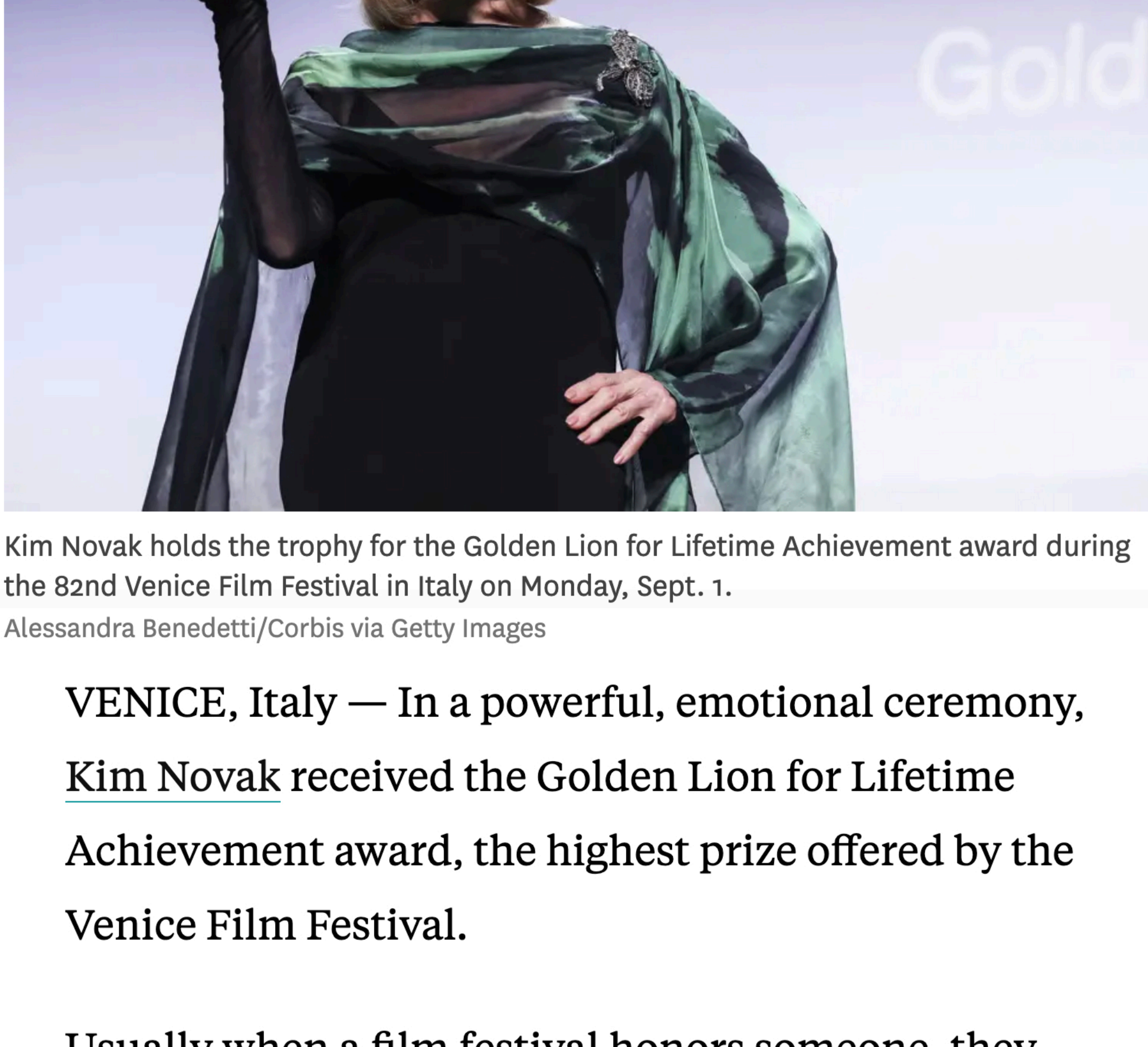


ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

‘Vertigo’ star Kim Novak receives emotional Golden Lion tribute at Venice Film Festival

