

BADLANDS COLA - 102 - “THE RAPTOR”

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.

SCENE 102.1

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 Two: The Raptor.

EXT. TOWN OUTSKIRTS - EARLY MORNING - D2

The pre-dawn world yawns wide, not quite day, not quite night: CRICKETS sing their last, while a rare but cutting WIND whips along the exposed cliffside. Here SUNNY sits, altered by an acute lack of sleep and the unnerving news from the night previous.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* Couldn't sleep. Around hour three of watching the clock's little red digits tick over in the dark, and I just got out of there. Drove. The only road I really remember — from back when I was a kid — is the one to the big paleontology centre a few clicks out of town. The whole place is closed down, according to a typo-riddled sign taped to the inside of the glass doors to the centre. Apologies to disappointed tourists and dino lovers alike, who are directed to the town's only radio station for updates on future reopening.

I should be watching the video Detective Nicholson sent. Make notes. Connect it to the case's other threads. Get back in the truck and ask around. But instead all I can do is sit on a bench shaped like a triceratops and stare out at the town, sprawling and turning lavender with the light of not-quite-dawn.

All I can think is: what if the second tape is *him* again; more rambling cult theatrics, just like the first?

An electronic BEEP as the tape is replayed.

JASPER MOON: *(Recording playing through phone speakers)* I know what you're thinking. You're thinking: what is this all about? What is it about, Jasper Moon?

Another BEEP cuts the recording short.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* Shit.

I train my sleep-deprived brain back to what Nicholson said on the phone last night, right after dropping that bomb.

BEGIN FLASHBACK.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT - D1

SUNNY paces in their motel room.

SUNNY: Missing? How?

DETECTIVE NICHOLSON: *(Over the phone)* The investigation is still underway. The important thing I need you to know is that we have no reason to believe you're in any danger.

SUNNY: You're saying that with so much confidence...

DETECTIVE NICHOLSON: I *am* confident. Moon knows you helped us bust him and his cult, but your current work is still highly confidential. He has no idea of your whereabouts.

SUNNY: That doesn't make me feel better. Say something to make me feel better.

DETECTIVE NICHOLSON: *(Pause)* Listen. This is completely off record, understand?

SUNNY: Yes?

DETECTIVE NICHOLSON: I'm not even sure he *has* escaped.

SUNNY: What?

A chair WOOFs as SUNNY sits down heavily.

DETECTIVE NICHOLSON: I don't know. Honestly. Nothing about the situation points to an actual breakout. There's zero evidence at the detention centre. It's like he just...*vanished*. The surveillance footage from his cell is...something's just not right about the whole thing.

SUNNY: *That's* supposed to make me feel better?

DETECTIVE NICHOLSON: Yes, it is. We're not clear on anything at this point, and the last thing I want you to do, investigator, is lose your focus. If I thought you were in danger, I'd pull you off the job.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. TOWN OUTSKIRTS - EARLY MORNING - D2

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* I believe him. Ish. Not his biggest fan, but Nicholson and I worked together for months leading up to the big Moon bust. But when he says it's like Jasper Moon just...disappeared? Do I believe *that*? Not a chance.

Music: *a slow, muffled beat with plodding piano.*

SUNNY: *(To the audience) (Pause, sighing, remembering)* Then I think back on the case. All the things that happened...things neither Nicholson or I could explain. How little made sense, even after the arrests. I watched hours of Moon's online recruitment videos, and he never once talked about salvation, or the end of the world, or even how they were going to change it. So, if he's out, if he's coming back home...why? What is your plan, Moon?

Rule number three of private investigation: the clock is always ticking. And mine just started counting down a lot faster. The work is the important thing. I can do the work.

Down below, the town's still asleep; not even a wayward dog bark to break the calm. I can see everything: the Comfortina's flickering neon sign, the winding river, the comically big dinosaur towering over the heart of the town.

Maybe I don't have the guts to watch that video yet. But I can look for the Moon family home one more time.

