The Fortress

At sixty-five, at an age when his acquaintances, few as they were, were making their pact with their Deliverer, melancholy thoughts of loneliness and death began to plague Max Widowski's spirit. The more he aged, the more did the face of death nauseate him with dread, and bitterness, harsh and unbidden, burgeoned, mounted and cascaded in torrents within him. — He must die soon. He must die and leave a world where nothing real and tangible would remain to give evidence of his passage and enter yet another world, mysterious for some, but for him lonely and black and void and eternal.

Day succeeding day, a wolf in his lair, he wandered about his house, without purpose, without direction. Inspired by a sudden thought, he hurried to his study or to Daniel's room, only to find, when he arrived there, that he had forgotten his original intention and was seized by yet another impulse to enter Elizabeth's room or the kitchen or the garden, the need again having been dissipated by the time he reached the place. He dressed carelessly, neglected to shave, did not go to his factories and stores and could not find his tongue to speak with people. His foreman who telephoned daily, he dismissed with cursory remarks and sealed his ears against the neighbours' children that their cries and screaming may not disturb his already-tenuous peace of mind. Languidly, he gazed upon the deciduous elms, the rose-bushes and the mute docile houses across the road. With torpor, deep and numbing, he traced the movements of children and of passers-by, and imagined that the earth was slowly splitting apart and swallowing up everything that either stood or walked or lay upon it. Nothing can survive forever, he thought, nothing can survive in the sight of God. And, brooding, black and oppressed, Widowski became jealous, gripingly jealous, of Him who had eternal life, and with vehement acrimony loathed the God he had at an early time, in suffering, denied.

If the days revolved around a tense and restless coil, his nights were disturbed a thousand times. Weary from boredom and morbid thoughts, he sank into his bed welcoming the forgetfulness and ease of mind that the

darkness of night might bring. But sleep became elusive. He tossed about the bed to no avail; he saw images in the darkness, pale faces and corpses, distorted and grotesque, that made his skin ripple; and when, at last, his eyes closed upon the night, the slightest noise — the distant barking of a dog, the rustle of the curtains, the shuffling of tree-branches in the wind — woke and startled him so that he sat up, starkly, alert, trembling and berried with perspiration. When merciful dawn rose to relieve his nocturnal torment, he was exhausted and pale, and his entire body shivered from sleeplessness and agitation.

His days were black, his existence barren, his future void. He would die — and everything on earth would remain as if he had never been.

Having nothing to look forward to — his wife was dead, Elizabeth married, David boarding out — Widowski went back on his years to brighter days that had boasted of his authority, his enterprise, his shrewdness. Single-handed, barely a handful of years in the new country, he had built up a hosiery factory; he had then branched into knitwear and millinery and broadened his compass, in time to buy out a chain of clothes stores and saturate them with diverse styles and sheer volume that ultimately captured the loyalty of at-first reluctant, even suspicious, customers. He had become prosperous, and prosperity swelled sponge-like with the purchase of real estate far afield. Wealth was the by-word at every mention of his name, and daring, vision, forcefulness — ruthlessness, some people said — the qualities most often brought to mind.

But all these things were evanescent. He knew very well that prosperity was subject to chance — as his very wartime survival had been; the slightest turn of a wheel could destroy him, along with his factories, his stores, his fortune. And, all said and done, people's memories were short. They, too, were human and, therefore, mortal. Who would, in years to come, remember his success? Who would know of the empire he had established? Who would acknowledge his authority, his prestige? All that would remain on earth would be a name fading on a gravestone, a notice in the newspapers, perhaps an obituary in the Jewish News, an arrangement of mute letters spelling "WIDOWSKI'S" on the frontages of his stores, and disloyal children who would seldom recall their father with anything but spite. What he sought, wanted — he

could not but admit the very fact to himself — was something more lasting that would stand firm for years, for a century after his own bones had decayed into dust.

And one morning, as he looked upon everything as though for a last time — for, menacingly intertwined with the desire for permanence, the very thought of suicide was ever circuiting just below the surface of action — he conceived a scheme, a plan, to erect to himself a building, a solid edifice, there where it could not help but strike the eye, there where through its use, his name might elude, escape, the ultimate crushing oblivion of death as once, in the camps of Theresienstadt and Dachau, he had done in body. Like lightning on a summer's day, it came to him and struck him with its barbed shaft and kindled at first a cautious, then throbbing, excitement.

But what? Where? For whom?

An old-people's home? A children's centre? A library? A hall? A gallery? A gymnasium? What?

His house, as if suddenly, became too small to contain him. Desolate roaming became frenzied restlessness as he passed through the rooms. He felt the need to touch — anything: linen, the door-handle, a window, the corrugated aluminium of the sink, timber, steel — through touch returning him to the solid grounded reality upon which his hold had perilously loosened. To feel hardness, predictability through the tips of his fingers; to rediscover familiarity and, through familiarity, new life, renewed breath, breath which earlier so cramped, so stifled, expanded now to its limits as, suddenly claustrophobic, he fled into the garden where the elms, roses, grass, dander and vapours of the nearby cereal factory blended into a vigorous harmony of redolence and fecundity and crushed through their very forcefulness the torpor of the preceding weeks.

But again the questions — What? Where? For whom?

In the street, cradled in blossoming sunshine, children idled banteringly on their way to school; students headed towards their colleges or the university, men and women hastened to work; old folk returned from the shops with the morning newspaper, milk, bread. Here, a dog sniffed at passing heels; there, a cat arched its bristling spine to the touch of a stroking hand. Cars hummed by, their drivers anchored to private thought; next door, two painters redecorating his neighbour's house whistled and joked; a train rumbled in the distance, or

a tram; and a bus jammed with people passed before him. He swallowed liberating draughts of morning crisp air, and swelled out, reached out, of himself. All around, people *lived*. They breathed. They moved. They cared. Above all, cared. Life was a blinking of an eye, and yet there was sufficient importance in it for them to fill that blinking with running, banter, thoughts and plans and, unquestioningly, to cling to it, often desperately, however acute might sometimes be the pain, however hollow the future left to many — to the old, the sick, the abandoned. It was biology he knew — first-hand experience had been the most forceful and instructive of teachers, however, harsh; it was biology, euphemistically transmuted into that importuning beast, the will to live — however absurd that will, destined as it was like all running, planning, thought and hope to flicker and fizzle into the rigidity and ultimate crumbling in the silent eternal darkness of the grave.

