For Hazel, whose father sparked this, and Rosh,
whose real name and story took us both to this place

My Teeth in Your Heart is a uclanpublishing book

First published in Great Britain in 2024 by
uclanpublishing
University of Central Lancashire
Preston, PR1 2HE, UK

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978-1-916747-14-2

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

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Set in Kingfisher by Becky Chilcott.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

JOANNA NADIN

My Teeth in Your Heart

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Pictorial Map of Famagusta & Varosha
HARBOUR
SANDY BEACH
Martinengo Bastion
Armenian Church
Carmelite Church
'Tanners' Mosque
St Anna's Church
Citadel 'Othello's Tower'
St George of the Latins Ch.
Greek Orthodox Archbishopric
Dervish Monastery
Venetian Palace
CATHEDRAL St Nicholas (Ayia Sofia)
Orthodox Ka'Dhedral
St Nicholas Djambouli Bastion
Ruined Churches
Ch. of the 'Stavros' (Cross)
Old Land Gate
Modern Gate
Off. of the Comptroller of Customs
Hospital
Railway Station
Police Station
OFFICES LAW COURTS
Municipality
Savoy Hotel
POWER STATION
English Club
Commissioner's Residence
Maronite Ch.
Maronite School
Market
St Heracon Ch.
Gymnasium
Ay. Triada Ch.
King George (old)
Sandy Beach
GLOUCESTER
British Institute
Old Turkish Mosque
Kyrenia Gate
Sch.
GOLDEN SANDS
Stavros Ch.
Entrance to "Othello's Tower"
FAMAGUSTA AND VAROSHA
Copyright 'ROMANTIC CYPRUS' GUIDE BOOK
Reproduced from Original pictorial drawing by J. S. 1948.
Details completed 1947 by R.C.T.

While the 1974 timeline of this story is based on true events,
the characters and their smaller wars are all fictional.

Anna

FEBRUARY 1975

ANNA GROANED, HER FOREHEAD dappled with sweat as she knelt on the cold stone floor of her grandparents' lavatory for the fourth time in as many hours. Why did they call it morning sickness when it lasted well past lunch? And for months on end, not the few weeks she'd imagined. So familiar was she with the pristine porcelain bowl of the toilet that she had begun to think of this Armitage Shanks chap as a character – his pitying face, his sighs, his dry hand as he patted her on the head and said, 'There, there,' as another plume of orange vomit splashed against the white china. Well, it would be nice if someone did, and that someone was certainly not going to be her mother, whose words on the subject were unrepeatable, and whose subsequent slap spoke volumes. It wasn't as if she'd picked this state to be flippant, or as some sort of slight to her parents or to A levels; she wanted to sit her exams, for heaven's sake – wanted to get to Cambridge.

No chance of that now.

She'd tried to get rid of it: had lifted heavy things, drunk

the gin she'd found at the back of her grandfather's liquor cabinet. But all that had succeeded in doing was adding to the queasiness and tally of lavatory visits. Nancy had once said something about a knitting needle, but Nancy was probably back in Dagenham now and Anna wasn't sure what she was supposed to do with the thing, even if she could have found one. Her grandmother's crafting was limited to calligraphy and none of the equipment for that seemed usefully medical.

'Anna?' Her mother's sharp tone snagged on the landing banister, scuttled across cabbage-rose carpet before slipping under the lavatory door. 'Anna?'

'I'm fine,' she managed. Not that her mother would be concerned. Just deserts, she'd made perfectly clear.

There was a silence, then, 'There's somebody here to see you.'

Anna groaned again, this time inwardly. It was probably her father, over from Bedford, just as he'd threatened. Now she'd be for it. Her mother's disgust was one thing, but he would have plans. Plans and punishment.

She flushed the lavatory and managed to stand, pulling her sweater over her distended belly; no hiding her little secret now. Six months gone, she was – possibly more. Her head was full, suddenly, of last summer, of Cyprus. So far from this wet February in Cheltenham. God, what she would give to go back. Back to the simmering heat of Varosha. Back to that bookshop on Euripides Street.

Back to him.

And would she change things if she could?

Would she?

Billy

JUNE 2024

WE ALL HAVE SECRETS. Like Cass thinks no one knows they've still got a thing for Harry Blandford, even though Harry is, while hot as fuck, as toxic cishet as you can get. (He told Cass he would literally kill them if anyone found out they'd hooked up at New Year, and I think he literally meant literally.)

