

X

P A T M A T S U E D A

X

For Michael Sykes,  
a lover of the  
word and the  
image

Pat Matsumeda  
May 27, 1987

Communica-Press  
Honolulu, Hawaii

June, 1983

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## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the following people: Frank Stewart, Suzzan Matsueda, Kathy Matsueda, and Nell Altizer. Mahalo for their support and aloha.

The publisher, L.B. Chong, would like to thank the following people for their support both spiritual and financial: Valerie W. Callies, Clemente Lagundimao, Jr., Noreen Chun, Greig Gaspar, and K. K. Mayeda. This book is dedicated to my parents, Norman and Mae Chong, and my apo, Alice Sue Hung Chong.

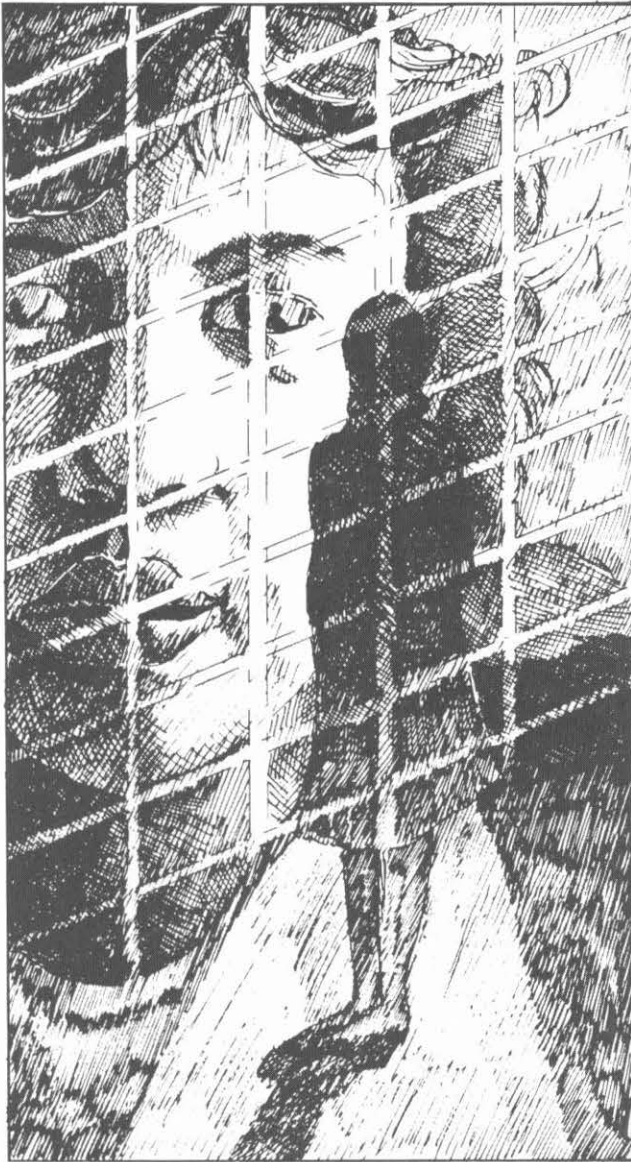


I

AT THE EDGE

Strewn over a table  
are a child's messages to me,  
pictures of her desires,  
stories of what would be  
if she were a god.  
She has been away too long  
from those she thought loved her.  
Now, to lead me amid  
the confusion of her disasters,  
she has put my name  
in a white frame  
to sing.

I try to reach her  
before fate will mar her,  
with its own disasters.  
So I sing back,  
but with excessive gestures  
and in foreign languages  
which, unlike those meant for Ulysses,  
are too easily left.



