

Buttercups and Daisy Chains  
by Jules de Jongh  
Season 2 Episode 20

[opening theme music and strapline]

Nanny Bea: Why hello there, I'm so pleased you've come. I've just brewed a fresh cuppa and my neighbour Jules will be here with our story any...

[knock sfx]

Nanny Bea: minute now.

Nanny Bea: Were you expecting anyone? Hello, who is it?

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

Nanny Bea: What a delight! Come in dear, hello.

Jules: Hello Nanny Bea, I've got you a tale you're sure to enjoy, all about a garden. Are you ready for a story?

Nanny Bea: Oh, yes please

Jules: Okay then, Buttercups and Daisy Chains, adapted for radio

Ruby and Aunt Blanche had each other. Neither chose this, it's just how they ended up. Aunt Blanche was really a Great Aunt but Blanche thought that made her seem old and Ruby thought it made her seem false so they mutually agreed without ever actually agreeing that just plain Aunt Blanche would do.

Aunt Blanche lived on the East side of town, where the lawns and the ladies were manicured to perfection. Blanche was one such lady. She had her hair done on Mondays, her nails done on Wednesdays and any remaining bits done on Fridays. The house she called Magnolia Drive, because it was on Magnolia Drive. It differentiated it from their seaside cottage and from people who didn't live on Magnolia Drive. The lane was crafted to curve in just the right places so you felt as if you meandered to her home rather than made your way there purposefully. But that was the only meandering allowed in Aunt Blanche's life.

Yes, the activities in the house on Magnolia Drive were purposeful and perfectly timed. There was a clock in every room and they all chimed in unison. Some were greatly disguised but still from which time could be told, like the china poodle with a gold chain around its neck and a timepiece in its belly. The dog stood on the mantelpiece facing the door as if

desperate to go outside. Ruby found him to be an ally and often thought of the adventures they'd have if only he were let off his chain.

You could see the time in the sitting room where Ruby wasn't allowed to sit, on a clock in a tall wooden cabinet which reminded you of its presence every hour, every half hour and every half a half hour in case you needed further warnings. It was constantly singing out, 'You mustn't be late, you must be one time,' in a series of chimes but they all sang the same tune just with more heraldry at the half hour and even more on the whole hour as if that in itself was a victory to be celebrated. Ruby despised this clock most of all as it was allowed to jingle and clammer in the sitting room all through the day and night while Ruby couldn't jingle or clammer by day or night anywhere at all and especially not in the sitting room. Such a boastful clock.

There was an almost whimsical clock in the powder room off the landing, of a bejeweled flamingo hovering over a gold studded lotus flower patiently waiting on one leg for the flower to open fully on the hour. It was a most confusing clock from which to tell time though, it could not be bothered to tell you the actual hour, only the point at which an hour arrived. This caused a great deal of trouble in Ruby's early days at Magnolia Drive, as Ruby would often wake to use the facilities. The lotus seemed to open its petals fully just as Ruby's eyes did the same but she hadn't a clue as to the time of day. Inevitably she would hazard a guess. Sometimes she'd guess 7am, time for breakfast, and return to the landing for confirmation. Even if the boring but functional clock on the landing table corrected her summation with an outlandish hour such as 5am, Ruby's body was already convinced it was 7 and refused to go back to sleep. Ruby came to rely on that boring clock more than any other and for that she learned to love its plain black case and flat white face.

Cleaning Magnolia Drive was generally the job of Mrs Greyson but polishing, winding and calibrating the clocks to keep perfect time was left to Aunt Blanche personally and that is how she started every Saturday morning, while Ruby was to complete any outstanding homework. The clocks demanded a great deal of time probably as they were constantly doling it out, so Ruby would finish her homework and head outside into the garden.

The garden at Magnolia Drive lived up to its name, there were two large Magnolia trees dominating the front garden, both delicately holding those hand sized white flowers all over their bare limbs when spring arrived. Aunt Blanche was most proud to possess the beacons she believed prompted the name of this very road. Her magnolias on Magnolia Drive were there long before the drive was. These old dears set the theme for the rest of the garden, green and white, no cream, no beige, just white flowers and green leaves. This took the shape of box hedges with their tiny green leaves cut into an obedient shape like a ball or a cone and at one time when the gardener was feeling heady from midday sun, into a waddle of Penguins looking for an iceberg to float away on, this was quickly cut down into slightly smaller cones than they were before the midday sun, once Aunt Blanche caught site of them.

The back garden was pristine but pretty with its perfectly cut lawn surrounded by perfectly plucked beds. The flower bed plucking was left to Ruby to provide an outdoor activity fitting that of a young girl in Aunt Blanche's opinion. Ruby didn't mind, actually she quite liked her time in the garden. Aunt Blanche would sit perched on the patio with a paper to occupy her

mind, now and again lowering it to guide young Ruby's activities. Ruby's only prior experience in a garden was playing, so in identifying weeds, Ruby required a great deal of assistance.

