Pesci charms as homeless man befriending student

WITH HONORS
Directed by Aleks Keshishian. Written by William Mastrosimone. Starring Joe Pesci, Brendan Fraser, Moira Kelly, Patrick Dempsey, and Josh Hamilton.

By Karmal Swamidoss

Joe Pesci and Brendan Fraser give a good performance as two people from very different worlds whose lives are dramatically altered by their meeting. Fraser plays Monty Kessler, an ambitious senior studying government at Harvard. The story starts as he is finishing the final draft of his thesis in the middle of November. It looks like he's ready for anything until a power surge destroys everything on his hard drive, including his thesis. On his way to the copy center, he loses his one printout to Simon Wilder (Joe Pesci), a man living in Widener Library's basement. Realizing how valuable his find is, Simon makes a deal with Monty: for every "thing" that Monty gets him (a perfectly-glazed donut, etc.), he will return one page of the 88-page paper. This agreement leads to a life-changing winter for both characters, and a good story for the audience.

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Considering the circumstances, one may ask, "why would a bigger, stronger man accept this deal from a smaller, weaker man? Why doesn't he call campus security and have him kicked out?" The situation is well-created and convincingly realistic, which is what follows their meeting is believable. At first, Monty cooperates with Simon only because he needs his help, but he gradually becomes Simon's friend. The friendship is unique and gives a new dimension to the film, but it isn't in enough of the scenes to affect the course of the story. Director Aleks Keshishian explained that the main story is about the friendship of Monty and Simon. In fact, that story is so prevalent that it is with Simon's encouragement that Monty finally takes the initiative and expresses his love to Courtney. One could say that because Simon doesn't have a home, the film is about homeless people. However, Simon is the first to point out that he does have a home: the library basement.

Monty (Brendan Fraser) listens as homeless Simon Wilder (Joe Pesci) uses the Constitution to make a point at Harvard University.

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