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THE BRIDGE  
Alvin Pang

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## **the bridge**

The woman I was going to marry was standing on a bridge, on one of three bridges, I can't remember which, but she had a red dress on that cost a whole week's pay. I knew because I'd bought it for her and she'd wore it, which meant we were in love. I gave her the flowers -- they were carnations -- so I could take her hand and kiss it, while the sky grumbled above us like her drunk grouch of a father, who was out of the way, dead, a victim of cheap gin at forty-five. It was the year of the Bus Riots, the same day, in fact, a detective's car was set on fire. He was beyond help by the time she finished adjusting her lipstick, although we knew nothing of it. By morning, 946,354 man-days' work would be lost, along with Father's salary and what pride he'd scapped together after the war buried the family fortune. A plump young mother struggled with an umbrella over her shopping and twin babies. I knew it was time. We stepped into shelter, I ordered coffee and toast over the rising din and shutters slamming, and without stirring it, downed a gulp for luck. Sweat got as far as the wrapping but not inside, for which I prayed in thanks to all the ancestors I could name. She couldn't hear me the first time, nor the second, so I gave her the little band of metal, twenty months of savings and a tooth-mark in a corner to prove it was pure. I see now, students bleeding and bones being broken mere streets across the city could not have been real, not with her face a sweet breath away from me and flushed, and clouding. Something shifted in her eye. The world was suddenly another climate. I never found the ring, nor even the mud-smacked box, not with the news spilt everywhere and her back arching away into downpour like it'd always belonged there. If there was any way the rain could have made her more beautiful, I don't know it.

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