

How Viktor “The Garlic” Took Alexey “The Stud” to the Nursing Home

Aleksandr Khant, 2017

Screenwriter: Aleksey Borodachyov

Place: Russia

Studio: VGIK-Debut

Length: 90 minutes

Language: Russian

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Aleksandr Khant’s internationally acclaimed directorial debut, *How Viktor “The Garlic” Took Alexey “The Stud” to the Nursing Home*, follows the story of two men, a son and his father, as their paths cross after many years apart. 27-year-old Viktor (Evgeniy Tkachuk) spends his days working and his nights chasing girls and drinking at bars, only to be dragged back home to his son by his wife. He is revealed to have spent his entire childhood in an orphanage after his abusive, alcoholic father abandoned his family, causing his mother’s suicide. Robbed of his childhood, the bitterness Viktor feels permeates all aspects of his life and is often expressed through his unruly, aggressive behaviour.

A powerful stylistic choice, Viktor’s bitterness is manifested on-screen through a saturated green hue which is especially prominent in the first half of the film. Dominating the colour palette of the film, the obvious green hue creates an artificially colourful world out of the bleak reality that the story takes place in. This is similar to the film’s use of hardbass music played over scenes of mundane, post-Soviet bureaucracy set in aesthetically outdated governmental offices.

Unbeknownst to Viktor, who assumes his father Alexey (Alexey Serebryakov) is either dead or in prison, Alexey is alive, albeit now disabled, and is being cared for by an old woman in his apartment. When the two men are finally reacquainted on the initiative of the old woman, Viktor shatters her hopes of inheriting the apartment and takes it for himself instead, intending to escape from his family and live there with his lover. Taking on the burden of his disabled father along with the apartment, Viktor plans to admit him into a nursing home. The only home with a vacancy, however, is hundreds of kilometres away. A tale of twists and turns then unfolds as the two men, en route to the nursing home in Viktor’s old minivan, encounter diversion after diversion, that, whilst comical at first, gradually take on a more solemn tone.

Whilst Viktor’s beat-up minivan, a 1991 Daewoo Damas, and the fast, electronic beats of hardbass music which dominate the first half of the film are the most obvious remnants of the

90s, Viktor, too, is depicted as a product of the time. Countless nights spent at the bottom of a bottle, coupled with his plans to leave his own family behind, Viktor is unknowingly walking in his father's footsteps. Upon this realisation, he begins rethinking his initial eye-for-an-eye approach – indeed, to abandon Alexey in a nursing home, Viktor would be no better than his father who abandoned him in his childhood. This reflection serves as the central message of the film – to recognize and break intergenerational patterns.

To Khant, blood is indeed thicker than water. It is not until the very end of the film that Viktor actively refers to himself as Alexey's "son", after having rejected it outright or simply ignored the question on three separate occasions. In this key moment, it becomes clear that the journey of Garlic and Stud, above all, is one of redemption and forgiveness. This theme is most clearly reflected in Viktor's character development. Through a series of unexpected events, including a surprising familial revelation, multiple near-death experiences, and a bitter-sweet recollection of childhood memories, Viktor is firmly established as the anti-hero of the story. Tkachuk delivers a stunningly convincing performance in this role – that of a man whose initial cruelty and resentment towards his father is gradually mellowed over the course of their sobering journey.

An incredibly well-crafted road movie and tale of redemption, this film is as much an exploration of destructive, intergenerational patterns as it is a touching depiction of the director's faith in second chances.