



## Horror, Hate, and Hysteria: How to Survive the Exigencies of War

### Description

# Horror, Hate, and Hysteria: How to Survive the Exigencies of War

### Author's Memo

Born in Tokyo after World War II, half Japanese, I've lived most of my life in the Mid-Atlantic and Appalachian regions, and I write out of the consciousness that I am both a product of the violence of war and a migratory being—not only in the strictest sense of physical displacement, but also in belonging. How do I place myself in race? Asian-American is a convenience that attempts to pull together an identity fraught with conflict. Not only does it fail to distinguish among the many countries of Asia, but the hyphenation also reduces to meaninglessness the varied cultures and ethnicities.

In my life I have migrated from middle class to poverty and back again. To what class do I belong? And for how long will my present situation last? Fortunes change; they can be as fluid as gender, depending on choice. On circumstance. On the continuum of male-female, how do I say if I am this or that, male or female, when all my instincts and behaviors range, even within a single day? Like Whitman, I contain multitudes. The violence that inhabits these poems is the violence of war and rupture and self-doubt. It is the violence of language that attempts to say the unsayable, though I am compelled to bear witness.





by Sahil Pandita for Unsplash

### **hold on until the shaking stops**

**“Those poor little people, those poor little people.” Oppenheimer**

Rolling thunder and the patter of the rain on  
crayon-colored pictures of the sun a simple yellow  
circle flashes bright through sieve of maples and  
everything lights up electric from within the mind a deepening ...  
box of memories opens up the letters spilling out and sometimes  
I am short vowel long tooth of the consonant that fates the boy  
or girl who can't go out to jump the rope to bridge the nose with wings  
to fling the buckeyes bombing screaming between horses that are boundaries  
we should keep I am small I am drinking chocolate milk out of  
the spout eating tigers one-by-one from a red-and-yellow  
circus with a handle sometimes I am zebra in my black-and-  
white striped boots sometimes mute giraffe ... letters in a language  
to make sense of it sometimes I am crouched under the cover  
of my desk ducking down between the lock of knees and making  
myself smaller smaller though they tell us we are safe and sound  
the sound of bell like an alarm our slickers hung on pegs like little  
yellow skins of little people we'd discarded

### **I was waiting for my father to say his father's name**

His name  
Falling down  
Like *this old house ... this old house ...*  
Made of splint and tinder. The curtains  
Always drawn. Whiff of crematorium  
Like grandma used to sing *I will take you home ...*  
Like confidential folk song  
His name abandoned after war  
Never talked about  
My father changed his name on

All official documents  
My mother said his father died  
From eating too much sauerkraut

### crush

When I pillowed dreams of boys who didn't love me—boys

I would possess. White boys. Polish, Irish and Italian.  
Everything about them strange. English Leather, denim,  
when I serpented garages where they denned. Boys

who tooled in cars. Who spit on sidewalks. Boys  
who moved in packs, who looked just like their dads.

There was the handsome-stupid boy who copied answers  
to the tests. Another who made passes, spiked the winning baskets.

There was that boy who left the dance, who combed his hair  
in the window of Pulaski's. He was too beautiful.

I coiled in the hurt (see the footnote). White boys. Polish, Irish and Italian.

Here, I think you want me to say something like  
*geisha, kimono, cherry blossom*—

Okaasan only said, *Be sure he loves you more than you love him.*

*Here I reference Kiyohime (??), a character in Japanese folklore, who transformed into a serpent, crushing the monk who hid inside a temple bell after he had rejected her.*

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