

by anything or anybody? Why should a woman not be ambitious for literature? Ambitious for herself?

Mrs Winterson was having none of it. She knew full well that writers were sex-crazed bohemians who broke the rules and didn't go out to work. Books had been forbidden in our house – I'll explain why later – and so for me to have written one, and had it published, and had it win a prize . . . and be standing in a phone box giving her a lecture on literature, a polemic on feminism . . .

*The pips – more money in the slot – and I'm thinking, as her voice goes in and out like the sea, 'Why aren't you proud of me?'*

*The pips – more money in the slot – and I'm locked out and sitting on the doorstep again. It's really cold and I've got a newspaper under my bum and I'm huddled in my duffel coat.*

A woman comes by and I know her. She gives me a bag of chips. She knows what my mother is like.

Inside our house the light is on. Dad's on the night shift, so she can go to bed, but she won't sleep. She'll read the Bible all night, and when Dad comes home, he'll let me in, and he'll say nothing, and she'll say nothing, and we'll act like it's normal to leave your kid outside all night, and normal never to sleep with your husband. And normal to have two sets of false teeth, and a revolver in the duster drawer . . .

We're still on the phone in our phone boxes. She tells me that my success is from the Devil, keeper of the wrong crib. She confronts me with the fact that I