

Mariuccia and the Meatballs
by Jules de Jongh
Season 2 Episode 27

[opening theme music and strapline]

Nanny Bea: Oh jolly good, we have our first visitor, make yourselves comfortable, grab a cup of tea if you wish and prepare yourselves for another tale from my neighbour Jules who will be here any...

[knock sfx]

Nanny Bea: minute now.

Nanny Bea: Wait right there, I will see who that is? Hello, who is it?

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

Nanny Bea: How fortuitous we were just talking about you. Hello, do come in, come in .

Jules: Why thank you Nanny Bea. You know we've got more than a story for you this week, we've got a caller with a Wonder Word.

[insert wonder word jingle]

Lola: Hi Nanny Bea. My name's Lola . I've got this week's Wonder Word which is...

[insert drum roll]

Lola: Hodgepodge. A hodgepodge is a jumble, things in disorder. My pencil case is a hodgepodge. I'm the only one that can find my way around it. That's all for now, bye.

[insert chimes]

Jules: Thank you Lola. Now we all have to keep our ears open for hodgepodge. See if you can find it in today's tale! Are you ready for a story?

Nanny Bea: Oh, yes please.

Jules: Okay then, Mariuccia and the Meatballs, adapted for radio

Meatballs were around long before Mariuccia but not these meatballs. These meatballs were lovingly hand mixed and mushed and rolled into perfection one summer's afternoon when school was out and Andrea was in, Nonna Mariuccia's kitchen that is.

The entire family was coming over this weekend for a celebration, of what we aren't quite sure but they'll take any excuse to gather together. There'd be uncles and aunts, cousins and nephews, any sister, brother, father or mother that was remotely related would be invited.

Andrea was recruited by Nonna Mariuccia not because he was her favourite, although he was, but because his passion for meatballs could not be matched. He'd spend hours patiently assisting Nonna without argument or hesitation, all so he could be the one, the one and only to taste test them.

Nonna had her favourite recipe, but she always set aside a portion of meat to be flavoured at will by Andrea. He'd troll through her cupboards adding a hodgepodge of herbs and spices and bits and bobs, not all his combinations were successful like the cinnamon and blue cheese meatballs or the sea salt and watermelon meatballs but Nonna never interfered. Those were his meatballs to season, to cook and to ultimately taste. He didn't always get it wrong either, sometimes he got it very right like when he swapped the coriander for the parsley in Nonna's 5 generation recipe. Nonna changed the 5 generation recipe, it was that good.

This meatball making day was a hot and sticky one squishing the cool minced pork and beef through his fingers was a welcome contrast to the weather. They mixed in the garlic mushed around the sausage and rolled each scoop into a tight little ball, not so little you could eat them in one bite, unless of course you were Uncle Ricardo who could suck the meat off a quail in one swipe. In the normal mouth, these perfectly formed meatballs were two bites worth, so you had to notice each one, cut them in half and admire the hodgepodge of herbs and bits speckled throughout. Sometimes when Andrea's personal creations were top tier, he'd tuck them into Nonna's batch and follow them to their diners plate so he could watch as they were hit with Andrea's surprise addition. It was obvious when they reached the Andrea meatballs as there'd be a squeal or a hmm of intrigue or delight. This was the second best part of making meatballs with Nonna, after the personal taste test of course.

Today Andrea had plans to add fennel and figs to one batch and paprika and peaches to another. Nonna made a point of not making a point about his choices, 'the evidence is in the eating,' she said and she meant it. Once all the balls were mixed and mushed and rolled they would go into the refrigerator stacked on trays, all except one of Nonna's for Nonna and one of Nonna's for Andrea and one of each of Andrea's for Andrea, and one of each of Andrea's for Nonna. Okay, that sounds confusing I know, but basically they end up with one of each flavour, each. If Andrea's passes the test, that batch would be added to the refrigerated ones.