Music: *an electric guitar strums a lost and lonely tune.*

Purpose returned anew, SUNNY returns to their truck, CLOSES the door, and gets the ENGINE running.

FADE TO BLACK.

SCENE 102.2

FROM BLACK.

EXT. CREEKHOMNE NEIGHBOURHOOD / INT. MOON HOUSE - EARLY MORNING - D2

SUNNY DRIVES through the slumbering streets of the town, hands wringing the wheel, foot quick on the peddle.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* Jasper's disappearance nags at me all the way down from the centre, and by the time I turn onto Creekhome's main road, I'm determined to get something good on him. Rule number four of private investigation: if you don't believe you'll find anything, you definitely won't.

It's the same pretty stretch of classic suburbia, minus all the humans. The bungalows sit dark and silent, settled back behind their cactus gardens, plastic lawn chairs sitting ghostly on empty patios.

I'm about to do my second loop past the derelict lemonade stand, when...

SUNNY: Okay, come on. Come on, come on. There's got to be something I've missed.

(Sharply inhaling) Where did...? Hold up. Hold up, hold up, hold up.

The truck GEARS DOWN, comes to a hasty halt as SUNNY roots around in their backpack.

SUNNY: Come on, where is my recorder? Ha, yes! Please tell me I charged you...

A simple recording device BEEPS to life.

SUNNY: Hell yes, I did. Okay. *(To the recording device)* Good morning, Detective Nicholson! This is your favourite PI Sunny, on case number two-two-dash-nine at, uh *(checking watch)* 4:07 AM on Sunday, August 1st. This recording will serve as supplement to my existing reports and notes on the case subject.

(Eager) Okay, so. I'm in the Creekhorne residential area of the town in question. Based on intel gathered from locals and my own surveillance, I may have found a house connected to Jasper Moon, or to the larger Moon family.

This is an audio-only recording, Log 01; it's probably still too dark for a camera to pick anything up anyways. At the end of this cul-de-sac is a bungalow. Structure is of note due to its dilapidated state: the houses in this part of town are super nice, well taken care of, but this one clearly hasn't been tended to in a while. Windows are dusty with curtains mostly drawn, lawn completely overgrown, flowerbeds dead. Apart from a white car down the road, there are no vehicles in the driveway or parked nearby.

(More to SELF than anything) And...even though I passed by like three times yesterday, I don't remember this house at all.

I'm going to check it out.

SUNNY TURNS OFF the truck engine and **EXITS** onto the early morning street. A few brave birds chirp, but otherwise the sleepy suburban street is dead. **SUNNY STEPS** carefully up the driveway of the strange house, recording device at the ready.

SUNNY: Okay, yep. Up close, I'm definitely seeing signs of dereliction. Mouse droppings on the window sills. Place seems completely silent, no ambient light or heat whatsoever. Still...

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK.

SUNNY: *(Calling softly)* Hello? Anyone live here?

Sunny waits, then KNOCKS again...

SUNNY: I will take that as a 'no.' Going around the back now. Obviously still want to keep a relatively low profile here, given that this is technically private property and...Well. Given what we know. Right, Detective? Ha. *(Sighing)* Right.

I'm looking at the backyard now, seems empty. Just a couple of crispy azaleas, no personal property. Curtains in the windows aren't closed back here, but the dust is still too thick to get a look inside.

Well! This looks like as good a place as any to start a proper investigation, Detective. Sunny out.

The recording device BEEPS to signal the end of the recording. And yet, SUNNY lingers in the backyard, the minute sounds of the WAKING TOWN filtering in through the thirsty trees. Then, SUNNY'S FOOTSTEPS are quiet as they approach the looming square of blackness that is the back door, weeds CRUNCHING underfoot as they go.

SUNNY: Just be locked. Be locked. Be locked, come on, don't open, don't tempt me, just...don't...

A glass door CLICKS, then CRACKS open...

SUNNY: *(Under breath)* Shit.

