

FIRST PRIZE (\$1,000)

THE GIRL REMEMBERS NANJING

(to Minnie Vautrin and Iris Chang)

Jessamine Price

"For the memories themselves are still nothing. Not till they have turned to blood within us."

—Rainer Maria Rilke

1.

At first the letters were a forest without paths,
Branch upon branch, thorn against thorn,
Then the next-door grandpa taught me tricks:
Two lines for a man, three for a stream,
Four for a water drop bursting the evening pond.

For others I invented names
To make my little brother laugh:
Man standing to pee, momma killing a chicken.
Strange characters began to tell a story.
This was my twelfth year.

You want to know about the war?
My tale is short: Bad stars fell.
The rich left town. The poor were left.
December was too cold to weep.

2.

Why tell you memories are a forest without paths: screams and knee against thigh the corpses piled breast upon belly and the smell of iron? Why tell you yesterday's flesh today blue curves and angles squint tight your eyes try not to read the message of their bayonets and burns? Why tell you the knocking door squinting my eyes curving my angles trying not to hear my ripping flesh an ocean without bottom?

You would drown too.

Why tell you the empty box by the kitchen door the too-much roar of bombs the shattering of shutters? Tell you the piss the scrubbing of shirts the fallen rice poured out into the jagged emptiness broken street? Tell you a single finger in the dirt the ragged join of leg and hip laid bare the hang of tendon crunch of bone? Tell you the row of naked feet by the river backwards swing of a noose?

You would hang too.

Tell you strange new craters of his face after the bullet and a trunkless head black hair turned dull staring from a red platter on the gray street? Tell you ragged skirt hems hacking at hairless napes skin wrenched from the red muscle one liquid breath before death? The night of broken doors little brother with a stick man with a club tongues without music barking and inside out their skins made wolves of their hearts guzzled our breath for warmth?

You would get eaten too.

3.

Now the next-door grandpa doesn't speak.

Little brother wakes too soon.

Two lines for a man.

I used to like that shape.

I throw my pencils on the fire
and how beautifully they burn.

You learned it well—to remember is to burn.

Our memories are ashes and blood

letters without meaning

forests without paths

legs without feet

this pain asks

a question

with no

Note: Minnie Vautrin (1886-1941) was the missionary, educator and president of Ginling College, Nanjing, who protected thousands of Chinese citizens from Japanese soldiers during the 1937 Rape of Nanjing. Iris Chang (1968-2004) was the journalist who documented the Nanjing atrocities and brought them to prominence in her 1991 bestseller *The Rape of Nanking*. Both women ended their lives by committing suicide.

SECOND PRIZE (\$400)

Nanking: A Child's Memory

Shelby Song, San Francisco, CA

At the foot of the osmanthus hill by the walled city of Nanking,
Once the realm of emperors, princes and concubines,
A little girl was born.
She had dimples as cute as buttons
And a full head of hair the color of the shiniest inkstone.
But her mother sighed,
Her father sighed,
Her great aunt sighed,
“Why do you have to be born a girl?
And why now, in this dreadful year of 1934?
Warlords have been fighting all around us,
The Japanese army has bombed our store in Manchuria,
We are war refugees in Nanking,
We are barely making ends meet,
A boy would at least carry on our family name,
But a girl is but an extra mouth to feed.

But feed her they did,
And nurture her they did,
With whatever little they had,
And with whatever vices they possessed,
For who could resist those dimples as cute as buttons,
Hair the color of the shiniest inkstone.
They taught her to sing, they taught her to dance,
They taught her to write with a wolf-haired writing brush.
She was the apple of her great aunt's eye,
She was a delight of her village.

The world was her great aunt smothering her with cuddles after emerging from the haze of the opium den.

The world was her mother squeezing her on her cheeks after collecting her winnings at the mahjong hall.

The world was her wading in the river with playmates searching for the speckled river stones
And the world was the warplanes whirring in the distance.

They say children under three don't remember,
But she remembered, and she remembered well.

She remembered the ineffable fear of the villagers crying out that Shanghai had fallen and Nanking would soon too.

