

Richard Gere to Star in 'Hachiko: A Dog's Story'

Actor will play a college professor who takes in an abandoned dog.

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After all the controversy Richard Gere faced in April when he publicly smooched and embraced Bollywood actress Shilpa Shetty at an AIDS awareness event in India, the actor could use a little distraction.

The silver-haired screen star will produce and star in "Hachiko: A Dog's Story," a drama that begins production in September, Variety.com reports.

Based on a true story, "Hachiko" is inspired by "Hachiko monogatari" a 1987 Japanese melodrama about the unshakable bond between Hachi, a male Akita, and his owner.

The '87 film won the 1988 Genesis Award for Best Film. Gere will play the starring role as the college professor who takes in an abandoned dog he finds.

Inferno Entertainment is funding the film. It will be produced in association with Japan-based Shochiku.

In the true story, Hachiko belonged to Dr. Ueno Eizaburo, who taught at Tokyo University. The professor commuted to work on the train, and the dog met him at the station every day at 3 p.m. Tragedy struck when the professor didn't return home from work because he had died after a stroke.

The very next day and for the next nine years of his life, Hachiko returned to the station and waited for his master to meet with him.

To honor this faithful dog, a bronze statue of Hachiko was created in April 1934 by sculptor Ando Teru and was placed in the same spot where Hachiko waited and waited for his master to come home. However, when Japan was at war, any available metal was melted down to create weapons. Sadly, Hachiko's statue metal was used for that purpose.

In 1948, after the war, the sculptor's son Takeshi created a new Hachiko statue – the same one that stands proudly outside Shibuya station to this day.