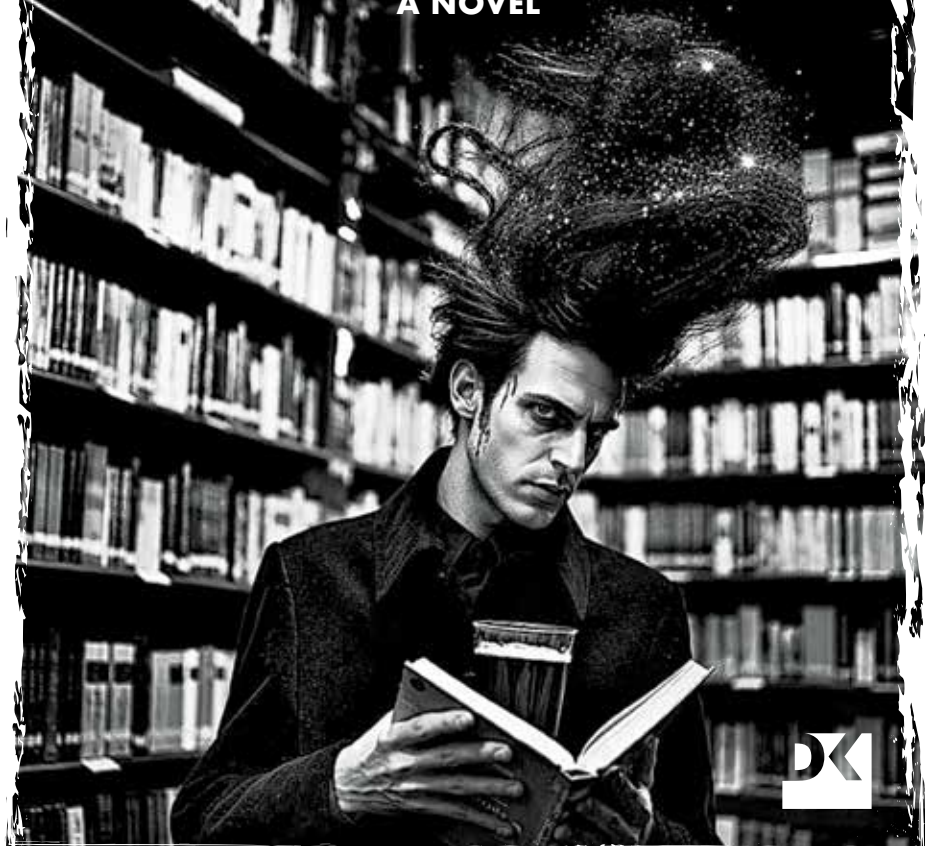


TEOMAN
DEAR MR.
ROCK STAR

A NOVEL



DEAR MR. ROCK STAR

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Written by: Teoman

Translated by: Sébastien Bernard

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Dear Mr. Rock Star

Teoman

DOĞAN KİTAP
ÖRNEKTİR

Translated by Sébastien Bernard

“a-bop-bop-a-loom-op a-lop-bop-boom”

Elvis Presley

Swallows

I gaze at the shoes around me and picture the poor feet trapped inside them. Splayed, tapered, plump, bony, veiny, weary, punished lifeless by heels. I cough. That's when I realize something for the first time. Besides the operator, there are three people in the room who are complete strangers to me. They must think I'm about to say something; they're looking at me. I glance back at them through the muted sunlight of my sunglasses. I say nothing. My manager turns back to the screen. The others follow suit. Funda speaks up: "I don't like either of these shots. In the first one, Timur looks groggy and dull-eyed. He came out awful." I watch the commercial's edit through the monitor. What's the point of all this? One day, a tumor will rear its head from somewhere in your body and you'll die. You'll idle until then, stuck in some waiting room where you're bored out of your mind. I should hurry up and get old already, put an end to this ordeal. I glance at the blonde girl. What's her job? I couldn't figure it out on the day of the shoot either. Is she from the ad agency or the production crew? She'd look better with a shorter cut. Beautiful earrings on her dainty ears. But her hair's hiding them. Her outfit isn't bad either. Pleated beige skirt and slightly lighter beige heels. Nice calves. Pronounced calf muscles, like upside-down swallows in flight.