By **Mick LaSalle**, Contributor

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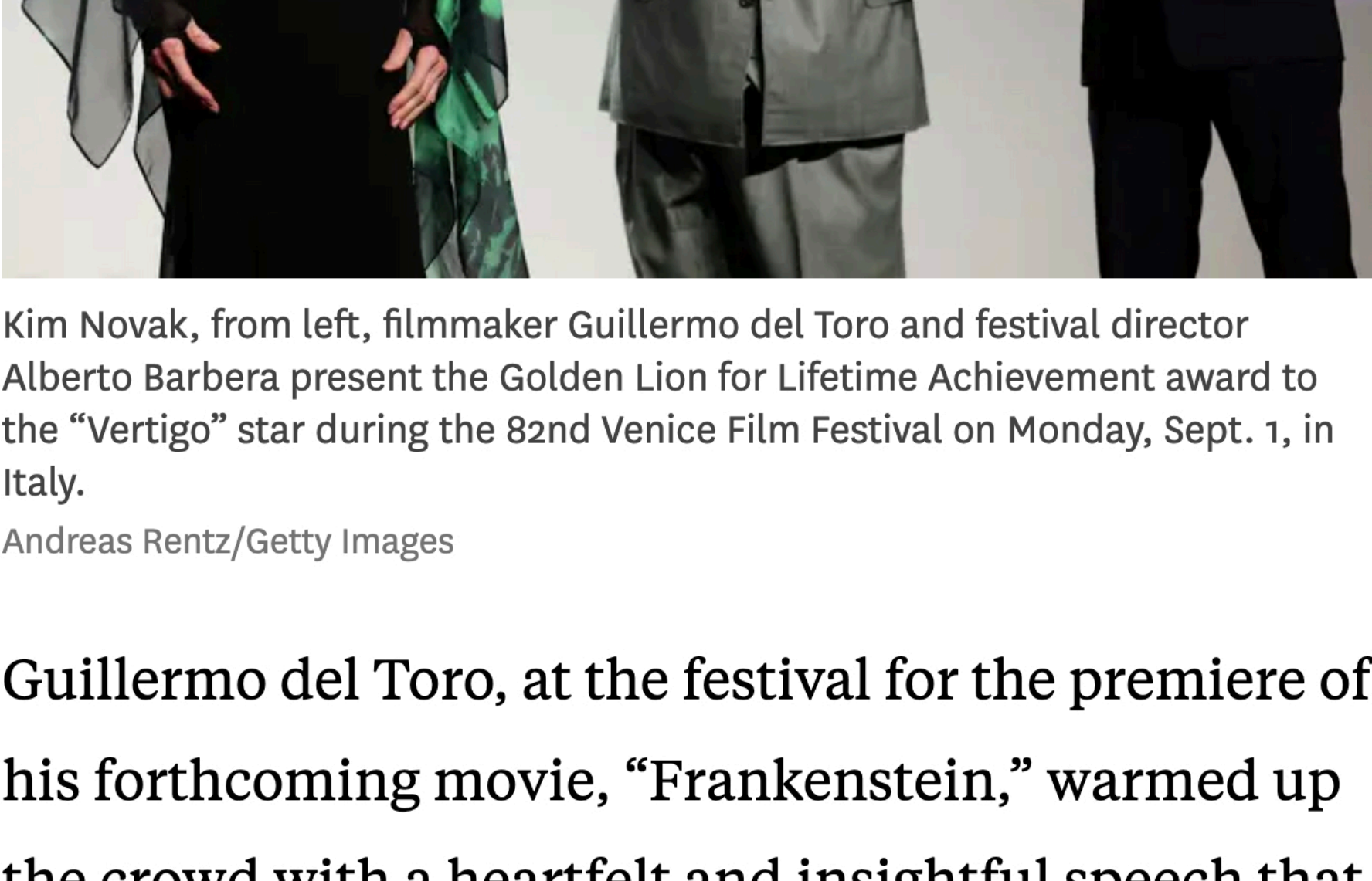
Kim Novak holds the trophy for the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement award during the 82nd Venice Film Festival in Italy on Monday, Sept. 1.

