

Paper Boats

By Zuoming Shi

Whenever I am dissatisfied in love, I fold a small paper boat.

A college friend of mine taught me how to fold paper boats. "There are two ways to fold paper boats," he said. "Although one of them is a bit lopsided."

We were sitting at the kitchen table with some origami papers I found from third grade. The afternoon sunlight shone through the window, landing in a small rectangle just beside the boats that he folded. We sat silently folding for a while, making one paper boat after another. The clock on the wall slowly, lazily, gently, ticking the seconds away.

Now I am standing by the river stream, a piece of perfectly square printing paper in my hand. Which way should I fold?

"First you fold the four corners in, and then the two opposite corners, so that it looks like a crystal."

I kneel down besides the stream, the water is so clear that you can see the algae bracing against the currents.

"Fold the four sides, and do it so that they overlap slightly."

I watch the currents, carefully selecting a path without leering rocks or sand.

"Then pull out the two sides, like this... and finally we push the angled part to the other side."

Holding the boat by its little triangular roof, I lowered it onto the water, the currents elegantly traces the edge of the boat.

I let go.

“There, done.”

Then he paused for a while, thinking about something.

“Although it’s a bit weird to be making boats out of these flowery patterns”.

The boat, carried away by the current, starts turning slowly towards me, as if saying goodbye. Then, without the time to turn back, it flies away from my sight, swallowed by the grey rocks and the rushing water.

I dream that there’s a little paper boat graveyard for my little paper boats. And perhaps that one day, down that flowing river, past the forests and the mountainsides, I may reunite with my silent waiting paper boats.