

January 2009, Beverly Hilton Hotel, Los Angeles, CA, USA

The glittering ballroom fell into an expectant hush as the presenter tore open the envelope.

“And the Golden Globe for Best Supporting Actress goes to... Kate Winslet for [The Reader].”

The crowd erupted into applause. Winslet kissed her husband quickly, her face alight with joy, before making her way to the stage in a graceful stride.

“Strange,” Mum murmured beside me, sipping her champagne. “I thought she’d be winning one for her lead performance in [Revolutionary Road].”

I scoffed. “Oh, please. Her role in [The Reader] was the lead as well. Just because she had less screen time than the male lead doesn’t mean her character wasn’t the main focus of the story. Her campaign manager probably thought it was safer to run for both awards, lead and supporting. Heck, she had more screen time than I had in [The Dark Knight].”

“She deserved the prize, though,” Meryl Streep added from across the table, her voice calm but decisive. “She was the best in her category.”

I inclined my head in agreement. There was no denying it: this was Kate Winslet’s year. Both her performances in [The Reader] and [Revolutionary Road] were so brilliant that you had to wonder why she hadn’t won major awards until now. I remembered watching an episode of Ricky Gervais’ [Extras], where Winslet played herself, joking that she took on a Holocaust movie just to win an Oscar.

And here she was, winning a Golden Globe for exactly that. She would eventually claim the Oscar, too.

Almost on cue, as if the universe was playing along, Ricky Gervais walked onto the stage half an hour later as a presenter.

“Well done, Winslet,” he grinned, pointing toward her table, where she sat with Leonardo DiCaprio and her husband, Sam Mendes. “I told you, do a Holocaust movie, the awards come, didn’t I?”

The audience burst out laughing. I joined in, unable to help myself. He was right: the only reason Hollywood kept greenlighting Holocaust films was the awards circuit. That was why heavyweight actors like Winslet still took them on. The tragedies had been real, yes. Terrible, inhumane, and vile. But it had been more than fifty years, and the stories had been told a thousand times. It felt like Hollywood should have moved on to new ground by now.

“There is another of my protégés here tonight,” Gervais continued with a wicked grin. “Armitage. The guy was so frustrated with his life when he couldn’t get laid, he became a psychopathic killer in Gotham City.”

Ricky was joking about the episode of [Extras] I had featured in, where my character was a horny teenager who couldn't get the girl.

The camera panned to me. I narrowed my eyes theatrically at Gervais before twisting my expression into a big, creepy smile.

The audience roared with laughter at the silent exchange. Gervais chuckled, holding up a hand. "I lied a bit there. Troy is my mentor, not my protégé." He turned to face me directly. "I was joking, man, don't get me whacked."

I dropped the act and laughed, easing the tension as he moved on to introduce the next nominated film.

Mum leaned toward me once Gervais was offstage, her voice low. "He's probably the only person who would joke about you so freely. Others would be too afraid to offend you."

I frowned slightly. "Do I come off as arrogant?"

She shook her head. "Not really. But you have retaliated against people who acted against you, and now you have the power to ruin careers as well. You wouldn't, I know that. Ricky knows that. But others don't."

I didn't like the implications, but there was nothing I could do about it right now. I couldn't exactly walk up to some random comedian and ask them to crack jokes about me. That was just inviting trouble.

The rest of the show continued as expected, with only one noticeable change from the original timeline. Because I was nominated in the Lead Actor category, the Best Supporting Actor award went to Philip Seymour Hoffman for [Doubt]. As much as I wanted Robert Downey Jr. to win for [Tropic Thunder], it made sense that the trophy went to Hoffman. He had missed his chance a few years earlier with [Capote], when Heath Ledger took the honor for [Brokeback Mountain].

Other than that, there were no real surprises. Best Director slipped past Christopher Nolan, just as it had in the original timeline, while [Slumdog Millionaire] claimed both that prize and Best Motion Picture – Drama. In my mind, the nominations for [The Dark Knight] in those two categories were recognition enough. It would take years before conservative gatekeepers like the Hollywood Foreign Press handed Best Picture to a purely commercial film. The last time it had happened was with [Titanic], and that had been an exception rather than a rule.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, it was time for the only award I truly cared about. Susan Sarandon walked onto the stage, holding an envelope in her hand.

"Here are the nominees for Best Actor in a Motion Picture – Drama."

