

Grażyna Lutosławska

Human things

a radio play

Opening credits:

Papers, photographs...

The drawer got sometimes offended. She could be silent for a week or two.

The coffee can. Old.

One day the telephone fell in love with the string.

It did not fall apart. It is good.

Hello, I'm here!

If the button had ears, maybe he would listen.

The chair from the skip.

The washing machine decided that she no longer wanted to be a washing machine.

The shoes came back from the walk.

The title of the radio play:

Human things

The woman's tale.

I do not like cleaning. But when I clean up... Oh, the ambers... the beads... I look at them and I immediately remember my mother in a lilac-pink dress. She used to wear these beads. I do not wear them. I have little jewellery. But I will not throw them out.

The tale of the ball:

There, there, there - the ball jumped. And then she rolled down the road and stopped at the curb.

'Hello! I'm here!' she called to the backpack she had fallen out of. But the backpack was already far away.

A crack in the curb heard it and said, 'Don't yell, you are not on the pitch.'

‘What is this place?’ the ball looked around. ‘It’s hard here. Loud. Who are they running after? I am here. Hello! I’m here!’ She shouted at the cars in the street.

‘They aren’t running, they’re driving,’ the crack could not understand how somebody would not know the simplest things. ‘And they’d better not notice you because they’ll flatten you.’

‘Me? The ball snorted. ‘It’s out of the question. I must be round. I have to roll. I have to be in the spotlight and others have to run around me. Or follow me. They can run in front of me, but only to read my thoughts and wait for my move. I am the one to tell others what to do.’

‘You talk a lot,’ said the crack.

‘It’s not nice here, I’ll roll over to my place,’ the ball decided, but she did not move.

‘What’s that? How’s it possible?’

‘And how would you like it to be?’ the crack laughed.

‘Normally. To the left, to the right, straight, a pirouette here, a spinner there and, hop, to the goal.’

‘Wow, what plans you have!’ sneered the crack. ‘They have lost you and they don’t seem to be looking for you.’

‘Forget it. I can handle it myself,’ the ball raised her voice, but she still lay where it fell.

‘What? How? What’s going to happen now?’

‘It seems to be your fate,’ said the crack. ‘You can’t do anything. You’ll be lying here until someone finally sees you and wants to take you with them.’

‘What? When they want? It’s me who wants it!’ the ball inflated. ‘Me! Me! Me!’ she kept repeating, inflating more and more until she finally burst.

‘Well, you won’t make a pirouette now,’ the crack looked at her closely.

‘Well, we’ll sssssssee,’ the ball hissed and fell silent because all the air had escaped from her.

And she was right. A moment later a truck drove past her, and the rush of air lifted the flat ball up. She made two turns and flew away.

But where, nobody knows. Who cares about the flying saucer that thinks she is a ball.

The woman's tale.

These scales are antique. I got them from a neighbour. They are great scales! Medical. My daughter uses them to weigh her suitcase when she flies away. The weight is always perfect. The suitcase weighs exactly the same as at the airport. You can measure yourself, you can weigh yourself. I don't dare. The neighbour was cool. The neighbour was very cool. We have some space, so we keep the scales at home. And later, if you want, you can give them away to the scrap yard. But only when we are gone. After us. And this is a magnifying glass. Ophthalmologist glasses are sometimes too weak. Pressmen are awful: they print such small letters. And if a book has small letters, I don't want to read it. The right print at the right age is very important. And the right eyesight, too.

The tale of the drone:

If he wanted, he could see everything. On top of everything else, he could see a pair of new skates that was on display just waiting to run across the ice. Meanwhile, the climate was changing and everyone wanted to wear wellies. But not him, the drone. He was above wellies, and above all skates, and above all. He could fly here or there.

Watch this or that. But he did not want to.

He was standing on the ground dozing off.

'Move,' said the ants. 'You can't just stand here and do nothing.'

'Rise up,' the sparrows suggested. 'You'll see how pleasant it is.'

'Later...' the drone stretched his propellers. 'I need to rest first.'

'You haven't done anything, you haven't looked at anything yet,' the astonished bees stopped collecting honey.

'But I'm ready,' the drone moved his metal wings lazily. 'And this is very tiring.'