And Willow thinks no one knows she plays football for the college team on a Wednesday night, despite her entire persona being curated around some kind of *Lord of the Rings* meets library geek vibe.

Even Mum has secrets. The two inches of gin she downs before she can muster the courage to clean up Gran and put her to bed. The two inches she adds after, then tops up the bottle from the tap like she's seventeen, not forty-seven, and she's not going to be drinking watered-down spirits tomorrow anyway. The messy texts she sends to my dad or to Dave or whoever, in the half-cut half-light of Gran's kitchen (our kitchen) which they all – standard men – ignore.

And mine? That at two o'clock on a Tuesday, when I should be knee-deep in Aeschylus in the classics room at Hills Road Sixth Form, I'm out of my depth in a flat above Ladbrokes, in bed with Harry Blandford.

In my defence, it was supposed to be a one-off. A snap retaliation, because, since we'd met on a bench in a dogshit-littered triangle of park one Sunday in lockdown, Cass had become pretty much my world. And when they kept telling me how much they liked me, and got me the job at the bookshop, and invited me over for a *Heartstopper* marathon, I'd stupidly assumed that they *liked me* liked me. Only, when I, on anti-Valentine's night, emboldened by Jäger and MAC Ruby Woo, went to kiss them, they practically gagged. So I did what generations of Stallard women have done when humiliated (well, my mother and me at least) and bolted, then lipsed the first willing person I saw when I stumbled out onto Silver Street, which happened to be Harry.

Since then it's become a habit. Like mainlining Diet Coke or picking your nose – mildly diverting, but not actually life-threatening, until you factor in Cass. And obviously I'm going to dump him. It's not like he even makes me feel good about myself except when we're actually doing *it*, and in the half hour before, when he's WhatsApping because he wants to do *it*. But he has this thing – this floppy-haired, wannabe-rock-star, poor-little-rich-kid thing – that keeps me coming back. Even when it's the middle of the school day. Even when we're a week off

mocks. Even when it's in some shithole of a flat that smells of cheap meat and bleach, and I should have ended it when he messaged, not waited until now, when we've already had sex and he's in post-coital smoke mode.

'We could have just gone to yours,' he says, leaning back against a sweaty headboard to skin up. 'I know your mum's in school. Saw her in the art block before lunch.'

The curse of having a teacher for a parent. But what he doesn't know is that I live with my grandmother: three months out of chemo, early onset dementia already embedded. That my grandpa caught Covid in the first round and was gone by that June. That my mother didn't come back so she could care for them, whatever she might claim to Uncle Matthew. She came back because Dave, her latest, was having an affair with the tech support, and decided to bubble up with her instead of us, like some geography-teacher version of Matt sodding Hancock.

'We could have gone to yours,' I bat back. *I know* your *mum's in some fucking day spa having her nails done*, I don't add. Not that I'd met her, but I knew the type: husband high up in Silicon Fen and if she does have a job it will be some hobby shop, or 'interior design', or 'life coaching', and what even is that? Well, unless Harry has secrets too.

He ignores me right back. 'You going to get it?' he asks, nodding at my phone, which has buzzed four times in as many minutes.

But I can tell from the ringtone it's a text – not a Snap or a

WhatsApp – so can't be anyone who actually matters. Besides, I have business to attend to. So I flip it over on the makeshift bedside table as he lights the tip of the spliff and clicks shut the lid of his Zippo.

'So . . .' I begin.

Which in itself is pathetic. I should be a warrior queen; should be one of the Greek women: Persephone or Medea. Medusa, even – I've got the hair, after all. And I'm just about to muster an 'about us' when the shrill ringtone of an emergency-only number punctures my courage. 'Fuck. Sorry.'

Why am I apologising? I think as I go to snatch it, lit up and buzzing. It has to be my mother or— No. What the fuck? Cass?

I stagger out of bed and shut myself in the mould-speckled bathroom where, trembling, I accept the call. 'Cass?'

'Where the fuck are you?'

'What? Just . . . in the toilet.' Not exactly a lie.

'What toilet? And don't tell me it's any of the ones in college, or the Costa on the corner, because me and Willow have checked. Twice.'

The butterflies that have been hanging out in my stomach start to flap their wings, scatter frantically. 'Just a toilet. I was feeling weird,' I add for veracity. 'What's going on?'

'It's your nan,' they say. 'Billy, you need to go home.'