She remembered the haggard eyes of the retreating Chinese soldiers banging on their doors, begging for food and water, their blood-soaked bandages dangling.
She remembered the deafening throb of the artillery
and the thunderous thrust of the canon fire that silenced all thrushes, robins, magpies, crickets, frogs and the wailing of babies.
and painted the blue sky scarlet red.

She remembered her great aunt begging her young mother to go and hide, her voice trembling in subdued anguish.
She remembered being carried on the back of her father, passing by corpse after corpse, severed limb after severed limb, as they trudged along in search of food at the local temple.
She remembered the deathly silence of the crowd when the soldiers came, soldiers in uniforms she had never seen, soldiers with the flag of the rising sun fluttering on their bayonets
Even sniveling babies dared not cry.

She remembered the soldier telling those wretched souls crowding the temple that anyone who had contracted malaria must be brought forth.
She remembered her great aunt whispering to her, "Child, if the Japanese come to you, be still, be very, very still."
She remembered the muffled howls of parents whose malaria-infected children or those who merely looked jaundiced were taken away, the lucky ones shot, the rest cut down with bayonets and sabers.
She remembered the scrawny soldier coming to her, his cold, cold sword glistening in the chilly December sun.
She remained still, deathly still, as her teeth chattered, her tiny face drained of blood.
She remembered the soldier's cold, cold stare, and her great aunt's lips quivering in the wintry blast.
"Sir, she does not have malaria. Look at her, she is one healthy, healthy child."

Perhaps fortune favored her,
Perhaps her tiny face, frozen in terror, drained of blood, already looked dead,
Perhaps the soldier's saber had simply grown dull,
Perhaps she was spared by serendipity.

But she remembered it all,
Because one's memories are seared into one's mind, like petroglyphs carved deep into the rocks that will last a thousand years.
When the river is dyed crimson by the endless flow of blood of the murdered
When the dead lie unburied and are piled sky high
When a child is thrust to the edge of hell and barely comes back from death,
She will remember and remember well.
That child is my mother,
Traumatized as a child,

Scarred for life.
But her story will not be silenced,
And her memories will live on. <shelbyjsong@yahoo.com>

HONORARY AWARD (\$100 EACH)

On 13 December 1937, in Nanjing

Masooma Ali, Karachi, Pakistan

An unforgettable massacre took place.
It was the capital of China before Beijing,
But destroyed by the Japanese race.
Oh! The Massacre Of Nanjing.

Before the Japanese troops invaded,
The Nanjing were mere people.
Happy and cheerful before happiness faded,
Worked in all fields but in the illegal.

Love and peace resided everywhere,
Men and women were treated well.
And their matters were handled with care,
Before the Japanese turned Nanjing to hell.

Every happiness was taken away,
When entered the Japanese troops.
Properties were robbed and burned to hay,
And men were shot in groups.
The women were horribly looted,
Not even minor girls were left.
Awfully raped and badly treated,
The worst of all is honor's theft.

Two Japanese officers Noda and Mukai,
Played the horrible killing contest.
They killed with swords and didn't even shy,
Destroying a hundred dove's nest.

The heroes of Nanjing are still known today,

Behind Rabe, Vautrin and Magee stayed.
To help the civilians to safely get away,
Saved thousands of people and their part was played.

Near the "Thousand Corpses Pit",
"A Nanjing Memorial Hall" is built.
Where even today souls sit,
Waiting for the Japanese to feel the guilt.
Oh! The Massacre Of Nanjing. amasooma375@gmail.com

[No easy way to express the outrage of the 'Rape of Nanjing']

The Hungry Ghosts Of The 'Rape Of Nanjing'

Sylvia Anne Telfer, Scotland, UK

China's essence, the Yangtse River, spills
a precious cargo of another sort of lifeblood
into sea beyond Shanghai,
Nanjing ponds are corpse-choked chills
down spine, and raped women,
skirts hitched high beyond thigh, lie
in ungainly poses, butchered by
the Japanese Imperial Army,
men without roses thumbing noses
at safety zones.
Will female bones remember
this terrible December
or the phoenix enfolding?
Unassailable dignity enthrones
their tortured faces for they
are lotuses rising pure out of muck
but still everywhere death fouls air
and mass killings suck away most graces;
some weep, some scream, some gape
for day after day, plunder, ashes,
capricious slaughter with no escape.
Even the city's magpies shun the scene.
Smash of windows, crash of looting
in the scent of sticky rice buns
snatched from the hands of hungry Han
are barbarities shocking global