Aunt Blanche soon found the continual questioning cumbersome so she purchased a book, 'Weeds, Pests and all things Undesirable, a Gardener's Guide to Glory.' Even with this Ruby often interrupted Aunt Blanche with questions, 'Aunt Blanche, the book says the buttercup is a weed, but how will we know if we like butter without them?'

'We'll read the package dear,' Aunt Blanche replied.

'And what about the daisies, without them how will I make my daisy chain necklace?'

'I'll buy you a necklace, now take those weeds to the compost yard, will you' Aunt Blanche insisted. The compost yard was the small parcel of land beyond the main garden. It was separated from view by a solid brick wall with a solid wooden gate. There they kept the bins, the tools and all other unsightly objects required for the management of a garden. Ruby did as her aunt instructed and a little bit more.

Eventually Ruby understood without even asking to remove the cow parsley as its heads of confetti flowers swayed in the breeze. To take out the thistles that prickle with their crowns of purple petals. And of course the self seeding poppies with their bright orange faces, disrupting the cool of the green and white palette. Every single one Ruby removed as instructed and then she did a little bit more. She would pull them out, roots and all very thoroughly, very carefully. (Aunt Blanche admired her diligence.) Then Ruby would take them to the compost yard, as instructed and instead of binning them for future compost as assumed, she would gently transplant them into the yard. The gardener was the only other person who went back there and since the whole penguin incident, he'd kept very quiet.

One Saturday, after the clock cleaning, Ruby plucked and pulled every 'weed' she could find, then made her way to the compost yard. Aunt Blanche probably wouldn't have noticed how long the child was absent if it weren't for the crossword, a cryptic clue about a weed. Aunt Blanche called out to Ruby to bring her the 'Weeds, Pests and all things Undesirable' book for her aunt to peruse. Ruby did not reply. On closer inspection Aunt Blanche could see the child was not within view and shouting was not the done thing. 'She must still be in the compost yard,' Aunt Blanche mused as she put down her paper and put on her garden shoes. Even her perfectly preened lawn was no place for Saint Laurent satin slippers.

'Ruby, darling, are you here?' she said as she approached the compost yard. Aunt Blanche really did not want to go into the yard, not even in her garden shoes. In fact, she did not own a shoe suitable for such terrain so she stood on the stepping stone just outside the yard and leaned her head around to call out once more, 'Ruby, darling, are...' Aunt Blanche stopped. She couldn't say a word but was pulled into the yard by an overwhelming urge. She didn't care about her shoes but took them off to walk barefoot on the clover lawn. All around her were birds and bees and butterflies, every colour, every sound of nature singing out. Aunt Blanche had forgotten what the birds sounded like as she made the gardener shift any nest so as to not find those very same birds soiling the patio or the lawn.

Ruby stood up not entirely sure what to say.

'Where did all this come from?' Aunt Blanche managed to ask.

'From your garden, they're your weeds,' Ruby replied in a buttercup crown and draped in daisy chain bracelets. Aunt Blanche began to cry, just one tear at first and that opened the door to another and another until they flooded out with each blink.

Ruby had made a lot of mistakes in her time at Magnolia Drive, she'd made her aunt angry and frustrated, irritated and annoyed but she'd never made her cry before. 'I'm sorry,' Ruby said and then instinctively embraced her aunt.

'No Ruby,' said Aunt Blanche, 'I'm sorry. I'm sorry I cut all the colour out of my life, I'm sorry I cut out all the songs. Out of what I was ready to throw away, you've created paradise.'

Ruby was still hugging her aunt.

The next Saturday, Ruby carried on collecting weeds they now called wonders to put in the garden beyond the garden while Aunt Blanche sat on the patio with her newspaper, but it was the gardening pages that kept her occupied as she picked out flowers to add to her garden, red and blue and pink and yellow, golden yellow. Ones that attracted butterflies, ones that self seeded at will, planting themselves wherever they pleased. She even instructed the gardener in the midday sun to cut the cones back into penguins. The gardener gave her a few days to think it over, before he complied.

Magnolia Drive was alive, bursting with colour and sound as the garden overflowed with flowers from every colour in the rainbow and the house rang out with clocks chiming at different times. Aunt Blanche was too busy having the most perfect time of her life to worry about keeping perfect time on her clocks.

The End

Nanny Bea: Oh, thank you Jules. Time, it can be your friend or your foe, it just depends on how you use it.

Jules: And it sure does fly when you're having fun.

Nanny Bea: And I have fun when I'm flying, so both time and I are busy. Except time doesn't have to get the paraglider ready, persuade someone to collect you and find a place to store it.

Jules: Paragliding, where do you do that?

Nanny Bea: One day I paraglided off my roof intending to land near the local Sainsbury's to collect some hamburgers for the barbecue and found myself in Hamburg itself, Hamburg Germany and they don't even call them hamburgers!

Jules: Wow, that's one long glide. How did you get back home?

Nanny Bea: Now that's a story in itself, perhaps I will share it with you next week if you can bring another story.

Jules: Of course. I'll be back for more Tales and Tea.

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Jules: Go there to find out about all our episodes. You can like and follow us on iTunes or Spotify and get in touch if you'd like to be on the show.

[Be on the Show jingle]

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