Anna

JUNE 1974

SHE'D ONLY GONE IN on a whim. She'd finished her copy of *Wuthering Heights* and school was still shut for the Whit week holiday, while Nicosia, where the English language library could be found, was 'far too far, darling', according to her mother. So she'd told Nancy she'd catch up with her later and watched her trot off to dog Gerry Bellingham, who ignored her as usual – not that this ever bothered Nancy, who was happy with the scraps he'd occasionally throw for her (usually when he was drunk at the Club). Then Anna had stepped into the relative shade of Euripides Street and slipped through the blue door of the bookshop and into one of those do-or-die moments. A single instance of serendipity, she would write in her diary later, that – had she agreed to go with Nancy for a quick swim, or listened to her mother's pleas not to 'wander off by herself' – might never have happened at all. But happen it had, and, oh! What a happening!

She'd seen him before, of course. Had eyed him quietly from the doorway while Nancy's mother Gloria demanded to

know why they didn't stock Jackie Collins, and complained that the shop wasn't exactly WH Smith, was it. His mother – she assumed it was his mother – had apologised and tried to push a copy of something by Joyce into Gloria's slim, many-ringed fingers. But Gloria had declared it had 'too many words' and flounced up the road to the Edelweiss for the first gin of the day, despite Anna's Mickey Mouse Timex showing it wasn't even noon. Then, another time, he deep in conversation – an argument, almost – with a local girl outside the Famagusta Tavern. She'd wanted to listen in even though she knew earwigging was wrong, even though she couldn't understand a word anyway, but her mother had tugged at her sleeve and she'd been whisked into the supermarket for something dull like washing-up liquid.

This time, though, they were both alone, or almost; the only other customer a man, Cypriot – Greek she assumed, given the section he was browsing. But the boy was shelving stock in the English Language corner, and nodded to her as she feigned to flick through *Black Beauty*. A stupid book to choose; she cursed herself instantly – it was for children, and she was seventeen, nearly eighteen – past horses and that sort of silliness. She pushed it back into place and slipped out the slim tome next to it – poems by Anne Sexton. God, what sort of order was that? Poetry and children's fiction filed, ragtag, together? No doubt William Blake was nestling against Enid Blyton as well.

'You like poetry?' came the voice – soft, accented English.

'I . . .' She looked up, met his eyes – deep brown, thick-lashed. 'Some,' she admitted. 'I haven't read this. I was just looking for . . .' What *was* she looking for?

She was just wondering what to say, trying to conjure something up that didn't sound either babyish or too obviously beyond her, when a crack rang out from the street outside, and she felt the boy's arms grasp her and pull her towards him and then down to the ground.

She could hardly breathe – his hot body pressed against hers, his ragged breath in her ear – still less speak. Not even when his mother called something in Greek, and he laughed, bursting the taut-balloon atmosphere, and said against her neck, 'Just a car. That's all. A car.'

She scrambled to stand, aware of the sweat that had pooled in her armpits, the crimson flare of her cheeks. Not a bomb, then. Or an 'intercommunal disturbance' as they were euphemistically referred to. Words that blurred the truth of it: that life here – despite the flashy glamour of the high-rise hotels, the glittering discos and the exclusive boutiques that claimed to match Paris for its fashion – was bitter, heated. Like a saucepan on a constant simmer that threatened to boil up, erupt at any moment and spill over like hot milk. At least for the locals. So that while ex-pat families like Nancy's – like hers also, to a point – lived on constant holiday, others fought a private war. One that was threatening to become public.

Nicosia was the heart of it, the capital city in the centre of

the island – but even out here to the east in Famagusta, and its southern suburb, Varosha, there were pockets: scuffles, late-night bricks through the windows of Turkish Cypriots. Then retaliations on the homes of enosis supporters.

Aged twelve, she'd had to ask what that word meant: *enosis*.

'Union with Greece,' Mrs Stallard, her teacher had explained to her. As if it were simple, obvious.

'But what about the Turkish?' she'd asked.

'Well, quite,' was all the answer she'd got.

There was no point asking more; Mrs Stallard was only doing what she'd been told – what they'd *all* been told. A letter had been sent to Anna's parents a month before they'd come here. 'It is your duty as a British subject to avoid taking sides,' it read. Then, in alarming capitals, 'YOU MUST REMAIN IMPARTIAL'. Not that her mother had taken note. She wasn't overly fond of the Greek Cypriots, but 'the Turks', she would say, with the same tone she reserved for toilet habits, were worse.