## II

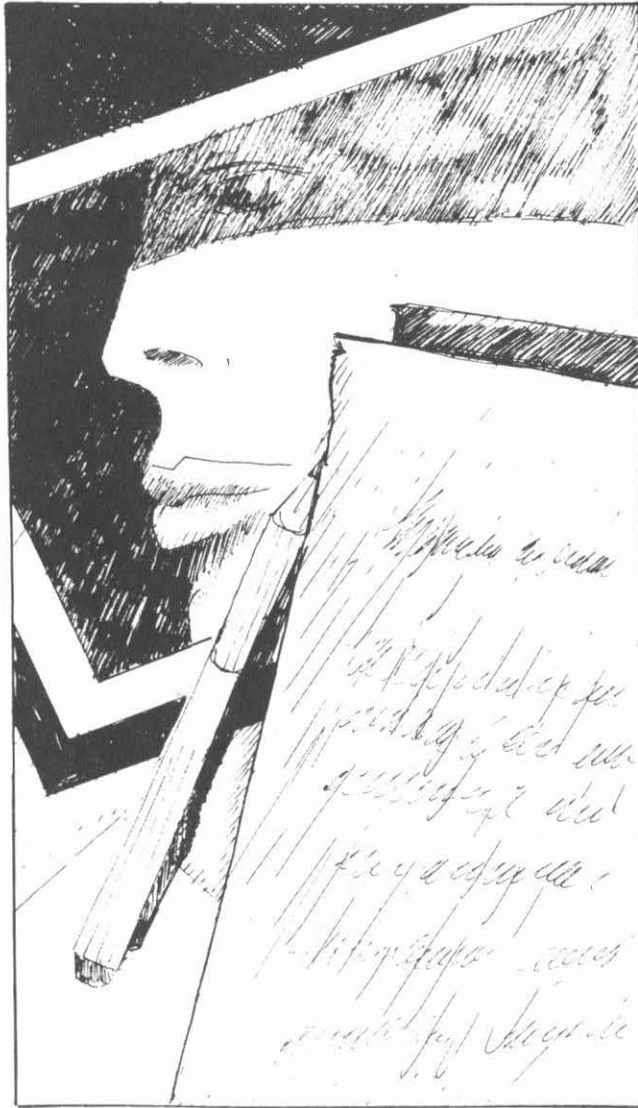
### TO HER MOTHER

*for Chloe*

Weak sunlight fills the space between the hedges  
as neatly as a white envelope;  
and out of it steps your mother  
She is before us, before we know her,  
her dark-brown dress spread wide  
like a palm against her body.  
In this long moment of confusion,  
there is only her,  
materializing.

The orange and yellow pattern of her dress  
is like a trellis  
against the dark background.  
We, wanting to find her  
in this strange, soft form,  
begin to fill in the grid  
with flesh and stronger warmth;  
but she will not yet be.  
We remember the familiar face,  
climb the patterned trellis  
to look into the new one;  
but still the silence.

She will not be,  
cannot be,  
even for us.



### III

#### POINT OF RECOVERY

Since you were responsible for someone,  
death was forbidden you.  
Still, you thought you wouldn't live  
through her daily attempts  
to rid herself of imperfection.  
That surgery which she practiced  
weakened you who were so sympathetic  
till one day she had to leave you —  
just as flowers eventually withdraw  
from what sustains them.

Now you rest through the summer days.  
Dreams bend toward you like slender trees,  
offering their lovely heads to supplant old faces.  
The sickly orange and brown tiles of the floor  
seem capable only of dull secrets  
or those that don't matter  
because they come too late.

Yet once you wanted to be something better;  
so you stare at the floor,  
trying multiple configurations,  
rearranging the delicate symbols of your beliefs.  
White skin peeling from your fingers  
reminds you of letters and pale photographs  
in which you tried to render your desperation  
with a literary detachment.  
You were afraid.  
You had to be ill, you can't help recovering.



## IV

### THE DIFFERENCE

Her office, as opposed to yours,  
has large rectangles of diffused light,  
falling on books asleep like children.  
She sits away from her desk,  
comfortable and bold at forty-five.  
Her spring-water eyes almost win out  
against the maroon sweater and dark-green chair.  
And every inch of her smile  
is only the distance  
between her and everything else in her office.

You come to her to talk,  
your eyes spilling drink and anger.  
You hope you won't have to confront  
the desire well mannered for your sake.  
Again the two of you compare your pasts,  
as if you could relieve the pain  
with synonyms alone,  
then finally humiliate the crisis  
with sighs and laughter.  
You leave, refreshed,  
after she has carefully loved you.

Back in your office,  
you uproot the plant atop your desk.  
It falls into the wastebasket  
thick and dry and pliable as cord,  
dead from inattention.