Standing on solid grey unyielding asphalt, his blood again warm as it tingled through his flesh, he recognised once more the same will in himself as purpose, replenished and renewed, burgeoned to awareness. To build! More — to create! Not to this life as he had done until now with his succession of factories, stores and apartment blocks on properties that had come easily to him — and for which he had paid a father's price — but to his future life, the life of his *name* which alone might endure beyond the final crumbling of his flesh. And, watching the current of activity pitching around him, it was towards the young that his thoughts extended, not to the prancing children for whom awareness was still new or evanescent or fastened to concrete happenings alone, but to the older students who might best acknowledge a name and carry it in their setting memories the longest. For that reason, an old people's home, where awareness and memory cascaded too rapidly down the slope of brevity and decay, he dismissed without elaboration, and a gallery and gymnasium which were but the province of a few he veered from as well, and turned his face to the university where he might erect an office block, a theatre, an auditorium. It was the thought of Elizabeth's children, Sharon and Naomi, who might some day be given reason to glow at their grandfather's name and of Daniel whom he might yet reach, rebellious son though he was, that hardened fancy into resolve.

Already he had a name for that which he would build. It

rolled in his awareness. — The Max Widowski Auditorium. He savoured the sound. The Max Widowski Auditorium.

The building rose before him, clear as marbled certitude, in his imagination. A massive, oval, domed edifice. Brown birch. Sturdy polished and resilient timber. Mosaic windows. Murals. A spacious sloping hall in the style of an amphitheatre, cushioned seats, a stage, foyer, cloak rooms, offices. Venue for concerts, stage plays, orations, reviews. A hall — no, not a hall, it could only be called an auditorium — such as he had seen in Sydney, in Adelaide and further afield on visits in the previous year to Israel, Europe and New York. A thing of beauty — he would see to that — and of utility, he saw it stand, saw it stand as his ultimate memorial, in its grandness and permanence telling of a man, a Jew, who, born in remote Lithuania, had endured hell and who, surviving, destitute and naked, had attained to the ease of wealth and who, through this creation had touched the hem of eternity. Death was not to be avoided, but its harshness levelling all to oblivion could be cheated. And in its very grasp — for a second time in his life — he had discovered, and was about to forge, the ploy to cheat it.

Liberated from gloom, a more jaunty mood now seized and cheered him. To the discomfiture of his salesmen and foremen, he encroached upon their domain, in the stores himself measuring customers who had come to browse or buy, in his factories hovering with pride of ownership over his employees as they cut and pressed and pumped stitches into sleeves, collars and hems on their machines. With regained buoyancy which laced his tone with driven urgency, he spoke to his estate agent, his bank manager and his lawyer, made enquiries of his accountant into his resources and visited a succession of university administrators — chairmen of planning, building and finance committees — who listened with interest, if not commitment. He learned from them that a new public lecture hall — if he so wished to call it, an auditorium — such as he described was a welcome addition to their university, but each was constitutionally bound to bring the proposal before his respective committee for consideration. Asked from behind quizzical eyes and brows creased in curiosity what lay behind his scheme, he laid his palms upon the table, fixed each man with a straight unwavering gaze and said, "I am grateful for what this country has given me."

Verbal exchange was followed by written correspondence.

Impatient and ever ready to seal transactions with a handshake, Widowski had no recourse but to comply, as with all previous transactions, with the demands of officialdom whose many cluttered abrasive wheels ground slowly. A man could live and die a hundred times between two letters, he thought. But go, move mountains. He began to fear, when for weeks on end he received no reply in the mail, that the entire scheme had been forgotten or shelved or abandoned, and with rising anger and frustration, he accused the chairmen of the committees of talking through the sides of their mouths, of playing games with him — a foreigner and a Jew — and of incompetence, indolence and dishonesty. His anticipation each day shattered anew by the absence of response, he wrote angry letters to the administrators he had spoken with or telephoned their offices in succession, but the letters he destroyed before posting and the receiver he replaced before speaking, turning his mind to other schemes that might bend before his will with greater plasticity. But none drew him with the same appeal. Once again, he became despondent. Thoughts of death returned. He felt again the aggrieved horror of an unmarked life.

But the mountains moved.

It had taken five months, but in the end, the university authorities had approved the scheme. If he were still of his original disposition, negotiations could begin, contracts settled and tenders invited. His generosity was appreciated and, the scheme culminating in success, would be suitably acknowledged.

At the centre of the university grounds, fronted by the Union Building and skirted on its other three sides by the Law School, Faculty of Arts and the Library lay an acre of lawn and pavements. Students, free for an hour, ate their lunches there; tables displaying literature promising worlds made better by socialism, Christianity, rationalism and yoga nestled against one another; there, without self-consciousness, lay young fellows and girls coiled in embrace; faculty heads, lecturers and tutors strode along the thoroughfares, serious, laughing, oblivious or melancholy.

Widowski repeatedly toured that enclosed acre, feeling the solidity of asphalt and the mute submission of grass beneath his feet, alive to the knowledge that this, in one sense the property of the university, was in another to be his, his, his.

Even before it stood there, he saw that edifice, he trod its carpets, touched its beams, visualised its dome and its murals, read the plaque declaring his gift on its outer wall and saw his name engraved large in plated gold above the entrance doors. The sense of purpose in having lived, endured and survived became restored and meaning returned to his being — to his having been — that transcended the mere possession of temporal wealth and influence. If only Rebecca had not died so prematurely — "worn out", to use Daniel's recriminating phrase — she would in time have comprehended the thrust behind their labours, those long hours of driving themselves, the early deprivations after their arrival to the country, the sleepless nights, the ambition, the anxieties. It was not money alone he had striven after — though it had been money that had saved them — but security, invulnerability and the creation of options, should the threat of annihilation ever recur. Elizabeth, born in Paris in transit, yet a child of Australia — of calm, ease and freedom —, but now married to a struggling printer who, out of stiff-necked pride, refused his help, might yet come to understand these more pressing needs; and Daniel, too, if only the foolish youth and perennial student would extricate himself from the web of fancy he had woven about himself — of becoming a writer, a poet — while he subsisted on a brittle string of part-time jobs — serving in a coffee bar, tutoring high-school students, proof-reading for a publisher, — the while awaiting that miraculous breakthrough that, in a harsh world of competition and cynicism, might never come. But not money was all. Nor security. Nor influence. Nor the opening of options. These were necessary, vital, to be sure, but evanescent. Where death levelled all, only one thing remained, one fact alone — the fact of having been. And that fact subsisted solely in the ultimate preservation on earth of one's name.