'Ready for what?' asked at once the ants, the sparrows and the bees.

'To see,' the drone answered.

'Then open your eyes and see. After all, you were made to look.'

'When the time comes, you'll see how I can see,' the drone murmured and fell asleep.

The days went by. The drone did not move, only slept. One day, rain fell from the sky. Not because of climate change, but because it got tired of hanging in the clouds.

‘Move,’ said the ants. ‘You’re getting wet.’

‘Get up,’ the sparrows suggested. ‘You’re getting rusty.’

‘Later...,’ the drone did not move an inch. ‘I need to rest first.’

The rain rustled, spat out, and went back up and the drone was still asleep.

The days went by as it was their task.

Suddenly... hop! A mosquito jumped on the drone. He kneeled him with his heels and boomed:

‘Giddy-up!’

The drone opened his eyes and rushed forward because he had forgotten that he was not a horse.

‘Crazy, the drone went crazy,’ everyone whispered: the ants, the sparrows, the bees, even the pair of new skates. Only the rain said nothing because it disappeared due to climate change.

But the drone did not hear it. He sped straight ahead until he tripped over a stone, fell over and scattered. And so he lies and sleeps, still ready to get up and look as soon as he wants to.

The woman’s tale.

I like some of these things very much. And I don’t want to get rid of them. Although they bother me. Sometimes they clutter the flat. They clutter and limit the space. And that’s why I would like to throw them away sometimes.

I don’t like throwing away furniture. Unless someone takes it apart. They can make a sculpture out of it. Maybe it could get a second life.

Some things I like to change. If I feel bad, for example, I have a cabinet that I paint in different colours. Painting furniture is, therefore, a type of therapy. The cabinet is sometimes blue, sometimes green, and sometimes golden-white, scratched, worn, it is different each time. I think that the cabinet is happy, too. Oh, here you go, it is still unfinished, it will be a bit more golden, a bit more coppery, I will add some white and

some green. It will be colourful. These are good colours. The colours of water, the setting sun, maybe a bit of winter (because here you can see a white ray). I like it. Earlier the cabinet was blue. Later, more turquoise, and now it looks like that.

The tale of the pots:

Once a pot bragged to another pot that he can cook.

‘I can do it, too,’ the second pot shrugged his lid.

‘You can’t do anything,’ the pot who bragged first snorted with sauce.

‘I know how to make tomato soup, hunter’s stew,’ the second pot tapped with his lid.

‘And of course, noodles.’

‘Phi,’ the first pot snorted the second time. ‘I can cook a sauce! And everyone knows that sauces are the hardest. The sauce must be brewed carefully. Must be seasoned subtly. And stirred carefully.’

He bragged and boasted until he splashed some sauce on the stove. The sauce got burnt and caused trouble. The pot began to wipe off the stain. He wiped and wiped, but the stain was still there and she screamed:

‘Am I worse than everybody else? If others are, they just are, and as soon as I appear, you have to get rid of me right away!’ she said firmly.

But because the pot was not the submissive type, he continued scrubbing. Finally, the stain disappeared. In her place scratches appeared.

‘Great! You have cooked it right, man!’ the second pot mocked the first one; the first one covered himself tightly with the lid and pretended that he had nothing to do with it all.

Meanwhile, the scratches grew and swelled with each passing day, because if they did appear, why should they sit curled up. Some straightened their ends, some wrapped themselves, some swayed sideways.

‘Get out of here!’ shouted the pot in which the sauces were being boiled because he did not like the new company at all. The scratches distracted him and he could not focus on brewing carefully, seasoning subtly and stirring carefully.

‘They’ll take up the whole stove soon,’ the pot in which the noodles were being cooking was getting nervous. Because of the nerves, he splashed some water all over the place.

The water soaked in the scratches and after some time the stove began to rust.

‘See what you’ve done,’ the pot of sauce was telling the pot of noodles off.

‘Me?! It’s all because of you,’ the latter one defended himself. ‘If you hadn’t bragged like that, nothing would have happened!’

‘If you had listened to me and had understood that I was better, everything would have been as before,’ the pot of sauce knew different.

Instead of cooking, they quarreled until they finally burned both the sauce and the noodles. Because of all the scrubbing, scratches formed on their bottoms.