The camera cut to me. I was ready for it.

“Troy Armitage – [The Dark Knight].”

Sarandon read my name with professional neutrality, but the crowd behind me erupted into cheers and applause. I nodded gratefully, then turned toward Mum. Before I could say anything, the broadcast shifted to the next nominee.

“Leonardo DiCaprio – [Revolutionary Road]
Brad Pitt – [The Curious Case of Benjamin Button]
Mickey Rourke – [The Wrestler]
Sean Penn – [Milk].”

Susan Sarandon drew out the reveal as if the moment itself were a performance. The hall seemed to hold its breath. Mum’s grip tightened on my arm, and I placed my hand over hers to calm her. My smile stayed fixed and genial. Whether I won or not, this was a live telecast. I couldn’t afford to look anything less than composed.

“And the Golden Globe goes to... Troy Armitage for [The Dark Knight].”

“Yes!” Mum shouted, unable to contain her excitement as the room exploded into applause.

I rose quickly, wrapping her in a tight embrace.

“I knew you would get it. It was inevitable,” she whispered in my ear.

“Thanks, Mum,” I replied, releasing her before making my way down the aisle. I shook a few hands as I passed, then detoured briefly to Christopher Nolan. Hugging him felt necessary, a gesture of gratitude.

“Thanks, Chris,” I said sincerely.

He patted my back with a small smile. “You deserve it. Now go, before they start playing you off before you even start your speech.”

“As if,” I laughed, before hurrying toward the stage.

Susan Sarandon greeted me with a warm hug before handing over the trophy. The weight of it settled in my hands, cool and solid, before she guided me gently toward the microphone. The stand adjusted itself to my height with a soft mechanical hum, placing me directly in front of the waiting audience.

“I did it all by myself,” I began, holding the trophy up. “So no one to thank.”

The crowd erupted with laughter at the quip, many still standing in ovation.

“Come on, sit down. Save the standing for me in fifty years when I get a lifetime achievement award or something.”

At my urging, the eager bootlickers finally settled back into their seats, the laughter still rolling across the hall.

I let the pause stretch a moment before beginning properly. “Thank you to everyone who watched [The Dark Knight] and stayed long enough to realize that it was me behind that hideous makeup. Mr. Nolan, I blame you for that, by the way. I would have much preferred a plastic mask for the entire duration.”

The audience chuckled again, softer this time but still with genuine amusement.

“I want to thank Dick Parsons, who agreed to cast me in the role when clearly I was not the right choice at a first glance. Our incredible cast and crew—Christian, Aaron, Maggie, Morgan, Michael, Gary, Wally, Jonathan, David, Emma, and so many more who brought this film to life. The makeup artists who created the Joker’s terrifying look, and the stunt and VFX teams who made me look like a badass when I was anything but.”

A ripple of applause followed, but it faded quickly. Background artists like makeup and stunt crews rarely received the recognition they deserved in a room like this.

I pressed on. “I couldn’t have done this without my team behind the scenes. Bobby, Benji, and Tobias, who make sure I’m always standing on my feet. My brother, Evan, who has been both my first critic and my biggest supporter. And last, but definitely not least, my Mum and Dad—who had no idea I was even part of this movie until they saw it at the premiere, just like the rest of the world.”

That confession drew a warm wave of laughter from the audience.

The teleprompter in front of me flashed, ‘Wrap it up.’ I ignored it. No one in this hall would dare play me off as if I were some forgettable newcomer.

“It is a privilege to stand among legends like Mickey, Sean, Leo, and Brad. Please give it up for these four incredible gentlemen, whose performances continue to inspire me every single day to be a better actor.”

I raised the trophy high, basking in the thunderous applause, before stepping offstage toward the exit where a swarm of reporters no doubt waited, ready to dissect every word I had spoken tonight.

(Break)

“To what do you owe your success, Troy?” a middle-aged woman asked, leaning forward with her recorder. “Especially for a role as tough as the Joker?”

“My parents,” I answered without hesitation. “I wouldn’t be an actor today if it weren’t for them. My Dad spent hours with me, going over the iconic scenes of the great actors of the past. My Mum drove me across the city to countless auditions, when she could have been doing

something better with her time. All because I wanted to be an actor. If not for them, I'd be a nobody."

