

'Okay, I'll read this to you 'though you have to understand that I'm not an experienced writer and this is an early draft. It's in two parts and the second part is still a work in progress. There's so much I want to change, I'm just trying stuff out...'

'Will you just read it to me...please?'

I took a deep breath. I started to read.

A Realist's Nightmare: A Story in Two Parts (Part One)

'It was morning and I was in my living room, I looked at the furniture and objects around me and they seemed ordinary and familiar, things I could take for granted. No one else was there. In fact I'd never invited anyone to my home as I didn't normally mind being alone. I felt that other people might create disruption whereas I liked to be in control, but my usual sense of being was troubled by a sudden inability to remember the names for many things. What I now know as the table for example, I could then only think of as *hard, flat, square, wooden surface on legs, bought the same week I moved into this flat*. A decline in my linguistic capability was almost understandable as I hadn't spoken to anyone for weeks, however, the devastating failure of reality that followed was a complete surprise.

'The first thing to go was the table. I was flicking through a Jorge Pardo monograph, when I realised the cascading pages were not the only movement in the room. The corner of my eye caught a sudden change. I looked up, and on the floor, in the spot where the desk had formerly stood, was a vaguely rectangular puddle-like mass of melted matter. I must have gone into a state of shock. As I stared into the amorphous blob that

was once a table, I could make out a number of twisted metallic strands that looked like elongated nails or screws and, running right through it, were the distinctive curving lines of the grain of the wood. Without getting up I lent forward, and allowed my outstretched fingers to make hesitant contact with the mass. It surrendered with an oddly pleasurable sensuality against the weight of my hand.

'I had barely shifted back into my chair when I realised that what I now remember is called a standard lamp, was beginning to melt too, although there was no heat in the room so it couldn't have melted but that's the best way to describe the transfiguration from a solid form. I wanted to go to a window to see if this phenomenon was occurring anywhere else, and I would have done so if I could have moved. I held fast to the arms of the chair. I was able to remember what it was called and wasn't going to let it go. It was as if there was some sort of unidentified new force in the world that certain objects had the ability to withstand, whilst others were unable to maintain their coherence.

'I desperately wanted an explanation. I'm fairly down-to-earth generally, in fact I tend to concur with some of Roy Bhaskar's Critical Realist assertions about how objects, people, even ideas, really exist. I believe these things exist externally to my mind, independently of my knowledge and perception of them and that they're grounded in the everyday normality of social relations. I know all the objects around me are always already shifting and contingent but I don't believe reality is reducible to an individual's knowledge or a particular experience. I wouldn't allow myself to think this sudden distortion of reality had anything to do with my imagination.

'I remember my contempt at Humean Idealism and the sort of theory that claims concrete objects are nothing more than

a bundle of properties and relations. A table would be just a collection of oak and joining materials, a combination of rectangularity and flatness, and a particular relation to function due to its shape and position in a room. There would of course be other consequences to such theories if they were true. If the only real thing is the idea, the object would then just have a momentary presence, and any sense that it appeared to endure through time would simply be the experience of a series of these momentary objects. In reading up about these ideas, I may have allowed myself a moment of doubt, which had then seeped into the room and was spreading from object to object, like an infectious disease.

'I forgot the name of the garment I wear over my clothes to keep me warm. It had been hanging on the back of the locker door, it now slid down the metal surface, I saw it glisten as it caught the light, slipping over the handle and shifting until it abandoned itself to become a fibrous mass on the floor. By now I was frightened. I knew I would have to get up at some point but I couldn't move. I sat rigidly in my chair, my hands gripping its arms until sitting and watching the things that I believed in collapse became intolerable. I forced myself up and stumbled out into the hallway, pulling the door to the living room firmly shut behind me. The end (of part one).'

When I stopped I realised I had become increasingly excited as I read. I thought of myself as categorically different to this woman with her weirdo-perverse compulsion to expose, but I had enjoyed the quiet disclosure of my private imaginings. I couldn't look up at her, I just felt ashamed at the sound of my words and my temporary loss of control. I should never have let her persuade me to read the text.

A Realist's Fantasy: A Story in Two Parts (Part Two)

'I was standing in the hallway of my flat, drained and confused, having been in an anxious state for the entire day, still I was determined to face my living room. If objects could mutate in the way they had this morning, then it was possible that everything had just as bizarrely returned to normal, but my optimism passed with the difficulty I was having in opening the door. I soon stopped trying to get in. I held the handle, sensing its solidity as a sort of secure and fixed spot, a full stop against whatever was on the other side. I concentrated on the words for things I could see in the hallway: a telephone, a mirror, a bag, the door. I sat down on the floor, taking the Jorge Pardo monograph out of my bag, indulging my hands and eyes with the smooth glossy paper, smart sharp printed words and the superior colour reproduction of carefully designed objects. Pardo's house always impressed me as a piece of realist sculpture. It seemed extraordinary that he made the house as an artwork but fabricated it with enough particularity for it to become a real home that he now lives in. Something fell out of the book. It was a business card: *Fantastist/Realist*, and there was a number. I remembered the woman this belonged to, her sense of the volatile fragility of language.

'The living room door finally gave way to the determined pressure of my shoulder. There was now a gap just wide enough to allow me to get in, and a thick turgid stew of matter to spill out. I trudged across the room, moving quite cautiously through the sticky aberration. It was a stagnant swamp of grossly distorted partial forms and yet there was something beautiful about its lack of compositional restraint. I stood knee deep in it, looking at shimmering scatterings of sand and molten shards of what was previously solid, there were unbound fibres of curtain fabric, free-flowing colours and shapes, memories

and associations. Amidst the multiformity, I noticed the sharply defined corner of a box-like form virtually intact suspended in distended swirls of vibrant plastic and I saw the anxiety in my face in a reflective puddle of black oil. I knew I was in my home but I was far from the taken-for-granted familiarity of the everyday objects I could live with.

'I felt the strength in my legs, the resistance that kept me upright, starting to give way, compelling me to sink down until I was semi-engulfed by the decomposing sludge. I lay back, allowed the swirling mass to take me and my thoughts with it, held my arms above the surface and saw the woman's business card still there in my hand. I remembered the threat of a loss of composure in her narration, the debased being-there of her words. I needed to explore intelligent, less fevered fantasies with her, simple things, to talk and experience the sharing of power, vulnerability and exposure: the glistening, flickering intimacy of storytelling.

'I looked up and could see into the hallway where the telephone was still on the wall. I decided to call the woman and invite her into my living room. After the events of the morning, I was concerned about the implications of not knowing her name, but I reckoned, what the hell, I'd just have to choose my words very carefully. The end.'

A.C.