

Devil Inside Us

Battle Between Reason and Passion



Sabahattin Ali

Devil Inside Us

Battle Between Reason and Passion



© 1940 Sabahattin Ali

Translated by: © 2025 Ince

Language of the original edition: Turkish

Publisher's label: Celine

Softcover ISBN: 978-3-384-56596-9

Printing and distribution on behalf of the translator:

tradition GmbH, Heinz-Beusen-Stieg 5, 22926 Ahrensburg, Germany

This work, including its parts, is protected by copyright. The author is responsible for the content. Any use is not permitted without the author's consent. Publication and distribution are carried out on behalf of the author, who can be contacted at Yücel Ince,

Saarlandstr.10,

26919 Brake,

Germany.

Contact address according to EU product safety regulation:

yuecel_ince@web.de

Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| 1 - Departure | 7 |
| 2 - Encounters..... | 13 |
| 3 - Awakening | 23 |
| 5 - At the crossroads | 40 |
| 6 - The inner emptiness | 49 |
| 7 - In the silence of the night | 62 |
| 8 - Between closeness and distance | 73 |
| 9 - Hope and fear..... | 85 |
| 11 - Stepping into freedom..... | 104 |
| 13 - Decisions of the past | 142 |
| 14 - Unsafe proximity | 153 |
| 15 - A new reality | 166 |
| 16 - The moral frontier..... | 175 |
| 17 - An Unexpected Encounter | 192 |
| 18 - Faded illusions | 204 |
| 19 - The price of truth | 218 |
| 20 - Turning point | 227 |
| 21 - Between illusion and reality..... | 239 |
| 22 - The dance of the false prophets | 248 |
| 23 - The sad sound of the ney flute..... | 259 |
| 24 - Sweet mist, bitter clarity | 268 |
| 25 - The last veil falls..... | 280 |

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| 26 - The letter..... | 289 |
| 27 - The unbearable truth | 302 |
| 28 - Letting go..... | 316 |

Devil Inside Us

1 - Departure

At eleven o'clock in the morning, two young men were sitting next to each other on the deck of the ferry from Kadıköy to Köprü, chatting. The one sitting on the seaward side was a plump young man with a white face and light brown hair. His brown, short-sighted eyes, which were always half-closed under his glasses and wandered slowly over the furniture, occasionally turned towards his friend and the sea on the left, which was bathed in sunlight.

His straight and somewhat long hair, which peeked out from under his slouched hat, covered his right eyebrow and part of his eyelid. He spoke very quickly; his lips were slightly pursed and his mouth was beautifully shaped when he spoke. His friend was a weak, thin, pale young man whose arms moved constantly in nervous movements and whose eyes looked sharply at everything. Neither of them appeared to be older than twenty-five and their height was medium.

The fat man, who did not take his eyes off the sea, said:

"I had to control myself not to laugh out loud. As the history teacher asked question after question, the girl seemed confused and turned her head as if she was asking for help from all sides. Knowing that she had never opened her notebooks and read before, I thought she was flying off the handle. Then my eyes fell on Ümit, who was sitting behind her, and lo and behold, she was gesturing at the professor with

her eyebrows and eyes. And she got what she wanted, my dear, the teacher asked a few trivial questions, gave the answers himself and let the girl pass."

"Does he like Ümit a lot?"

"He likes every girl... If she's just a little bit handsome..."

Then he punched his friend's knee with his hand, as if he wanted to continue his story:

"Life bores me..." he said. "Everything bores me. School, professors, lessons, friends... especially girls... They bore me... ad nauseam..."

