

The rain always makes the street feel smaller.

Water gathers along the curb, slipping quietly into the gutter where it forms a thin, restless river. Leaves drift past like boats, carried along by a current that is continuous. Even now, when the sky darkens and rain begins to fall, I sometimes find myself standing by the window, watching the water rush down the street.

Because whenever it rains, I reminisce about my favourite paper boat.

The storm had only just passed, leaving the air cool and heavy with the smell of wet asphalt and damp eucalyptus leaves. Outside our house, the road shimmered with puddles, reflecting the grey sky like broken mirrors. Water ushered through the gutters in twisting streams, sweeping fallen ground debris along with it.

To the normal eye, it was just rainwater draining away. I envisioned a river.

A spark lit within my hazel bug eyes. After many harsh, breezy autumn days, I could finally reward myself for my activity. I sat on the front step with a sheet of paper carefully torn from my old school notebook. The page was faintly lined with pale blue stripes running horizontally across, the rubbed out pencil marks from math class still noticeable, and a faint yellow shade that made it look like it was from the 1800s.

I folded the corners inward, pressing each crease down firmly with my fingernail as if each fold determined how far the boat travelled. The paper softened under my fingers as the shape leisurely took form. A small boat.

I turned it over in my hands, carefully studying the sharp edges. It was simple - fragile even - but somehow it felt important, as though it was meant to go somewhere. Holding it delicately, I stepped down from the porch and crouched beside the 'river'. The water hurried past, whispering against the concrete like it was impatient to resume its journey.

For a moment, I hesitated. Then, I placed the boat onto the surface of the stream.

At first it wobbled uncertainly, tipping slightly as the current nudged it forward. I held my breath, waiting for the paper to collapse into the rushing water. But instead, the boat steadied itself. The current caught it gently, rocking it like a cradle before pulling it along the gutter. Slowly at first, then faster. I jog alongside it.

The gutter curved along the street like a narrow river channel, the rushing water swirling around fallen leaves and small stones. The boat glided over ripples and shallow dips, pirouetting whenever the current struck it sideways. Once, a twig caught against its side, trapping it while the water pressed urgently behind it. I reached down quickly and flicked the twig away. Freed again, the little boat drifted forward, eager to continue where it left off.

The gutter transformed from a river to an ocean. The curb rose beside it like a cliff face, and the water churning beneath the paper hull sounded like distant waves. The small, off-white boat

seemed strangely brave as it hurdled down the street, light and delicate yet stubbornly afloat. I chased it past driveways and puddles, my shoes splashing against the wet pavement.

For those few minutes, the world shrunk, sizing down to the thin strip of water and the tiny paper boat sailing alongside it. Then the river diminished. Ahead of us, the storm drain waited.

The metal grate sat dark and silent at the edge of the road as the current funnelled toward it. Leaves gathered there first, spiralling slowly before slipping through the gaps. The boat drifted closer, caught in the tightening whirlpool. For a moment it hovered at the edge. One corner dipped slower into the water tornado as the paper began to soften.

I squatted beside it, reaching forward as if I might rescue it at the last second. But, before my fingers could get a grasp, the current suddenly pulled stronger, winning the tug of war. The boat slipped free and vanished into the darkness below.

Just like that, it was gone.

I stayed there for a long time afterwards, staring down through the prison-like bars into the black space below. The water rushed somewhere far below, carrying floor debris among my small boat. Slowly, the river in the gutter began to dwindle as the rainwater drained away, the tide softening until only thin streams trickled.

Eventually, I stood up and walked back toward my house. At the time, I thought I had simply lost a paper boat. Years later, I realise. It was far more than that.

That small white boat carried something with it when it disappeared - something fragile and fleeting, creased carefully from an ordinary afternoon. Childhood moves like the water in that gutter: restless, always rushing somewhere ahead.

For a while, you can run beside it, believing you can follow wherever it goes.

But eventually, the current carries it somewhere you can no longer reach.

Even now, when rain gathers along the curb and the gutters begin to fill again, I sometimes catch myself watching the water drift past, half-expecting to see my favourite paper boat.