

Mina and the Moonlighters
by Jules de Jongh
Season 2 Episode 22

[opening theme music and strapline]

Nanny Bea: Oh good day to you and welcome to my cottage. Your timing is impeccable as my neighbour Jules will be bringing us a story any...

[knock sfx]

Nanny Bea: minute now.

Nanny Bea: And here she is. Hello? Is this who I think it is?

Jules: Hello Nanny Bea, if you think it's your neighbour Jules with a story, then it is.

Nanny Bea: Precisely, oh come dear, do come in, we are so looking forward to your visit.

Jules: Well I couldn't wait to get here. Today we have a story from the land of figs and roses, where the grasshoppers, crickets and frogs, oh! I shouldn't say anymore, I don't want to spoil it, just listen and you'll find out. Are you ready for a story?

Nanny Bea: Oh, yes please.

Jules: Okay then, Mina and the Moonlighters, adapted for radio

In the land of figs and roses, music seeped from the Fastandshiney home serenading neighbours of all makes and sizes. There were of course, the Shabanis, Madanis and Soltanis, families who refused refuge from the wicked air conditioning which they believed would steal their good health, turning instead to their balconies where they melted on their hot summer's eves. As rivers of salted water splashed across their brows, they were soothed into submission listening to Mina and her family play and sing. Even the smallest of creatures, grasshoppers, crickets and frogs made their way closer to hear Mina's family. Everyone in her household added a layer to the music. Mother would melt her golden voice over anything the family was playing and sing its melody to the night. Even her name, Ava means voice, as if her parents willed her to sing even though they were but the bows from which their child, a living arrow, was sent forth.

Mina's father could play any instrument in his hands but his hands were most often drawn to the violin. He could not resist, beyond Mother, Mina and her sister Sara, Father's violin was his most treasured girl. She was also his most obedient, sitting quietly in her case, poised waiting eagerly for the moment he picked her up. To father, this violin was his liver, and that,

it is said, is a good thing. A violin was not a traditional instrument in his land but all the same his family for generations passed it down, traditionally.

Sister Sara played the piano and the piano alone. As the oldest of three children, it was her selection to be made first, and she chose the piano. Father was forever seeking an empty seat to fill but Sara did not oblige him. It was in fact his desire to sit at that seat which prompted Father to purchase the piano, a grand one at that. It was of great value but of little cost as few had the room for an instrument of such size. They did not have room for an instrument of such size but tolerated its dominance, never complaining as they navigated their way around it. The largest feature of their apartment became a landing place for family pictures, so many in fact that Sara resisted lifting the lid fearing her mother's insistence that she dust each artifact in the process. This fear became a vow that Sara would live in the most minimal of homes when she was in her own, a home without trinkets or objects or any such item that hosted dust purely in exchange for its beauty to behold.

Although Sara was the oldest, many years the senior of Mina, they were an apple cut in half, two peas in a pod, cut from the same cloth. This twinning of their hearts made their separation that much harder when Sara left the family home. But what a waste it would be to keep such intellect, such passion in the cupboard rather than on the mantelpiece.

The seat at the piano would now have been open were it not for Sam. The brother of Mina held not an interest in the instrument, simply an interest in the agitation of their father. By nature a drummer but no longer. He would return to that pursuit another day. And even though Sam was clearly sitting in the seat that once was Sara's, Father would often say, 'Sara's place is empty,' as he missed her until his heart tightened. His love for her, although great, did not know its own depth until the hour they were separated.

But the music played on so the neighbours of all makes and sizes continued to listen.

In brother Sam talent rained from every one of his fingers. There was so much Sam could do that he did not know what to do, until his national service. At 18 every boy now man in the land was called upon to join the military. That is where Sam found his future, in the sky, flying over their apartment, flying over foreign lands, drumming on whatever he could find, drumming his crew to despair. With Sam gone the seat at the piano was now free and at last, Father found his place.

And the music played on so the neighbours of all makes and sizes continued to listen.

Mina knew exactly what to do with her future, the same as she did with her present, make music with every breath. It was the flute she cherished. It was but a second hand purchase in a faded grey case but when Mina played it was as though the breath of God passed through it. And although the red velvet lining was crushed smooth and shying away in places, the flute was perfection. When Mina played it, she was as proud as a peacock, boastful as if she'd fallen from the elephant's nose..