Alessandra Benedetti/Corbis via Getty Images

VENICE, Italy — In a powerful, emotional ceremony, [Kim Novak](#) received the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement award, the highest prize offered by the Venice Film Festival.

Usually when a film festival honors someone, they are merely confirming longtime and established critical opinion. But at their most useful, they can influence how people think about an artist, by calling attention to greatness that has been largely overlooked. The Venice Film Festival performed the latter function with regard to Novak on Monday, Sept. 1, and it made for a memorable experience for the “Vertigo” star herself and the packed audience lucky enough to secure Venice’s most coveted ticket this year.

The honor solidified what fans of the Alfred Hitchcock classic had known all along since watching Novak opposite James Stewart in the San Francisco-set thriller. From Fort Point to the Legion of Honor and Mission Dolores, 1958’s “Vertigo” embedded [Novak’s image into the geography of the city](#).



Kim Novak, from left, filmmaker Guillermo del Toro and festival director Alberto Barbera present the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement award to the “Vertigo” star during the 82nd Venice Film Festival on Monday, Sept. 1, in Italy.

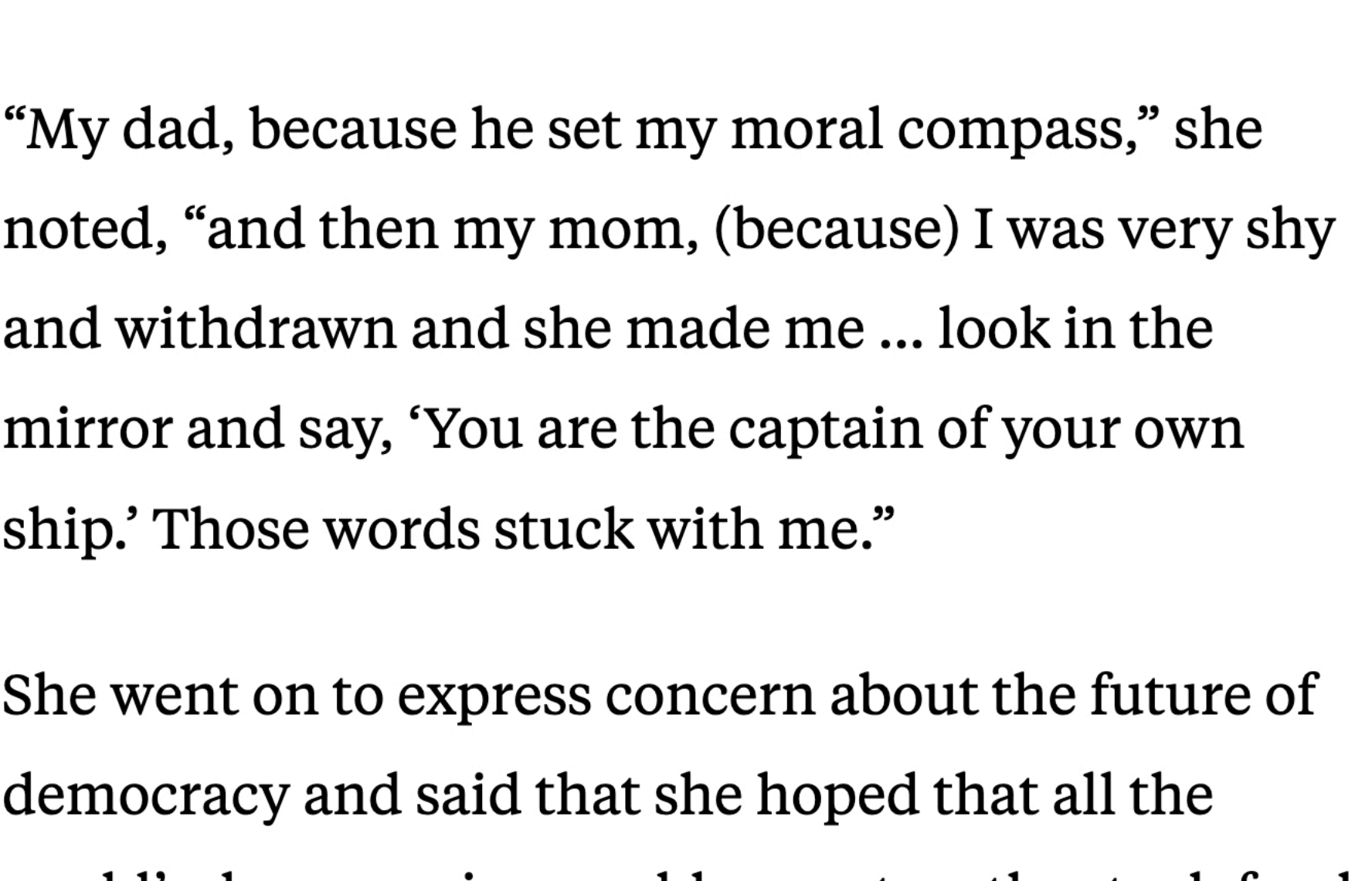
Andreas Rentz/Getty Images

Guillermo del Toro, at the festival for the premiere of his forthcoming movie, “Frankenstein,” warmed up the crowd with a heartfelt and insightful speech that posited Novak as an actor whose innate shyness gave her an ever-present underlying air of sadness and mystery. He praised her versatility that allowed her to be equally at home playing a “remote goddess or a waitress on her lunchbreak.”

Then he introduced the 92-year-old Novak, and the audience at Venice’s most prestigious theater, the Sala Grande, exploded, with a standing ovation that went on for five full minutes.

When it was Novak’s turn to speak, she matched the audience’s energy.

“First of all, I’d like to thank the gods up there in heaven — all of them, not one in particular, just all of them — because they have given me such a gift,” Novak said. “They waited until it would be the most meaningful in my life, at the end of my lifetime.”



Kim Novak receives the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement award during the 82nd Venice Film Festival on Monday, Sept. 1, in Italy.

Andreas Rentz/Getty Images

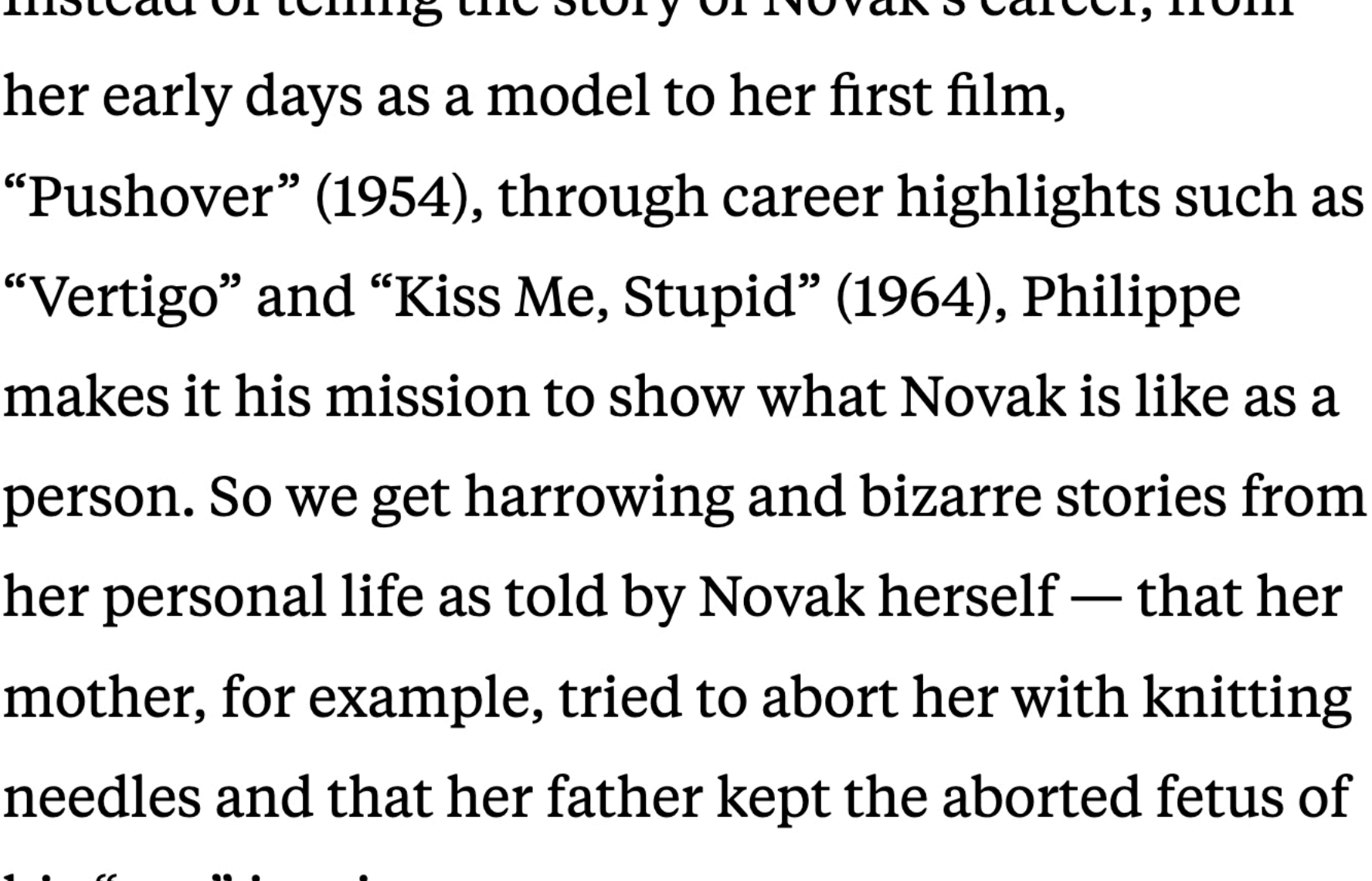
She also thanked her parents.