The door SLIDES fully open. As SUNNY steps inside, the oppressive air of a derelict house presses down. Uncomfortable. Unwelcoming.

SUNNY: Okay, so. Just a light break and enter. You know. A Sunday B and E. Like you do. *(Calling VERY softly)* Hello?

Yeah, okay. A peek. A quick look around and then out. Out, then greasy diner breakfast, and good news for Nicholson. *(Imitating conversation between themselves and NICHOLSON)* "Wow, Sunny, you're so smart and brave," "Yes, yes, thank you Nicholson, my extortionate invoice will be in the mail."

SUNNY's footsteps echo oddly in the empty space.

SUNNY: *(To self, nervous)* It's musty in here. Judging by the decor, this place hasn't been touched since the 70s. Wallpaper's peeling, furniture's all over the place. Is that a conversation pit? That's kind of amazing, actually. No family photos left around, though. That would be too easy.

And, behind door number one...

A door OPENS, slowly...

SUNNY: A basement. With no lights. Nope nope nope...

A door CLOSES, quickly.

SUNNY: Okay! Skipping the murder basement, going right on through to the front room, might as well unlock the door while I'm—
(Pause) Huh, front door was left unlocked too? Who abandons a place like this...

A BREEZE drifts across SUNNY's shoulders: gentle, and entirely unnatural. Music: a quiet, paranoid drone.

SUNNY: (Heavy breathing for two beats) What the hell? (Pause)
There're...stairs here. Stairs down. Again.

No way. Two separate basements? Is that even possible? What...

The air THICKENS, tension sharpening to a razor edge as SUNNY gazes into the horrible second basement, into the abyss...

SUNNY: I shouldn't be here. Moon could...I shouldn't —

SUNNY breaks, stumbling back through the front door, struggling with the DOORKNOB until they explode out into the cul-de-sac and its familiar sounds. Their shoes SLAP the pavement painfully as they put distance between them and the house, spooked.

SUNNY: (Heavy breathing) Stupid. Poking around alone like it's my first goddamn case.

Irritated, SUNNY wrenches their truck door OPEN and keys the IGNITION. Music: the paranoid droning returns, uneasy and thick.

FADE TO BLACK.

SCENE 102.3

FROM BLACK.

INT. COMFORTINA MOTEL ROOM - MORNING - D2

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* Sun's finally up.

There's no shortage of good breakfast spots in town, I learn. Somehow, I can't bring myself to park the car and waltz into the "Big Bronto Cafe" like I'm just another weekend tourist. Like nothing's wrong.

So, a convenience store feast it is.

Back in my room at the Comfortina, I close the blinds to the rising heat, set my dollar coffee and day-old strudel on the nightstand, and load up the detective's second video on my phone.

I'm expecting part two of the manifesto tape Nicholson sent before, but this is...different.

The now-familiar CLICK signals the beginning of the video on SUNNY's phone: a VHS tape from another era. It's FUMBLED for a moment, as if the cameraperson began filming suddenly.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* The video is terrible quality. Grainy. The background is just fuzzy browns and blacks, like nighttime? The only light comes from a bunch of ultra-bright worklamps, and illuminates the bottom half of someone I can't see. Their hands are shaking.

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

SECOND SPEAKER: -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.

SECOND SPEAKER: 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.

JASPER MOON: To whom?

SECOND SPEAKER: 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.

SECOND SPEAKER: What...what is this?

The video abruptly CUTS to a new scene, the audio all static.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* The scene disappears — but the video is still rolling. An amateur editor's cut, maybe...or a glitch in the tape. The second shot is completely dark, motionless except for the scattered prickle of static. The hand holding the camera bobbles, then regrips as if searching, and suddenly the featureless dark resolves into night sky. It gapes, empty as a dream, then the camera focuses: something is hovering in the sky. A smudge of white, its edges shifting, hazy. Getting larger as it hovers.

No. It's not hovering. It's *flying*. Tumbling. Screaming towards the camera...