Late in the day Mina gazed upon her flute to find a mark not befitting its beauty. A quick cat washing would remedy the problem, nothing more than the smallest of rubs. But that rub alone was more than the flute could bear. No longer perfect, it had to be repaired.

But with Father on the piano and mother singing along, the music played on so the neighbours of all makes and sizes continued to listen.

Mina missed her flute more each minute and would ask of her father again and again when would it return. Father did not have the stomach to tell her that all he had was one raisin and forty dervishes, little money and many mouths to feed. It was not for Mina to know if this was the reason Father found work that took him far away. He so wished he could be with the family and his more profitable work but you cannot hold two watermelons in one hand.

With Father gone and Sam gone and Sara gone and Mina's flute gone, the music was gone, there was nothing for Mother to drape her golden voice over, nothing for the neighbours of all makes and sizes. The nights became a quiet place. The Shabanis, Madanis and Soltanis still perched on their balconies now in silence hiding from the air conditioning. Mother tried to fill the seats where the family used to sit with conversation but Mina grew more grey as the days moved on. If only mother could give her love as well as her thoughts. But Mina had thoughts of her own. Mother reminded her of what a salty person Mina once was, overflowing with laughter and charm.

The grasshoppers, crickets and frogs gathered close to her window thinking perhaps the music was there but very quiet. And when they listened closely they could hear something, the stream of tears from a little girl who wanted nothing more than to make music. It is then that the world turned upon its head. And if you listen closely you can hear what the grasshoppers, crickets and frogs had to say.

They too speak as poets in this land of figs and roses. The tears of Mina, a child who with her music turned the voice of the wind into a song made sweeter by her own loving, brought them to the window nearest.

The crickets were the first to speak, 'Let me circle round you!' they cried out to Mina but she could not understand. Through the window they could see as she turned her back to them.

The grasshoppers added, 'A flower has no back!' as even Mina turning their back to them could not offend.

Only the frogs were wise, 'You cry out to her but she does not hear. Your nightingale talking, your flattery is nothing to her but noise.'

The grasshoppers understood, the crickets did not but remained quiet in hopes time would reveal the meaning.

The frogs continued, 'You know that joy is just sorrow unmasked, from the selfsame well from which her laughter rose these tears now fall. She is weeping for that which has been her delight. It is this music we must restore.'

The crickets and grasshoppers began chirping in confusion, how were they to make music when they had no instruments to play. And what of music did the frogs know anyway?

To this the frogs took offence, and the rest of the night was more silent than before as the creatures said no more.

The next night it was the crickets once again who were the first to speak, 'We do not wish to be a reed, dumb and silent, when all else sings together in unison.'

The grasshoppers and frog remained silent, not that they held the grudge of a camel, simply that they were unaccustomed to hearing the crickets speaking such wisdom.

Finally the frogs and grasshoppers replied together as if they had telepathy between their hearts, 'We must dig deep within our souls and make music for her this night.'

Before this night, these grasshoppers, crickets and frogs had never made music before, oh they would chirp and gribbit to Mina's music but nothing more. So at once they found from deep within the fullness of their work, a part of earth's furthest dream, assigned to them when the dream was born. Before this night they were on lookers walking half asleep, not realising all they were created to be but now;

The cricket found his melody on the end of his wings,

The grasshopper found his song on his legs,

And the frog found his voice, his Ava, from within his throat.

Together they found their music, the language of their spirit. The song was so loud that all in the land of figs and roses stopped to listen, the Shabanis, Madanis and Soltanis, even Mina and her mother, the fastandshineys, heard the music in the moonlight and the gift of music was restored.

The End

Nanny Bea: Oh, thank you Jules. Why just last night it was a particularly balmy one and I heard my local cricket band. They, they kindly invited me to join in and I, I must tell you it has been some time since I've picked up my didgeridoo but it all came back to me, like riding a bull.

Jules: Don't you mean riding a bike.

Nanny Bea: A bicycle good heavens no, I forget how to ride mine all the time but a bull, once ridden, never forgotten.

Jules: Yes, I would find that hard to forget.

Nanny Bea: Oh and before I do, will you be joining us again soon.

Jules: Of course I will, I'll be back 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.