He paused for a while. He moved his glasses with his hand and continued:

"I don't want anything. Nothing seems attractive to me. I feel that I'm getting lazier by the day and I'm happy with that. Maybe in a while I'll become so slack that I won't even feel bored anymore. You have to do something, something like that... Or we should do nothing at all. I think: What can we do? Nothing! In a world that has exist-ed for millions of years, the oldest thing is twenty thou-sand years old... Even that's a bit of an exaggerated figure. I was talking to our philosophy teacher the other day. I approached the discussion very seriously and tried to explore "the meaning of our existence". He couldn't answer the question of why the hell we came into the world either. He spoke of the pleasure of creation and the truth that life itself is meaningful, but that's nonsense. What do you want to create? Creating means making something out of nothing. Even the smartest among us cannot go beyond the wealth of knowledge and experience accumulated by our predecessors. What we want to achieve is only to change these existing goods and bring them to market.

How this ridiculous task can satisfy a human being, I don't know. If there are stars that send their light to us in five thousand years, it does not seem wise to me to try to attain eternity by writing works that will rot in libraries after fifty years and whose names will be forgotten after five hundred years, or to spend one's life kneading mud and wielding pencils on marble so that in three thousand years one will be exhibited in a museum without arms and legs."

With an important manner in his voice, he murmured slowly and thoughtfully:

"It seems to me that there is only one thing we can really do, and that is die. You see, we can do that, and only in that case do we make full use of our will. You'll ask me why I don't do that! As I said, I'm incredibly lethargic. I'm lazy, I drift according to the law of inertia. Eeeeh."

He yawned spectacularly and stretched out his legs. An older man sitting opposite him, reading an Armenian newspaper, immediately withdrew his and gave the young man a disapproving look.

His friend didn't pay much attention to all these words, perhaps because he was listening for the tenth time, but continued to wander his eyes and mumble, occasionally frowning as if trying to organize some ideas in his head.

When the person sitting next to him had finished speaking, he smiled meaningfully:

"Ömer," he said. "Do you have any money? Let's have a Raki tonight."

Ömer with an impertinence that didn't match his profound words from earlier:

"No, but we're going to take someone out. It would have been easy if I'd gone to the office today, but I don't feel like

it at all."

The thin young man shook his head with a serious expression:

"Soon they will fire you. Can you be absent so often without excuse? In fact, all departments are looking for excuses to get rid of civil servants like you who go to university.

The situation for those who work at the post office is particularly bad. Time is more expensive there than anywhere else. Or at least it should be."

Then he added with a laugh:

"It's no wonder that letters from Beyazıt to Eminönü take forty-eight hours, thanks to hard-working employees like you."

Ömer answered very calmly:

"I have nothing to do with letters. I'm in accounting. I fill out books until the evening. In the evening, I occasionally help the cashier. Counting money is a beautiful thing, dear Nihat."

Nihat, as if he had suddenly been revived:

"Interesting thing..." he said. "Money is generally an interesting thing. I often take a Lira out of my pocket, put it in front of me and look at it for hours. There is nothing extraordinary about it. Interesting thing..." he said. "Money is generally an interesting thing. I often take a Lira out of my pocket, put it in front of me and look at it for hours. There is nothing extraordinary about it. Some elaborate lines, just like the official writing exercises at school. Perhaps a little finer and more complicated... Then a picture. A few lines of summarized text and one or two signatures... If you bend over it too much, the smell of heavy grease and dirt also hits you. But what a wonderful thing this dirty paper is, my dear,

think about it!"

He closed his eyes for a while.

"For example, on any given day, you are overcome by an enormous inner restlessness. Life seems dark and meaningless to you. You start to think philosophically, as you were just ranting about. Even that gradually becomes difficult, and you don't even want to open your mouth. You think no person; no conversation could revive you. The air is suffocating and meaningless. Either too hot, too cold or too rainy. Passers-by look at you blankly and run around with their tongues sticking out, like goats chasing after a pile of grass, always busy with trivial business. You try to collect yourself and analyse this unpleasant state of mind. The inextricable knots of the human soul spread out before you like a riddle. You cling to the word depression that you have read in books like a life preserver. Because for some reason, we all tend to give a name to all our worries, be they material or spiritual; if we can't do that, we go completely mad. However, if this tendency did not exist in people, doctors would starve to death.

