

Cowboy Chicken Ranch
by Jules de Jongh
Season 2 Episode 21

[opening theme music and strapline]

Nanny Bea: Hello and welcome, my kettle has just boiled and I am awaiting the arrival of my neighbour Jules who will be bringing us a story any...

[knock sfx]

Nanny Bea: minute now.

Nanny Bea: Why who could that be? Hello? Who is it?

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

Nanny Bea: And so it is, come in dear, and bring your story with you.

Jules: Hello Nanny Bea, you know I couldn't arrive empty handed. But today's tale is not quite what you might be expecting. Are you ready for a story?

Nanny Bea: Oh, yes please.

Jules: Okay then, Cowboy Chicken Ranch, adapted for radio

As you'd suspect this ranch has cows, it also has chickens but what it doesn't have, it hasn't had for a mighty long time. You see the ranch ran right along the coast, jutting out into the sea in fact, a conventional cowboy and some other cowpokes did what you'd expect of them. They farmed the fertile land, managed the lively livestock and generally maintained the grounds and the surrounds, that was until the storm of 1898, November 26th to be exact. This day was the first of two titled the 'Portland Gale', a hurricane and blizzard so fierce it sank over a hundred vessels and took many lives. This raging storm sent our cowboys inland as their ranch was surrounded by water, surrounded by ocean and not the place you wanna be during a storm like this. Now those cowhands, cowpokes or cowboys, whichever you take a liking to, had every intention of returning. The ranch was their business, their home, their life. Nothing could keep them away from it, except what kept them away.

Once the Portland Gale settled and the cowfolks headed back towards the ranch, they couldn't find it, they got to where the ranch was and it wasn't. All that was left behind was a rugged coast line where the ranch had broken off. Now our cowpals weren't altogether sure of the ranch's whereabouts, but they reckoned it had broken in pieces and sunk to the ocean floor taking the animals, the buildings and all the supplies with them. And that's what most folks'd think.

The chickens didn't. The chickens knew the truth, they lived the truth as the Portland Gale ripped their self-sustaining ranch from the side of the mainland and sent it drifting out to sea. The chickens didn't know how long they'd been a floating but it was long enough to get them far enough so they couldn't see the mainland any more. The rooster was trying to keep track of the days as usual but Rhodry had lost his cues, the sun rising and setting would set him off to crowing each morning, marking another day but the stormy skies were too black to tell day from night. Rhodry started crowing randomly, whenever he got bored, [insert crow] whenever he felt the urge [insert crow]. A rooster waking the day with his declaration gets a cowboy going, it wakes the chickens, rouses the cattle and sets your day a starting. But a rooster squawking and hollering all times of day [insert crow] sets your nerves on edge and this is what prompted the rise of the chicken cowboys. The hens prided themselves as the most civilised of the farmyard animals. They had an arrangement with the people, we give you eggs, you give us food. The hens did not realise how much they'd observed and absorbed from their people interactions, that was until their last nerve was shot by Rhodry and his crowing [insert crow]. We get it Rhodry. Ester, Nelly and Doris could take no more and during their usual knitting circle, hatched more than a few eggs, they'd hatched a plan [insert clucking].

Doris was a big bird, a bit scary if I'm to be totally honest, so she made it her job to keep Rhodry in check. Order must be restored and that started with a proper awakening and no false starts spouting out of Rhodry any hour of the day. Doris didn't even have to use her beak, she just turned to Rhodry each time he stepped out of line and did his pre crowing clearance, 'Uh, uh, um' he'd go, stretching out and filling his chest with air for a mighty...a mighty nothing as Doris'd turn sharply in his direction. Rhodry would shrink back and find another diversion.

Nelly was the smartest of the hens, so she took over the running of the ranch and employed a team of underlings to do as she told them to do. They had cows to milk, crops to harvest and plans to make.

Esther had the most sensitive role as she was the most sensitive hen. She was in charge of animal relations. All this change was mighty disruptive and someone had to keep the peace and cooperation. Hens could peck and that don't feel too good but all it would take is one cow to stomp or worse start a stampede and order would be destroyed. Nope, the hens needed all the animals on side if they were to keep this ranch running.

The early days were tough for sure. After Doris got Rhodry in line, she took on the food distribution, well the management of it. It was exhausting and not viable long term. Loading up one feed bin could take her all day and that's not allowing for the planting, tending and harvesting the food required. She needed inspiration and got that from the farm cat, Gwyndolyn, Gwyn as she was known to her friends was not a fan of hard work, she'd used her golden coat and fluffy tail to get pretty much anything she'd wanted from the people, but the chickens were immune to her charms so she had to find another way to get her way. Now as much as Gwyndolyn was lazy, she was cunning and put to good use, she could transform the Cowboy Chicken Ranch. She'd already managed to design for herself an automatic food trough, a cuddle box and a grooming board. In a matter of weeks Gwyn had automatized all the people's tasks so the lifestyle to which she'd become accustomed,

remained her custom. This wasn't without notice. The knitting circle, which managed to continue on Esther's insistence for the mental well being of the head Cowboy Chickens. Well Gwyn's ingenious solutions were often a feast for discussion during these sessions. It wasn't much of a leap for Nelly to ask Esther to ask Gwyn to meet with Doris to find some new feeding solutions for the rest of the ranch occupants.

Gwyn was reluctant at first but Esther came alongside Doris and convinced her that the food Gwyn was so happy to consume was a product of a fully functioning farm taking up half the land on this ranch if you exclude grazing land. As I told you, Gwyn was lazy but cunning. She could see where her bread was being buttered, literally, she loved buttered bread, so she agreed to advise, and only advise on the ways they could automate the Cowboy Chicken Ranch.

Well once Gwyn got started, she couldn't help herself and inventions popped up everywhere, there was the self driving tractor, the self milking parlour, the self shearing sheep pen. Thankfully they were able to harness the power of the sea and wind converting that to run all these contraptions.

Of course Esther, Nelly and Doris have since made their way to the hen house in the sky but they passed their skills on to the next generation who built upon and passed them on to the next generation, to the next, and to the next. The ranch is now so productive, they've turned to exporting some of their goods. Today and unknown to most people, The Cowboy Chicken Ranch floating out at sea is the largest supplier of dried pilchards throughout the world.

The End

Nanny Bea: Oh, thank you Jules. Well you know that I have a great respect for the exploits of the hen community. Why, my very own hen family have constructed an amusement park in my back garden. It did come as a big surprise to me one dark winter's night when I fell into the pit while trying to close their coop door.

Jules: You fell in the pit.

Nanny Bea: I fell in the pit that was later to become the base for the largest subterranean roller coaster in the world.

Jules: Oh I love roller coasters.

Nanny Bea: As do I but I'm afraid this one was just a prototype at $\frac{1}{3}$ scale. Large enough for the hens but sadly too small for the likes of you or I.

Jules: It all happens here Nanny Bea. I can't wait to join you again next week for more Tales and Tea.

Thomas: Go to NannyBea.com

Jules: Go there to find out about all our episodes including the transcript so you can read along with us. To get a reminder of the next episode's arrival, 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.