

The Shrinking Giant

by Jules de Jongh

Season 2 Episode 9

[opening theme music and strapline]

Nanny Bea: So good of you to join us and welcome to my cottage I like to call Dave. My neighbour Jules will be bringing us a story any...

[knock sfx]

Nanny Bea: minute now.

Nanny Bea: Hello? Who is it?

Jules: Hello Nanny Bea, it's your neighbour Jules with a story.

Nanny Bea: What a pleasant surprise, hello, come in dear, come, come.

Jules: Thank you Nanny Bea. You're looking well.

Nanny Bea: I've decided to put on my Sunday best in honour of your visit and because we have a delightful Wonder Word.

[Wonder Word jingle]

Emelia: Hello Nanny Bea I'm Emelia and I've a wonder word for you, it's cantankerous.

[Drum roll]

Someone who is cantankerous is irritable or difficult to deal with, like my brother when I wake him up early on a Saturday.

Thank you, bye.

[piano out]

Nanny Bea: Thank you Emelia. Now listen closely and maybe you can find cantankerous in our story.

Jules: Oh I think you will because today we will hear about a giant from the hidden land of Antarctica, she was a very disagreeable giant until one day she met with a fully

automatic, never problematic, entirely mechanic laundry facility that didn't live up to its name. Are you ready for a story?

Nanny Bea: Oh, yes please

Jules: Okay then, The Shrinking Giant, adapted for radio

In the Antarctic and under the ice is the small community of large people, giants in fact, in a land they call Antarcticadia. They live as we Upperlanders do in most regards except they're under a couple metres of ice, clear ice so the sunlight comes beaming through. They've adapted to under ice living and require very little air, they can swim for miles without popping back up. That will be a very useful, even life saving skill for one Betula Barracuda. She was a feisty one that Betula some might even say cantankerous. You always know when Betula is in the room and what she thinks of this, that and the other.

Why only the day before the incident that required her useful life saving skill, Betula was at the local market, doing her weekly shop. When she got to the counter the cashier asked for id, well that's all it took, "ID why I've been shopping here since you were nothing more than a newborn baby as small as an elephant!" I did say they were giants, remember. Betula berated the poor clerk who was only doing her job, which was to ask for identification from everyone buying scissors, to make sure they were old enough. But saying that to Betula just fired her up all the more. "Old enough? Old enough to do what, cut out some coupons from the paper! Cut the tags off my new blouse? Cut out a paper snowflake! How old does anyone need to buy a pair of scissors? I mean what has society come to, telling me I gotta do this and I can't do that." Betula carried on ranting until the manager, who knows her well, arrived. He's been here before and it's never pretty. His main tactic is to lure her outside with the promise of an ice cream for her trouble, ice cream is everywhere in Antarcticadia and although a delicious treat, it wouldn't stop that cantankerous woman, but it would take her out of the store and around the corner just far enough for their customers not to hear any more.

Oh Betula, give her any reason to rant and she will. And she's as big as a bus, literally, that voice travels. Fortunately everyone there is as big as a bus, they're giants remember. Her neighbours were ingenious in the way they disguised Betula's voice, some had spouting fountains, others had wind chimes and some installed music systems to play a steady stream of, well anything really, as anything was better than her hollering. So when the planners proposed building a new fully automatic, never problematic, entirely mechanic laundry facility in the neighbourhood, there wasn't a single objection, except of course from Betula, but no one counted that.

It's a shiny building, surrounded in glass with sparkly metal equipment in all sorts of configurations. No one is entirely sure which bit does what, customers simply scan their identification card (to ensure they are billed accordingly) then deposit their dirty laundry into a massive suction vat. From there the laundry is sorted with whites going one way and colours another; then it splits off the delicates from the robust, the exceedingly dirties from the nearly cleans. Beyond that point no one can see, they just wait until the machine calls out their number, "Number 471 please go to collection bay 8," or the like, then they are

presented with neatly tied bundles of cleaned, dried and pressed laundry wrapped in scented paper and tied up in a bow.