## V

### THOSE UNNAMED

who roll out of the heart  
and take your love away  
so you never see her again—  
Once, you poured love into her  
and refreshed yourself continually  
till life seemed something you could store  
like water or gold  
Now you go home  
and find light sitting like a bird  
upon your doorknob  
You turn the cold thing  
and walk into an empty room,  
sigh and fill a glass  
Against a wall lit with summer  
and on one palm,  
you lean and then  
close your eyes.  
In simple acts,  
where truth is mere description  
and mere description the truth,  
you find you sense her best:  
the lovely face that looked at you  
believing you fair,  
believing you gave more  
of something more yourself  
each unfailing day



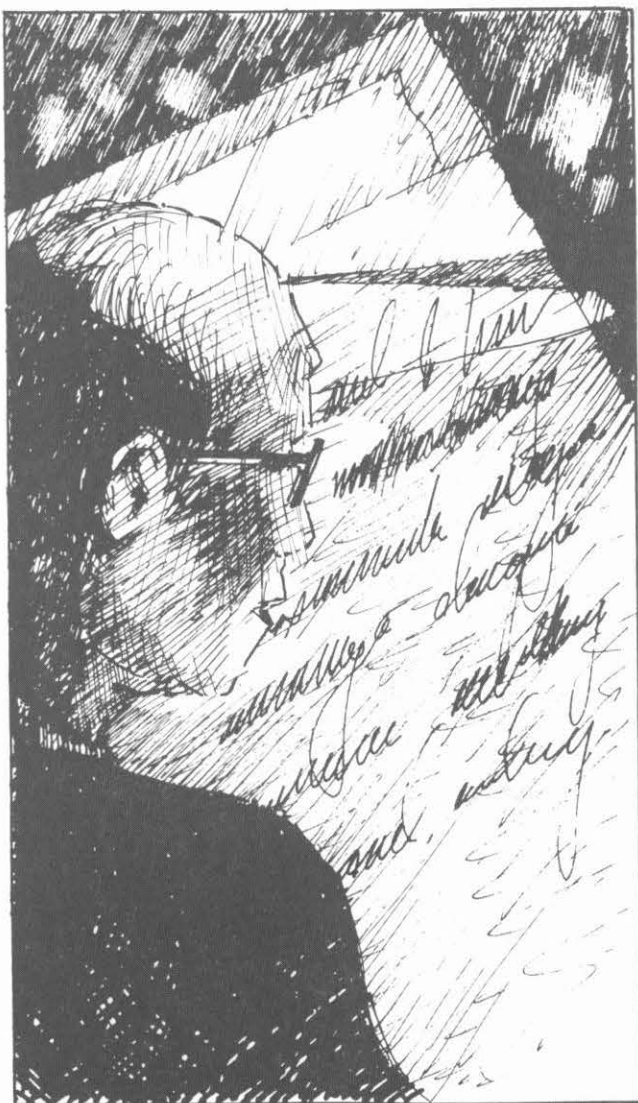
## VI

### PRAYER FOR ALCOHOLICS

Dear Lord:  
I see the spray  
of your warm grace  
this afternoon falling  
on the baseball field  
near the music room  
of the high school.  
While I wait  
for some circumstance  
of my situation  
to change.  
I see spray  
scattered into the air  
like rice thrown after  
a loved bride.  
Vigorous  
while leaves flutter  
with the same light  
that makes the spray white.  
The scene like music  
against the sounds of birds  
and small children,  
whose sounds will someday  
change.  
But more vigorous now  
the wind shakes the trees  
as if to rob them  
of spray and leaves,  
filling the air  
with a moan  
that envelopes the sound  
of children.

When my young daughter  
touches me,  
it's as if a bell  
is speaking.  
It surprises my flesh.  
I remember when  
I was a child:  
how my father  
taught me to draw  
a perfect Indian's head.  
He guided my hand:  
it was the only thing  
he could draw;  
and I learned well  
the abstract shapes which  
when combined  
make a smiling,  
benign face,  
one that doesn't know  
time or loss.  
But drawing it now  
gives me no pleasure:  
it is too perfect  
or perhaps the perfection  
had gone out of my hand  
when I stopped  
loving him:  
my alcoholic father.

Now I pray  
for the other men  
close to me.  
For the fury and misery  
that bring them close to ruin.  
I drink the afternoon's  
honey light,  
the gold drink of the world,  
hearing weak,  
self-righteous voices.  
There is no grace  
save that falling,  
lost on the soft  
and infinitely tender  
grass.