**newstands but the evil grips harder
and somewhere nearby
a Japanese soldier blades a boy
whose screams impel those
of the wounded to live on, revenge.
Hungry ghosts gather,
cherry blossoms wither.**

**And so, today, in the seventh month
in the lunar year, as in all the years
since 'The Great Sin', hungry ghosts
oppose the venomous ones
for in loss of whole families,
no ceremonies, no chants in praise
of parental love or filial piety.
But by the grace of the Jade Emperor
many crystal glasses sow rice
in a spiritual realm and joss sticks
make fragrant those spectral paddies
as kin kneel before clan altars
in this city, Nanjing, still with its birth
wall of brick, gravel, yellow earth.**

**In now tranquil Jinling Girls College
is a statue of the missionary,
Minnie Vuatrin,
that fearless sword of all.
Dead a long time now Minnie Vautrin
from America that Chinese folk call
'The Goddess of Mercy'
but your selfless words live on,
"Had I ten perfect lives,
I would give them all to China."
How stark was your terror when in dark
a truck passed you with seized girls?
How fast were the swirls
of your despair at their yell,
"Save our lives!"
when impossible in an evil crucible?
How many hungry ghosts?
How many unsung heroes?
"Only God knows."**

The humane will always man their posts,
forever build walls against enemies
for the tortoise tiptoes,
the dragon is pregnant
and the Purple Mountain weeps,
offers the plump falls of its plum trees. sylviatelfer@hotmail.com

tears in the sky

Michele Baron, Dulles VA

towering city, at once modern and ancient
seat of empires and conquests, dynasties, and dreams,
hosts of harvests, and sorrows, and terrible wrongs,
... and home, now, to hopes, which, finally, begin
to fill our days, and shine light on our tomorrows

echoes past contrast with gaiety of the present —
pop culture and Ming Tombs; the horror of war,
the river of tears of the 300,000
join the mythical power of timeless mountains and waters
enduring, wordless, through days and nights, across ages and eons

what do we learn, from the trees, and the grasses,
cut down, with knives, and axes,
yet growing back, again, and again?
what do we learn, as the sun lends it light
to the bleeding, weeping skies?

... when we are buried,
we can no longer change
the days we share,
under the heavens

while we live, every breath is a new chance
to wash away, like great rivers, the ugliness of memories we cannot change;
to leave behind, smooth, and shining,
the glorious truths that our lives had worth, have meaning ...
the beauty of the souls that passed, but will never, ever, be forgotten

norabelehcim@gmail.com

Forgiveness

Yue Li, Rockville, MD

---- To commemorate the 80th anniversary of the death of compatriots in the "Nanjing Massacre"

How could I forgive you? The Zhidu Mountain precipitous,
Shadows of rocks, and the turbid
Rushing river.

In the distance, black sand and mud are soaked with red blood.
There, are my brothers and fellow villagers, who
Need to be buried.

How could I forgive you? Forgive the rope tightly
Binding me, or the cold sharp blade
Held high over head? In the eyes filled with blood lust,
A stone-built elegant imperial city collapses, burned and destroyed
Under artillery fire.

How could I forgive you? With the wound on my forehead,
Or still bleeding heart?
On the Thousand-Buddha Cliff, the carved stones', toward the dusty world,
Drooping eyelids?
Or a benevolent's, for a bloodthirsty beast, contempt and fearlessness?

The river is still torrential, flowing
Eastward.
The ringing bell of the Qixia Temple becomes silent
Under the bloody sky at dusk.....

