



In Pursuit of Lavender

Akiko Itoyama, translated by Charles De Wolf

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Description

Two escaped mental hospital patients embark on a journey to free themselves from the crises that constantly plague them.

In this novel-length road story, the female protagonist, who is haunted by an audio hallucination – ‘twenty ells of linen are worth a coat’ – that plays over and over in her mind, escapes from a mental hospital with a young man. This is the story of their journey together.

The hallucinatory words come from a passage in Marx's *Das Kapital*, but the protagonist knows nothing of that; nor does she understand what they literally mean. After she starts to hear them, she attempts suicide and is then diagnosed as manic and placed in a mental hospital. Unable to stand life in the prison-like hospital, she makes a daring escape with Nagoyan, another patient.

She is 21 and fluent in the Hakata dialect of northern Kyushu. Nagoyan is a 24-year-old company employee suffering from depression who insists that he is a native of Tokyo, though he is actually from Nagoya. This strange pair, just escaped from their Hakata hospital, struggle with the mental crises that constantly assault them as they head southward in a junky car, picking destinations at whim as they go. On the way, they sightsee, quarrel, and yearn for the fragrance of lavender, which is supposedly good for the emotions.

At last they reach Ibusuki in Kagoshima, the southernmost part of Kyushu, where they are able to smell the unlikely scent of lavender. Walking together along a path in the seabed that only appears at low tide, they make a decision that will change both of them, and will help them achieve the catharsis they desperately seek.

Readership: This book will appeal to readers of ‘road stories’, to those with an interest in translated works by award-winning and prolific Japanese writers and English-speaking fans of Akiko Itoyama.

About the Author

Akiko Itoyama (born 1966) is a Japanese writer and winner of the Bungakukai New Face Award (2003), the Kawabata Yasunari Prize (2004) and the 134th Akutagawa Prize (2005).

Charles De Wolf is a writer, linguist, and translator of Japanese literature, both classical and modern.

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