The project was assigned to a firm of architects whose senior partner Carl Stillman, who personally undertook the task, was a sturdy man of fifty-five with a rampant shock of grey-white hair, thick lips and a gaze that grasped at once the grand design together with the minutiae of which all that is grand is composed. He had travelled widely, had studied architecture in its endlessly diverse forms in Paris, Amsterdam, Lebanon and Japan, and had published, at his own expense, a splendidly-illustrated volume entitled "Out of

Sand the Grandeur". At one time named as respondent in a divorce suit, he had subsequently retreated from social intercourse, had remained a bachelor and given his free hours to the study of religions, becoming conversant with the teachings of Buddha, Lao-tze and Confucius, with the laws and rituals of Judaism and the strictures of Islam as well as deepening his already-ingrained knowledge of Christianity. He spoke English, French and Italian fluently, quoted from Dante, Shakespeare and St. Augustine with ease, and had displayed competent landscapes and still-lifes in a number of galleries around Prahan and North Melbourne. Evidence of his designs was sprinkled about the City — office blocks, a student hostel, a luxury hotel — and a brief biographical entry had been incorporated into the most recent Who's Who.

Widowski, when he spoke with him — having discovered the architect's identity, he was driven to make his private vision known to him — felt the extraordinariness of the man more by intuition than through direct knowledge. Against himself, Stillman was a big man. His forehead rose high, his eyebrows were thick, his eyes steady and his chin and cheeks as though chiselled out of marble. He was immaculately dressed in grey suit and tie and wore on the fifth finger of his left hand a signet ring embossed with the emblem of his profession. Softly-spoken, he yet gave off an air of unruffled assurance and dependability and Widowski felt — knew — that, his vision accepted, it had been weighed on unseen scales, its merits set against its shortcomings, and judgement pronounced with the poise of authority and control.

And yet Widowski felt ill at ease. The architect, who as well as drawing the plans had agreed to supervise every phase of the construction, had a dusky flush over his cheeks and, when they walked together across the university grounds discussing the proposed edifice, was compelled to pause at intervals to regain his breath.

"You should see a doctor," Widowski had offered on one occasion, but Stillman had merely shrugged a shoulder, stamped a heel to test the firmness of the soil and said with a faint conceding nod, "My doctor watches."

A time-schedule to begin work was set and Widowski made out the first substantial cheque as advance payment. He had, as benefactor, insisted upon sitting on the building committee. But from the first, there were delays. A dispute

over wages arose between the contractors and the builders, then between the contractors and the building committee, a dispute which Widowski resolved by promising over-award wages. Then a vociferous group of students protested the submerging of their area of green beneath a structure of concrete and brick and were only finally appeased, after prolonged and tedious argument, by a promise to reserve the foyer of the proposed auditorium for their display stands and to extend the hours of service of the attached coffee lounge.

Every delay buffeted Widowski into a renewed frenzy in which he telephoned Richard Bellows, the chairman of the building committee, and Stillman, the architect, daily for reports on progress. Bellows, a man practised in the grinding workings of bureaucracy repeatedly proferred the formula "They are yielding, progress is under way" even when signs of progress, to judge from students' placards and notices posted around the quadrangle, were negligible, while Stillman, listening to Widowski more then responding, remained unperturbed.

"The race is not to the swift", he said slowly and softly into the telephone. "The almond blossoms early but ripens late. Rather be the mulberry, the last to blossom, the first to ripen. Who rushes is often late."

Almonds! Mulberries! Replacing the receiver, Widowski huffed down his nostrils, cursed, and gritted his teeth. It was his life, his name, his epitaph no less that he was negotiating with Stillman. Yet all that the architect could talk about were almonds and mulberries. "I might not be alive when your mulberries are again in season," he wanted to shout at Stillman, but how penetrate the mind of one who coursed with the tide, yielding, unprotesting, mute, of one who himself nourished no ambition nor particular desire nor apparent hope? He must beat against the very rock of the other's temperament and even then not dare to expect that he left more than a handprint upon that unshifting stone. Returning and crossing repeatedly that quadrangle of grass and pavement, he confronted his mortality anew and cursed that reality that saw not the slightest hint of conversion of paper into beams, of plans into structure. And once again, hollowness, horror and futility coursed through him as he skirted the brink between tedious life and sometimes welcome, inviting, alluring self-administered death.

But the breakthrough came. One Monday morning, the construction workers moved in; a high wooden fence of smeared adjoining palings was erected around the perimeter of the quadrangle; and earth-movers began to pound and to purr. Watching, once more buoyant and hopeful, Widowski saw the lawn being turned to loam, saw those dark matted clumps of earth and grass being driven away, saw the hole in the ground deepening and extending into an enormous quarry. He understood that to create height, one must first create depth and, impatient though he was to see the appearance of the first tangible structure — a beam, a rod, a slab of concrete — rising from the foundations, yet he bade his time, complimenting Stillman when he saw him and hinting, then declaring openly that were it not for him, for Widowski and, more remotely, for the fate that had befallen him at an earlier time, that projected auditorium might never have been. He had hoped for a more demonstrative response from the architect, but Carl Stillman, wheezing faintly, looked into the excavation where two workmen in blue singlets and helmets joked as they measured the terrain, pouted his thick lips and said, "The agent is the man, the honour is to God." Widowski, momentarily chastened, promised himself not to reveal too much to Stillman but an inner compulsion gave vent to words that would not stay confined behind barred teeth. "Who would have believed twenty-five, thirty years ago, when I came here without a penny. . .," he began, not completing the sentence, to which Stillman, calm and dispassionate, said, "Who loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver."

Stillman was extraordinary, Widowski saw, a sober unsmiling man of thrifty words, yet endowed with aphorisms for every occasion; and, slapped repeatedly by the architect's softly-spoken measured replies, he came to resent the bigger man, to chafe also at the other's assumed superiority, to scorn the seeming lack of personal ambition which mocked his own driving, and to deplore the passivity of the other man's nature. And he began to keep his distance, less likely thereby to be stung, and, when, unavoidably, they met, he nodded briefly at the younger sturdier man, quickened his step and strode away as though he had just remembered something pressing.

Those slaps to the face brought to his memory others.

The day having passed, divided between his factories, his

stores and the university which drew him with the irresistible centripetal force of a gigantic magnet, he faced once more the solitude of evening, its empty-handed barrenness, the restless waiting for the next morning to hasten towards light, the while, even behind accounts, behind the afternoon newspaper, the television set or a book, recalling days that — had the choice been his — might never have been. The day, for instance, when Rebecca in a trough of bodily fatigue and mental depression had hanged herself in the shed; the day when Elizabeth, having slipped from his control, and pregnant, had insisted upon marrying her abrasive arrogant black-nailed printer (and in a registry office, what was more); the day when Daniel walked out, leaving on the kitchen table wedged between the salt and pepper shakers in the midst of unswept crumbs a note scribbled hastily on unlined paper:

> "Stuff your notions of security! I don't care a fig for them, nor your money, your properties, much less for Medicine into which you would drive me. I am going to be a writer. A poet, come what may. Escape at last from those obsessions of yours that have stifled my very breath for so long. To be free of them! Once and for all! Not enough that you drove Mother, worn-out, to an early grave nor that you killed, yes, killed Elizabeth's love, you want now to bury my soul as well. But that you shall not have! *That* I shall not give."