## VII

### POEM FOR THE UNICORN

*You say you find an inner  
Force in bodies, and watch  
The smallest fiber turn  
Upon an inner rule.*

—John Logan

I

The house where you stay  
is cold in the morning;  
it is the beginning  
of a late season in the islands.  
You take your glasses off  
and strain to bring the world  
into focus.  
Your face could have the texture  
of an old painting  
if you would not ignore it,  
but bunches of your hair  
will not sell for anything.  
You put a strand aside  
as if it were a piece of thread.

On the other side of the street,  
young men are resting against a wall,  
their slightly bowed heads  
fused into a light cloth of shadows  
edged in rust and gold.  
The wind blows wide, shallow waves  
against them,  
parting their hair,  
touching their eyes and lips and necks  
more softly than you ever could.  
You touch the strong green stems  
of your tall flowers.

II

The afternoon quiet  
is drawn across your hands and arms  
like a worn, black curtain.  
Upon your dark desk  
white paper sleeps,  
and you are watching the light  
burn through the louvres.  
You want to speak clearly  
in your letter,  
as if for the first time.

*The universe is too concave for me;  
my dreams promise no rebirth.  
Even here there are no angels;  
only the bodies of men will take  
the guilt inside the flesh.*

Walking along the shore  
to deliver your letter,  
you move through the cold  
like a careless woman  
indifferent to the life in her womb.  
Your swollen stomach  
is an old, dark-toned bell.  
In you sorrow is continually raised  
like some obsolete monument,  
to be destroyed, then resurrected again.  
The sea breaks over your head,  
and the birds clatter like ordinary women  
before an old man  
distilling sleep  
from the liquor of his friends.



*Balzac truly heroic, who makes night into day,  
who drives himself in vain to fill the gaps  
made by his debts, who above all dedicates  
himself to building an immortal monument.*

—Rodin

## VIII

### IMAGES OF BALZAC

*cast by Rodin*

He stands  
in the ruined green afternoon,  
the hollows of his eyes  
like big, dark medals  
hung from his brow,  
wound in his monk's robe  
like a ship caught in the long,  
gauzy arms of the wind

And in another photograph  
the white plaster cast,  
the final Balzac  
that stood sheltered in the studio  
until the artist's death,  
a smoky white ghost  
anchored in the darkness  
as if earth were hell

It shall never be  
erected anywhere Rodin said  
but bronzes of it  
were cast posthumously:  
from smoky ghost  
to iron-colored defiant  
cast for museums,  
it rejects these homes  
with a single, untiring look

Only at ease  
in the green atmosphere  
of the Steichen photograph,  
like an ancient fish  
swimming so slowly so deeply  
he seems motionless  
or finally  
at rest



## IX

### TWO EXILES

I: To Tristan

Brave, consuming statue,  
in sleep exiled from me also.  
One stern arm holds the sword  
which gleams like the iron twilight.  
Slowly the moon leaves the sky  
and enters like the angel Raphael  
come to speak to the first man  
of discrimination in love.  
Fair, devoted angel  
leaves us far behind  
in his errorless wake.

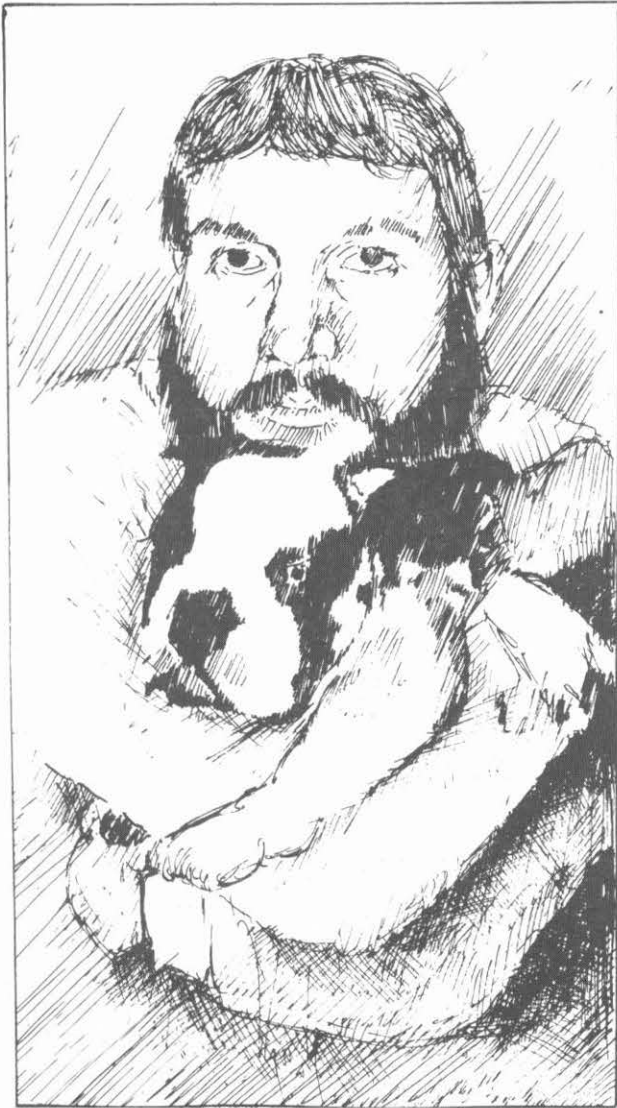
Love flourishes in this grotto,  
netting and threading the air  
till it sways like a heavy flower.  
In the morning,  
you will regard me like the sun,  
your faithful heart shining;  
and always, while the world beholds the heavens,  
we hold each other and lose both.  
Still, tempting foreigner,  
I stare into your shield of sleep.  
Though these tender days have cleansed us,  
love will find its way out of here;  
and what was known before  
will be known again.  
One of us  
must be awake for the end.