The STATICKY video cuts out completely, leaving SUNNY in the uncomfortable silence of their motel room.

SUNNY: Holy shit.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* Doctor. Jasper Moon called the poor, freaked-out person in the video "Doctor." And they were talking about fossils.

I race to check the dossier Nicholson sent along with the video, to confirm my hunch, but the moment the document opens, my heart sinks: I'm met with the same blacked-out bars of expunged data as always.

Nicholson's footnote is sympathetic, but stark: "Further details sealed due to ongoing investigation. Sorry Investigator, had to call in a favour just to get this to you. Good luck."

God damn it.

SUNNY DIALS a number into their phone. The call goes immediately to an instant message.

DR. GILLESPIE: *(Pre-recorded voicemail)* Hello, and thank you for calling the Alberta Centre for Paleontological Research. Due to unforeseen circumstances, we are temporarily closed to all visitors, researchers, and non-essential staff at this time. For updates on the centre's reopening, please tune into the local radio station 101 FM, or head to our geocities web page at —

SUNNY ends the call.

SUNNY: That's right, they're closed. What was that radio station they — oh, right, I guess it's the only one in town.

SUNNY turns on the RADIO in their room. STATIC. They FLIP through channels, scanning, but find nothing.

SUNNY: What the...

SUNNY: (To the audience) Dead. 101 FM The Raptor is dead, the channel nothing but a blank wall of static. I stand in the sweltering heat of the anonymous motel room, scanning back and forth, but every frequency is dead. Dead as this lead. Dead as Jasper Moon's missing fossil collection, his "cultic pageantry." Dead.

Music: a waltzing tune of nervous piano and echoing guitars.

FADE TO BLACK.

SCENE 102.4

FROM BLACK.

INT. TRUCK INTERIOR / EXT. BADLANDS / INT. RAPTORBUS - LATE AFTERNOON - D2

We ride along with SUNNY as they COAST through the desert in their truck.

SUNNY: (To the audience) I'd been hoping to get a nap in, but after that discovery? No way.

I've been offroad for a while now. Behind me, desert dust flies up in the wake of my truck like orange wings that drift long after I'm gone. The sky's a flat concrete slab of blue that presses down into the horizon as I climb yet another sloping mesa.

It's easy to lose myself in the drive; to remember the rock tunnel in the video, or the grainy, shaking hands of a doctor who I am almost certain is actually a paleontologist — hands I desperately need to track to a person.

I glance away from the stretching Badlands beyond the windshield only to check the note taped to my dash. On it are hastily scrawled numbers: coordinates to the broadcast station for 101 FM, the Raptor.

Private investigation rule number five: sometimes coincidences are just coincidences, except when they're not. Is it likely I'll waltz up to the Raptor broadcast station, find out they just spilled some coffee on their soundboard and can't actually get me a contact inside the paleontology centre? Sure. Would my time be better spent knocking on the centre's doors until my fists turn to hamburger? Maybe. But if this isn't a coincidence, I'll be damned if I miss the thing that's right under my nose.

The TRUCK slows.

SUNNY: (To the audience) Such confidence. Shame it all goes swirling down the drain the moment I realise why the online map only listed coordinates to this place, instead of a proper address.

SUNNY parks the truck and KILLS the engine. They sit in silence for a moment, listening to the COOLING ENGINE as they debate whether to leave the car, or drive back the way they came.

SUNNY: ...Really?

SUNNY finally **EXITS** the vehicle, their shoes **CRUNCHING** on gravelly sand, shielding themselves against the **DUST** and **WIND** kicked up this far out of town. **Music: a drunken, distorted guitar plucking away.**

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* This isn't a radio station. It's a goddamn Mad Max LARP.

The coordinates have led me to what looks like a repurposed school bus on the edge of a cliff looming over town. The entire domed roof is a welter of antenna and satellite dishes that burn white-hot in the high sun, like a beast with a back full of molten quills. On the vehicle's rusted side, someone's painted a terrible pastiche mural of a purple raptor.

