

Kotaro Takamura



CHIEKO'S SKY

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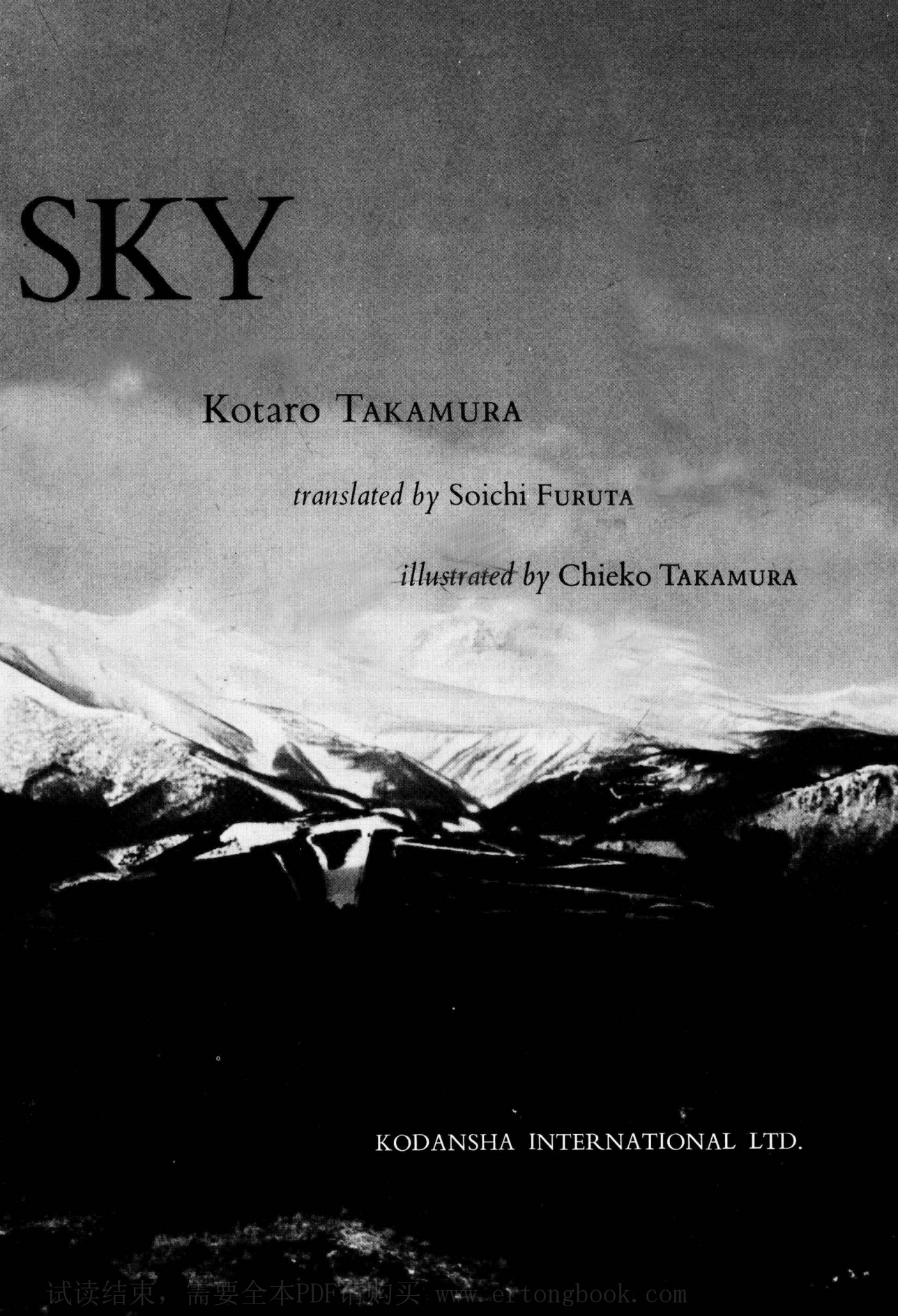
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SKY



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translator's preface

*forming is Nature's axis.
sine qua non of the world's existence.
from "To play with Chieko"*

*Kotaro was a sculptor, first of all.
He sculpted his poetry with a sculptor's hands.
Hands.
Certainly not merely with a painter's eyes.
His poetry was a "body" poetry, tactile and immediate.
As "body" equates with "form" in sculpture,
his was a "form" poetry. He did not write poems,
he formed them.
Thus in "Naked form" he wrote:*

I long for the naked form of Chieko.
modest and full
solemn like a constellation
undulating like a mountain range
always covered with thin mist
there was a fathomless sheen
to its agatelike formation.
.....
to create that formation once again
with my hands
is a covenant fixed by nature.

