

Mr. Standish

A dark city full of dark buildings. Mr. Standish lived there. Dark people full of dark thoughts. Mr. Standish among them. A city full of walls. Walls wretched, walls tall, walls rising, at every turn surprising. Images sprang out of the walls, flickering and gasping in their disbelief of reality on the streets. Buy, buy, and buy. Buy things you cannot see, and eat what you cannot smell. Drift along people; drift along on memories' bliss. Because everything is for sale. Nothing left unturned, nothing left unburned. For the fuel of nations, new creations... everything alone, separated, worlds apart, islands away, all you need is to buy the ticket for the rocket to freedom. A dark city full of dark buildings. People wore hooded clothing and hid their eyes. It wore Mr. Standish out. "We all know each other," he would say to himself, walking down the street, "millions of people and we all know each other." Everyone would go home directly after work and sit, each one of them in front of their own walls. Canvases for their mind, their brain-waves projected images onto the wall through rubber pieces with wire and metal parts; an array of intriguing technology dangling from their heads. Deep water ran beneath the streets, tall weather-vanes flew high in the sky. Night came swiftly there among the long shadows of bending buildings. Night came swiftly - and Mr. Standish as well as every other person in the city stayed awake with their minds ensnared in the walls, imagining perfect sleep. And miles above them satellites relayed their thoughts, beaming them out into

the far reaches of unknown and frightening space. Out to a people wretched, a people tall, with intelligence rising, a civilization surprising.

Mr. Standish went through his day trying to see a world that could never exist, while others existed in the world they could not see and allowed it to trample and abuse their hearts till everything they did was left without emotion. Mr. Standish walked the streets avoiding the seductively-scented monsters that were hid between the pages of magazines on news stands. He never walked on the side of the street where crazy cloaked men with pale skin and goose-bumps lurked in the long-entombed libraries. He never went in the slums of the city where leather-skinned children lassoed un-fossilized dinosaurs and rampaged the streets. He was, after all, a cautious man, not given to needless risks. He was a pleasant man, smiling to himself in mirrors. He indulged in just a few things, one of which was frequenting the antique stores; shopping, looking, fingering things of long- forgotten memories, not buying a lot, but on occasion purchasing an item he liked. A knick-knack, jewelry, a coat, a hat, sometimes even more bold forms of art, such as a sculpture or painting.

And it was a painting that Mr. Standish saw, hanging crooked from a wall, beckoning his glance on a cold September day. The first thing he noticed was the fire-red background which cut up his heart with an effect he never felt before. So vivid, so clear and detailed in its ancient simplicity, nothing like the canvases he was used to. It was a portrait of a woman from her side, smiling down on a bouquet of flowers. For the first time ever, Mr. Standish saw something serene

and graceful. He bought the thing and took it home with him. Back at his apartment, he shoved the brain-wave transmitters out of the way and hung it on the wall, right where his mind once threw images up in quiet desperation.

Mr. Standish was one in a million. He had something outside of his mind that had the power to calm him. Day after day he looked at the woman on his way in and out of the room, sometimes sitting for hours in front of her. One day he ventured to smile at her. The sides of his mouth twitched up and down hesitantly, till they were slowly pulled upward forming a very shy smile. "My God! Am I smiling at another person?" he wondered. "No, no, it can't be... it doesn't count. She's not real... I am real, but not her." So, being comforted with this fact, he smiled to her everyday while she smiled to the flowers.

One day, while the sky darkened with clouds, Mr. Standish sensed an unbidden emotion well up in his heart, controlling every limb of his body. It made him sit down on the floor in front of her and stare wide-eyed, pale-faced, and quite vulnerable to whatever it was. All the sudden a shot rang out of the back recesses of his mind, something that he had read long ago on an old wooden plaque he had bought. In italicized words it had said "Bury your heart in love's dirt." And now it rang in his ears violently. "My God! Am I loving another person?" he asked himself. "No, no, it can't be... she's not real. I know I am real, but she is not."

Ignoring the overwhelming emotion, he went on with his life, living in the world that could never exist. However, on a cold November morning he smiled

at the woman, and saw something he never noticed before. A smirk. At least it looked like a smirk, what he thought would be a smirk, but he couldn't quite tell. It irritated him. Somewhere in his chest, where the emotion once rampaged, a small but quite noticeable pain emerged. He felt ashamed of all those smiles given to the woman everyday. His eyelids and toes grew resentful, and curled in anger. He clenched his teeth, his jaw gnashing, his blood boiling- there he stood in front of the woman, swelling in him anger wretched, rage tall, fury rising, an untapped power surprising! Clawing, tearing, ripping, shredding, he slams the woman, the beautiful face, and with grace clenched in his fists, he cries "No! No, it can't be... you are not real! I am! I am!"

Shadows fattened and grew as one more day passed and conquered the city full of dark buildings. Mr. Standish lived there. Music passed no ear and light lit no eye of all the dark people full of dark thoughts. Mr. Standish among them.