SUNNY: *(Calling out)* Anyone home? Any DJs? Any...raptors?

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* Judging by the state of the quote-unquote "station," the Raptor seems down on its luck. There isn't much around to speak of, but what is here looks just as ancient as the bus: the lone folding chair with the yellow nylon all shredded, the scrap heap of old radio parts, what looks to be a half-assed attempt at a tomato garden...? Everything is sun-beaten and crusted in what looks like years' worth of sand.

The bus looks empty. Just like the house.

SUNNY: Hello?

SUNNY risks a hesitant **KNOCK** on the door of the converted bus. **It SQUEAKS** open, barely an inch.

SUNNY: Oop — sorry, didn't realise your door's unlocked!

(To self) Can you even lock a bus door?

(Calling out again) I'm coming in, just want to make sure everything's okay... Oh *shit*.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* It's like a tornado went through this place. Floor's covered in clothes, plastic mugs, vinyl records. The walls are lined to the windows with musty old audio tech, soundboards stacked on top of record crates on top of things I don't even recognize. I glance to the front of the bus, where the driver's seat remains mostly intact. Did someone take this thing for a bumpy ride down a cliff or something? There's a set of keys in the ignition, a kitschy raptor-branded keychain swinging gently, but I can't imagine this hunk of junk actually groaning to life.

I step carefully through the debris littered across the metal flooring, hands clasped behind my back like a child in a room full of delicate glass vases. Don't touch, just look, then leave.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* At first, all I can see is the chaos, but I let my eyes unfocus from the broken objects and leaning amplifiers to see more: little clues, hints to the person who works here — or, I'm slowly realising, lives here. An old poster featuring the 1990 roster of the Edmonton Oilers, taped to a window with a patchwork of Parks Canada stickers. At the rear of the bus, a mattress on top of stacked pallets that seems to pass as a bed. In the tiny makeshift kitchen, a crate of off-brand cola bottles rattles with every step.

As I near the bed, I finally see it: photographs. Pl gold.

Not many. Just a handful, mostly polaroids so old and bleached-out I can barely make them out. There's a goofy one of a horse, as if the

camera had a carrot dangling under it or something. Half a dozen landscape shots of the Badlands. And one of two teens sitting cross-legged in a living room, surrounded by what looks like the remains of a ham radio they've pried apart with their own hands. I don't recognize either of —

The safety of a hunting rifle CLICKS off, far too close for comfort. While we don't know their name yet, the voice of SUNNY's assailant is stout and unhurried, if a bit frayed by age and the Badlands sun.

SUNNY: Agh!

ASSAILANT: Well, wouldn't that just send you 'round the pickle patch. Hands up, darling.

SUNNY: Okay. Okay...

ASSAILANT: *(Sing-song)* Hands up!

SUNNY: *Okay!* My hands are up! I'm sorry, this is a misunderstanding. Do you work for the Raptor?

ASSAILANT: Oh! Trespassing and tellin' jokes at the same time? You are a talent. Who the hell is asking?

SUNNY: I heard the radio station go dark and came to investigate. That's all.

ASSAILANT: What in the hell kinda person comes all the way out here to "investigate?"

SUNNY: Ha. An...investigator? I'm a PI.

ASSAILANT: *(Incensed)* Someone send you to investigate Strathcona?

SUNNY: Who?

ASSAILANT: Oh, still joking around, are we?

SUNNY: Listen. I don't know what this is, or why you're involved, but I can just walk away, okay?

ASSAILANT: You're *not* here for Strathcona?

SUNNY: *Who* is Strathcona!?

ASSAILANT: *(Imitating STRATHCONA's radio voice)* 101 FM, the Raptor.

SUNNY: The radio guy's name is Strathcona? I...okay? Look, I just want to know why his station went dark, and if he can get me in touch with the paleontology centre —

ASSAILANT: Tell me who you're here investigating!