As you cling to that word "depression" and thrash about in the endless sea of inner turmoil, you bump into an old friend you haven't seen for a long time. As soon as you see that he is well-dressed, you immediately remember your bankruptcy and, if you are lucky, borrow a Lira or two from your gullible friend... And then the miracle begins. It is as if a strong wind has swept away a layer of fog from your soul, and suddenly you feel an inner clarity, a lightness, an expansiveness. The old restlessness has been blown away. You look around with joy and start looking for someone to chat with. You see, my best, what volumes of books and hours of

thought could not achieve is achieved by two dirty banknotes. Perhaps because you can't bring yourself to accept that our souls are being sold so cheaply, you pursue nobler causes; a cloud rising a few hundred feet higher in the sky, or a cool wind blowing on the back of your neck, or a clever idea that comes to you at that moment seems to be the reason for this change. But between you and me, it's just the opposite: thanks to the two Liras in our pockets, we're able to see the clearing sky, feel the coolness of the wind and even have clever thoughts... Come on, my friend, we've arrived at the pier. One day we'll either go mad or rule the world. For now, let's try to find money for a Raki and drink a few glasses to our bright future."

2 - Encounters

When Nihat had finished speaking and stood up, he noticed that Ömer wasn't moving. He put his hand on Ömer's shoulder; Ömer flinched slightly but didn't change his position.

As the other leaned over to see if he had perhaps fallen asleep, he noticed that his friend had his eyes fixed on the opposite sofa and seemed to be looking at something with extraordinary fascination while ignoring his surroundings. He turned his head in the same direction and began to look. But he couldn't see anything. He put his hand on Ömer's shoulder again and said:

"Come on, get up!"

Ömer didn't answer, but just grimaced to signal that he wanted to be left alone.

"What's going on, man! Where are you looking?"

Ömer finally decided to turn his head and said:

"Shut up and sit down!"

Nihat obeyed this order. The passengers slowly began to get up and move towards the exits. Ömer kept turning his head up, right and left to see between them to the other side. His friend nudged him and asked:

"Hey, enough already. Tell me, where are you looking?"

Ömer turned his head slowly and said, as if he were announcing a catastrophe:

"There sat a young girl, did you see her?"

"I haven't seen anything, what's going on?"

"I hadn't seen one of these until now!"

"Are you talking nonsense now?"

"I'm saying I've never seen such a creature before!"

Nihat screwed up his face in annoyance, stood up again and said:

"Despite all your great speeches and your legendary intellect, you will never be a serious person!"

After this sentence, the mocking smile on the edges of his lips continued for a few seconds, then gave way to an indifferent expression. Ömer had also stood up now. He stretched his neck and stood on tiptoe as if he was looking for something.

After a while, he turned to Nihat:

"She's still sitting there!" he said.

Then he turned his eyes to his friend's face:

"Cut the chatter. I'm experiencing the most important minutes of my life right now. My feelings have never deceived me before. Something extraordinary has happened or is about to happen. The young girl I saw there seems like someone I've known since before I was born, before the world, before the universe came into being. How can I explain it to you? Should I say "I fell madly in love with her at first sight, I am burning, I am on fire!" But the strange thing is that I have nothing else to say. I'm even amazed that I'm standing here with you chatting. From now on, every minute of my life that I spend without it would mean death for me. Don't be surprised that I now look at death, which I had just praised so highly, as something terrible, why shouldn't you be surprised? Who knows? I don't have to give you explanations... What's the point? Now don't be conceited and give me some advice! What should I do? I'm facing a terrible situation. Once I lose sight of them, my life will consist of nothing but searching until I die; and that time will certainly be

very short. Oh man! I'm talking nonsense. But I am saying something extraordinarily true. The possibility of never seeing her again is the most terrible and unfortunately the most obvious. Just think, I can't remember her face even now, but I'm sure that somewhere deeper than my memory there's an image of her as clear as carved in stone that has existed since unimaginably ancient times. If I were to mingle with this crowd with my eyes closed, I'm sure some force would infallibly lead me straight to her."

