



## Grass for His Pillow (Tales of the Otori, Book 2)

By Lian Hearn

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**Grass for His Pillow (Tales of the Otori, Book 2) By Lian Hearn**

***Grass for His Pillow* is the second book in the *Tales of the Otori* series by Lian Hearn. Don't miss the related series, *The Tale of Shikanoko*.**

Praised for its epic scope and descriptive detail, *Across the Nightingale Floor*, the first book in the Tales of the Otori series, was an international bestseller and critical success, named by the *London Times* as "the most compelling novel to have been published this year." With *Grass for His Pillow*, Book Two, we return to the medieval Japan of Lian Hearn's creation—a land of harsh beauty and deceptive appearances.

In a complex social hierarchy, amid dissembling clans and fractured allegiances, there is no place for passionate young love. The orphan Takeo has been condemned to work as an assassin—an enforced occupation that his father sacrificed his own life to escape. Meanwhile, Takeo's beloved Shirakawa Kaede, heir to the Murayama and alone in the world, must find a way to unify the domain she has inherited, as she fights off the advances of would-be suitors and hopes against fading hope that Takeo will return to her...

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

Lian Hearn's second novel in the Tales of the Otori, *Grass For His Pillow* continues to enrich and expand his mystical imaginings of feudal Japan. Picking up where *Across the Nightingale Floor* left off, Takeo fulfills his debt of honor and accepts his heritage as a member of the superhuman cabal of assassins known as "The Tribe," and is thus ingested into their plots. But his heart yearns for Kaede, his one true love, and secretly wishes to fulfill the final wishes of his adopted father, Otori Shigaru. Meanwhile, Kaede returns to her homeland to find her father's estate in ruin and her inheritance in jeopardy. The two each encounter vast political machinations and deadly consequences as they unconsciously move toward their overwhelming urges to reunite and defy (or perhaps embrace) fate.

Hearn's second book into the Tales of the Otori series is a more poignant tale than the first, painfully examining the lines between honor, duty, and love. With its calming and satisfying conclusion, the landscape of Hearn's mythical vision of Japan braces for a dazzling storm in the book to come. --*Jeremy Pugh*

#### From Publishers Weekly

The pseudonymous Hearn's second thrilling installment of her Tales of the Otori trilogy (after 2002's *Across the Nightingale Floor*) is once again set in a magic-haunted version of medieval Japan where no one wields unchallenged authority and no one is safe. The swirl of treacherous, shifting clan alliances threatens to overwhelm young lovers and aristocrats Takeo and Kaede. Separated throughout most of the action, the two must develop their talents while trying to maintain their integrity. Takeo possesses superhuman gifts such as the ability to become invisible, project a double image of himself and hear distant conversations; however, he must discipline his skills and control his impetuous temper. He also must work out his relationship with the Tribe, a treacherous secret organization of spies and assassins that saved his life but that may have murdered his father. Kaede, meanwhile, has to escape the powerless role of a woman if she is to protect herself and her family domain from predatory neighbors. Adept at creating vivid natural settings where the supernatural feels unusually plausible, Hearn catches fresh details of trees, birds, rivers and mountains. With quick, direct sentences like brushstrokes on a Japanese scroll, she suggests vast and mysterious landscapes full of both menace and wonder. Hearn shows that middle novels of trilogies don't have to simply fill space between an exciting opening and conclusion.

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#### From School Library Journal

Adult/High School-Familiarity with *Across the Nightingale Floor* (Riverhead, 2002) is important to understanding this story, as Hearn gives no recap of events in that book. Takeo abandons his adopted family, the Otori, to be trained by the Tribe. He learns more about this mysterious clan and about his origins, including the secrets behind his father's conception and death. In the end, he must decide if he will remain true to the ruthless, amoral Tribe or follow his heart and avenge Otori Shigeru. Shirakawa Kaede also faces difficult choices. She resists the path tradition demands of her, and seizes opportunities and education usually only granted to males. She is determined to claim her inheritance and remain faithful to Takeo, no matter the cost. The novel suffers from middle-book syndrome in that just as the action starts to get exciting, readers are told to wait for book three. Rather than the adventure and intrigue of the previous title, *Grass* focuses more on the internal transformations of Takeo and Kaede during the winter of their separation. The wealth of detail in the pseudo-Japanese setting helps ground the story. Purchase where the first book is popular.

*Susan Salpini, Fairfax County Public Schools, VA*

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#### **Leonard Santiago:**

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