“My dad, because he set my moral compass,” she noted, “and then my mom, (because) I was very shy and withdrawn and she made me ... look in the mirror and say, ‘You are the captain of your own ship.’ Those words stuck with me.”

She went on to express concern about the future of democracy and said that she hoped that all the world’s democracies would come together to defend themselves against tyranny. And she spoke about her lifelong love of painting, which she says has helped her during the downswings of her bipolar disorder, a diagnosis she revealed publicly in 2012.

These are the facts of the Novak ceremony. What can’t come across in a rough description — and therefore must be stated — is the sense of privilege everyone felt for being there for this moment in this legendary actor’s life.

The pleasure of the ceremony was extended by the screening of Alexandre O. Philippe’s new film, “Kim Novak’s Vertigo,” which takes a very different approach to a Hollywood documentary.



Kim Novak arrives at Hotel Excelsior during the 82nd Venice Film Festival on Monday, Sept. 1, in Italy.

Vittorio Zunino Celotto/Getty Images

Instead of telling the story of Novak’s career, from her early days as a model to her first film, “Pushover” (1954), through career highlights such as “Vertigo” and “Kiss Me, Stupid” (1964), Philippe makes it his mission to show what Novak is like as a person. So we get harrowing and bizarre stories from her personal life as told by Novak herself — that her mother, for example, tried to abort her with knitting needles and that her father kept the aborted fetus of his “son” in a jar.

We also see her in the throes of emotion when she opens up a box containing the [gray suit she wore in “Vertigo,”](#) an iconic costume that became one of the most analyzed outfits in movie history, embodying Hitchcock’s obsession with remaking women into his ideal vision.

Frankly, Philippe’s approach might have been less welcome in another context, but having had a blast of Novak’s personality during the Golden Lion ceremony, the audience already knew that this woman is a lot more interesting than Hollywood ever allowed her to be — and they wanted to see more.

Of course, to be fair to Hollywood, Novak’s films of the 1950s and ’60s did allow Novak to accomplish enough so that she could win — and deserve to win — a Golden Lion, whose previous winners include actors such as Robert Redford, Jane Fonda and Catherine Deneuve, and filmmakers such as Martin Scorsese, Pedro Almodóvar and Federico Fellini. But the remarkable person she really is, and was, has been a secret not captured on film until Philippe’s unique documentary.

That makes it a valuable piece of work, a special record of a unique artist.

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