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Russian Janitor's Mock GQ Photoshoot Pays Off

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Vetlugin's ordinary work day as a janitor starts before dawn. **Instagram / filippov_photo**

Fashion photographer Roman Phillipov, 33, snapped the chic photos of his friend, janitor Yury Vetlugin, in a bid to raise funds to help pay off Vetlugin's debts — and the photos have become the latest Russian internet craze.

The fashionable GQ-esque photographs appear alongside ordinary pictures of Vetlugin, 42, at work in the city of Ufa in Russia's republic of Bashkortostan and his not-so-glamorous life story.

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Публикация от Роман Филиппов (@filippov_photo)

“I first met Yura as a kid at a summer camp for children with disabilities where my mother worked,“ Phillipov wrote. “Yura was left on the doorsteps of an orphanage as a newborn. He grew up there and was diagnosed with a psychological disability.”

Phillipov’s mother and grandmother have been supporting Vetlugin for years — sheltering him at their house and later helping him get state-guaranteed housing — until he fell prey to scammers several years ago, the photographer said.

Vetlugin was tricked into taking out the equivalent of $7,000 in loans and then forcibly taken to a nearby village to work as an unpaid houseworker. He managed to escape to Ufa and find his way back to Phillipov’s relatives after nearly being murdered with an axe by his captors.

The idea to have Vetlugin pose for the stylish fundraiser came to Phillipov after he discovered Vetlugin's natural photogenic qualities while taking pictures of his ordinary day as a janitor.

"I thought to myself: 'He is so handsome — why don't I film him like I can like I always do?' So I did," Phillipov told the local UTV television channel.

Phillipov asked his followers to make small donations to Vetlugin, who "could be on a real GQ cover if only he had a little more luck in life." Just days later, he raised nearly double the requested amount.

"I did not expect this to happen," Vetlugin told UTV, crying with joy.

While his first foray into modeling broke the Russian internet, Vetlugin remains cautious with hopes for a big modeling career.

"I was already invited to do a shoot for a glasses commercial, but we will see what happens after that."

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