Anna had barely met any Turkish Cypriots – her school was British; the shops and hotels in Varosha were Greek – but even so, she knew that her mother was wrong, was blinkered. Anna had ventured into the walled part of the city to the north – barely half a mile from Kennedy Avenue – only once, with Peter Stallard. He'd shown her the mosque, converted from a church; had talked about the Byzantine and Ottoman empires with such passion and at such length she'd begged to get baklava

purely as relief. The Turkish Cypriots she'd met there were genial, seemingly pleased that Peter could speak a little of their language, while she remained embarrassingly mute. Though her Greek, if limited, was improving.

Her mother would be appalled at that, no doubt. When Peter had made friends with a bunch of Greek Cypriot boys on the beach over a game of cricket, she'd scolded Anna not to follow suit. It was baffling, given she'd begged her daughter to keep up her French, had arranged 'play dates' (at fourteen – how awful) with a girl from Avignon in the year below hers.

'What's the difference?' Anna had asked. 'Other girls are allowed to see who they like.'

'Other girls have other mothers,' came the familiar retort. 'The locals, they're . . . not like us. Besides, it's pointless. We'll be back in England this time next year.'

That was almost four years ago. Now Peter was finishing his second year at Cambridge and she was here, in the arms – or just out of them – of a Cypriot boy in a bookshop.

'I'm sorry,' he blustered. 'For jumping on you. I didn't mean . . .'

She thought of the girl he was with that time, wondered what she might think if she'd seen it. Wondered then if he was embarrassed; if he was worried this might be misconstrued. 'It's quite all right. I understand . . . I mean, thank you,' she managed. 'It was . . . gallant.'

God, what a word to use. This wasn't Camelot; what was

wrong with her? Though perhaps this was good, given that girl – she punctured the 'something' of it.

But he grinned. '"Gallant". Like a knight, yes? I've not been called that before.'

Her face still hot, she looked down, saw at her feet the pile of books they'd knocked over in the process. 'Here,' she said quickly. 'I'll help you.'

She plucked up the paperbacks – a random selection, which she began to slot back into the arbitrary alphabet.

'You don't have—'

'I don't mind,' she replied, still staring at the shelves. Then, summoning courage, 'You could have separate sections. I mean, for adults and children. Or fiction and non-fiction. If you wanted, of course. It's just an idea . . .'

'Try telling my mother that.'

She winced. 'Sorry, it's none of my business.'

'No – I mean, I agree with you. But her system is . . . her system.'

She slotted the last Frederick Forsyth back into place – one her father had been given at Christmas, but had still not had the time or interest to pick up. 'I should go.'

'You didn't want a book?'

She felt her insides swill again. 'Oh, yes . . . Just, perhaps . . .' She snatched for a title, any title. '*Jane Eyre*.'

He looked up to the Bs, pulled down the Brontë. 'Here.'

Her eyes met his again and this time didn't flinch. 'Thank you.'

It wasn't until she went to pay – his mother had disappeared into the back – that he asked her name.

'Anna,' she replied as she handed over the note, tacky from her damp hand.

'I'm George,' he told her without prompting. And when he gave her the change, he let his fingers sit on her palm for a second. 'I've seen you before,' he told her. 'At Edelweiss. You're always reading.'

He'd seen her too – had noted her! She took a breath, then let her hand drop, clutched the money. 'I like books.' She mentally slapped herself. 'I mean, I'm studying English for A level.'

'Me too. Well, not the A level bit but I want to do it at university. Athens, perhaps.'

She bloomed at that – the link – then settled herself. 'I have a year left. But my friend Peter, he's at Cambridge.' How should she describe that – explain its importance? 'It's a big place, one of the best.'

He nodded. 'I've heard of Cambridge.'

She jinked. 'Of course you have.' She was as bad as her mother, assuming ignorance.

There was a silence, the air fat with static and the motes of dust that floated on the bright slice of sunlight that cut between them. Then, 'Do you want a job?' he blurted. 'Only, we were looking for someone for Saturdays and some evenings.' He gestured at a handwritten sign in the window, clearly in Greek.

'Oh, I . . .' Did she want a job? Was she even allowed? Jobs

were for Cypriots first, unless it needed a special skill.

'Your English is better than mine,' he added, seemingly reading her thoughts. 'You'd expand the custom. I'll ask my mother. It's just her, mainly. My father's at the Larnaca branch. My brother helps out but he's . . . not always here.'