'It is time Polpetto,' Nonna said to Andrea. Time to taste the meatballs. Nonna made a pile of spaghetti and mounded 1, 2, 3 meatballs, one of each flavour for Andrea to taste but first he named his pride and joy, one Benny one Bob. Nonna's meatballs preferred not to be named. Now no plate of spaghetti would be complete without a sprinkling of parmesan cheese. So there it was, on top of spaghetti all covered in cheese, Andrea's three meatballs 'til he happened to sneeze, one rolled off the table and onto the floor, then Andrea's poor meatball

rolled out the front door, and it just so happens Enzo the neighbour's dog was passing by, fancied a meatball and gulped it in one bite much like Uncle Ricardo.

Andrea was devastated, he'd only made one paprika and peaches meatball and now it was gone. Benny the meatball was no more, never to be tasted, never to be recreated as Andrea's hodgepodge of ingredients were added without the aid of measuring implements, without the crutch of a recipe. A fleeting moment in time. Bob the lonely experimental meatball sat beside Nonna's recipe feeling like a spectacle with his vibrant fig pieces poking out here and there. Andrea could see he was uncomfortable so ate him at once. Fennel and figs could be a contender.

The rest of the day distracted Andrea until he found himself fast asleep and dreaming of meatballs, two meatballs in fact by the names of Benny and Bob.

'Hey, is that you Benny?' Bob said both confused and excited.

'It is me. And is that you Bob?' Bob shook his head yes.

'Well what do you know?' Benny said in wonder.

Bob, being a meatball didn't really understand the saying so he answered the rhetorical question, 'I know that I saw you roll off the table and onto the floor, and then you poor meatball rolled out the front door. It wasn't a pretty picture my friend. And without you I felt like a spectacle with my vibrant fig pieces poking out here and there sitting beside Nonna's meatball perfection. I couldn't take it buddy.' Bob started to tear up.

Benny did the honourable thing and set his mind at ease, 'S'all good dude. I went on the ride of my life. That Enzo he licks himself something awful but if you ignore the dog hair, the trip was totally awesome. I went into his barking hole and down this esy fogus tunnel and straight into the stow mach bowl. Oh we had some awesome times there hanging out with the other things he swallowed. I'm talking about bottle tops, coins, rubber bands a hodgepodge of anything you find on the floor. I'm telling you dude, Enzo has no limits to what he'll swallow.'

'I too went down one of them esy fogus tunnels but the belly of Andrea had nothing but the finest food. It was a who's who of food stuffs, you know what I mean. But now look at us, together again.'

'Totally. I mean what are the odds?' Benny said with another rhetorical question. Meatball Bob once again took this too literally and started working out the odds but being a not too bright meatball that took longer than Andrea's dream and longer than our story.

The End

Nanny Bea: Oh Jules you and your stories. As if a meatball could speak, a sausage roll, perhaps but a meatball, never.

Jules: Oooo a talking sausage roll, you might just have something there Nanny Bea.

Nanny Bea: You mean a story seed that you can grow into a full sized tale.

Jules: Exactly! I'll put it in my seed box and see if it sprouts. You know we take story seeds from any of our listening friends so do get in touch.

Thomas: Go to NannyBea.com

Jules: Go there to find out more about story seeds and being on the show like our talented caller Lola. You can like or follow us on iTunes or Spotify to get a reminder. And come back next week for more Tales and Tea.

[Be on the Show jingle]

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

(Bonus not included in recording)

Nonna Mariuccia's Meatball (Polpettine) Recipe

Minced Beef
Sausage Meat
Pieces of cooked Ham, ground into tiny pieces
Boiled Potato mashed
Ground Parmesan Cheese
Garlic
Parsely
Salt
Pepper
Egg, beaten

Egg, beaten & Breadcrumbs kept separate

Mix together first list of ingredients, divide into balls. Roll balls in another beaten egg then breadcrumbs, fry in oil and enjoy.