SUNNY: You know, that's not —

ASSAILANT: I'm sorry, who's the one that got caught trespassing? Don't make me get trigger happy with you, darling.

SUNNY: Okay! Fucking — ! Okay. It's the Moon family. I'm here investigating the Moon family.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* The real rule number one of private investigating: no case is worth taking a bullet to the back over.

SUNNY knows just how dangerous those words can be, especially with a rifle between their shoulder blades. The **TENSION** inside the bus thickens, until...the rifle's **SAFETY** is engaged.

ASSAILANT: That is quite the interesting development. Go ahead, turn around.

SUNNY: Thank you, I — Oh.

ASSAILANT: Weren't expecting to be held at gunpoint by someone who gets the senior's discount at the movie theatre? (*Laughs*)

SUNNY: Could you...put the gun away, please?

ASSAILANT: Oh! Um. Sorry, didn't mean to scare you. Or, actually, I did, but *now* I didn't mean to scare you. I been watching Strathcona's bus since this morning and, uh...got a little bored.

SUNNY: Wait. "This morning?" Did you see who did this?

ASSAILANT: Nah, didn't catch the buggers in the act. Strathcona's been gone since last night. Kept the station on a pre-recorded loop, which means he knew he was gonna be gone a while. But then the loop ran out, which means he's gone longer than he expected.

SUNNY: Gone. As in missing?

ASSAILANT: Oh no, I know exactly where that dumbass is. Getting to him, though...In this town, sometimes that's a different matter altogether.

SUNNY: Okay, um. Look, whatever that means; I think this Strathcona guy might be in contact with the people at the paleontology centre, and they are my next big lead with this whole Moon situation. I need to speak with him.

ASSAILANT: If you manage to find Strathcona, you won't need the dino scientist at all.

SUNNY: Why not?

ASSAILANT: Because he knew the Moons better than anyone else.

Music: *A jangling guitar sting, fading into a fuzzy bassline.*

SUNNY: Really. How did he know them?

ASSAILANT: Why don't you ask him yourself.

SUNNY: *(Annoyed)* You just said you can't find him.

ASSAILANT: I said I knew where he ran off to. Just can't *get* to him, is all. It's too risky at my age. But you...

SUNNY: What are you...no. No. Absolutely not.

ASSAILANT: You're the one digging up names this desert has kept buried for years. If you want to know about the Moons, you find Strathcona first.

SUNNY: Fine. How do I do that?

ASSAILANT: What's your name?

SUNNY: Sunny.

ASSAILANT: Nice to meet you, Sunny. You're welcome to call me Hawthorne. First thing's first: take this walkie talkie.

After some RUMMAGING, a baffled SUNNY accepts a walkie-talkie from HAWTHORNE.

SUNNY: ...Okay.

A second token: HAWTHORNE hoists a rat's nest of keys in front of SUNNY's nose and JINGLES them.

HAWTHORNE: Now go get in that big-bitches cityslicker truck of yours and follow me nice and close. We're going for a ride.

Vehicle doors SLAM shut, two engines revving as SUNNY and HAWTHORNE spin off into the desert, dust clouds the only evidence that either of them were ever there.

FADE TO BLACK.

SCENE 102.5

FROM BLACK.

EXT. CREEKHOME - LATE AFTERNOON - D2

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* I almost had it. If only I had my wire on, or my recorder going, I could have my first shred of actual evidence!

But no. I couldn't risk reaching for it, and sometimes you only get one chance to ask an all important question like "does Jasper Moon actually have a sister?"

So now I'm driving in the shadow of a Jeep twice as old as I am, with a gun-toting fringe jacket bowling alley grandma at the wheel, following her every turn back into town. Where to is anyone's guess.

The world ROLLS BY as SUNNY pilots their truck dutifully after HAWTHORNE. Suddenly, the walkie-talkie BLIPS in the passenger seat.

SUNNY: *(Startled)* AGH.