Soon a new stove appeared, and new pots on the new stove. And everything was fine - until the day when one pot told the other one that he could cook.

The woman’s tale.

An old sewing machine. This is a machine from 1938 from the Krakow company Adria. It is very pretty. It works. It has a perpetual warranty. An eternal warranty. My husband sewed on it very nice things: trousers - he sewed me a pair of nice trousers, tablecloths - he could work very well on the edge. Such a husband and such a machine are hard to find.

The tale of the washing machine:

That day the washing machine decided that she no longer wanted to be a washing machine.

‘I go round and round. I’m so clean and so boring. I want to be dirty. It must be much more interesting.’

And then she said to the dishwasher, ‘How far can you go? Well, darling, tell me how far? How long can you do the same thing over and over again?’

But the dishwasher said nothing, it just swish-swash-swoosh washed the dishes.

‘Washing, spinning, washing, spinning over and over again. For once, if I could just drop it all and walk ahead...’ the washing machine fantasized.

But the dishwasher still said nothing, because it was busy.

‘I’d go to where all the stained sweaters come from,’ the washing machine murmured.

‘Smutty dresses, shirts with marks... I wonder where they get so dirty?’

And the dishwasher washed and washed.

‘It must be fascinating,’ the washing machine continued, ‘to smear, to smudge, to splash, to spatter, to drip, to drabble, to soil...’ Here it had to pause. Her door slammed with another portion of laundry.

‘How-far-can-you-go-well- dar-ling-how-far...’ she repeated over and over throughout the washing, until spinning, because then she could not talk and work simultaneously anymore.

After two hours, everything was clean. The washing machine opened her door and first threw out the clothes, and then she washed and spun words: ‘How... can...go...well... ling... far...’ then she fell silent, because she ceased to understand what she wanted to say.

And the dishwasher still said nothing because she was resting after work.

‘You won’t see anything in your life, you’ll see,’ the washing machine tried to scare her in the evening.

And the dishwasher, like the dishwasher, kept silent.

‘Go on, stay here and do the washing-up. I wonder what will come of it. I’m going.

How far can you go? Well, tell me how far? How long can you do the same thing over and over again?’ she said and left.

She walked and walked until she came across a puddle. She jumped into it, smeared, smudged, splashed, spattered, dripped, drabbled and soiled, and finally she was happy.

‘Well, now I can go home and wash and spin for the rest of my life,’ she said. So she did as she decided. But when they saw her at home, they immediately threw her in the trash, because washing machines are not made to be washed. And the dishwasher, which during this time worked itself to her death, was waiting for her in the dustbin.

They embraced and decided to start a second life.

The woman's tale.

A chair from the skip. This is it. Thirty years ago a neighbour brought it to me and said: I was at the skip, I looked around, and there was such a beautiful chair there, I thought it would be just right for you. I painted the chair and it got a second life. It's been with me up till now. You can sit on it, it is stable, it doesn't wobble, you can climb on it. I am not a light and weightless woman, and when I stand, I feel confident on it. I prefer this chair to a ladder.

The tale of the shoes:

The shoes came back from the walk. The right one pleased, the left one resentful. 'We should have gone left,' the resentful shoe wrinkled his nose until water leaked out. 'I'm sure there were no puddles on the left.'

'A little water hasn't hurt anyone yet,' the right shoe shuffled his sole with satisfaction and began to untangle his wet laces. 'What a refreshing bath it was!'

'I hate bathing! Just wait and see, I'll get a runny nose,' whined the left one.

'No shoe has ever had a runny nose,' the right one jerked out snuggling down on the shelf.

'Since we have noses, we can also have a runny nose. Oh, oh, I feel... A... a...,' the left shoe took a deep breath and almost sneezed, but stopped between "a" and "choo" because he just remembered something. 'I've wanted to ask you something for some time now: why do we always have to go where you want?'

'Because you say where you want to go only after we return home,' answered the right one.

'Tomorrow will be different,' the left one said and fell asleep.

