

Wing Tek Lum, *The Nanjing Massacre: Poems*

OUR ACTRESS

“Then she went inside to change clothes...This person is really admirable.” -Tsen Shui-Fang, diary entry for December 29, 1937

“Quick! Quick!” she exclaims, and she pulls on my arm. We bound upstairs to the room we share with three others. Immediately she starts taking off her dress and shoes. I look at her dumbfounded. She hisses at me “Quick! Give me your dress, the green one! She is referring to the one I keep in my trunk, which I take out only for special occasions. As I rummage through my clothes, I ask, “Why do you want my dress?” She tells me, “I need to change into it now go back down to get another one.” She has already claimed some sullen bald-headed man as her father. She pulled him out of the crowd of those whom, the invaders suspect as our soldier deserters, Of those who if no one identifies them will disappear forever. Now he waits in the shadows of our vestibule. “How do you think you will be able to get away with this one more time?” I challenge her. She looks at me with her wild, sparkling eyes. She finishes buckling her shoes and stands up straight – pausing to let me look her over. She is a head taller than me, so the hem falls only to her knees. I observe, “Luckily we have been starving these past few weeks, so now you have lost enough weight to fit into my dress.” She smirks. Deftly she dabs on lipstick and rouge that she finds in the box of one of our roommates, and then grabs a floral shawl from another to cover her head. We race down the stairs and or the doors. So many men are still lined up, and without hesitation she rushes over, wailing loudly, to where the trucks are. “I found you!” she cries out, flinging her arms around a stocky young man hunched over. She kisses him several times, and he starts to sob as she pulls him back to our side of the road. We engulf the two of them. She is still calling him “Husband” as we lead them into the courtyard. Later, we gather together with her “family.” They tell us that they are not soldiers and were rounded

up in the dragnet. The younger one has a wife and child, and will now return to them; The older one is not from here and plans to leave the city as soon as he can. We wish them well, as our actress wipes away the smudges of lipstick from the young man's cheeks.

*Wing Tek Lum is a Honolulu businessman and poet. The poems in this teacher's guide were originally published in his collection of poetry, *The Nanjing Massacre: Poems* (Bamboo Ridge Press, 2012).*

1. This poem shows character and bravery in a savage time, among rescuers who put themselves in danger to save others. Who were other rescuers in the European Holocaust?
2. What might have happened if the Japanese soldiers had figured out what the actress was doing?
3. Why is this poem titled “Our Actress” rather than “The Actress” ?