Communicative BEEPS and chunks of STATIC pass back and forth as SUNNY and HAWTHORNE speak.

HAWTHORNE: *(Over walkie-talkie)* Come in, PI, this is Hawthorne. You read?

SUNNY: ...Yep. Loud and clear.

HAWTHORNE: Good. Turn's coming up soon.

SUNNY: Are you going to tell me anything about this place? It'd be nice knowing what I'm getting myself into here.

HAWTHORNE: No can do, you'll just have to trust me.

SUNNY: Ha. Yeah. "Trust." *(Sighing)* What happened to Strathcona? You said he *ran off*?

HAWTHORNE: *(Sigh)* Sure did. I can't say I blame him. He'd been ornery all day, what with the headlines. We were having dinner in Big Bronto when the evening news started running the story on Jasper. Again. He'd seen it before, but...I don't know. Hit him different, I guess. Strath ran out of there so fast it'd make your head spin. Left me to pay for dinner and everything. Never does that.

SUNNY: Did he seem angry?

HAWTHORNE: Oh, Strathcona's not really the angry sort. Bullheaded, maybe; terrible at planning ahead, for *sure*. Between you and me, he seemed more...determined. Maybe a bit scared.

Now, turn left. It should be here. It's here more often than not, anyways.

A quiet DRONING atmosphere seeps in as SUNNY realises...

SUNNY: *(Pause)* No...this house, it's. I've been here before. I was here this morning.

The vehicles come to a HALT, but SUNNY is frozen in the car seat...

SUNNY: *(Breathing heavy)*

...Until a KNOCK at the window startles them.

SUNNY: Agh!

They ROLL DOWN the window of the truck, letting the suburban BUZZ of CREEKHOME filter in from outside. The sounds are domestic and familiar, but their gentleness is at odds with the TENSION SUNNY feels crawling up from inside them.

HAWTHORNE: Now, I thought I heard you say you've *been* here before...

SUNNY: Uh. Yeah. Because I *have*. I was looking for this house yesterday, but I couldn't find it. But I looked again this morning and...it was like it appeared out of thin air.

For a long moment, the two regard each other, as if waiting for the other to break.

HAWTHORNE: Yeah, it does that.

SUNNY: What?

HAWTHORNE: Now, listen here, you keep that walkie-talkie nice and close. Strath could still have his on him, so it might come in handy. The park wardens' golden rule: always have a walkie handy!

SUNNY: Okay—Wait, what am I supposed to be — ?

HAWTHORNE: (*Overlapping SUNNY*) Now, see that white car over there? The one with the abysmal parking job?

SUNNY: Yeah, the Mustang?

HAWTHORNE: That's the one. That belongs to Strath. Now, if and when you do manage to retrieve his dumb ass, you make sure he can drive, and then you send him straight to Blue Dunes.

SUNNY: (*Surprised, protesting ineffectively*) Hold on, hold on, where —

HAWTHORNE: Oh, Blue Dunes is my campground a few clicks out east. He knows where to go.

SUNNY: You're *leaving*?

HAWTHORNE: I told you, I'm too old for this...place. And I need to get dinner started. Look, all you need to do is sit tight and keep an eye out.

SUNNY: An eye out for what?

HAWTHORNE: For Strathcona, of course!

SUNNY: So I'm just going to sit here? And wait?

HAWTHORNE: You'll do just fine.

HAWTHORNE gives the truck an overconfident SLAP on the hood, then turns to leave...

HAWTHORNE: (*Distant*) Oh! Hell, almost forgot.

FOOTSTEPS once again approach SUNNY's truck as HAWTHORNE returns with haste.

HAWTHORNE: One last thing, darling. This one's important.

No matter what you see, no matter what you hear, you do *not* go inside that house.

FADE TO BLACK.

Music: Ominous shimmering synth tones, pebbled through with eerie guitar plucks.

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, Ron Guan, David J. Dixon, Dustin Vuong Nguyen, Elvis Barkdale II, and Danielle Bryn. 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

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