"A writer!" he snorted again as he had done when the first impact of the letter had passed, but did not this time add the effusion of his anger that had riveted him then: "A scribbler! Starve! Starve then, and come crawling back when your belly's empty!"

For Daniel had managed, had survived, more adeptly than Widowski had expected — or hoped. His son, accustomed to comfort and easy service, should have foundered in the chaotic battering ocean that was the outside world; yet a year had passed, more, and still the boy was out there, not giving the slightest indication of returning. And more, if there was any truth to the rumour, he had settled in with a gentile girl, a Doreen McKinley, or was it McKenzie, into a flat somewhere on the perimeter of the university, coming home sometimes to take away another pile of clothes, a pair of shoes, books.

The ingratitude!, he smarted. Elizabeth. Daniel. For whom, if not for them, his labours, the self-deprivations, the weekends and nights spent behind the machine upon arrival

and then in the factories and the stores? And what of Rebecca's labours? Were they indeed solely to pacify his delusions, as Elizabeth had tossed at him, or for herself, Rebecca — or for them, the children, that they may never know, nor need to know the deep aching hollow destitution of scratching out a living. He had made a mistake, yes, but had there been any overt indication that Rebecca was losing grasp of her mind — he would have made peace with less, would not have driven so hard to achieve, acquire, attain. He recognized her despondency only too late, and for this, neither Elizabeth, nor Daniel, both buffeted by the separate adolescent traumas they were passing through, had forgiven him.

Elizabeth, in time a student-teacher, was the first to rebel, bringing home her Albert, a tall, shaggy-haired, unshaven, broken-nailed printer from Beacon Press. He, Widowski, had not approved but all his attempts to separate the two merely intensified defiance. He had hinted at first, then pleaded, offered inducements — a car, an overseas trip, whatever she wanted. And when these failed, he had resorted to threats which, though at the outset were mere bluff, with repetition solidified into resolutions he could not bring himself to retract.

"Not a cent will you get from me!" he had shouted during one of these arguments that had become customary fare. "Not a cent, do you hear?!"

But Elizabeth had merely shrugged her shoulders, a barely perceptible action which served to fuel the fire further.

"You've had it too easy all these years — a big house, freedom, elegant clothes, posh hair-dos, an education, security . . . security that I, yes, that I have built up with my own hands almost from dust. And now you want to sink into a life of struggle with that . . . that letter-setter of yours — with rent to pay, gas bills, electricity, telephone and later, children to feed and bring up."

Elizabeth had blown down her nose, a gesture she had learnt from him.

"Money is not everything. There is also love, decency, humanity. Because of you, Mother. . ."

He cut across her accusation.

"Love?! Decency?! Humanity?! *You* who, at twenty, don't know how to wipe your own nose, give *me* lessons?! Tell me, my sweet, where was love when your grandfather

was gassed and your grandmother shot? Where was decency when Jacob, my brother, your uncle, was strung up on gallows like a side of meat, and my sisters, your aunts, lay dying of typhus in Belsen? And humanity? Where? Tell me now! Do you know why you are here today?

Elizabeth made a wry face.

"Money," she said.

"At least you do know. Yes, because of money and because of the greed of guards, soldiers, peasant. I *bought* my life. And your mother's. Bought it for cash — at railway stations, cross-roads, even in the labour camps. If we were to rely on love, on decency, on humanity. . . Ha! — And all our comforts here, these too I bought, but I did it honestly, through hard work, for you, for your brother, for all of us. If you marry that gypsy of yours, if you. . . You'll come running, I swear it, but the door will be closed. Remember! The door will be closed!"

She had moved in with Albert, in time became pregnant — to spite him her father, Widowski, angry and shamed, had huffed — and informed him of her intention to marry the printer. Faced with facts, however unpalatable, Widowski had been prepared to relent. She being his only daughter, after all, he had offered to pay for her bridal outfit, arrange the ceremony at the synagogue and pay for the wedding reception at the Southern Cross. But even more than Elizabeth, Albert, whom, as a manual worker, he did not credit with independent intelligence refused, rejected, his offer. A non-believer, veering politically to the far left, he despised with equal venom both religious ceremonial and the possession of wealth. Religious belief he stigmatised as baloney and wealth as theft, and openly scorned his prospective father-in-law's striving after acquisition and the supposed security it promised, predicting the end of the capitalist system and the advent of an order in which wealth would be shared more equitably and in which no grasping factory-owner and landlord would lick the fat of another's labour.

Widowski did not attend the wedding at the registry office and forbade Daniel, then nineteen, to attend as well.

But the boy disobeyed and, before leaving for the ceremony, had pointed a stern finger at his father, and said, "Whatever she's done, she is still my sister and, don't forget, your daughter."

Yet he could not find it in himself to forgive her then.

Four years had passed and Elizabeth, who, he knew, now mother of two children, was feeling the pinch of need, had not come running. They met sometimes. On the children's birthdays, he brought gifts for Sharon and Naomi — a walking doll, a pram, a huge furnished doll's house — which they pounced upon with innocent delight. But when, in passing, he had surreptitiously forced an envelope into Elizabeth's hand or left a cheque on her kitchen table or in the drawer, he found it soon afterwards in his own letter-box, accompanied neither by note nor explanation.

Where he had been in error remained unclear to him. And, at a deeper level, he came to wonder also where, in his whole life, he had sinned. For, coinciding with Elizabeth's marriage, he was entering into his sixties and those deeper levels were beginning to preoccupy him. Success had not brought him that sought-after contentment or security or certainty. In Daniel's early progress through medical school, he had entertained hopes of some measure of further achievement through his flesh and blood, but Daniel, more disposed to the philosophical and literary than the scientific, and growing restless with the demands of a university course which, having entered almost blindly, more to fulfil his father's expectations than his own inclinations, he despised, had dealt a further blow to any claim to equanimity that Widowski had made. With the boy's angry — or was it petulant — departure from home, emulating the action of his older sister three years before, Widowski, alone in the house grown too large for him, felt suddenly vulnerable. And vulnerability evoked black memories of camps left behind, memories which, reaching down to those depths of which he again became aware, stirred echoes of a faith long estranged and long denied in the pursuit of poise and resilience and those options that had once before secured survival. He tried again to pray to the God of his early manhood, murmuring by rote the formula scorched into his memory by a harsh and nervous teacher. But the prayers, heavy and burdened, anchored things that they were, did not rise to the wanted heights. They weighed instead dull and leaden in his blood and twined themselves with premonitions of death, futility, waste and decay. And he cursed that God Whom he could not reach, berated Him for punishing him for alleged sins that could not be sins and loathed with envy that unfeeling,

unheeding eternal Being that from His distance toyed with men and mocked their best intentions and smote the very eyes of those who seeking succour, seeking meaning, turned to Him.

