

Part Two: The Lady Hideko

Once, when still a child, I climbed a tree in the garden in order to see the ground from a different height. That part of the garden where the sky looks black, but is not. It was spring, there had been blossoms, I had been a child. Not long in the great house. And the hiss of the wind. And the clouds. The bend of the sky where it looked. Seeing, from that height, the gentlemen file past on their way to the library, with its acres of books. From there the perimeter of the grounds, its acres and acres, was obscured by a perpetual mist. I was an orphan, but resembled in some way, in some angles, from certain eyes, a lost aunt—once hanged, becoming a length of rope inside a hat box.

As a child I studied history, remembering that

I remember the greenness of the trees, and also the lamps.
Flickering on and off in the midst of storms.

When the girl arrives, she calls herself Tamako. She calls herself a great many things, though not aloud. When the gentlemen arrive, they file quietly past. The fiction of their names. I would watch from the stage while reading and painting, while learning my history. I would study my length of rope. A past does not become and goes. My father said this to me once, but it was long ago. It was in another country.

When a child sees itself at the end of a long drive; when the clocks are stopped at twenty to nine; when in the library the books are arranged precisely—by period, by weight, by significance. There are blackouts in the night; they come without warning.

Bella Li