

# THE SHOOTING GALLERY

By  
Nickolas Gilbert

Final Draft

DARKNESS

The CLICKING of a camera shutter mixes with the RAIN outside, then a STROBE fills the screen and takes us to...

INT. LOFT/STUDIO - EVENING

...PHOTOGRAPHIC LIGHTING, tethered by cable to a HIGH-END CAMERA.

It's in the hands of PROFESSOR ROVENSKY, a shirtless, beatnik academic. Rain TRICKLES on the window as he snaps pictures of something displayed on a well-lit EASEL (of which we only see the back).

Between snaps, he sips from a glass of WINE.

The doorbell RINGS.

ROVENSKY  
(yelling)  
Just a minute.

He throws a SHEET over the easel, pulls on a turtleneck and answers the door - revealing ANNA, young and attractive, despite her studious glasses and frumpy wet clothing. She carries a CAMERA with a long TELEPHOTO LENS, which she hopelessly attempts to shelter from the elements.

ANNA  
Professor Rovensky.

ROVENSKY  
(slight accent)  
Oh, hi Anna. How are you?

An uncomfortable moment.

ANNA  
There's something I need to talk to you about Professor.

ROVENSKY  
Can't it wait until office hours? I'm working and I don't usually see students outside of...

ANNA  
(interrupting)  
It's really important to me.

He considers her for a long beat... brushes a splash of water away from her camera, then picks it up. He examines it carefully, then takes her picture.

ROVENSKY

Come in.

ANNA

Thank you.

He returns the camera.

ROVENSKY

How are you finding the Leica?

ANNA

Fine thank you.

They walk to a lounge area with couches, kitchenette and a make-up table. Next to it is a costume section with racks of wardrobe.

ROVENSKY

Here, let me....

He hangs her jacket, then hands her a make-up towel and they sit. Somehow Anna is perfectly lit.

ROVENSKY (CONT'D)

So, what's on your mind?

ANNA

It's about the critique.

He rises and moves to the counter. Several cameras lounge next to coffee canisters and other assorted kitchen stuff.

ROVENSKY

Can I get you something to drink?

ANNA

(hesitating)

Maybe some water, or hot tea.

They share a moment... Until the Professor breaks the trance and selects a decent bottle of wine, then pulls out another glass. He opens the bottle professionally.

ROVENSKY

What about the critique?

ANNA

Well, Professor Rovensky...

ROVENSKY

We're outside class, just call me  
Thomas...

ANNA

Thomas.

ROVENSKY

The light really loves you... but of  
course you know that?

He grabs an old Polaroid and steals her image, the flash  
burning the frame. Anna speaks as she blinks it out.

ANNA

I don't understand what you were saying  
about my prints.

ROVENSKY

What don't you understand?

ANNA

Well, I don't really... what I mean is,  
how can you say I need to put more of  
myself in my pictures?

ROVENSKY

Oh, it's not how you shoot, technically  
you're great, it's more... what you  
shoot.

ANNA

What do you mean, what I shoot--

ROVENSKY

I mean the subject matter. It's so...  
impersonal.

ANNA

But the work isn't about me, it's--

ROVENSKY

That's it exactly!

ANNA

What is?

ROVENSKY

That you're not giving enough of yourself  
to your art.

ANNA

I'm not?

ROVENSKY

No. I hate to say it, because you are otherwise such a good student, but I don't see anything of your beauty in your work.

He hands her a glass of wine.

ANNA

But how can I...

ROVENSKY

Just like we talked about in class... it all comes back to the great masters...

She doesn't respond.

ROVENSKY (CONT'D)

And?

ANNA

And...

ROVENSKY

And what did they do?

ANNA

They were painters.

ROVENSKY

That's right, they were painters, but more so they were masters of light and shadow... Take Van Gogh. He was the subject of some of his best work... He mastered color, composition, look at his early work, but he wasn't there until he mastered his subject matter.

ANNA

But I'm not interested in portraiture, or in painting.

ROVENSKY

Art is about expression Anna.

ANNA

But I'm not--

ROVENSKY

Let me ask you a question. Do you know what you want to be after you graduate?

ANNA

I want to be a documentary photographer.

ROVENSKY

That's great, you want to be a  
photographer...

ANNA

A documentary photographer--

ROVENSKY

You want to be an artist. And what do you  
want your art to do? How will it inspire  
the masses? What will separate it from  
all the other work out there?

He refills his glass.

ANNA

Well, I think that with my photography I  
can show the world the truth of the  
socioeconomic situation in...

