

Lighthouses, Levers and Lasers  
by Jules de Jongh  
Season 1 Episode 17

[opening theme music and strapline]

Nanny Bea: Welcome to my cottage for another tale, I've invited my neighbour Jules over. And she'll be here any...

[knock sfx]

Nanny Bea: minute now.

Nanny Bea: Who could that be? Hello?

Jules: Hi Nanny Bea, it's your neighbour Jules?

Nanny Bea: Oh lovely, come, come in dear, do come in. Oh, hello.

Jules: Hello Nanny Bea, I've brought you a massive adventure today.

Nanny Bea: Oh I better make a bigger pot of tea! Do tell our listening friends a bit about it.

Jules: Well today we'll see what happens when a classroom turns into a circus and a city and a salty seaside. Are you ready for a story?

Nanny Bea: Yes please

Jules: Okay then, Lighthouses, Levers and Lasers

Mrs Garcia was ready to pop, with her first baby which she discovered would actually be her first two babies and they wanted out. She planned on working until they arrived but they had other plans. Five weeks early they made their intentions known, and very loudly too.

But to be honest, they were making quite a fuss before then, making Mrs Garcia's feet swell up like footballs, making her forget whether it was i before e or e before i, they even had the power to knock her out, fast asleep in the middle of class.

To start with, the class would be ever so helpful, like when Rosa said, 'Wednesday comes after Tuesday' or Joshua whispered, 'You write with the pointing end, Mrs Garcia.' Eventually though the class started to deteriorate, even the helpful ones.

It started with a few giggles, then a couple games, then full on chaos as each student did as they pleased. They made such a racket that Principal Peters could hear it as she walked past, so she stopped walking past and walked right in, right in to mayhem, paper airplanes

whizzing by, rubber bands shooting into the sky, a girl braiding another's hair, a boy balancing on one leg of a chair. It looked like a low budget circus had come to town. And Mrs Garcia didn't buy a ticket as she was knocked out again, head on her desk, dribble on her cheek. 'It's time to go home Mrs Garcia,' the principal said softly before facing the class and doing quite the opposite, 'Behave yourselves!' she shouted. All whizzing, braiding and balancing stopped at once and a shiver trickled down every student's spine. Principal Peters was a woman of few words and less patience. There was total silence until Blingalingaling Blingalingaling the school bell rang out announcing the end of the day but nobody moved, 'Tomorrow I expect more from you, tomorrow you will write an apology to Mrs Garcia and behave impeccably for your substitute teacher.' 'Yes Principal Peters,' they all said at once.

But after a walk home, a night's sleep and another day, the children had forgotten that promise and came to class still squirrely and distracted.

That's when an elderly gentleman arrived, and I say gentleman because he looked like one in a long coat and trousers nearly under his armpits. He had a bright blue bowtie cocked slightly to one side and a matching handkerchief folded as though it had never been used.

Liam Foster, the cheekiest in the class said, 'How old are you, a hundred?' 'Why thank you young man,' the gentleman replied, 'I do try to stay in shape.'

Rosa offered a diversion from Liam's rudeness, 'You must be our substitute teacher?' 'Must I, well in that case I will be.' the gentleman answered. So, what are we asking today?' he said. No one really knew how to answer that. The confused and slightly awkward silence was broken with a ping from Liam's phone. 'Oh, so you have an idea young man?' Liam fumbled for an answer, 'No this isn't my phone, I don't even know where it came from.' 'Then that my boy is our question!' the gentleman said victoriously.

He then walked over to the white board that looked more grey as he approached it. In his hand was a piece of chalk, maybe he carries his own and he started to draw. First a slab of some kind, a slice of bread maybe and on it was a lever like a see saw with an extra seat. 'What is this?' the gentleman asked, 'oh forgive me, it must be hard to see from the back of the class.' So he lifted it off the chalkboard and put it down on the desk. It's edges were no longer jagged chalk lines but instead smooth and almost shiny, like it was made of brass on top and wood on the bottom. Then he pressed the brass lever. [... --- ...] 'This was my friend Samuel's idea, Samuel Morse. Perhaps you've heard this morse code in an old film as a ship was going down. [... --- ...] SOS they would tap out on this device, several beeps for each letter, just imagine how long it would take to text a message like...Liam what was that message you were just texting?'