II: To Isolt

Your dress is alive  
with swans and parrots  
beating against the wind;  
yet your bride's step  
rules the chaos  
of your dress.

Insanely,  
I danced with you in my dreams,  
till weary of choosing between  
what is real and what is not,  
I wed the real.

Red dragonflies hover over a pond.  
I call Isolt  
her only possession is your name  
and she teaches me practical things:  
how to be a sparrow  
when the years are too long.  
When I die,  
all the sails will turn black,  
like the wings of rebellious angels,  
and a fire will burn above  
my sealed, white face,  
and I will not know  
it is you.



## X

### POEM FOR NORMAN

*i watch the roses of the day grow deep*  
—e. e. cummings

Tobacco and wine and roses  
the sweet smell and the acrid  
the smoke of cigarettes  
and the smoke of flowers  
floating across the table.  
Outside, the coffee-sprayed evening and the rain;  
inside, the restaurant so bright  
we sit intoxicated:  
our eyes meeting, deflecting  
like bells around the necks  
of Swiss cows decked with flowers  
on holidays.

At the other end of the table a child —  
her ninth birthday  
(the reason we've gathered to celebrate) —  
and a young boy  
with red-flecked skin and green eyes.  
Roses and white baby's breath  
in the center of the table . . .  
and suddenly you go mad  
like a cow breaking from the light of the pasture  
the smell of tall grass driving you  
like a knife against your neck.

Questions, you want questions from me,  
the white of years of suffering  
displayed like a huge diamond upon your finger,  
the red of Bardolino wine  
burning like a rose against your cheek.  
The other end of the table burns in the fire  
of being nine, tended by your young son.

Innocence blazes on the children's skin  
as they sit, laughing, under the chandelier.  
The baby's breath is like a screen of tears  
through which we see them.  
It makes us turn away,  
seek comfort from what we know,  
each other.

"Ask me questions, Pat."  
I ask you about your wife,  
the mainland (where you've just been),  
love, the promise of marriage –  
it quickly becomes abstract and deadly:  
the real world charges through our conversation  
and, bloodied, you slow down.  
You try to hide the wound out of shame,  
then go crazy sorrowing,  
finally reveal it to strangers . . .  
Meanwhile, in the young girl,  
pain has just begun to be fixed  
like the smoke of sweetness in the roses,  
the black stains in the wine,  
someday to be discovered  
with a ring of tears about the mouth.  
Later, we will put the children to bed  
and breathe their sweet youth,  
drink the fearlessness of their love:  
things so subtle they will nearly kill us.  
But the grief we foresee for our children  
is yet years away.  
The inheritance of powerful  
and foundering dreams.

## COLOPHON

This book was typeset in Palatino typeface. In part, it was set by the people at Typehouse Hawaii, with the remaining portion set by Lianne B. Chong. Lianne also illustrated and designed the book. X is a limited edition of 500 copies, printed on Teton Text papers at Oahu Printers with pressman Dan Inoue.

A limited edition is signed; this is: