

## A FORTRESS: DAVID PRICE

These were early days. The children's fortress was still at ground level, a tangle of sawn planks and hardboard. Things manifested themselves, or not. It occurred to her quite often around this time that no possible course of rehabilitation could possibly, truly preserve her from what it was she suffered from, or suffered without. She was, in fact, slowly carving out some distance between herself at arrival and herself in the present. But she temporised. The world still conducted itself with a certain, compelling mischievousness. Earlier that very morning for example, as she walked from the central building to the featureless space that the residents somewhat euphemistically referred to as 'the garden', a paving stone showed evidence of having been disturbed. She suspected the intervention of a groundskeeper's trowel, or some such tool whose leverage had been disproportionate to its task. The stone's disturbance had produced a number of mutely remarkable features. She looked more closely and a distance revealed itself; where once she would have been overcome or possessed by the disturbance amongst the stones, now she could be looking down at herself from some impossible perch above. Yet the change still felt significant. And there *were* changes. Firstly, on the two-dimensional plane, of course, the perfect tessellation with the neighbouring stones was now lost; furthermore, the depth of the stone was revealed; a third dimension showing itself as if it were teasing a passer-by with a glimpse of an undergarment's hem. She stood before this minor disorder, its implications and all its forms and could not move along. In time, the slight adjustment in things would pass unnoticed, unremarked. Now, the image formed by the disturbed paving stone was entirely hers, entirely local, assigned exactly to the position in which she stood looking down at the ground before her and to the height at which she stood (indeed, had she worn slippers rather than heeled boots the image would have been altered slightly). Everything, even the rather neutral hazy light, the absence of overnight rain, and many other such incidentally crossing factors. The implications danced around her head and still there was nowhere for them to rest. Were there some means available of recording an image

like this and having it become an entry in a bulletin or gazette (she was not sure quite what form this might take in practice; some kind of record for news and events that were slight rather than momentous) a little poetic caption might accompany it that would efficiently register multiple facets of the phenomenon at the same time. She thought more simply, about the individual words that could be implicated. She realised that, in isolation, the word 'slab' was ugly and undignified. She thought of a word, 'unlaying', and a space opened instantly up. The word made satisfying, practical sense and had no associations or inheritance from everyday usage. She spoke it. There was nothing there, in the sound, other than the possibility of an image that she had chanced upon, this image ushered discreetly into appearance by the word. There was, in truth, nothing interesting, nothing to invade the mind of a viewer, or to draw any serious attention. This was, she thought, a means of restraining objects by kindness or by an elaborate kind of politeness.