The Swallow Crag towering ---- a nestling bird
Spreading
Its broken wings. yl.yueli@gmail.com

EVIL UNDER THE SUN

MAUREEN ANNE BROWNE, NEWTOWNARDS, NORTHERN IRELAND

**Who will speak up
for the Chinese people of Nanking city,
acknowledge their suffering
at the hands of Japanese soldiers
perverting the way of Bushido,**

**who will speak up
for the babies they bayoneted,
the children, the maidens,
the old women, they raped,
the civilians they decapitated,
the prisoners they injected
with cholera, mutilated -
stomachs ripped open,
limbs frozen, amputated?**

**History recording, debating, statistics.
Each one of the countless victims
had a name when living.**

**Who will speak up
for the Chinese people of Nanking city?**

**Will Purple Gold mountain, there
when they were being burned to death
their bodies thrashing writhing
their screams hammering the air,
or the tons of earth
they were buried alive under,
or the Yangtze river
that caught them when they fell,
blasted with bullets, turning it red?**

**Who will speak up
for the Chinese people of Nanking city?**

**Who will remember
the acts of kindness from their own,
those of another country,
American, Danish, German,
driven by a common humanity
to do something?
The Pastor, the Missionary,**

the Teacher, the Nazi, stood between,
saved thousands of Chinese.

We must speak up
for the Chinese of Nanking,
we must remember
those who came with compassion,
defied the danger, and took them in. maureenannebrowne@outlook.com

City of Sorrows

John F Keane, Stockport, United Kingdom

The moon bent like a bow, the sun setting
Smoke towers rise from delinquent fires
Women shriek from shuttered rooms
The coarse laughter of Imperial savages
Fresh corpses choke the wide Yangtze
The ragged shots of execution squads
Barked commands to loot, rape and kill:
How much sorrow can one city bear?

Shinto drums call for slaughter
Swords flash through exposed necks
Bayonets drive through clutching ribs
Blood-spattered Imperial flags flutter
Samurai heroes seek out old women
Rape passes are issued to the horde
Locusts descending on a ripe field:
How much sorrow can one city bear?

Half the wide Yangtze flows sunset red
The moon shelters behind clouds
Only the hungry fires light Nanjing
Sparks sweeping towards heaven
Soldiers rest, exhausted with slaughter
Empty your minds of shame or guilt
For you are all one in the Emperor:
How much sorrow can one city bear? j_f_keane@hotmail.com

VERY HONORABLY MENTIONED (NO PRIZE AWARDED)

No Peace Without Justice

David Lohrey, Green Cove Springs, FL

It's not on the cultural radar as are the Japanese cities, Nagasaki and Hiroshima. It lacks the prestige of nuclear annihilation. The Chinese in Nanking died, and nobody denies it, but their deaths lack nuclear glamour.

History moves on and the criminals get away. That's harsh, that's rude, but that's the way it is. The Americans didn't push prosecutions after the war and very soon the guilty and the victims were forgotten.

For many, forgiveness is easy. Give the Japanese a break, some say, forget it. Time to move on, but the crime of genocide doesn't disappear; death by Imperial fanatics doesn't just go away. It stays.

The Americans and the Japanese cooked up the myth of the peace-loving Japanese after the war. It was the propagandists' way to defeat the rise of communism. Suddenly, the enemy had become a new friend.

Instead of blood-thirsty killers, the Japanese were depicted as innocent victims and peace-lovers. "We would never do a thing like that!" and the world chose to believe them. Nanking was dropped from the cultural radar.

Nobody wants vengeance. It is time to move on, but it will never be time to forget. We must take a good hard look at history. Nanking was a death capital as terrifying as Dresden, as ghastly as Buchenwald. What happened there was no accident.

The murderers in Nanking looked their victims in the eye and stabbed them in the heart. They were as heartless as the American bombers, but they didn't just look down and push a button, as they did over Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

They murdered with relentless determination and with sadistic glee. They stabbed pregnant women and chopped up infants. They shot men between the eyes. They drove over living victims; it was a killing spree.

Nobody wants vengeance but we must all take an oath of remembrance. It is time to move on, they say, and we agree, but we must never forget it. There can be no healing without justice. These deaths haunt the present.

