

Little Bee, Chris Cleave, 2008

1 Most days I wish I was a British pound coin instead of an African girl. Everyone would be pleased to see me coming. Maybe I would visit with you for the weekend and then suddenly, because I am fickle like that, I would visit with the man from the corner shop instead – but you would not be sad because you would be eating a cinnamon bun, or drinking a cold Coca Cola from the can, and you would never think of me again. We would be happy, like lovers who met on holiday and forgot each other's names.

A pound coin can go wherever it thinks it will be safest. It can cross deserts and oceans and leave the sound of gunfire and the bitter smell of burning thatch behind. When it feels warm and secure it will turn around and smile at you, the way my big sister Nkiruka used to smile [...]. Of course a pound coin can be serious too. It can disguise itself as power, or property, and there is nothing more serious when you are a girl who has neither. You must try to catch the pound, and trap it in your pocket, so that it cannot reach a safe country unless it takes you with it. But a pound has all the tricks of a sorcerer. When pursued I have seen it shed its tail like a lizard so that you are left holding only pence. And when you finally go to seize it, the British pound can perform the greatest magic of all, and this is to transform itself into not one, but two, identical green American dollar bills. Your fingers will close on empty air, I am telling you.

How I would love to be a British pound. A pound is free to travel to safety, and we are free to watch it go. This is the human triumph. This is called, *globalisation*. A girl like me gets stopped at immigration, but a pound can leap the turnstiles, and dodge the tackles of those big men with their uniform caps, and jump straight into a waiting airport taxi. *Where to, sir?* Western Civilisation, my good man, and make it snappy.

See how nicely a British pound coin talks? It speaks with the voice of Queen Elizabeth the Second of England. Her face is stamped upon it, and sometimes when I look very closely I can see her lips moving. I hold her up to my ear. What is she saying? *Put me down this minute, young lady, or I shall call my guards.*

If the Queen spoke to you in such a voice, do you suppose it would be possible to disobey? I have read that the people around her – even Kings and Prime Ministers – they find their bodies responding to her orders before their brains can even think why not. Let me tell you, it is not the crown and the sceptre that have this effect. Me, I could pin a tiara on my short fuzzy hair, and I could hold up a sceptre in one hand, like this, and police officers would still walk up to me in their big shoes and say, *Love the ensemble, madam, now let's have quick look at your ID, shall we?* No, it is not the Queen's crown and sceptre that rule in your land. It is her grammar and her voice. That is why it is desirable to speak the way she does. That way you can say to police officers, in a voice as clear as the Cullinan diamond, *My goodness, how dare you?*



Answer the questions as you read:

1. Who is the narrator?

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2. What does she wish to be?

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3. Why is a coin "fickle" (inconstant)?

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4. Why can it cross oceans?

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5. Why does it have power?

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6. Why can it transform into "empty air"?

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7. What is perceived as "triumph"?

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8. What is meant by "a girl like me"?

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9. Does the coin speak the same language as the narrator? Why not?

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10. What is most powerful than crown and scepter? Why?

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Now your turn:

Imagine the coin answers the narrator.

Why wouldn't it want to be her?

Use the information from the text.

A girl like you can't.....

It is impossible for you to.....