He dreamed that they went for a walk. Just behind the threshold, the right shoe, as always, turned right, and then he, the left one, stamped his sole, and they turned left. The road was flat and dry, so they marched comfortably and briskly. The right shoe looked at the left one with admiration and thought: 'Wow, I will go far when I listen to the left shoe.' And the left shoe said nothing but carried his nose proudly upturned.

Suddenly there was a crunch! Clang! Grind! Oh! They stepped on the glass. Their soles were sliced, their laces were cut, their noses were scratched. And what now? The right shoe looked at the left shoe with reproach, but said nothing because his tongue was damaged, although he would like to say a couple of things. Well, that was it.

It was supposed to be the end of the shoes, and then the left shoe woke up. And when they went for a walk, he remembered that today he was the one to decide which way they would turn.

‘We’re goin’ right!’ he shouted briskly, though not very clearly, because he had a runny nose.

‘You didn’t like it there, we were supposed to go left,’ said the right one.

‘And what if it’s dangerous there?’ the left one mumbled. ‘We’d better go right.’

‘There are puddles there,’ said the right one. ‘Some can be very deep.’

But the left shoe was already on the doorstep marching to the right.

‘Stop! Wait for me!’ the right shoe tied up his laces quickly.

Before he finished, he heard a loud splash, and then a quieter: pop, pop, pop...

Luckily, everything ended well, because it turned out that if shoes could have a runny nose, they could also swim. Maybe one day they would even learn to walk straight?

The woman’s tale.

Cassette tapes and films. My dad made amateur films. On the 8mm tape. Me and my mother were on those films. There were few such amateur filmmakers in those days. It was the fifties and sixties of the last century. I found one film. Oh, that’s the tape. And there are little figures on it. It’s me in the first grade “A”. Two classes went for a walk that day. A total of ninety children - there were forty-five people in each class. We were dressed in school aprons and in these aprons we rolled downhill. My dad called it: “Elżunia’s first trip”.

The tale of the phone:

One day the telephone fell in love with the string.

‘With the string? What – the string? Why with the string?’ everyone asked. ‘Are there few phones? A phone wouldn’t be enough for him? What did he mean by that?’

For the time being, the telephone did not say anything about it, although he could, because first of all, he was a telephone, and secondly, this feeling did not happen every day. Let others find out how great interspecific love could be. In the meantime, everyone was laughing, ‘a telephone and a string, what a pair.’

The telephone was looking at the string that was rolled up on the shelf, not more than two handsets from him. He watched and fantasized that one day the string would look at his display and see that no one could love as much as he does, a cordless phone, because he was a mobile phone.

Days went by. The telephone was still in love and the string was still rolled up. And it would have been like that until today, if not for the fact that the phone battery had run down. It died suddenly, without warning, and there was nothing that could restart it. The phone was lying down and kept silent, that is, this time not only did he not speak about love, but he said nothing at all. Not a sausage! He was a telephone after all, and that was his task: to speak. Who, with whom, when, with whom, by whom, about whom, in whom, with whom, for whom, why, why for. That is why. The phone was sometimes wrong, but only somebody who says nothing, does not make mistakes. And the phone spoke because he was used as a means of communication. Without battery, however, he was u-se-less! So he ended up in a cardboard box under the table in which useless things lay. He barely got there, then he fell out of it, because it turned out that the box was full. The cardboard box was pulled out and the phone cramped. He managed to think that it was over, that he would never see the string, and that was when he saw her!

The string was uncoiling. She was beautiful. Long, twisted, she was writhing in the air like a headless kite. She wrapped around the cardboard, and because the phone was on top, they suddenly became very close. And then the phone felt his energy return! He could speak again who, with whom and when, with whom, by whom, about whom, in whom, with whom, for whom, whom, why and even why for. He could, but he did not

want to. So he pretended that he was still broken and went off into the blue with the string.

They certainly lived happily ever after somewhere, because that is the aim of every true love.

The woman's tale.

And here we throw away ash... I've always wanted a fireplace. We brought a cool pair of fireplace scissors from Portugal.

In fact, I don't have much desire to own stuff. I didn't get the habit of collecting things from when I was a child. My dad lost everything in a moment. Before the war, he lived in Lviv, and when the Soviets came, the family had to leave the flat within three hours. They never taught me... I don't know what to call it... My dad used to say: today you have it, tomorrow you don't, it doesn't matter - the most important thing is what you have in your head. And in the soul. Whether you have this armchair or another, it doesn't matter at all.

