

**The Cartier Project, novel by Miha Mazzini**

*Selim, an immigrant worker from Bosnia, falls in love with the actress Nastassja Kinski. And he doesn't miss even a single show in the local cinema:*

Selim stood in front of the cinema. Clean shaven, in a white velvet suit, a white shirt, a black bow tie, and a carnation in his buttonhole. A few meters away from him stood a group of his comrades from the dormitory. They were sniggering. He paid no attention to them. I strode over to him and said hello.

"Do you have a date?"

"Yes, I'm going to the cinema," he said.

I didn't have to ask which film was showing. Nastassja was looking at me from the display case with her catlike eyes.

"Are you coming?" he invited.

I went.

We sat in the back row. There were about twenty other people in the auditorium besides us.

The lights went off. Selim went completely still. I swung my legs over the back of the seats in front of me and cradled the bag of ribs.

The audience was split into three groups, like little islands in the auditorium. They were rustling candy wrappers. They were shouting comments. Competing with witticisms.

After less than five minutes the film broke. The auditorium was full of whistling. The lights came on. Selim got up and walked through the whole auditorium to the platform in front of the screen.

He stood silently in the middle of the stage.

Slowly they all went quiet, asking themselves what he was up to and expecting some juicy jokes.

He spoke.

"If anybody opens their mouth or makes any noise whatsoever during the rest of this film, I'll smash their face in."

The three in the first row laughed loudly.

Selim went down the stairs, walked up to them, and smashed their faces in.

Then he went back on the stage.

There was a deadly silence in the auditorium.

He looked up to the projection room and shouted, "And if the film breaks once more, I'll smash your face in."

Everything was quiet up there, too.

Selim returned to his seat and sat motionless.

The film didn't break anymore. We watched it in fear-induced silence right to the end.

When the lights came on again, I could hardly get up. Both my legs had gone to sleep. My ass was full of pins and needles. My back hurt.

I hadn't dared to move for two hours because the rickety rows of wooden chairs accompanied every little move with a sad creaking.

Selim went to see the next performance, too.

I was very glad to be rid of his company. His madness was growing by the minute. And I had no idea where, when, and how it would all stop.

I became scared.

*Selim is tormented by one unrealisable ambition: to meet Nastassia Kinski in the flesh. To be able to approach her, he has to become famous himself.*

"What's the matter with Selim?"

"What? You don't know?" Ibro was surprised. He couldn't believe that I hadn't heard the news yet. "I don't know, I haven't been around for a while." "True, I haven't seen you. He's standing. . . ." "What do you mean, he's standing?" "He's standing on one leg." "Why, what for, how, tell me!" "He's been standing on one leg in the middle of the room for three days and three nights, not saying anything. He eats what I bring him, but he doesn't put his other foot down. I wake in the night to see if he's gone to sleep. And he is asleep. On one leg. He wants to be mentioned in some book or something." I understood. I quickly finished my beer. "Let's go." "Are you going to talk to him?" "Yes." "I was going to ask you to do that. Only you can persuade him to stop." Ibro paid for all the drinks. We half ran to the dormitory. Selim, for fuck's sake, when is your madness going to end? I'd always assumed he'd calm down, that he wouldn't fall into the black hole of his obsession. But I knew that he had an explosive nature, and that I had a certain influence on him. I felt partly responsible. "Talk him into giving up," Ibro said on the way. "You know, when I bring Ajsha to the room tomorrow after the dance, and like, Selim is standing in the middle of the room, not moving, not saying anything. . . . You know what I mean? Otherwise I could ask him to stay at a friend's overnight."

I looked at him angrily. He shut up and didn't say a word the rest of the way.

I climbed through the window and waited for Ibro in front of the door to their room.

"You stay here. I'll talk to him on my own."

"Okay."

I knocked and went in.

Selim stood on one leg facing the window. Looking at the foundry chimneys.

He didn't turn to look at me.

I stood in front of him, blocking his view.

Not a twitch. He was looking through me. If he could see anything anymore.

"Hello, Selim."

He didn't answer. Nothing changed on his face.

I lit a cigarette.

"You want to get into the Guinness Book of World Records, eh?"

I may as well have been talking to the wall.

"You found a way of becoming well known. An equal to Nastassja. Before you go to Rome, if she's still there, and stand before her. . . ."

He didn't say either yes or no. I went on.

"Think about it Selim. I'm relying on you having some brains left. You usually use them. Have you ever seen that book?"

He remained motionless.

I continued with the voice of an old lady telling her cat not to shit on the Persian carpet.

"Quite a large book. At least three hundred pages. A new edition every year. And thousands of mugs like you in it. Twenty per page. At the very least. In small

print. You'll still only be one of many. She won't even hear about you."

The cat went on shitting wherever it felt like.

"It means nothing, fame acquired with these records.

Saccharin

for those who can't get real sugar. And something else. Listen carefully. To accept your achievement for publication in the next edition, I seem to think you have to have at least two witnesses who are present at all times and you have to notify the publishers beforehand of the exact date of the beginning of your endeavor. Maybe they even send somebody to witness it. And what did you do? You stood in the middle of a room like a stork and hey, bingo, there's your record. Who's gonna believe you? Ibro is at work in the morning. You could be lying on the bed in the meantime. In the afternoons he's out, at night he sleeps. It could be that you were only standing there when somebody was looking at you. I do believe you. But nobody else will."

My voice was becoming pleading, and there was a hint of desperation in it.

Suddenly I felt like crying, "There's no point, Selim! Everything's useless!"

He was still staring through me.

My desperation turned to rage.

"Listen to me carefully." I leaned forward, face to face, eyes to eyes. "I'll go out now. I'll smoke a cigarette in front of the door. Think about it. If you've got any sense left you'll come out. I'll come back and ask you what you think. If you decide to continue with this, we'll pack you up and send you to

Madame Tussauds. We'll leave you alone then. So, it's up to you."

I left the room and Ibro pounced on me immediately.

"What happened, did you succeed?"

"He's thinking, let's wait five minutes."

I lit a cigarette and smoked it slowly, dragging it out. I rolled every puff around my mouth three times. I was convinced he'd come. The door stayed closed. I put the cigarette out. I gave him another two minutes. He didn't come. I looked in. He was still standing like before.

I closed the door in Ibro's face and stepped in front of Selim.

Two streams of tears were running down his cheeks.

"What's the matter, aren't you going to stand on both feet?"

Finally he spoke. He said, "I would, but I can't."

He sobbed.