The clip ended as Harvey Weinstein clenched his fist around the remote and shut off the television, the screen fading to black. The Golden Globes highlights had been on loop all morning in his office.

"Oh, come off it, Harvey," his brother Bob said, lounging in a chair across the room. "Awards are just a game. Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose. We already picked up two last night: Kate Winslet and [Vicky Cristina Barcelona]. You can't beat someone like Troy. He's considered the best actor of his generation for a reason. With that performance, the Oscar for Best Actor is practically his."

Harvey shook his head slowly, eyes narrowing. "Winslet already let me down when she didn't thank me yesterday. How dare she? She won that award because of my efforts, and now she has the nerve to forget who put her there. I was the one who pushed for her campaign in Supporting Actress so she could walk away with two Globes. That ungrateful bitch will learn what it means to cross me."

Bob's gaze hardened. "What are you planning to do, Harv? Didn't we already talk about your... tendencies?"

"Nothing drastic," Harvey said, feigning calm as he swirled the drink in his glass. "We'll have our writers release pieces about category fraud, target Winslet's credibility. And we'll pull back her promotion budget. No point spending money on people who don't show gratitude. Divert those resources to [Vicky Cristina Barcelona]. Push Penélope Cruz, Rebecca Hall, and Javier Bardem."

"Javier Bardem?" Bob asked, skeptical. "This year's Best Actor field is stacked. He has no chance, and Rebecca Hall won't stand a shot either. Why waste resources?"

"Bardem will get in," Harvey replied with chilling certainty. "The press will help him. Make sure the articles also question Troy Armitage. He's being pushed as a lead when his role is clearly supporting. Spin it as category fraud as well. And run subtle stories about Leonardo DiCaprio's obsession with winning an Oscar. If Troy and Leo both get weakened, Bardem has a lane. As for Rebecca, we'll rework the narrative. It can be done."

Bob leaned forward, voice low. "Are you sure you want to make an enemy of Troy Armitage? This isn't something you can undo. He has the money and the influence to make life very difficult for us."

Harvey waved him off with a smug grin. "You overthink. Troy is still too naive to understand the way Hollywood power plays work. He won't even realize it was us pulling the strings. Now go. Do what I told you. And send in that massage therapist I booked. Last night's parties wore me out. I need some rubbing down, if you know what I mean."

Bob shook his head in mild disgust before leaving the room.

(Break)

I took a deep breath to center myself. This was it. The culmination of a decade of hard work, all boiling down to this one scene. It needed to be perfect. This was my favorite moment from the books, and Alfonso had elevated it further by deciding to shoot it in a single uninterrupted take. That choice meant most of the cast on the “good side” of the story had to be present on location.

“Action!”

Emma and Jamie sat on the stairs of a crumbling Hogwarts, ash and rubble scattered around them. I stood just a few steps behind, my chest heavy with a secret I was desperate to share. But at the last moment, I faltered.

“Fred’s gone, Hermione,” Jamie sobbed in-character, his voice raw. “He’s... just gone. I hated his and George’s pranks all my life, but now I would do anything to have him back, even the pranks.”

“Shh,” Hermione whispered softly, her arms around him as he buried his face against her neck.

My face drained of color. The weight of realization pressed down on me. My friends had already lost so much because of me. If I told them what I had discovered, they would be forced to sacrifice even more. I couldn’t do that to them.

With trembling hands, I drew the cloak of invisibility and slipped it over my shoulders, vanishing from sight. I moved forward silently, the steadicam tracking me step for step, Alfonso himself guiding the camera with unblinking focus.

Once I was far enough from my friends, I pulled the cloak off and muttered a shrinking spell, folding it neatly into my pocket. After ten years of working with CGI, small tricks like that barely fazed me anymore.

Hogwarts stretched before me in ruins, a battlefield drenched in despair. Shattered stone, broken banners, and the still forms of the fallen lined my path. My lip trembled, and for a moment, the enormity of it all nearly broke me. I wanted to turn back. It was all futile.

Then, ahead, I caught a glimpse of something that steadied me. Neville and Luna huddled together amidst the wreckage.

“Harry,” Luna said with a faint, dreamy smile. “Neville saved me from a werewolf.”

Neville’s expression twisted in guilt. “But I couldn’t save Lavender.”

Luna reached up, touching his cheek with quiet reassurance. “It wasn’t your fault, Neville. You can’t save everyone.”