Liam was shocked that odd old man knew he was texting, doubly shocked that he knew Liam's name. So Liam stumbled in compliance, 'Uh, it says um, big yikes old dude is extra.'

'Well we cannot all be as Lit as you Liam but let me work this out, in 1866 when all they had was a telegraph machine like this, it would take you...34 taps to write that message and no one else could send one until you were done, no that would be a problem, wouldn't Lily?' Lily quickly turned off her phone.

'And they did not seem to mind all that clicking, it was the one message at a time that got their heads scratching. Take my friend Alexander Graham Bell, Alexander where are you?' as he called out another man's voice answered from the back of the class, 'Ahoy!' They all turned to see and there he was a man at the back of the class but the wall had faded into the shadows, as the man spoke again it became lighter and you could just make out a table he was sitting at tinkering with another slab of wood with brass bits but this one had a kind of funnel.

'I can telegraph any sound, even the sound of speech!' Alexander said aloud to himself. 'Well we don't want to disturb!' Alexander was talking into the funnel asking his assistant Watson to come here. 'So sorry my friend, we were just deciding on a greeting for this new device, a way to answer when it rings, I like the sound of Ahoy, quite jolly and welcoming,' Alexander said in his very deliberate manner after years of elocution lessons and being a teacher for the hearing impaired.

'That Ahoy thing did not catch on. He may not have won that battle but he managed to get the first patent on this new contraption, and that is a gold medal for inventors! Seems many others were working on this new fangled telephone device but he beat them to it.' Mr Bell was totally focused on his work when a [lighthouse fog horn], echoed across the room, [lighthouse fog horn] it came again and with it a trail of fog, all misty and cold. It was thick as custard, they couldn't even see their own hands. [lighthouse fog horn] it bellowed again but this time a great flash of light burst in with it and swiped across the walls. Joshua couldn't see anyone, only the light and the fog, 'what is that?' he called out. 'They're sign posts of the sea, for ships to enter the coast,' said a man with a wooly beard to match his wooly hat standing on a rocky mound that seemed to grow out of Mrs Garcia's desk. 'A lonely life it was for you before that Stevenson chap got the wireless going!' 'Aye, indeed!' said the man on the rock as the mist turned more white than grey, in a white flurry of ice dust the lighthouse keeper was gone and the rocks were completely covered in snow.

'Listen carefully class or you might miss it.' They sat with ears and eyes open as the ice dust settled down and revealed a hut with wire poking out of it and two men huddling inside it. The wire attached to a pole and then floated up into the air with a kite 'Inside that hut is Marconi the tall, skinny one. He's waiting for a message using good old Morse code sent all the way from England, 3000km across the Atlantic to this rocky island off the coast of Canada.' Marconi jumped up with excitement, 'Oh Blast what did I miss?' 'It was the letter 's', ' Marconi replied. 'Well, never you mind, we can listen to another of his inventions anytime the uh....' a crackley hiss interrupted the gentleman, or was it a hissy crackle, [radio tuning].

'Is it true Mr Tesla that over 17 of your inventions were used by Mr Marconi in the creation of the radio?'

The sound of the radio seemed to be coming from everywhere and the classroom was completely black.

'Ah yes, Nikola Tesla, before it was a car, it was a man. And that man predicted in the year of 1926, a full 50 years before the first cellular mobile phone,' As the gentlemen spoke a spark of light came from the door of the classroom, just a little spark [spark] but then it grew [spark], and grew [spark] and grew until it was not just one spark but hundred of them

darting across a giant cage [spark], it was blinding at first then they could follow these sparks from one side of the room to the other like they were grabbing a tower on the other side, underneath the shower of light sat a man in a chair, 'Tesla predicted the creation of those phones and more, what was it you said my friend Nikola?' The man in the chair spoke up.

