

girl adopted by Pentecostal parents. The girl is supposed to grow up and be a missionary. Instead she falls in love with a woman. Disaster. The girl leaves home, gets herself to Oxford University, returns home to find her mother has built a broadcast radio and is beaming out the Gospel to the heathen. The mother has a handle – she's called 'Kindly Light'.

The novel begins: *'Like most people I lived for a long time with my mother and father. My father liked to watch the wrestling, my mother liked to wrestle.'*

For most of my life I've been a bare-knuckle fighter. The one who wins is the one who hits the hardest. I was beaten as a child and I learned early never to cry. If I was locked out overnight I sat on the doorstep till the milkman came, drank both pints, left the empty bottles to enrage my mother, and walked to school.

We always walked. We had no car and no bus money. For me, the average was five miles a day: two miles for the round trip to school; three miles for the round trip to church.

Church was every night except Thursdays.

I wrote about some of these things in *Oranges*, and when it was published, my mother sent me a furious note in her immaculate copperplate handwriting demanding a phone call.

We hadn't seen each other for several years. I had left Oxford, was scraping together a life, and had written *Oranges* young – I was twenty-five when it was published.

I went to a phone box – I had no phone. She went to a phone box – she had no phone.

I dialled the Accrington code and number as

