

The Wrong Crib

WHEN MY MOTHER WAS ANGRY with me, which was often, she said, 'The Devil led us to the wrong crib.'

The image of Satan taking time off from the Cold War and McCarthyism to visit Manchester in 1960 – purpose of visit: to deceive Mrs Winterson – has a flamboyant theatricality to it. She was a flamboyant depressive; a woman who kept a revolver in the duster drawer, and the bullets in a tin of Pledge. A woman who stayed up all night baking cakes to avoid sleeping in the same bed as my father. A woman with a prolapse, a thyroid condition, an enlarged heart, an ulcerated leg that never healed, and two sets of false teeth – matt for everyday, and a pearlised set for 'best'.

I do not know why she didn't/couldn't have children. I know that she adopted me because she wanted a friend (she had none), and because I was like a flare sent out into the world – a way of saying that she was here – a kind of X Marks the Spot.

She hated being a nobody, and like all children, adopted or not, I have had to live out some of her un-lived life. We do that for our parents – we don't really have any choice.

She was alive when my first novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, was published in 1985. It is semi-autobiographical, in that it tells the story of a young