We demand nothing more than recognition, an acknowledgment of responsibility, not even an apology, just sincere regret. This war is over. We are ready to shake hands. We'll never forget but we can move on. Nobody wants vengeance. lohr_burgh@hotmail.com

I, Minnie

Joanna Oltman Smith, Brooklyn, NY

(All text from Minnie Vautrin's Diary, Nanjing, 1937, Yale School of Divinity Archives)

Within one's own consciousness
there was a fear
of unknown danger.

I shall sleep
with my clothes
on tonight.

The mother whose
twelve year-old girl
was shut outside the city
has stood outside our gate
most of the day
scanning the city
for some sign
of her little daughter.

Tomorrow is Sunday,
I believe.
All days are alike now.

Such deep indignation
at such destruction
and suffering rises within me
that I have difficulty
in controlling myself.

I saw a great
ribbon of fire
on Purple Mountain.

They are fearful...
for they have young
girls in their family.
Few people will sleep
in the city tonight.

War is a sin against
the creative spirit
at the heart
of the universe.

Stories of young girls who
were mistreated
are coming in...

There is terror in
the faces of the women....
many young women were taken
from their homes
by the Japanese soldiers.

There probably is no crime
that has not been committed
in this city today.

Tonight a truck passed,
in which there were 8 or 10 women,
and as it passed they called out
Gin Ming. Gin Ming.
Save our lives.

Oh God, control the cruel
beastliness of the soldiers
in Nanking tonight...

Wish someone were here to write
the sad story of each person —
especially that of the younger girls
who had blackened their faces
and cut their hair.

The fruits of war are
death
and

desolation.

The soldiers on guard
get a good amount of amusement
from herding people like cattle
and sometimes they put the stamp
on their cheek.

...the dried leaves rattling,
the wind moaning,
the cry of women being led out...

Artist's Note (as requested by poetry contest coordinator):

I read Wilhelmina "Minnie" Vautrin's (an American missionary in charge of Ginling College in Nanjing) diaries throughout the period of the fall of Nanjing, and was overwhelmed by her first person account. I majored in history, so I was 100% true to her actual words. Where I used only partial sentences, I inserted ellipses. jo@nyccsmith.com

Will of a Comfort Woman

Yearn Hong Choi, Fairfax Station, VA

For a long time, I could not breathe.
Life has been a burden on me:
Harsh, tough, and merciless.
Time and time again, I missed Bo, Mlyako and Sunyi
Who were raped and killed in the Southeast Asian jungle
70-some years ago.
My country has been cruel to me.
Some luck survived the Japanese Sacred War,
Crimes of humanity.
The Japanese Government has been telling me
All wars must be brutal and cruel
Filled with barbarian killings and Massacre.
After the War, I washed my body hundred times,
A thousand times,
But I could not cleanse such a disgrace from my body and soul:
Disgrace was the fact that I was a woman born to a helpless kingdom.
Why should I feel shame?
The kingdom should be ashamed.
The War criminals should be ashamed of their acts.
Who would dare to cast a stone at me?

Those who would dare stone me
First stone the King and Kingdom,
Stone the War,
And stone the Imperial Army and War history.
I could not face the Sun:
I could not face the light; and I could not face the Buddha.
Please cremate me with the shameful history of the Kingdom
And the Pacific War.
If I am reincarnated,
Let me be born as a beautiful woman in New Nation.
Please let me meet and marry a young man
Who is compassionate enough to comfort me,
and is ready to fight these crimes against humanity.
Please let me bear and raise a healthy baby,
And let me be a lovely mother.
Namamitable!
Avalokiresvara! yearnhchoi@gmail.com

Nanjing - 1937

Gershon Ben-Avraham, Be'er Sheva, Israel

A woman's body was a sacred place,
A garden containing small seeds of life;
So it was with tender words, an embrace,
A Nanjing man would sweetly court his wife.
At first, she was coy, then bold—not afraid,
A willing partner in this game of love.
She'd share with him her holy hidden glade,
Whispering, cooing like a turtledove.
But then came soldiers giving rein to lust.
And for these men, a woman held no worth.
Her hidden gate if standing closed was forced.
Of no matter, a Nanjing woman's death,
Her sacred places pierced with glass or steel,
Sown with seeds of death, wounds that never heal. gershonbenavraham@gmail.com