That loathing, reawakened, now turned against Carl Stillman who, in his quiet aphoristic way, also mocked his attainments and designs. The architect loomed in his mind, disturbed his evenings, racked the night. In his dreams, he saw the man's large face hovering over the hollow in the ground, his thick slowly-moving lips directing a team of blue-shirted gum-booted labourers in their work. He saw, behind the tentacled mesh of scaffolds, sheer facades of grey stone rise from the quarry, saw huge beams straddle, as though in flight, the cavernous chasm between opposing walls, saw plate-glass windows beat back the sunlight with eye-burning glare. And rapt, watching, soaring, he saw the scaffolding fall away, the workmen receding and the building stand, a colossus amidst lesser forms, testimony to his wealth and memorial to his being, seeing it stand as *his* until, emerging from the arch riding over the entrance, he read the name engraved in gilt, the name not his but that of Carl Stillman, beneath which the architect's eyes flickered and winked, his thick grey lips set in a leer. And Widowski woke, startled, sweating, eternity deprived, to the hollow darkness of night that hung muffled around him with the silence of the grave.

At first keeping his distance to avoid the barbs, Widowski now clung to Stillman, suspicious that in his softly-spoken unruffled way, the architect might claim the building as his. It was not wholly impossible for, though the original conception was his own as was the donation towards the scheme, yet were the plans and execution Stillman's, and if the auditorium were to stand in its projected grandeur, it would be no less a testimony to the creative force and skill of the architect than to his own acquired wealth and beneficence. And, at the thought, Widowski burned with resentment at the need at having to share his creation with that other man who had not suffered as he had done, nor laboured long cycles of day and night, nor lost wife, daughter and son in pursuit, in the new country, of the security and poise that were nothing more than reasonable.

But though the dreams clung to Widowski, yet did Stillman assert no claim. The architect visited the construction site

every day, talked with the foreman, tested the stability of the scaffolds, tapped the rising walls, felt with his feet the soil beneath him. Sometimes, Widowski, arriving at the same time, saw Stillman standing retreated in thought and wondered what schemes the other might be brewing. But Stillman betrayed no hint of any. Standing together, speech at a premium — for other than of the building, they had no common concern —, Widowski was aware of the architect's wheezing as, remote, almost aloof, the other was gazing into the hollow where the construction was taking place. And unable to desist, prodding, probing for clues that might give flesh to his fears, he tossed his head, indicated the rising foundations with his chin, let out a faltering laugh and said, "You must be pleased when you see your work," to which Stillman, biting a lip and rubbing his chest, answered in a tone that yielded nothing, "I do as I understand."

The weeks, the months passed too slowly for Widowski. May, June, July came, went. And then the wetter months, during which the slippery boggy earth, the perilous rafters, the frequent downpours impeded the work. But progress there was. He saw it, not from day to day, as did Stillman with a suggestion of satisfaction ominous to Widowski, but rather week by week, when he suddenly discovered that the southern or the western wall had climbed by a further height or that a space for a window became apparent or a staircase, a doorway, a platform. Repeatedly, he asked the architect when the building might be completed, to which Stillman, breathing heavily, replied, "Look not down but upward. He will grant us life to see it."

It was during one of his visits to the university that Widowski encountered Daniel. His son, bearded, bespectacled, carrying a handful of books, had seen him and momentarily glanced about him for a route of escape. But, reconciled to the presence of none, he moved in Widowski's direction with more animation, the better to show that he was in a hurry.

"Ashamed of your father?" Widowski said, blocking the boy's path.

"I have a lecture to go to."

"So go," Widowski said, not moving.

Daniel's eyes darted from his father to the narrow space on either side of him. His father made room for other passing students, but for him the opening seemed to contract.

"What do you want from me now?"

"You belong home."

The boy shrugged a shoulder.

"Is your shikse more important than your father?"

"I don't want to argue."

"Argue? Just a question. Man to man."

"Then stop treating me like a child."

"Now who is arguing?"

The futility of the conversation apparent to him, Daniel narrowed his eyes. The lips receded in the beard curved into a sneer.

"And what are you doing here anyway? Become a student, have you?"

The tone, to Widowski, was patently derisive. Once, he would have launched into the boy with an open hand or a belt for insolence. Such times had passed. Words alone now remained with which to reprimand, but words alone were no longer sufficient. His son was beyond all reach.

"You want to know why I am here? Come then. I will show you."

"I have a lecture."

"Only a minute it will take."

Daniel gritted his teeth, but came. Taller than his father, but more slender, he walked beside him. Widowski sensed his reluctance and felt a perverse satisfaction at having his wilful son ensnared.

At an observation point around the construction site, Widowski stepped aside and urged Daniel to move before him. Progress had been made. The lower reaches of the building had attained to ground level and, now, new scaffolds, uprights and beams jutted higher. New staircases of rough unpolished concrete had been laid, broad gaps for windows were apparent and apertures for doors and recessed alcoves, the whole still crude and graceless, but unmistakably solid, massive, of one purpose. Around the structure, earthmovers purred, cranes hoisted and lowered huge grey slabs of stone, and workmen shouted, whistled, swore.

"This is what brings me here," Widowski said, describing an arc with an extending arm. "This, I am building — a hall, a theatre, no, an auditorium."

"In your name, I suppose," Daniel said, harshly.

"In my name."

The boy looked over the structure in front of him. Widowski, wanting, ready, to point out its separate features, moved alongside him. But, in the face of Daniel's rigid stance, his narrowed eyes and his jaw, even beneath the beard, set in marble, he said nothing. He hoped for a comment of surprise or appreciation or favour, but knew that his son would not yield. Already, he regretted having opened himself to the boy.

Almost swivelling on the balls of his feet, Daniel turned. He stared into Widowski's face — a hard, contemptuous stare.

"Very nice. Now will you let me go to my lecture?"

"Is that all you can say?"

"Look. What do you want me to say? To do? Kowtow before you? Bow and kiss the feet of a man who doesn't know what next to do with his money?"

Daniel, erect, severe, glared. He lossed his head. He flared.

