

The Guys

The Guys are New York firemen who lost their lives in the Twin Towers, as described in Anne Nelson's play for two actors which Nelson and director Jim Simpson have converted into a motion picture. It does little to hide its stage origins and is essentially a conversation between a writer, Joan, (Sigourney Weaver) who agrees to help a fire captain, Nick (Anthony LaPaglia), compose a series of eulogies for eight men he lost in the 9/11 attack.

The two get together in a nondescript apartment. Nick, an inarticulate sort, doesn't know where to start in commemorating his men. Joan simply asks him to recall them as best he can. Nick doesn't "go for all that hero stuff," and sees each squad member as "just a guy," or "nothing special," but, of course, each fellow, once described ("Barney was the comic...", "Patrick was my best buddy..."), becomes a fully rounded individual--whose life was cut so cruelly short.

When Joan reads Nick's remembrances back to him, he is struck by what he has wrought. What Joan, meanwhile, has wrought is ordering the captain's knowledge and devotion into spare but moving language, language with the weight of tragedy. In fashioning the eulogies, Joan realizes that she thus contributes to the easing of the city's massive pain.

Weaver is respectful and, at first, watchful, then empathetic in dealing with her fire chief. When she weeps over one of the eulogies she has just written, it is not in recognition of her craft but in the fundamental poignancy of the words which describe one useful, now mourned for, life. Anthony LaPaglia progresses from that tongue-tied guy who dreads the whole idea of speaking in public to a man dignified both by the company he kept and the leadership he provided that same company. This is definitely a small chamber movie, barely a movie at all, but its idiom, made vivid by two complete pros, is a moving salute to some of New York's very finest.

("The Guys" is rated PG)

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