ROVENSKY

Leave that bullshit to the journalists,  
you're an artist. An artist!

ANNA

I know, but I think my work--

ROVENSKY

An artist... And you become an artist by  
putting a little of yourself in your art.

He rummanges around in a drawer.

ANNA

But with documentary how can I--

ROVENSKY

Take Nan Goldin for instance. She was  
basically documenting what happened  
around her, but she wasn't judgemental of  
her surroundings, she wasn't afraid to  
show herself and her environment to the  
world.

ANNA

Yeah, but that's not the type of...

ROVENSKY

She made her work personal by using her  
experience and her *body* as a statement  
about humanity.

He continues fiddling with something in the drawer.

ANNA

I don't want to make any statements about humanity, I just want to help--

ROVENSKY

Are you familiar with the work of the Vladimir Romanoff?

ANNA

I don't think so.

ROVENSKY

Vladimir Romanoff was a Czechoslovakian photographer working in his homeland when it was still far behind the Iron Curtain.

Rovensky speaks very passionately (this is not his usual lecture material). Anna seems moderately interested.

ROVENSKY (CONT'D)

By day, he worked for the state shooting pictures of Eastern Bloc buildings, statues of esteemed politicians or any number of other great monuments the communists were building, *for the people*.

ANNA

And...

ROVENSKY

And in his heart, he wanted to shoot pictures that would tell the truth of the oppression his peers were actually facing. But whenever he attempted to showcase any such pictures he was censored and heavily reprimanded. His creative work was destroyed before it ever even had a hope of hanging in a gallery.

Anna falls into the story.

ROVENSKY (CONT'D)

Romanoff was determined, but disappointment after disappointment took its toll on the photographer. As the years went on his health started to deteriorate. He became emaciated and sickly. But even after years of dead-ends and disappointment he still had the will, the will to express himself and let the world know the truth.

She's on the edge of her seat.

ANNA

So, so what did he do?

ROVENSKY

So he started taking pictures of *himself*, documenting his physical and mental dissent. In essence, he cast himself as the subject and used his own deterioration as a metaphor for what was happening in the bigger picture with the state.

She's hooked.

He pulls his hands from the drawer revealing a JOINT, which he casually lights and drags on...

ROVENSKY (CONT'D)

Romanoff didn't let anything come between him and his art... His prints are very rare, an endangered species really... Would you like to see some?

He offers her the smoke. She considers.

ANNA

I don't really...

He passes it to her. She hesitates, examines it closely, then takes a deep drag and coughs violently.

She downs half her wine.

ANNA (CONT'D)

It's strong.

ROVENSKY

Come.

He leads her past the easel...

ANNA

What are you working on?

ROVENSKY

(startled)

Oh, ah... art.

...to a massive filing cabinet, where he selects a few PRINTS and places them on a light-table which he illuminates.



The series is of a naked man in varying states of malnutrition, holding a camera and shooting self-portraits. The background is always a Czech flag, which becomes increasingly tattered and torn as the series progresses.

ROVENSKY (CONT'D)

Have you ever had a transcendental experience? One of those moments when everything suddenly makes sense?

ANNA

I think so.

ROVENSKY

(pointing)  
Romanoff.

ANNA

I've never seen a naked man look so sad before.

ROVENSKY

Transcendental. Do you like it? Like Romanoff?

ANNA

(stoned)  
He's really fastinating, fascinating...

She shivers a little.

ROVENSKY

You must be freezing, in those wet things.

ANNA

Yeah, a little bit.

ROVENSKY

I could throw them in the dryer for you, wouldn't be any trouble... I'm sure there is something your size.

He points her in the direction of the costume area. She considers.

ANNA

That might be nice. Would it take long?

ROVENSKY

No, no trouble at all.

She heads to the costume area and shops through the racks, holding up things for size. Some of the items are sexy, some cute and fuzzy. None seem to meet her figure.

He pretends like he isn't looking, but sneaks peaks at every possible moment.

ANNA

Where do all these come from?

ROVENSKY

Oh, shoots.

She selects and moves behind the screen. We see her silhouette through the screen as she changes.

ANNA

I dunno, I dig Romanoff but I don't know that, I mean transcendently speaking and all, that it being a self-portrait was the most, powerful choice. I mean, it might have been better to choose others, other people.

She heads back into frame wearing only a ROBE and the bunny ears. Rovensky can't take his eyes off her.

ANNA (CONT'D)

The only fit.