One afternoon, when the children were only just back from school but not everyone was back from work, Betula made her way to the fully automatic, never problematic, entirely mechanic laundry facility. She inserted her identification card, as you do, and deposited her dirty laundry into the massive suction vat but when she did the dangling belt from her cardigan was sucked in as well. She protested, pulling and yanking, but to no avail. The machine suctioned away until it had pulled her belt, her cardigan and herself deep into the bowels of the vat. As you can imagine, she hollered and she shouted, she screamed and she spouted all nature of things but no one took any notice. They didn't notice when she fell into the vat, they didn't notice when she was sorted with the colours, they didn't notice when she was nearly split in two between the exceedingly dirties and the nearly cleans. When Betula passed through every cycle and popped out the other side, something went terribly wrong. The fully automatic, never problematic, entirely mechanic laundry facility was not equipped to deal with living laundry and with hindsight really should've washed her on a delicate cycle, instead she went through the hottest of hot cycles and came out, well, small. She'd shrunk in the wash.

The bundle of her sat in bay 3 for nearly an hour as she picked her way out of her own laundry and through the scented paper and the copious bow, complaining every step of the way. Betula had no idea what state she was in until she made it back into the open. It took awhile for her to get her bearings. She looked around but all she could see was shiny. When her eyes adjusted it became clear. She had shrunk to the size of a tennis ball. Now for Upperlanders that would've been tough but she's below in the land of giants the size of buses. And boy did it make Betula angry, she hollered and she shouted, she screamed and she spouted all nature of things but no one took any notice because no one could hear her. This went on for days, for weeks even until Betula hollered all the cantankerous out of her. And once she stopped yelling she started smelling the riches pouring out of the bakery and seeing all the ice sculptures decorating the park. She became quite pleasant and helpful even. Whenever someone dropped a coin, Betula was the first to pick it up for them. Whenever a child dropped their toy or a dog had lost his bone, Betula was there pointing or handing it back if she could.

Betula became such a helpful member of society that the Antarticadia civic council held a special meeting gathering all the great minds of their land on behalf of Betula. "As you know," said the grand elder, "we are gathered here today to discuss the misfortunes of one, Betula Barracuda. She was tragically shrunk in the wash in what we now call the fully automatic, sometimes problematic, entirely mechanic laundry facility. Have any of our esteemed scientists suggestions as to how we remedy her shrinkage?"

And they did. One proposed giving her growth hormones like the Upperlanders give to their cattle. Another suggested a regime of diet and visualisation techniques (this person was excluded from discussions after lunch and thinking of them leaving the room). And yet another offered to soak her fully then stretch her out over a couple of days. Betula was not invited to the meeting, no one had thought to do that but being so small, she just rolled on in. By the time it came time to voting on their solution, Betula had made her way across the meeting room floor, up the lectern and across to the microphone. Where she spoke for all

gathered to hear. "My fellow citizens of Anarcticadia, first I must thank you all for your concern and efforts regarding my shrunken state. I too was most concerned with this condition...at first. But once I moved through my stages of initial disbelief, all consuming anger then darkest of blue depression I found a place of not just acceptance but liberation!" The counsel were more than confused. Betula shared with them how in this smaller state she could see life from another perspective, one where shouting and making a fuss was useless and finding a way to be useful was life giving. She's never been happier. The counsel took a moment to discuss this privately, then presented to her their proposal.

"Given your size compared to ours, it is quite likely you could be trod up on and ultimately flattened into the ground but given you have found value in your condition and wish to remain shrunken, we offer you a wardrobe of reflective garments so you may carry on living without fear of benign stomped. And in recognition of all you have done for the community and the trauma you have endured, we will provide a laundering service of such garments, and all your linens as well."

Betula was happier than happy. She'd always dreamt of a dayglow wardrobe and now it was hers and she never had to see a laundry facility again.

The end

Nanny Bea: Thank you Jules. You know I wore dayglow for an entire decade. The clothing came in fashion and then would never seem to wear out.

Jules: Well at least you could be seen in a crowd.

Nanny Bea: Oh I could be seen from the moon. Actually that's what put an end to my dayglow days. NASA requested I wear a more neutral wardrobe as I was distracting the crew on the space station. They are keen listeners of our Tales and Tea, hello Sergey I send my kind regards to you and the crew. (Shall I tell them you will be back next week with more Tales and Tea?)

Jules: I think you just did and they visit our website.

Thomas: Go to NannyBea.com

Jules: Go there to find out about all our episodes. Tales & Tea is written for you, so please do let us know what you think. You can like or follow us on iTunes or Spotify or from the International Space Station so it seems. And get in touch if you'd like to be on the show like our lovely caller Emelia.

[Be on the Show jingle]

Mr Announcer: This has been a Toad in the Hole production for NannyBea.com.