After saying these words with extraordinary speed, he actually took a step forward and closed his eyes. He was still holding Nihat's wrist with his left hand. Nihat looked at his friend in amazement. Although he was used to all kinds of craziness from him, this intense excitement seemed a little strange to him. When he couldn't find anything to say, he said:

"What kind of creature are you, Ömer?"

Ömer's sweaty hand squeezed Nihat's wrist even tighter:

"Look, look, she's still there... Can't you see her?"

When Nihat turned his head in the direction Ömer was looking, he saw a dark-haired young girl sitting on one of the sofas, which was completely empty. An old, fat woman was sitting next to her and they were talking about something. She was holding a thick packet of sheet music in one hand and leaning against it with the other.

She had a graceful head movement with curly hair on her thin neck. The first noticeable feature was the strong expression of will that her chin revealed. Between her words, which Nihat could not hear from where he stood, she was silent, as if she had made a clear decision, then she began to speak again, as if announcing another decision. Her eyes

were somewhat dark, but natural.

Her entire posture and demeanor were completely natural. Her hand, which slowly stretched out on the linoleum of the sofa after rising with a gesture from the place where she occasionally leaned, had thin fingers and a pale color. The fingernails were cut off at the base; they were thin and long. Nihat's gaze wandered over them for a while, then he turned his head to Ömer: "So what? What do you see in her?" he wanted to say.

Ömer's voice broke, as if he was delirious:

"Don't say anything! It's obvious from your face what a brilliant idea you're going to hatch!" he said. "I've made up my mind. I will go there immediately, take the girl by the arm and..."

He paused, thought, then muttered:

"And... I'll probably say something. Maybe she'll start talking first. She will certainly recognize me at first sight. It can't be any other way. And she won't be able to hide it when she recognizes me. Come on, let's go together, you stay a little behind me. Listen to us. It certainly won't be ordinary to talk to a girl we've met in a world whose nature we don't know."

After he had said this, he pulled Nihat by the arm.

He pulled away and said:

"Are you planning to make a spectacle here on the ship?"

"What do you mean?"

"The girl immediately calls the police, and the police don't hesitate to take a thug like you to the police station. Do you really think the world is full of nonsense like in your head, for God's sake? Will you ever be able to open your eyes and really see people? Will you spend your whole life chasing imaginations, dreams and Don Quixote-like ambitions,

deluding yourself and imagining that you and others will achieve extraordinary things in this world where there is nothing but mediocrity? You have just said that a person can do nothing in this world, and now you are venturing into frivolities that very few people can do. I don't understand what the difference is between you and an ordinary madman!"

Ömer stretched his neck as if he had been insulted: "You'll see. Your bird brain can't understand the dark and deep relationships between people. Wait here."

With these words, he walked towards the young girl.

Nihat instinctively turned his head towards the sea:

"Oh dear!" and began to wait for the first noise of impending trouble.

With his gaze fixed on the young girl, Ömer walked slowly forward as if suddenly awakened from a sleep.

Just as he approached the girl, he heard a female voice next to his ear:

"Oh!.. Ömer, how are you?.. They don't even see you anymore!"

When he turned his head to the side, he saw that his distant relative Emine was sitting next to the young girl.

Emine continued:

"Gosh, you've been staring here the whole time, I've been sitting here waiting for you to come, but you just couldn't stop chatting. Come on, otherwise we'll stay on the ferry."

Both women got up and left. Ömer was confused about what to say and tried to collect himself:

"By God, how was I supposed to know.... Auntie. Do I have time because of school, work? You know me, you won't hold it against me, will you?" he said.

Aunt Emine laughed:

"Oh, who would blame you! Who expects anything good from someone who writes to their parents maybe once a year! Come on, tell me, how are you?"