Seeing as I'm in the presence of a pretty girl, it would be nice to start a conversation by, say, commenting on the editing. But I give up. I'm not in the mood right now. Plus, my mind was elsewhere during the edit. I have nothing to say. I didn't even listen to her name when we were introduced – then too, my mind was elsewhere. Better to start up a conversation using her name. And I obviously have to talk about the video, what else? But again, I paid zero attention. It's not like I can just blurt something random. Heh, this is too much right now. I give up. I look at myself on the screen. Playing the fuckboy. Then I turn and shoot a sharp glance at my beautiful scene partner in the flesh. Turns out there's an aquarium to my left. It's only now I notice. I watch the fish inside. Different-sized fish dashing or lumbering about. Three little fish are feeding; when the big black fish comes in they scatter in different directions. Why the hell is there an aquarium in the editing studio?

My manager keeps going: "And the last shot. His face is too tense because of the cold. I want to see other takes for that."

The girl sits down on one of the chairs. She smiles when she notices me eyeing her. Then she turns back to the screen. Bored, I step outside. I light a cigarette, sitting on a bench in the courtyard outside the agency. The bench is dark brown, with unpolished but varnished wood. The paint hasn't worn off. No jerk has carved their name into it. If only that girl would come out and join me. Using smoking as an excuse. At least it would pass the time. Maybe we'd see each other later tonight. I'd go meet her after the studio. I'd have a plan for the night. And once the night's over, I'd go home with her. It would be nice to go home with her.

I should visit my mom tomorrow. Her body continues to deteriorate with every passing moment. The hip replacement surgery didn't work. It can't be done again. She's 84 now. She could die on the operating table. I wonder if the nerve block treatment

we've tried for the pain will be effective. The doctor said, "Fifty percent chance it'll help." I hope to God it does.

The girl doesn't come out. But my manager does. We start walking. I tell her, "No more commercials, that's it. Look, I'll hang myself in a hotel room on tour. It'll be on you."

She scolds me. "First you say one thing, then another. Soon as you hear about the money, your eyeballs pop out of your head. Either we do it or we don't. You're giving me mixed signals."

I grin sheepishly. The poor woman's right. "You're not wrong" I say. She says I've been boozing too much. That she knows everything I've been up to. Who do I think I'm fooling with those sunglasses? She can read it all over my face. I ought to start acting like a grown-up. "I'm all dried out from maturing, what more can I do?" I say.

She asks if I've been up to anything other than drinking. I play dumb. She doesn't buy it, just stares me down. So I let go of the blank face. "I haven't been" I say. "Clean as a baby now." We reach the parking lot. She heads for her SUV, I head for my Audi. SUVs aren't for me. They don't handle curves well. Too tall, too wobbly. "An artist shouldn't overstep" my old producer used to say. It applies to everything. You shouldn't draw too much attention to yourself. That way, you also steer clear of danger.

My driver opens the door. From a distance, Funda calls out, "Take care of yourself."

I call back, "I'm a grown-ass man, will you relax already?"

"Yeah, sure!" she yells. I tell my driver Serkan to head to the recording studio. And to pick up a bottle of Johnnie Walker Double Black along the way. They might be out at the studio. A little while later, he pulls over and hops out. After doing a few shots using the bottle cap, I change my mind. I call the studio. Tell them I'll drop by for oversight after the guitar track is laid down. I describe how the instrument should be played: "We're going dirty. No polish. Grit and grime all the way." Suits the vibe of the track!

I go to a bar in Kabataş Setüstü. Not in the mood to see my jaded lookalikes in Cihangir, each one of them tired of themselves and of life. They've set up tables along the waterfront. I order a whiskey. Something smoky – that'll do it. There's a square, brass ashtray on the table. Classic and beautiful. I put out my cigarette.

My mother. She's never happy. Keeps weighing on my mind. And my daughter. What kind of person will she grow up to be?

The weather's unseasonably nice. Gets even better after dark. I'll wait here for news from the recording studio. The tables around me all empty. Just how I like it. Before long, a couple sits at the table next to mine. But they're quiet and polite. No problem. I'm fine. By my third whiskey, I get a message.