*In his poem "You get prettier and prettier,"
he sculpts the woman Chieko's body....*

your body washed by age
is heavenly metal flying through infinity.

*Brancusi once said,
"My hands think and follow the thoughts of my materials."
So did Kotaro's hands think and follow
the thoughts of his materials
—his wife Chieko, her body and soul together.*

*Chieko became his "particular" universe,
with which he tried to be one.
Basho once said,*

*Go to the pine if you would learn about the pine.
When you and the object have become one,
Your poetry issues of its own accord.*

*So Kotaro went to Chieko to learn about Chieko
and become one with Chieko.*

*And his poems flowed out of him
of their own accord.*

This is his poetics.

*Many love poems have been written,
but none like Chieko's Sky,
this forty-year chronicle
of one man's love affair with a singular woman.*

Many erotic poems have been written.

*"The Song of Songs," Catullus, Villon,
Shakespeare, Byron, Heine, Baudelaire,
Lawrence, Eliot, Cummings, Neruda . . .*

Despite stylistic variations

*in terms of romantic euphemism, bawdiness, symbolism, and so on,
the underlying keynote was always an "ambiguous eroticism,"
in which the object of love was never revealed
as explicitly as Chieko was.*

*Kotaro wrote a hymn of the body, a critic has said,
candid, bold, and tender,
almost in the tradition of Walt Whitman who sang:*

*Of physiology from top to toe I sing,
Not physiognomy alone nor brain alone is worthy for the
Muse, I say the Form complete is worthier far,
The Female equally with the Male I sing.*

*Here in Chieko's Sky the Form complete of Chieko
is laid bare for us by the fierce hands*

of Kotaro the sculptor.

*Love has seldom been etched more concretely
and vitally as in "a salamander dances violently"
in his poem "In admiration of love."*

*There have also been many painter-poets or poet-painters,
like Wang Wei, Buson, Blake, Hesse, and Klee.
Since Michelangelo, however, there has been
no sculptor-poet of major stature
but Kotaro.*

*He was neither a sculptor who dabbled in poetry
nor a poet who dabbled in sculpture.*

*In Japan, his place as the father of both
modern sculpture and modern poetry
has long been established.*

*Pursuing that "heavenly metal flying through infinity,"
Kotaro struggled to enter Chieko's world of
absolute reality.*

Chieko is in dimension a.
dimension a is absolute reality.

.....
all is a playful stroll over Chieko's dimension a.
as we play, we get a little less vulgar.

*It is with these last lines
of Kotaro's in mind
that I would like to give this translation
of a unique volume of love
to the Western reader.*

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to someone

just can't stand
your going away.....

like bearing fruit before flowering
like budding before seeding
like spring coming right out of summer
please don't do
such an absurd unnatural thing
just the thought of a stereotyped husband
and you who write in a round hand
is enough to make me cry
getting married? why you—
you who are timid like a bird
capricious as a great wind?

just can't stand
your going away.....

how could you so easily
how shall I say? ... well ...
feel like selling yourself?
yes, selling yourself
from the world of one
to the world of everyone
yielding yourself, so senselessly yielding
yourself to the man
oh, what a hideous act!
like a Titian
out shopping in Times Square
I am lonely I am sad
uncertain
it's like watching that fat Gloxinia

you gave me
rotting
like seeing it degenerate, deserting me
like staring at the trace of a bird
traveling through the sky
it's that sad desperate feeling of a broken surge
fleeting lonely burning
... yet it's different from love
Santa Maria
nothing like that nothing like that
though I don't know why, to begin with.....
just can't stand
your going away.....
much less, your getting married
yielding to another man's whim