ROVENSKY

The perfect fit.

He grabs her cloths, almost pulling them out of her hands.

She moves toward the easel, starts to look under the sheet.

ANNA

What's under here?

ROVENSKY

Don't touch that! It's, it's a *work in progress*.

ANNA

Is it a painting? No wonder you're so into *the great masters*, you're a closeted painter.

ROVENSKY

Well, I'm not exactly--

ANNA

Aren't you going to put those in the dryer?

He exits. His FOOTSTEPS grow faint.

She mills around waiting for the coast to clear, framing up various shots of the room with her Leica, which we see through her lens.

ANNA'S CAMERA POV: She pans past the easel, then reverses, landing it center frame.

When the footsteps are barely audible, she sets the camera down and walks to the easel, then slowly, carefully, pulls off the cover revealing...

...a MIRROR. She considers the situation as Rovensky returns.

ROVENSKY

What have you done?

ANNA

I was just, I was... it's a mirror.

ROVENSKY

Yes. Yes, it's a mirror.

ANNA

But how is a mirror a work in progress?

He let's it linger for a beat.

ROVENSKY

Romanoff.

She shakes her head in disbelief.

ANNA

You were taking pictures of yourself?

He refills his glass, then hers.

ROVENSKY

Anna, I have an idea, an idea that I think will help you understand what I'm talking about and help you give yourself fully to your art.

She's not buying it.

ROVENSKY (CONT'D)

I see how you identify with Romanoff and I think you should experiment with using yourself as your subject.

ANNA

What?

ROVENSKY

I really think it would help you grow as an artist.

ANNA

You mean like a self-portrait?

ROVENSKY

I don't want you to think about it in terms of portraiture, I want you to think about it, yes, as self-expression, but also as a *document* of that expression.

ANNA

A document of that expression?

ROVENSKY

You'll be expressing yourself, but it'll be documentary photography.

She considers.

ANNA

Maybe I could try.

ROVENSKY

An A for effort.

ANNA

Okay.

ROVENSKY

Luckily we're in a studio.

ANNA

You mean now?

ROVENSKY

There is no other time than now.

ANNA

But I'm not, you know, I don't have--

ROVENSKY

Go on, believe in you.

She walks to the mirror, contemplates.

ANNA

I'm really not sure this is the right direction for my work.

ROVENSKY

You like music?

He moves to an old record player, holds up an obscure LP. It has a picture of a man in a turtleneck with crazy hair playing a clarinet. Anna tries to smile.

ROVENSKY (CONT'D)

Stop resisting art.

She considers, acquiesces.

ANNA

I'm not showing these in critique.

ROVENSKY

They will be our little secret. You have my word as an artist.

Anna frames up, halfheartedly poses as Rovensky drops the needle on the album, SMOOTH JAZZ.

She cringes.

ANNA

I really don't feel right about this.

ROVENSKY

I want you to think about Romanoff. I want you to give yourself to your art, to create something... transcendental.

He downs his wine then moves a little closer to her, bouncing his head to the music.

ANNA

I shouldn't have come here. Where are my clothes?

He moves a little closer.

ROVENSKY

Don't worry about that. Let's focus on your art. You need to put yourself in your art.

ANNA

I really have to go.

ROVENSKY

Let me show you how to give yourself  
completely to your art.

He stands uncomfortably close to her, embraces the  
moment, then pulls off his shirt.

ANNA

What are you OH MY GOD.

ROVENSKY

You can't let anything come between you  
and your art.

He reaches for her robe.

She jerks away, accidentally slamming her camera into his  
face.

He stumbles and falls, slamming into the mirror and  
smashing it into a million pieces.

ANNA

Don't touch me!

He holds his face, withering in pain. Blood trickles down  
his cheek.

ROVENSKY

I was only trying to...

ANNA

Are, are you ok?

He reaches for her leg, tries to pull himself up.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Stay away from me!

She grabs the lens and wields the camera like a fire axe.

ROVENSKY

What? No. No!

She slices into his head with the camera and he drops to  
the floor, blood dripping down his face.

ANNA

Professor? Are you okay?

She gives him a kick for good measure.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Professor?

She calmly walks to the kitchenette and sits on the sofa, then calmly savors her wine as blood pools on the floor.

She runs her finger along the lens. A few specks of blood coagulating on her fingertip.

A beat, then she walks back to the carnage.

Through the lens, she assesses the best angle then snaps pictures of what's left of her professor, her image reflected in the mirror shards.

FIN