Serkan and I head to the studio. Traffic's a nightmare. A slow-burning war of nerves in a single-lane crawl. I throw myself at the whiskey. One capful. Then another. Then another. That's when I stop counting. But I'm sick of drinking from the cap now – I need a glass. And ice. Wait, one more capful. Drivers do all in their power not to let each other through. A nonstop volley of curses runs through my head. The road won't end. Then neither will my cursing!

Memo opens the studio door. "Welcome, boss, you're gonna love it when you hear this." I need a drink. I head to the kitchen. Among the dishes, I spot the Art Deco blue ashtray I bought myself. Then I grab my own crystal whiskey glass from the counter. Now I have my glass, ice, whiskey, ashtray. What more could I want! My head's spinning. My stomach's burning a little, too. No big deal, I'm used to it. In the studio's control room, I sprawl on the armchair I also bought myself. A 1950s design. I'm ready. When I say, "Let's hear it" I hear my own voice from outside my body. I've drunk too much. "Turn it up, though!" Safa says, "Let's see if you like it." Let's see indeed. I dim the lights a bit. I finish off my whiskey and pour another one. The ice hasn't even melted yet.

The song was supposed to be done with just one guitar. I already rejected Safa's string quartet arrangements. I want monotony in the track. A monotony that'll tighten your chest. Grit. Something that gets under your skin. That's what it means to me, anyway. I know it's not like that for a lot of people. For them, this won't even be a song. I'd made the vocals just as monotonous over the lead guitar. No rise, no fall. A voice without any feeling in it.

My head's spinning even more. The guitar intro starts. I wait a bit, to understand how it makes me feel. Blood rushes to my head. I jump up. "Listen!" I shout. "Listen to the vocals, then listen to the guitar. Let images flood your brain, put aside your musician hang-ups. Focus on the real emotion." I'm too dizzy on my feet, but I can't sit back down. I catch my breath and keep going: "Musicians! They hear shit like notes, compressors, touch – stuff that doesn't matter. Forget about playing good or playing bad, forget about pitch. Is this guitar riff beautiful? Don't think in words. Let pictures come to mind." Safa speaks in choppy, hesitant words. "The guitar sound felt beautiful and melancholy to me." I've long crossed the threshold of self-control. "Melancholy? Is that what we're after?" I shout as loud as I can. Spin around in the control room. Point at the sound suspended in the air. "Who's looking for melancholy?" I ask. "What's the guy singing, eh? Are you hearing anything about 'autumn leaves, fishermen casting nets, a snot-nosed kid in a weeping fit, an old mee-maw coming back from the market'? Listen to the lyrics."

The sheer volume of my own voice hypes me up even more: "Listen to what the guy's saying. 'I was disgusted by order and meaning / my insides torn to shreds with desire.' And how does he say it? Like he's disgusted. Why? Because newsflash, he's disgusted with the whole world! 'Anyway I had no respect for anything,' he says. 'People drank my blood; I let them – let them get their fill and go on their way; until I had no blood left

to bleed.” Then I turn to Memo, staring him dead in the face. “What kind of guy is this?” I answer myself. “He’s repulsed by the world! He’s a Dostoyevsky character. A wreck. A voice from underground.” I get to the real question: “So, what kind of beauty are we after here? Listen to the guitar. Does the *sound* reflect the meaning of the words?”¹ I said listen to that guitar. He’s nothing like our guy. He’s spotless, polished, wearing a crisp white shirt and rolling dough with his wife to help with dessert after work. He’s had a swimmingly ordinary life. He’s not disgusted with the world. So tell me, for God’s sake, what the hell is our Dostoyevsky hero doing next to Mr. Dough-arms over here? Soooooo...” I build to the grand finale now: “We must redefine beauty. Since our hero spits out his words with disgust, I make them ugly when I sing them. I sing gritty. No preening vibratos, no fussy flourishes. Why? Because artistic integrity demands that I sing ugly! The charm of the harsh, the sweetness of the sour! And *just* like that – the ugly becomes beautiful! That ugly voice and those ugly words – we call that beauty now. We have redefined beauty. So what now? By this new standard of beauty, is that guitar sound still beautiful?”

