

I lost my right arm

I lost my right arm on the way home. May was in a rush and did not even notice it. She paid no attention to the crying – she was so used to the yelling and kicking that these spare tears were not a cause for concern. She uttered a tired, “We’ll be home soon,” and pushed her way across Westminster Bridge, as fast as she could, past the crowds of excited tourists who were using their mobile phones as cameras, waving selfie sticks in the air, pointing at the London Eye or the Houses of Parliament, smiling and rubbing their hands together to keep them warm in this crisp mid-November morning. May didn’t notice.

I saw my arm lying on the ground, against the backdrop of a hundred postcards, each costing ten pence only. Michelle saw it too, but we were being pushed with such vigour, there was no way we could have put up a fight. Michelle cried bitterly, angrily, with her eyes and her mouth, with her fists and her curled-up toes. “Stop, stop, stop,” she whimpered with sadness and frustration. May ploughed through.

A hop-on hop-off open-top double-decker bus drove by filled with excited schoolchildren, and I saw dozens of curious little faces looking at us from the bottom deck, their eyes suddenly filling with sadness at the current state of affairs. There was nothing that they could do, and nothing that I could do either. The bus became a red blur, and they probably forgot about my arm as they continued their tour of London. I tried to take comfort in the fact that Michelle cared about me and my loss, as was reflected in her tears and her protests, but nothing could change the reality that, from now on, I would not be able to squeeze her tight and give her a double-arm hug, or clap with joy when she sang for me. The further away we moved from my arm, the harder it was for me to let go.

We kept on moving forward at a fast pace, reaching Victoria Embankment and crossing the street right away, the green light in the shape of a man letting May continue at full speed. The crying intensified with every step we took, but it was drowned by the cacophony of conversations being held around us, in about a dozen different languages, some which I had never heard before. The ear-piercing sirens, the discordant honking, the boats along the River Thames, and the odd helicopter over our heads were enough of a distraction. May was in a rush, and she ploughed through all the way to the underground station, all the way past the angry cab drivers, past the oblivious shoppers bumping into us with their bags full to the brim, past the police officers gracefully accepting to take a picture with a tourist, past the street vendors yelling, “Three magnets for a fiver” while they stocked their tired white three-tier revolving racks with key rings and other souvenirs, past the powerful clanging of Big Ben, past the loud heartbeat of the busiest city in England. It should not have surprised me that May never noticed.

I looked at my arm from a distance, and bid goodbye to it. I closed my eyes and tried to come to terms with the fact that, from now on, only one arm would have to suffice. If only I had lost my left arm, maybe it would not have been as bad. No, who was I trying to fool? It would have been equally painful. I did not cry – I can’t, I thought. I would pull through.

When at last we reached Westminster Station, May finally slowed down. She was frantically searching for the lift, her feet now still but her head turning in every direction, her voice in a whisper asking Michelle if she could see it, though not really expecting a reply. “It’s okay, honey,” she added, “we’re almost there; we’ll be home soon.” May finally spotted the lift, we moved towards it, she took off both her gloves and she pressed the button to call it; then, she sighed with exhaustion, as was always the case when we had to come to Central London for an appointment or to meet some of her friends. These trips to the capital were more stressful than

she would let on; the city was vibrant, inviting, but also incredibly overwhelming, especially when she came with Michelle and me. I wondered if this would be my last trip; many things would change now.

As we got on the lift, May tried to calm Michelle down with food; she offered breadsticks, raisins, a cereal bar, a chocolate biscuit, and even some blueberries, and when she realized it was no use, she finally asked, “What’s the matter, honey? I know you’re tired, but we’re on our way home now.”

Michelle did her best to stop the tears and, glad to finally be heard by her mother, she replied, “It’s my doll, Mummy. Her arm’s gone.”