serious? Look, if you'd have burst out of that house with a hoard of gun-toting cowboys on your tail, or a pack of wolves, or whatever, I wouldn't even be asking. But there was nothing in that house. Nothing.

STRATHCONA: And those sounds we heard were...? What? "Nothing?"

SUNNY: I... no, there's —

STRATHCONA: Haven't you noticed yet?

SUNNY: Noticed what?

STRATHCONA: Things don't always work the way you expect them to here.

Music: *A quiet sting of jangling guitar that echoes and warps into oblivion.*

SUNNY: *(to the audience)* I almost hurl a nearby hale bale at him, and then I think: the Moon house basements. The duplicate motel rooms.

SUNNY: Sure, okay, let's say...let's say yes to that. What the hell does it *mean*, though? Why is it happening?

STRATHCONA: I don't think you're ready for that rabbit hole.

SUNNY: Look, I told you I'm a private investigator; rabbit holes are literally all I do.

STRATHCONA: And that's the problem, isn't it? You're just grinding out your nine-to-five here, right? You only care about the Moons because someone's paying you to care. Because someone's paying you to stick your nose into *an entire town's worth* of other people's business. That about right?

SUNNY: Okay, you know what? I'm not putting up with this. Glad I was able to help you with your chores and save you from that huge empty house, asshole!

SUNNY *sulks off into the dark, leaving STRATHCONA alone with the ponies.*

STRATHCONA: *(Mock-cheer)* Bye! Never come back!

FADE TO BLACK.

SCENE 103.3

FROM BLACK.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT - D2

Music: Somber, forlorn twangs of guitar.

A stretch of lonely highway: SUNNY scuffs along the road, ignoring the icy WIND, yips of a distant COYOTE, and the occasional car that RACES by in the dark.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* For a long while, I don't care that I've just burned my best lead so far. The cold desert wind feels good on my raging blush. Shouting at that asshole wannabe cowboy felt even better.

And then I realise just how far Blue Dunes Campground actually is from the town. I think about the miles and miles of dead, empty Badlands. Of the dinosaur bones packed beneath my sneakers, era after era, layered up and pressed down tight. And the sound we heard in the Moon house...

The wind doesn't feel good anymore.

The WIND rises to an unnerving keen, when the quiet is suddenly BROKEN by the BLIP of a walkie talkie.

SUNNY: Agh!

STRATHCONA: *(Over walkie-talkie)* You should really wear reflective gear if you're gonna walk on a highway like that.

A familiar ENGINE coasts furiously up alongside SUNNY: the Mustang. It comes to a halt, and the window is ROLLED down.

STRATHCONA: Get in.

SUNNY: *(Shivering)* Yeah, no. I'd rather sit on a cactus.

STRATHCONA: You and me both, but you're still six clicks from town, you can't walk it, so get in.

SUNNY: Yeah, still better than the presented alternative.

STRATHCONA: Oh my *god*, you are the worst. Look, don't make this more painful than it has to be. Hawthorne's already on my ass about letting you walk.

...The tarantulas come out at night, you know.

SUNNY: Shit.

The OPEN and CLOSE of the passenger side door reeks of defeat. Inside the cab, heated air BLASTS from the vents, and STRATHCONA steers back out onto the road.

SUNNY: You take me straight back to my motel, got it?

STRATHCONA: Trust me, I'm getting you out of this car and away from me as soon as humanly possible.

SUNNY: ...I have pepper spray.

STRATHCONA: Normal thing to say to someone trying to help you.

After a few moments of unbearably awkward SILENCE...

SUNNY: Can I...turn on the radio?

STRATHCONA: No.

SUNNY: Okay. *(Long Pause, then throat clearing)* So, uh...what's the name of Jasper Moon's sister?

Music: The same somber guitar from before.

SUNNY: *(to the audience)* The change that washes over Strathcona is subtle, but instantaneous. His jaw ticks, once, twice. For just a moment, his eyes close up tight. This man is such a stranger, his strangeness filling up the small space inside the car, and for one instant, I think I have my answer at last...

STRATHCONA: *I swear to god, if you don't stop bringing up the Moons, I will drive this car off a cliff and kill us both.*

SUNNY: All right, fine! Let me...let me try to take a page out of Hawthorne's book, then.

(Overly civil) So. You're the guy behind the Raptor, eh?

STRATHCONA: *(Grit teeth)* Yep.

SUNNY: Which makes you a radio DJ who doesn't listen to the radio.

STRATHCONA: I listen to it all day, every day. I literally live in the station — thanks for breaking into my office *and* my house, by the way. In fact, I'm heading there after I drop you off at your motel. Are you at the Comfortina or the Royal?

SUNNY: Oh. The Comfortina. Wait, you're going to work through a shift after all that?

STRATHCONA: No, I'm going to queue up the entire Floyd discography and *sleep* through a shift.

SUNNY: Well, you need to do some signal maintenance. The station's been staticky ever since I passed Sparville, you know.

STRATHCONA: I'm aware.

The Mustang GEARS DOWN, comes to a halt on an equally deserted road. STRATHCONA cranks the parking brake.

STRATHCONA: Here we go, the Comfortina. *(Tiny snort of laughter)*
Ironic.

SUNNY: What?

STRATHCONA: The sign? It's a...moon?

SUNNY: And?

STRATHCONA: You're looking for the Moons? *(Confidence evaporating)* It's...it's ironic?

AWKWARD. *For a moment, they just sort of sit there, stunned by mutual embarrassment.*

STRATHCONA: Get out of my car!

SUNNY: Getting!

SUNNY EXITS the vehicle to the familiar motel parking lot
AMBIENCE.

SUNNY: Um. Appreciate the ride.

STRATHCONA: Like I said, I was on my way back anyways.
(Pause) Thank you.

SUNNY: For what?

STRATHCONA: For getting me to Blue Dunes.

SUNNY: *Hah.* I don't know man, it seemed like you were going to get out of that house whether I was there or not.

STRATHCONA: It...doesn't work like that...Goodnight.

SUNNY: Sure. Goodnight.

The motel DOOR clunks shut behind SUNNY. The room feels the same...except for the radio playing tinny SHOW TUNES in the background.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* It's not until my motel door clicks shut behind me that my nearly 24-hour day finally hits me. A dozen priorities fight for rental space in my head — I should call Detective

Nicholson, I should check the news. I should file that report I promised. But all I can do is dig my heels out of my shoes, and get myself under the duvet before exhaustion takes me out completely.

I realise I left the radio on when I left this morning, but I'm way too tired to turn it off.

***The radio PLAYS uninterrupted for a while...
...Before repeating unnaturally...glitching into chaotic STATIC that a sleeping SUNNY cannot hear...***

JASPER MOON: Sunny? Sunny? *SUNNY?* Have you found me yet, Sunny?

FADE TO BLACK.

Music: Ghostly voices and synth beats rise into a welter of uncomfortable chords.

CREDITS: "Badlands Cola" is written, directed, and produced by Renee Taylor Klint. This episode was sound designed and mixed by Sarah Buchynski of Polarity Audio Works, and featured the voice talents of Liz Morey, Briggon Snow, Danielle Bryn, and Ron Guan. 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.

END OF EPISODE. See <https://wherethestarsfell.com/#scripts> for transcripts for today's guest show, *Where The Stars Fell*.