I can tell no one thinks I’m expecting a response. They got the message a while ago. So they’re only pretending to listen at this point. Of course, no answer comes. I’m shouting as I talk. But not at them, actually. At the song, the *sound*, my drunkenness, myself, the world: “Disgusting, horrible!”

Suddenly, I feel like an empty sack. But I can’t stop. I can barely speak now: “Go back to how you felt as a child. Did you want to meet the man who rolled dough with his wife? No, you thought about that guitarist who made your hair stand on end. That’s who we all wanted to meet. And did we picture him rolling dough? No! He was some mysterious figure in the fog. We wanted to meet

1. Italicized English words are spoken in English in the original.

him. We wanted to *be* him. We didn't want to be a poor little kid. We yearned to be someone people would want to meet. Now, give me the sound of the guitarist we all wanted to meet as little tykes. When you play that sound, never forget this: the words belong to a man who's disgusted with the world. The guitar should be his companion. We've redefined beauty, the old ugly has become the new beautiful."

As I finish my drink in one go, Memo breaks the silence: "Got it, we can adjust the guitar effects, bro. We'll also have to change the phrasing."

"Just give me the picture I want, you can play it with a shrieking *zurna* for all I care!"

I slump into the chair. I realize I'm done for. This is all about something else altogether. What I'm really angry at is producing trash. In full awareness that it's trash I'm producing. Like everyone else. That's the source of the exhaustion and irritation inside me. This is the first song I've written in six years. A song I couldn't care less about. When I say, "I'll have one more drink then go" Memo replies, "Bro, don't drink any more." Everyone says the same thing to me. Always. "Alright" I say, "I'm going home."

I won't go to the bar. It would drag on for too long. If I go, I'll definitely bring a girl home. I'll talk her head off and tire her out by morning. I don't want to have sex. Why disappoint her? I'm better off drinking at home.

As soon as I get in, I hear the ringing in my ears. Side effects of the alcohol and the studio. I need a long sleep tonight. I take my 20 mg Zyprexa. A double dose. Dissolvable tablet. I'll definitely have a bunch of nightmares. I also take 5 mg of melatonin. Melatonin is like sugar to me. Does nothing by itself. Still, it helps my cortisol. Maybe I'll sleep deeper. Drinking it calms me down. I need another whiskey. I pour a double. I drink it in one go. My stomach burns. I forgot to eat today. I order pizza online. Pepperoni. I sit back in the chair.

I wake up to the phone and the doorbell ringing at the same time. I've passed out. The kid delivering the pizza says he's been buzzing my door for ages. I give him a big tip. Poor guy's working at this hour. I eat a slice of pizza and toss the rest into the trash. At that moment, the rage I felt in the studio comes rushing back to me. My shouting and screaming. I laugh out loud remembering this state. My nonsense truly never ends. Dostoyevsky my ass! This is just a shitty track. I can't stop laughing. I'm a walking, breathing, footed nervous breakdown. The kind that makes everyone's life a living hell. I let it go. It's done, let's move on. Bedtime.

DOĞAN KİTAP
ÖRNEKTİR



“People need the past. To remember who they are. Or rather, to remember who they used to be. For a moment, I feel the urge to cry. To sob. So I start cracking jokes instead. Awful jokes. Better to nurse my melancholy alone. Save it for when I’m home.”

Timur is a 46-year-old, borderline misanthropic rock star. While battling alcohol, life, depression, feelings of pointlessness, midlife and creative crises, he is also trying to be a father to his four-year-old daughter and a son to his mother. But the hardest thing for him is to endure himself.

This is a lonely rock star who feels constantly forced to be someone else, who no longer knows who he is, and cannot keep up with the age he lives in.

Meanwhile, he also tries to navigate a romantic relationship he struggles to convince himself of. As much as he can, naturally. Or rather, as much as he can’t.

Teoman proves his prowess as a novelist as much as a songwriter. Here is a character who is both deeply familiar and alien to us, a life that is at once deeply tragic, intensely entertaining, and downright hilarious...

Translated by: Sébastien Bernard

QR kodu okutunuz



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Doğan
Kitap