'I . . .' God, could she do this? Should she? Her mother would have something to say – something about 'other girls' again, no doubt. And then there was *his* 'other girl'. If she was still on the scene—

She stopped herself. He'd offered her a job, nothing more. And wasn't she the one who wished for a life beyond Nancy's flat and ex-pat parties and the Club on a Sunday? 'Yes,' she said. 'Yes please, I would like a job.'

He smiled quickly, efficiently. 'Come back on Saturday?'

'What time?' she asked.

'Around eight.'

She nodded. 'Eight then. On Saturday.'

*

She carried that nugget home in her pocket, along with the novel, as if it were gold. And it was, really – a jewel, just for her. Or to show off to Nancy later, whose income was limited to babysitting for the sunburnt children of tourists, whom she openly despised. Not that Nancy wanted for funds: her allowance kept her in Wella hairspray, in Rimmel lipstick, in a revealing C&A swimsuit flown over from England, whereas Anna's pocket money was rationed and to be saved for books

and stationery. Hairspray and lipstick and revealing anything was, her mother firmly believed, for the 'wrong sort' of girl – those other girls again, with other mothers. Well, perhaps now she could afford to be that sort of girl, if quietly, on the side.

'Where the hell have you been?'

She pulled up short, having clattered through the front door of their apartment in Kennedy Court. Her father was never normally at home. Not on a weekday. Not often on the weekend for that matter – God knows what he did; something in banking. Not the Cypriot one, but one back home that had a branch here.

'I said, where have you been?'

'N-Nancy's?' Anna stammered.

'That's a lie.' Her father, austere already in his navy suit, pulled himself up to his full height. 'Your mother's called Gloria already and she said Nancy left you somewhere on Democratia Avenue. She said she'd begged you to come with her, but you insisted.'

Damn Nancy. She had always been a blabbermouth.

'I just wanted a book.' She brandished the copy of *Jane Eyre* as if it were a sword: Excalibur – her protector, her saviour. 'It's for school,' she added, knowing school was her trump card. 'We're doing it next term. I wanted to get ahead.'

'It doesn't matter what it was for. You know the rules.' Her father sighed. 'I suppose at least you're back now.'

Her mother, who had been standing quietly behind him, let out an odd sort of cry – a mew, like a cat.

'What's happening?' Anna asked, pushing the secret down deep in her pocket. 'Why are you home? Why is she . . . why are you crying?' She could barely say it. Parents didn't cry, especially not her mother. It was horrible, uncanny; she didn't know how to react.

'Your grandmother,' answered her father. 'She's not well. Not well at all. A stroke. Your mother's flying back to England to be with her.'

Her chest seemed to tighten. A stroke? Was that like a heart attack? And what did that mean? Would Anna have to go with her? Of course she couldn't. Not now. It wasn't as if she even knew Granny Baxter, and the little she did was hardly inviting. Her maternal grandparents never visited – 'far too hot for us', they claimed, and 'flights are eye-wateringly dear'. More likely the food, or the people. 'Foreign' was a swear word, pith-bitter when they said it. No wonder her mother was a coiled spring out here.

'Obviously, you'll go.'

Anna snapped to, felt her insides flip, her hands ball into fists in indignation. 'But my exams,' she protested. 'They start in a week.'

'Oh, right,' said her father. 'Of course.'

'Can't you sit them in England?' her mother tried, wiping her eyes then her nose with a pressed handkerchief, before turning to Anna's father again. 'It's not as if you can look after her. You have work.'

No, no. This couldn't be happening. 'I'll be fine,' Anna insisted, then, grasping at anything, flung back, 'I can cook and someone can check in on me. Nancy's mother—'

'Gloria?' Her mother snorted. 'She's out every night and most of the day as well.'

'Peter's then. Mrs Stallard is only two doors away. You said yourself how much you admired her. Teaching, as well as everything else.' And Mr Stallard was something high up in British Government Communications – GCHQ – which had a branch here, though doing what she'd never asked.

'Yes, well—'

'I'll do the cleaning, I promise. And tidy my room. And—'

'Let her stay,' her father said, obviously floored by the whole conversation. 'For God's sake. Have your break—'

'It's not a break,' snapped her mother.

Her father's face tightened. 'I didn't mean it like that.'

He probably did, but pointing that out wasn't going to help anyone.

'She can fly out at the end of term. If you're still there.'

July the nineteenth, Anna checked in her head. *If* her mother was still there, which she wouldn't be, would she? And even if she was, Anna had – she did a quick calculation – six weeks without her. Six weeks of exams, yes, but also of freedom.

To see who she wanted.

To be who she wanted.

To be – she shivered just thinking of it – to be with him.