July, 1912

heart of one night

look, the moon of a July night
running a fever in the poplar grove
a faint waft of fragrance from cyclamen
sobbing on your silent lips
woods, roads, grass and distant streets
writhing in a causeless sorrow
and heaving white sighs faintly
a young couple holding hands side by side
treading over the black soil
an invisible demon draining a sweet wine
an echo of the earth-rumbling last train
sounding like a mockery of man's fate
my soul has secretly begun to writhe
moistening a sash of Indian ~~chintz~~ with sweat
trying to maintain the patience of a fire worshiper
heart, heart
wake up, my heart
wake up, your heart
what can this mean?
inseparable, painful, inescapable
and sweet, hard to leave, unbearable
heart, heart
rise from the sickbed
abandon the hashish doze
everything visible, though, now seems maddening
look, even the moon of a July night
running a fever in the poplar grove
incurable illness
my heart tormented by beautiful vermin
on the grass of a greenhouse
heart, heart
. . . what, alas, are you calling now
in this silent midnight?

August, 1912

fear

you mustn't you mustn't
put your hands on this tranquil water
much less, toss in a stone
even the single tremor of one waterdrop
would waste a myriad of useless ripples
you must revere the stillness of water
and measure the value of silence

you mustn't tell me more
what you're about to say is so damned perilous
better not to speak
if spoken, then it's a thunder fire
you are a woman
after all, a woman, though they say you are manlike
you are that round moon sweating in the blue-black sky
that moon leading the world to a dream
and transposing an instant to eternity
enough enough
don't bring the dream back to reality
and eternity back to the instant
much less
toss such a perilous thing
into this limpid water

the stillness of my mind is a treasure bought by blood
the treasure that sacrificed blood incomprehensible to you
this stillness is my life
this stillness is my god
moreover, a fastidious god
who threatens even now to disrupt
the appetite of a summer night
would you dare touch that very spot?

you must you must
you must measure the value of silence
or else
set to work with extraordinary resolution
the ripple stirred by that single stone
might assault you and engulf you in the whirlpool
might shock you a hundred thousand times harder
you are a woman
you must foster strength enough to bear this
but can you do it, I wonder
you mustn't tell me more
you mustn't you mustn't

look
isn't this smoggy, greasy station
now like a treasure-house shrouding some great beauty
in this moon and a little sultry mist?
that green and red signal is playing
a tremendous role between silence and glancing
and tuning up the moon-night emotion far away
now, surrounded by something
a certain atmosphere
a certain formless power governing a strange modulation
I am poised in most precious balance
my soul musing on eternity
my eyes finding infinite value in all things
quietly quietly
keeping in touch with an unknown force
am I now forgetting a language

you mustn't you mustn't
put your hands on this tranquil water
much less, toss in a stone

August, 1912

peep-show song

(in praise of the very innocent tableaux of a peep show)

the Deep North is the country
 the Twin Pines is the village
watch her run
across the red-brick wine cellar
that woman, fleeing
a woman just like wine
born suddenly out of wine froth
her destination was Kichijoji
that would burn down anyway
even the River Abukuma's water
could never douse this fire
together, wine and water
are true foes
wine and water indeed!

August, 1912

one evening

fire burning in a gas stove
oolong tea, wind, thin evening moon

... that's it, yes, that's the world
the sincerity they covet is nothing but a dress uniform
it's a masquerade of nature
it's the erect position of attention
in the confusion of the world they have lost their minds
—the minds of the self-knowing that had once been naked
don't be surprised
that's the world
a gang of abominable, cruel men
harboring vulgar thoughts
and staring an inch before their eyes
and so the man who endeavors to live true
... as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be ...
is, on the contrary, judged insincere
suffers persecution as you suffered
those cowards
and hypocrites
first look at us with voices of wonder
then sing the gamut of abuse, to while away their time
for they, the insincere, just meddle with events
and disregard the persons concerned
to be contemptible is the world
to be shameful is a little man involved in it
doing what we are born to do
advancing on the right path
respecting the laws of nature
we must reach a land where our thoughts are always
in harmony with natural law

the best power comes only from belief in ourselves
don't be surprised by their ugliness, like frogs
rather find in them beauty of the grotesque
to appreciate our loving hearts is enough
we must live in nature and freedom
breaking up all entanglements
like wind-blowing like cloud-floating
if there is no falsehood in natural law, inner need,
 and the promptings of wisdom, then it's good
nature is intelligent
nature is prudent
don't be vexed by those freaks
come now, let's eat a simple meal again in Ginza

October, 1912