Once something funny happened. Well, now I think it was funny, but it wasn't funny at the time. I was ten then, I came home after school, my mum came back from work, we looked around, and there were no chairs at home! My dad came home and my mum asked him: where are our chairs? And my dad said: there was a fire in the house of the family who lived nearby, everything burned, so I gave them our chairs because they had nothing to sit on. And my mum said: well, yes, but now we have nothing to sit on. And my dad said: there is one chair left over there ... So there was no excessive attachment to things in our home. My father lost everything, but he survived. He died when he was ninety. And I think you can survive without stuff.

Although some things are indeed lovely. For example, the old coffee can. I got it from a friend who is already dead. The can is a beautiful stand for a flower pot. "Roasted coffee", it says so here. It's a pre-war can. Beautiful letters. The can is green. Nice green. Olive. The letters are golden with a black rim. It looks great under this flower. I went to school with this friend and we liked each other very much. The can has good energy. And I like such things.

The tale of the button:

The old button narrowed his old eyes because sometimes he got bored looking at the old boards of the drawer.

‘I’m not that old,’ the drawer said indignantly, as the needle laughed at her three aged knots and the hole left after the fourth one, which one day slipped away never to return.

‘He must have found a younger drawer. You are useless,’ the needle mocked her. ‘It’s good that nobody opens you, because you would fall apart completely.’

‘But you’re lying inside me, you and the button,’ the drawer creaked.

‘I’m here only temporarily,’ the needle assured her. ‘Just watch it - somebody will reach for me.’

‘You don’t have eyes to see,’ the drawer reminded the needle.

‘But I have an ear and I will definitely hear someone approaching.’

The needle tended to forget that the tip from the side of her ear was missing, so the ear was not really there.

‘There won’t be any sewing,’ the old drawer, however, had a good memory. ‘You don’t have an ear. You are useless.’

‘Maybe I’m no good for sewing, but I am!’ the needle flared up. ‘I heard that I would be useful as a pin.’

They kept arguing, and the button looked at them indifferently.

‘Do you think you are more indispensable than me?’, the needle teased him when she had no one to talk to. The drawer sometimes got offended and kept silent for a week or two. ‘Well, you’re not,’ the needle replied to herself. She knew that it would not say a word. He was silent from the day he got to the lowest drawer in the garage locker. ‘I still have a chance, but your coat is long gone. I heard him getting into the car.’

Luckily, the button had no ears, so it still had a hope. He was lying down, looking at the bottom of the drawer above him, waiting and dreaming that one day he would see his coat again.

‘How’s he doing?’ he was worried. ‘The wind must be blowing him without me. He needs me. He’s definitely looking for me.’ And one day he decided, ‘I will reach out to him. And he rolled towards the knot hole.

‘What are you doing? You’d better not leave, lie here and they will find you,’ the needle advised him. But the button decided to take matters into his own hands.

‘You have no hands,’ the drawer remarked knowingly. If the button had ears, maybe he would listen, but he did not, so he jumped into the knot hole and rolled toward the exit. But on the way he fell into a mouse hole and never came out of it again.

One day the garage was demolished to make way for a modern, multi-storey car park. Under the rubble, the old drawer and the needle were killed, which did not manage to be useful as a pin. The mice had to move to another place. They never needed the button, but since they were not aware of it, they took the button with them and everyone lived happily ever after.

The woman’s tale.

The most important thing in my house: the kitchen dresser. It was at my grandmother’s. It was at my aunt’s. And now it is at my place. I learned to walk next to this dresser. My mother also learned to walk next to it. It has not fallen apart, it is good and capacious. Yes, I like such things. It’s also magical because it has crystal glass. As the sun goes through the window, jolly light reflections appear on the wall. And if I want to laugh at myself, I look in the mirror that is in the dresser. It distorts my face. I look at it and think that if I get angry with someone, I probably look like the reflection in this mirror. Then I immediately start thinking differently about my life.

There is a picture of my mother on the dresser. She was very cheerful.

If I had to move out, I could only take the dresser. And start all over again.