"It's money, all money, only money. If you could buy souls, you would. If you could buy eternal life, that too you would. What you do comes out of here, your pocket, not from here, your heart, or here, your brain, from your very being. You merely buy — factories, stores, buidings, labour. But you don't *create. Create.* You. . ."

Widowski felt the rising heat in his blood. He interrupted the boy, seeking to contain the deluge.

"And for that my son, the great poet, the writer, the scribbler, turns his back on his father."

"It's your *world.* Your *world.* I can't live in it. It's your values. Security! Security! Security! That's all I grew up with. Surrounded by a fortress, an empire set up by money, whatever the cost — to Mother, to Elizabeth, to me — in case, just in case, another Jew-hater comes and threatens us again with our lives. Look! What was, was. This is another age, another country. I sympathise with your past suffering — you told me the facts often enough — I understand it, have always understood it. But I refuse to be possessed by it. . ."

"You've had everything too easy."

"I want to taste the world outside. And write about it, create, create, create. Not buy and be stifled, not buy, yet sell myself . . . myself. — Now, will you let me go to my lecture?"

"Go!," Widowski said, resigned to the futility of argument. "And may you never have the need to say to yourself or your children 'My father was right'."

Elizabeth, when he visited her on Sharon's birthday a fortnight later, was scarcely more impressed. She had evidently been told by Daniel about the building at the university for, during a lull, when conversation was meagre and strained, she alluded half-heartedly to its progress.

Remembering Daniel's outburst, Widowski had no wish to provoke his daughter who was in obvious sympathy with her brother. He knew that the boy often came to dinner at Elizabeth's and probably brought his shikse as well.

"It's coming on," he said. "A memorial to the family name, to your grandparents who perished in Majdanek."

The lie was too obvious, but to retract was impossible. He heard Albert who was listening without particular interest in his chair blow down his nose.

Shortly after, having kissed Sharon and Naomi goodbye, suddenly feeling again the weight of age and the imminence of death upon him, he left. Although it was still mid-afternoon on a Sunday in September, the streets seemed black and despondent, remote, lost to time. He felt himself acutely separated from everything both living and inert and drove home in a vacuum that knew neither warmth nor smell nor flavour nor sound. Here, a car passed, there a pedestrian, a cluster of children, a mother wheeling a pram; above, the branches of trees moved with minute shudderings, and sparrows flitted and somersaulted among the leaves. But they were no part of him. They belonged to a world now alien in which perhaps there *was* a God, in where there *was* family, love, pleasure, spirit, faith, in which there *were* outreachings of the heart and mind that the pocket could never buy. He felt again the loss of tenure on his life and the thought of suicide in imitation of his wife recurred. But there appeared before him an image of Theresienstadt, he remembered the shuttling across Europe in foul stench-ridden cattle-cars crammed with decaying and dying flesh, recalled the hunger, typhus and deprivation through which, somehow, human beings, including himself, had endured and survived. The suddenness of the vision jolted him and he grasped the steering-wheel firmly, let down the window, and took deep breaths. Heat rising to his face, he recognised the absurdity

of that impulse to death — the absurdity of surviving hell in clinging to life, yet ready to end life so senselessly, shabbily, meanly. And he knew — God or no God, purpose or no purpose, love or no love — that as he had made his bed, so would he have to lie in it. He had his businesses to attend to, the auditorium to see through to the end. Whatever value he gave to his life, it lay not in the present but rather in the future, in the memorial he was erecting. But that was no reason for denying the existence in his hand. He would live, see out his days, forge that life-after-life from stone and gilt, and lie in death, when his time came, secure in the knowledge that others more favoured from early on had yet achieved far less than he.

Widowski had made peace with his children's coolness to his scheme, and yet, in the weeks that followed, he did not remain untroubled. Stillman unnerved him. Not through anything he said — Widowski couldn't wholly fathom the architect's allusion to time, perfection, master builders and mortal tools, though he considered them innocent enough — but rather because of his more sustained remoteness and engrossed deliberations that ignited in him the fear, first apprehended in his dreams, that the architect might quietly, surreptitiously, make final claim upon the building. He *knew* that Stillman could not legitimately do so, but *felt* that he might, knowledge and feeling, in all his previous ventures married in finely-tuned harmony and success, now so acutely and disconcertingly, discomfitingly divorced within him. And there was something else about the architect, something that did not quite accord with his fears, yet which, the perspective perspective of vision rotated, intensified them acutely. Stillman was sick. Only with the progression of the weeks, of the months, did Widowski become alert to the fact. The wheeze, faint and purring, was an ineradicable part of the architect, like his shock of grey-white hair, his suit, his signet ring. Widowski had become accustomed to it and, after his initial suggestion that Stillman see his doctor, he gave it little thought. But the ever-mounting breathlessness, the creeping duskiness in the other's cheeks, and the slowly-deepening eyes receding into sharpening sockets made the fact inescapable. Stillman was not only sick. He was dying. And from a dying man, Widowski knew, there was nothing to fear, except that it brought the reality of one's mortality closer to home and magnified the urgency of the work. The

man himself, however, with one foot toeing the other side of life, could not threaten, nor harm, nor take away that which was another's. What was such a man's gain, after all? — Yet, here lay the very dread. Stillman *could* take away. He could take with him Widowski's name and, through that building, into eternity preserve his own, just as Widowski himself, dreading oblivion, had intended, desired intensely to do. Why else the architect's abiding interest in the scheme, his insistence upon personally drawing up the plans, upon overseeing the construction from the very foundations, upon visiting the building site day after day, ill as he was, as doggedly as Widowski himself? Suspicion rankled, the more so as Stillman, in his distance, gave nothing away.

The nearer the project approached completion, the more anxious did Widowski become. To himself, he wished that if Stillman were indeed fated to die, he might in fact die soon. But immediately he reproached himself for entertaining so crass, so base a thought. To that depth, the depth of depravity, he would not stoop, not after himself having known times of death and struggle and survival. He wished instead, hoped, that the architect might rather withdraw from the project, the building now so close to the end that it no longer required Stillman's supervision.

Stillman, however, stayed. Indeed, he intervened in every phase of the construction still more sedulously than before, he spoke to the foreman and labourers with ever-greater urgency and knit his brows more deeply than ever. A peculiar tenseness, uncommon in the man whose every word had earlier been measured, transmitted itself to Widowski. Widowski sensed, recognised, the architect's race against contracting time. Stillman's plight made his own impatience keener. The days, the nights, for him stretched towards infinity, even as Stillman's zeroed in towards extinction. Once out of his factories and stores, his hands sought occupation. Would that his name were already engraved on the arch above the door. Would that the building were already clearly, boldly, indisputably, his. Would that he were able to detach himself finally from Stillman whose existence had, without his will — even against it — become pinioned to his. The architect haunted him. His remoteness was sinister; behind those knitted brows lurked pernicious designs to wring from life the last — that only — thing that it could still offer a dying man — a legacy, a memorial, a name. Better to

have it out with him once and for all, dispel all illusions, pretences, doubts; let Stillman know his hopes were vain, his scheming futile. Widowski burned.

