Would there be television? Would there be *Dallas*? Could they watch Sue Ellen wake up in the morning with her make-up on and would there be music? Did Nigeria sell nectarines? Would there be a loft and could they take the beanbags because three years was a long time, longer than any place they’d ever been, and there’d definitely be decisions. Were they ever coming back? Were they emigrating? Ida was behaving as if they were. She kept shopping, every day. She wasn’t in when the twins and Kemy got back from school (would there be school? would there be uniforms?) and Bel had to be their mum and toasted-sandwich-provider until Ida came home, laden with plastic bags splitting from the weight. She bought wholesale. Ordinary things that were a part of life, like shampoo and bubble bath, soap bars and clothes and toys as if this were her last chance to get them. Didn’t they sell soap there, or shampoo? She even went south of the Thames to Brixton with Bel on a Saturday and bought fabric and false hair and cocoa butter. Brent Cross, aglow and bulging with Christmas, became a weekly expedition. And Aubrey complained about the money, that he wasn’t made of it, and just because Alders was paying for everything it didn’t mean Ida could behave as if her husband was an oil tycoon and they lived on a ranch.

Would there be Christmas? Couldn’t they go after Christmas? Christmas was meant to be cold and snowy, not hot, and Nigeria was hot. Most of the clothes they were taking and that Ida was buying (the best so far: two identical bow-strap stripy dresses, Georgia’s white and turquoise, Bessi’s white and fluorescent pink) were for summer, even though it was almost winter. And they’d even had their hair cut, which Georgia was still angry about because of how it
went wrong. The hairdresser in Neasden was run by an Irish couple whose two daughters were the stylists. They were not officially trained. They were not up to the challenges posed by afros. The trimming of an afro required an understanding of roundness, which needed to be applied to the scissors. Mandy, the older daughter, snipped at Bessi’s hair for a very long time, looking confused, flicking her brown bob from side to side, until it was not the trim Ida had asked for but a full-blown, four-inch transformation that sent Bessi into a torrential grief there in front of the mirror, watching her face getting soggy. Ida and Aubrey were sympathetic. Ida called Mandy useless (the coming of Nigeria was making her vocal, even feisty) and Aubrey refused to pay. Georgia was also sympathetic – ‘Don’t worry Bess,’ patting her, ‘you still look pretty’ – until the sacrifice of her own hair was suggested as the only solution. They were twins. They had to look like twins. Georgia’s hair must also be cut, to the same length. But not by Mandy, by her sister, the other one, by Emma, who got it wrong, even wronger than Bessi’s. She took five inches off and Georgia was bitter, even towards Bessi, probably for the first time.

Georgia and Bessi didn’t believe in looking absolutely the same because that was there in their faces, almost, though Georgia’s features were fuller, she had rubyness in her lips, and wider, browner far-away eyes with lashes that hit the sky. But these differences were almost invisible to outsiders. They were the same, like dolls. They were twoness in oneness. When they’d started primary school one of their classmates, Reena, got them to stand next to each other on the wall in the playground, not moving, while she counted differences. There were five. Reena wrote them down and put them on the noticeboard:

1. Georgia’s mouth is biggist.
2. Georgia has big ears, Bessie don’t.
3. Bessie’s eyes are smallist.
4. Georgia is half an inch tallest and a bit fatter.
5. Georgia has a beauty spot by her mouth – she is pretteist.

They got cornered at lunch by people checking, pointing, looking for more differences. Were Bessi’s teeth slightly more crooked and was Georgia’s face rounder? And Georgia, doesn’t she walk with her feet pointing outwards, like a penguin or a ballerina, whereas Bessi points hers inwards as if she’s knock-kneed?
The real differences, the ones that mattered most, were inside, under clothes and in the soul. There was light and there was shade. If they wore different colours it meant that they could be whole people inside themselves, because people could see that Georgia was Georgia, in turquoise, and Bessi was Bessi, in pink. There were pink thoughts and turquoise thoughts, with white stripes. This meant so much more than a red stitch inside the collar, which was how Ida and the teachers used to differentiate their old green puffa jackets when they were six, before they’d discovered the ability of colour to make a half into a one. A half of green into a whole land of pink. A half a question (for sometimes even their parents couldn’t tell one from the other) into a whole turquoise question.

"What’s mine and what’s for the room while we’re away?" Georgia