Without taking his eyes off the young girl, Ömer replied:

"Always the same. No news!"

In the meantime, they had arrived on the bridge. They all walked together in the direction of Istanbul. Without intervening in the conversation, Ömer's eyes, which he had averted from his aunt's neck, met the gaze of the young girl walking beside them. The girl looked at the man in front of her for a while, as if trying to remember something, with a long, lost-in-thought look and without blinking, before turning her head forward.

After Ömer had watched the shadow of her long eyelashes falling on her eyes for a while, he turned to his aunt and made a gesture with his head as if to ask: "Who is that?"

Aunt Emine, with a politeness typical of people from Anatolia who have lived in Istanbul for a long time, said:

"Ah!.. Didn't I introduce you? You must know each other! Do you recognize Macide? She's the granddaughter of your mother's great uncle. When you left Balıkesir, she was still so small. She's been living with us for six months now. She practices the piano and goes to school."

She turned her head and looked at Macide.

Meanwhile, the girl shook Ömer's hand:

"I'm going to the conservatory!" and turned her eyes forward again.

Ömer tried to find in his mind his mother's great uncle and his granddaughter among the hundreds of relatives now scattered in Istanbul, Balıkesir and many other places. When

his eyes fell on Aunt Emine, he noticed that her face had taken on a slightly sad and confused expression. He asked; she made a few gestures that meant "You shouldn't say that in front of her!".

When Ömer lowered his head curiously, the plump woman quickly murmured in a low voice:

"Shut up! Don't ask me what happened! Come and visit us and I'll tell you!"

Her eyes seemed to want to say something. There was an expression of interest and compassion for the girl in her gaze.

After quickly glancing at Macide, who was walking on her right, she turned to Ömer and murmured:

"Poor thing doesn't know anything yet... I just can't tell her, her father died a week ago... I don't know what to do."

Ömer suddenly felt a spark of joy flash through him and immediately felt extremely ashamed. It seemed indecent to him to see this death as an opportunity that could help him. But there was a "calculative" side of us that evaluated events, drew conclusions and acted without ever getting in touch with our moral part. And although it was not spoken out loud, it was always this side that won and asserted its opinion.

While he was thinking about it, Aunt Emine interpreted the few seconds of silence that Ömer had spent pondering as a sign of his grief over the death of a relative.

"Come and see us these days, it's a long story, I'll explain it to you," she said.

They had arrived at the streetcar stop in Eminönü. The woman and the young girl said goodbye to Ömer. The young man looked after them for a while, and although he

didn't admit it to himself, he hoped that Macide would turn around.

But she walked on, her fine and beautiful figure almost floating on her flat shoes, and jumped into a streetcar that was just arriving, after holding out her hand to Aunt Emine. Ömer, who was still following her with his eyes, flinched when a hand suddenly slapped his shoulder hard. Nihat expected an explanation in an almost belligerent attitude.

When he saw that Ömer didn't open his mouth, he said:

"Man, you're something. To avoid seeing the embarrassing spectacle you would make on the ship, I turned my back on you. And then I saw that you were no longer there. Then I saw you chatting with them on the bridge, I followed you. Is the girl traveling the same way? Ha? And the fat woman is wearing just the right merchant's outfit..."

Ömer laughed:

"You never think otherwise anyway; your holy head cannot rest until it has reduced everything to an existing measure. This man didn't know this woman, went and spoke to her. The woman didn't report him to the police, so I guess it was as it seemed. Done, out. It can't be anything else. There is nothing extraordinary in life. Everything is one and the same. It's as simple as that..."

He nudged his friend's head with his hand:

"I'd rather have no brain at all than such a straightforward one. There's nothing you could imagine!"

Nihat ignored these words and asked instead:

"All right, my dear, so what happened? When you came to her, did the girl hug you and say, 'Oh, where did you come from, you human I've been connected to in dark worlds since the universe was created?' Even if I believed that, I can't