And burning, the day came when he could no longer restrain himself.

It was January. The building had attained to its full height. The stone walls had been scrubbed, the windows polished; the scaffolds were being dismantled and the enclosing fence removed to restore that severed acre to the university to which it belonged. Still to be completed were the lawns, the flower beds alongside the concrete paths, the dedication plaque, his name in gold above the door and in bronze high upon the southern wall.

The day was hot, forty degrees, the sun was high. Widowski came upon Stillman wiping his brow and blowing away the heat through thick puckered lips. Widowski thought suddenly of Daniel, of Elizabeth. He remembered Rebecca, felt acutely the emptiness of his achievements. The perspiration clinging to his back, he leapt at Stillman, leapt with words at once urgent, pressured, demanding.

"Even today. In a hell like this. Many flats I built. Blocks. Ten, twenty, even twenty-four. And factories. Big buildings. One storey, two storeys. But the architect — not once I see him. Not once. But you — every day. In cold, wet, in fire like this. So much this means to you, this building, this . . . this. . . So much to you who has built so much, so many, so big? I think, and think, and do not understand. . ."

Stillman, tall, increasingly gaunt, his collar become too loose, bowed towards him. The focus of his eyes was sharp, the sharper for their being recessed in sockets grown too large for them. Beads of sweat glistened, glass splinters on his brow.

"You repay a debt," he said calmly. "I repay a gift."

"A debt? Gift?"

"A debt for what this country has given you."

Widowski remembered the unabashed lie he had told the chairman of the planning, building and finance committees of the university and that he had repeated, already a safe unquestioned formula, to Stillman early on. The architect's memory was too acute. He wondered whether Stillman might be mocking him. He felt the need to defend.

"It has given me much," he said — reasserted —, aware even as he said it of the very falseness behind his assumed

solemnity. "Even this, my . . . my building, this theatre, auditorium will never repay what I owe."

Under Stillman's scanning gaze, he felt the prickly heat of his brazenness well into every pore.

"Yes," the architect said, flatly, turning his gaze to a workman who was lowering a platform of the scaffolding, and retreating beyond accessibility.

Widowski was dissatisfied. Across the space between them, he sensed the architect's contempt. He tried to draw Stillman back.

"I mean it, it is the truth!" he said. "I am grateful. That is why I build. This country has been good to me. I . . . I. . ."

Stillman's profile sharpened, tightened. The visible corner of his eye narrowed, sending out a spray of creases towards his temples, his cheek became more deeply scalloped as he sucked in his lips, the tip of his nose curved faintly. He was obviously battling the heat.

"It is the truth!" Widowski repeated.

Stillman nodded. He did not look at Widowski.

"True is what each man believes," he said.

The architect's remark was spoken calmly, with neither haste nor emphasis, yet it rang in Widowski's ears like an accusation. Widowski, ignoring, or unable to heed the counsel of wisdom that dictated silence, flared.

"And you! *You!* What gift do you repay with my building? Yes, my building! Every brick of it, every stone, every piece of timber bought with *my* money."

Stillman remained unruffled.

"Forgive me," he said, "but money is a loan. A loan, like life itself."

"No!" Widowski shouted. "It is mine. I worked for it. Days, nights, Saturdays, Sundays. Every cent honest, not a cent cheated, stolen. . ."

"And yet — may I be personal? — you are an unhappy man."

The sun burned. Widowski felt the heat in his face but was uncertain how much of it rose from the fire in his own blood. The architect's insight too searing, too close, he felt the compulsion to deny.

"Unhappy?! I! No. I have everything. A fine house, factories, shops, investments, children, grandchildren. . ."

Stillman probed his face as he spoke. Feeling the weight of the other's eyes upon his own, Widowski looked away.

"You have reasons to be happy," Stillman said, "and yet you are unhappy. What is yours is not yours. You have it merely on loan. What you say is yours belongs not to you but to time. And you are aware of it. That is why you build this hall — to escape the scorn of time. I know. I see. I understand. I do not condemn you for it. But, to me, such are the strivings of unhappy men."

Widowski wiped his brow, his neck.

"That is not why I build," he insisted. "I am *not* unhappy."

Stillman took a deep breath. His lips turned upward at the corners. He blinked. The grey-whiteness of his hair glistened mercuric in the sun.

"I am mistaken, then," he said. "Let it be. Let it be."

But Widowski, driven, could not let it be. His own question remained unanswered, his fears not yet subdued.

"But you," he said harshly, seizing Stillman's arm as the architect turned away. "You. Coming here every day, even on a day of fire, to something not yours. Why, why, — if not to take away what is mine?"

Stillman turned back. His long withering face showed an unfathomable sadness, pity, pain.

"Why do you attack me?" he asked. He held out his arms. The sleeves of his suit rose above his wrists. He wheezed faintly. "*I,* take away from *you?* Look . . . look at these hands. What do you see?"

Widowski looked, saw what he had already seen so often before in the architect — the long spindled fingers, the joints like bosses over which the skin, thin, contracted and pale, had been stretched taut. The signet ring, loose on its previous finger, had been transferred to an adjoining one.

"You see but do not say. The truth is too delicate. It is better, easier to lie — to oneself, to others."

He paused. Widowski bristled at what seemed a deliberate barb.

"I shall tell you then," Stillman continued. "I am beyond hurt. I made my peace with the truth long ago. It is death you see. Pale, wasting, destroying death."

"Have you seen a doctor?" Widowski said, weakly; irrelevantly, he knew.

"A human doctor, yes. But I am in the hands of one still higher."

He raised his eyes briefly into the shimmering blueness of the sky.

"It is to Him that I repay my gift."

"With my building?" Widowski instantly flared, threatened again, alerted once more to his irrational fears.

"It is your building, yes, but my offering," Stillman said.

"It is not yours to give."

"It shall bear your name, but the building is mine. You have bought, but I have created. Your name shall live on before the eyes of men, mine shall dance forever before the eyes of God. Your immortality I don't begrudge you, mine shall be the more eternal. To you God has given a loan, to me He has given a gift, and to Him I offer my work. His gift has been that of creativity, my offering is that of perfection."

In Widowski, turmoil burgeoned, confusion, and perplexity, as apprehensions, impotence, contrition and regret wrangled within the renewed sense of his hollow and ultimately barren existence.