'The whole earth will be converted into a huge brain, We shall be able to communicate with one another instantly, irrespective of distance. we shall see and hear one another as perfectly as though we were face to face, and the instruments a man will be able to carry one in his pocket.'

'Why thank you my friend or should I say merci, gracias, danke schoen, a clever man that Tesla spoke over 8 languages, memorized entire books and his work inspired lasers, radar and robots.'

As he said that, the sparks of light joined together to create one beam coming straight out of a giant man made entirely of metal [spark]. Liam squealed, 'Ah.'

'Why there's nothing to fear my son, it's just a television show.' When they turned back it was the same metal man but on a small screen in a wooden box. The image was a bit ragged and it looked like they were on a stage almost with rocks made of styrofoam and people painted purple to look like aliens.

'Some say this was your inspiration Mr Cooper. Oh watch yourself Lily,' the gentleman said as a taxi nearly clipped Lily's desk. That bright yellow streak was followed by more, taxi's, buses, business people, busy people walking around and across this frantic four lane street that spilled out of the side of the classroom, Lily looked at a building covered in mirrors and followed it all the way up to what must have been the 50th floor. The classroom roof was gone now and above them were skyscrapers in all directions, racing to reach the clouds.

Then a phone rang out [ringtone]

Liam and Lily looked at each other. 'It wasn't us,' Lily said. 'I'm calling from a portable cellular phone,' the man boasted. He was standing right behind Liam. 'Martin Cooper class, and that brick in his hand is actually just a prototype, it'll be another 10 years before you can buy a phone that weighs as much as a bag of sugar. You'd need some mighty big pockets for that one.'

The gentleman started looking under the desks, behind the bin, around the floor, 'Anyone see a bag, black, the size of a shoebox? Ah there it is, right in front of Rosa.' And there it was on Rosa's desk. The gentleman unclipped the latch and pulled out a phone of sorts. It was heavy, more like 2 bags of sugar and it was attached to something. 'Still can't fit it in my pocket yet, and this was only 30 years ago but lookey here, can you read that out Rosa?' 'Merry Christmas.' 'And that was the very first text message from a lad named Neil Papworth.' At that the gentlemen picked up the phone and sat down at Mrs Garcia's desk, he seemed a bit tired, the colour had run out of his cheeks and even his bright blue tie wasn't so bright. He sat there quietly until Blingalingaling, Blingalingaling the school bell rang out announcing the end of the day but nobody moved, 'Tomorrow I expect more from

you, tomorrow you will write an apology to Mrs Garcia and behave impeccably for your substitute teacher.' They all looked up and saw Principal Peters standing at the door, 'Yes Principal Peters,' they all said at once as though they'd rehearsed it. The students looked around the classroom. There were paper airplanes and rubber bands in neat piles, the roof was just the roof and the walls were just walls. And Mrs Garcia's desk was empty.

After a walk home, a night's sleep and another day, the children never forgot to keep asking questions.

The end

Nanny Bea: Jules thank you, for that incredible journey through time. A most complicated answer to such a simple question. Much like last week at my sky diving club. I was purely making a passing comment about the history of the aeroplane and oh did that spark controversy, everyone had an opinion. And opinions are much like elephants, worthy of respect but I'd rather not have them over for tea.

Jules: Unless of course it's Babar, he does have impeccable table manners.

Nanny Bea: Oh yes, he'd be a lovely companion much like you are my dear and will we have the pleasure of your company again soon.

Jules: That you will, I'll be back next week for another Tales and Tea?

Thomas: Go to [NannyBea.com](http://NannyBea.com)

Jules: Go there to find out about all our episodes. On [NannyBea.com](http://NannyBea.com) there's our entire collection of stories to listen to and to read along. As well as details about how to get in touch.

[Be on the Show jingle]

Mr Announcer: This has been a Toad in the Hole production for [NannyBea.com](http://NannyBea.com).