Their small moment of tenderness was enough to kindle my resolve. If they could cling to hope here, then I had to follow through with Dumbledore's plan, even if it meant my own life. Unlike Neville, I can save everyone.

"Neville," I said firmly. "Will you do something for me? If Ron and Hermione can't kill Voldemort's snake. He calls it Nagini."

Neville hesitated, brow furrowed. "Is it important?"

"Very," I insisted while taking a step back.

He nodded, determination setting in. "I'll do it. But where are you going?"

I took another step back, my voice low. "I have to do something else."

Neville gave me a steady look. "We're all going to keep fighting, Harry." His words were a farewell, and I almost choked on my reply. My throat was too tight, so I simply nodded, swallowing the ache, and moved on.

As I walked through the shattered halls of Hogwarts, I passed survivors clinging to courage, offering words of reassurance that the fight was far from over. Their voices followed me, faint echoes against the ruin.

I didn't stop until the castle was behind me, until the last stones of Hogwarts fell away and I stood at the edge of the Forbidden Forest, my destination waiting in the darkness.

Without thinking much about it, I took out the last memento that Dumbledore had left for me, a golden snitch, and kissed it. The forest around me was silent, heavy with dread. Even the distant battle at Hogwarts seemed muted, as if the world itself held its breath.

"I'm about to die," I whispered.

The golden sphere clicked open, its delicate wings fluttering before a small black stone slipped out. It hovered for a heartbeat before dropping into my palm.

"The Resurrection Stone," I breathed, awe filling my voice as its weight settled against my skin.

I closed my eyes for a moment, and when I opened them, four figures surrounded me. The sight made my chest tighten. I rushed forward to Lily Potter, but my hand slipped straight through her as if she were made of mist.

"You've been so brave, sweetheart," Lily said softly, her voice warm yet echoing with an otherworldly quality.

My lips trembled. I wanted to speak, but no sound came.

"You're nearly there," James Potter said with a proud smile. "We are very proud of you, Harry."

“Does it hurt?” I asked, though there were so many other questions I wanted to say.

Gary Oldman, in his role as Sirius Black, stepped forward. His voice was steady and calm. “Dying? Easier than falling asleep.”

Hearing him was almost unbearable. My throat tightened. “I... I didn’t want you to die for me. Any of you.” My eyes turned to Remus. “I’m sorry, Remus. Right when you had your son...”

David Thewlis, playing Remus Lupin, gave a gentle smile that did not quite reach his sorrowful eyes. “It’s not your fault, Harry. He will know why I died, and I hope he understands that we were trying to make a better world for him to live in.”

Tears blurred my vision as I looked back at my parents. “Will you stay with me?”

“Until the end,” James promised, his voice firm.

“And he won’t be able to see you?” I asked, glancing at Sirius.

“No, we’re here, you see,” Sirius said, pointing toward my heart.

I turned to Lily again, whispering, “Stay close to me.”

Her smile was tender, her eyes glistening, “Always.”

The ache to embrace her, to feel her one last time, nearly overwhelmed me. But I resisted. Instead, I let the stone slip from my hand, falling soundlessly onto the forest floor. Just as the moment reached its peak—

“Cut!”

The silence that followed was thick. For a second, no one moved or spoke. This was undoubtedly one of the most demanding scenes I had ever done, not only because of the technical precision required but because of the raw emotion it demanded. The weight of it all pressed heavily on me. We had rehearsed for days, perfecting every detail so there would be no room for error.

This was the seventh take, and I still had no idea if I had given Alfonso what he wanted.

“It’s perfect!” Alfonso’s voice broke the silence. His grin widened as he looked directly at me. “Especially you, Troy. With that level of performance, I will not be surprised if you get your next Oscar nomination for this role.” Then he turned to the crew with a sweeping gesture. “And with this last scene, we are done shooting [Harry Potter]!”

The words felt unreal. I had heard wrap calls for many [Harry Potter] films over the years, but this was the first time it marked the end of the entire franchise. Ten years of my life had led to this single moment, and still, it did not sink in properly.

I glanced around at the faces of the cast and crew, so many of them family to me in one way or another. Emma and Jamie stood together beside the camera, their eyes red but shining. Without a second thought, I rushed over and pulled them both into a fierce three-way hug.

No words were needed. Our collective tears said everything.