"That is why you have come every day?" he said mutedly.

"It is given to every man to create in life one perfect thing. This is mine."

"And you are not taking away my name?"

In Stillman's last ironic pitying smile before he turned away, bowed and becoming skeletal down his neck, Widowski saw that that was no longer — had never been — the issue. He looked at his auditorium, saw it in a new light. The scaffoldings removed, it stood grandly, a prodigious towering mass of grey austere stone set off on three sides by rising pilasters of polished timber and, along the southern face, by broad tinted windows framed in steel. A dome, immaculate in its roundness, glistened like silver under the white burning sun, the shafts of light fragmenting into blazing splinters that pierced the eyes. Not a line was spare. Nor a shadow. The building conveyed the sense of having been conceived in its entirety from the outset, of having been born mature and vibrant without having passed through the troubled process of growth and development from a modest ill-defined seed. More — and this struck Widowski with a force that made him hold his breath when he recognised it — the very wholeness of the conception imparted to the structure a unique simplicity, of a kind that could cause the most common labourer to say, "I too might have done the

same." Herein lay true inspiration, true beauty, perfection; and dedication, love, commitment.

Turning, he saw Stillman walking away. His suit hung on his shoulders. His gait was slow, his tread measured, clinging to the ground as if protracting the purchase on earth-bound reality still left to him. For an instant, Widowski saw his own back receding into the distance.

To each his own delusions, he thought, reflecting upon Stillman, but knew immediately that architect was not deluded. Rather he was everything that Widowski was not — a believer, a visionary, a mystic, a man at peace with himself and his God.

And more — much more.

As Stillman disappeared from view, Daniel flaming in sunshine came before him, angry, accusing.

"If you could buy souls, you would. If you could buy eternal life, you would. What you do comes from your pocket, not from your heart, your brain, your very being. You merely buy, buy, buy. But you don't create, you don't create, you don't create."

And Stillman from a distance echoed, "You have bought, but I have created."

Bought, created, created, bought.

Widowski became aware of the heat. It pounded his brow, scorched it with its dryness. Noises purred, rang, hummed in his ears. The shimmering blue above him made his head spin, the orb of whirling white burnt his eyes, blinding him, and his throat welled with nausea. The thought, the terror of imminent death petrified him into immobility.

"My God," he murmured. "Not now, not yet. Have mercy"

Groping, he found an upright post remaining of the surrounding fence. He steadied. A passing workman grasped his shoulder.

"Ya' OK, mate?"

The voice sounded remote and brassy. Sight returning, multi-coloured butterflies flickering luminously before him, he nodded.

"The sun got to ya', 't seems," the workman said. "In this 'ell, an old man oughta' wear a 'at. Or 'e'll get 'imself a decent stroke."

Widowski found his car. He leaned back in his seat until his hands ceased trembling, then began to drive away. His

head throbbed, his eyes smarted. The streets seemed narrow; he felt constricted, stifled. He turned on the air-conditioner but it offered little relief. All around, the air was on fire. Before him, the asphalt shivered like a shimmering mirror, hissed like simmering water, like seething oil. He saw the figure of Rebecca against the glow, saw Elizabeth, then Daniel emerge into the light. He knew that it was memory, imagination, taunting him, but the clarity of his wife and children terrified him. They were pointing their fingers, rigid, outstretched in accusation.

"What have you done with your life, Max?"

"I have built, Rebecca, built. . ."

"Bought, Father, not built. . ."

"A secure life. . ."

"Stuff your notions of security!"

"For all of you. Out of ashes. After Dachau and Theresienstadt. . ."

"That was another world."

"The past."

"A man has a right to build for himself a life. . ."

"But how much have you destroyed along the way, Max?"

"What have I destroyed?"

"Our love, Father."

"Our happiness."

"And Mother's health. If not for you. . ."

"You bought your life, yes, but sold your soul."

"You built but, in building, you also destroyed."

"And what have you of it all now, Max? After all these years? . . ."

"A name, Rebecca, Yours, mine. On my auditorium, a name."

"Also bought. . ."

"Created!"

"Stillman is the creator."

"The perfection is his."

"As he said, it is given to every man to create in life one perfect thing."

"It is given to a man to perform one perfect deed."

"What is yours, Max?"

"What is yours, Father?"

"What is yours? Tell us, what is your, what is it, what is yours?"

Their voices rankled. Arriving home, his hands empty as he scurried without purpose between the rooms, he could not escape their claims upon his thoughts. He also remembered Stillman and, stiffening, felt again the cold touch of mortality. Around himself, he had raised a fortress, as Daniel had said, an empire called "Widowski's" of brick and stone and dense solidity, and yet not since Europe had he felt so vulnerable. The fortress proved withal a brittle shell, its centre a cheerless hollow from which the stuff of life — love, family, solidarity, warmth — had steadily seeped. No building, no creation would rectify the destruction his obsession had wrought. No name bought, engraved in gold or suspended in bronze would annul the void that enclosed him, even alive, like a shroud around the dead. No memorial could exalt an existence stripped of communion, tenderness, God; or of laughter, loyalty, care.

Once more in the days that followed, he wandered about his house, dressing carelessly, not shaving, brooding in circles about his life, about achievement, destruction, death. Then during the nights, enclosed by silence that would not let him sleep, he wrote long letters to Elizabeth and Daniel, confessing his error, laying bare the ache of his solitude, begging that they understand, forgive, accept, just as now he understood the love of Elizabeth for Albert and Daniel's need to create. For security without soul was the refuge of a cave, affluence without creation was the wealth of a beggar. And as he wrote, Widowski knew that Stillman, the believer, the mystic, striving after his last act of perfection in homage to his God, would have understood.

Widowski no longer visited the university. The chairman of the building committee wrote to inform him that the construction of the auditorium was completed and that the official opening would be held in the first week of the coming academic year. The Chancellor would be delivering the main address and the honour of his own presence was requested.

Widowski read the letter twice, three times, then, folding it carefully, tore it into shreds.

A week later, he read in the death notices that Carl Stillman had died.

Composed, mellow, buoyed by the vision of a perfect deed, he took out pen and paper from his desk and wrote to the chairman of the building committee. His hand was steady, his thoughts clear. He would be grateful, he wrote, if

the university authorities made moves to render his bequest of the auditorium anonymous and accept the name of one more worthy than he to replace his own. And may they, in his memory, inscribe upon the doors the motto "In creation is eternal life."

He sealed the envelope, addressed it, and, cleansed, he went out into the bright, open, sunlit streets, walked briskly to the post box on the corner, where tranquil, buoyant, the very weight of gravity rising from his shoulders, he dropped the letter through the slot.