

SUPERSTAR

ZOHEB MASHIUR

The managing editor's real name is Vikram and there are rumours that the corpse of the last person to have addressed him by it was found in a canal. This person had supposedly been his mother. So people take him seriously when he smiles sweetly and says, "But call me Vicky, baby."

Right now Vicky is not smiling, sweetly or otherwise. Vicky is pounding his designer fist on the table and baying for blood in an indeterminate accent. "I don't want any more Kimye, Brangelina or Nark stories! Especially not Nark! Which idiot was it that thought that was a cute way to talk about Neil and Mark? I'll have him shot out of a cannon!"

The idiot in question quietly slips away, because the cannon is real and currently in the lobby.

"But, Vicky, darling, they're what the readers want," a feckless goon offers.

"Ken, sweetie, I love you but if you ever again talk about what the readers want I'll feed you to the shark." Vicky smiles and waits for the nervous laughter. It is clearly a joke: he is a strict vegan and forces the lifestyle on his pets as well. He continues, "We don't cater to reader demand. We create the demand. They care about all these celeb couples and empty stars because we told them to, dear. And right now we're stuck in a rut and it's always the same old faces on our covers and spreads, and I'm bored. Get me something fresh by tomorrow's meeting, hmm? Something bold, something genuine... a real superstar, not some vapid pretty-boy we have to do all the work for."

And so the meeting adjourns. The trembling publishing execs and junior editors are in trouble – the last time any of them had real human contact was when they berated the Starbucks barista for not using ethically-sourced vanilla extract.

Not everyone in the world of celebrity gossip is well-heeled. Someone has to work in the underbelly, making the machine tick. One of those thankless souls is Arman, a phobic cashier's assistant. Simply 'phobic', for he is totally terrified. One of the few things that brings him a

measure of peace is his hobby of amateur astronomy: the empty terror of black space is at least reliable and orderly.

On this night Arman has his telescope trained at a well-charted quarter of the galaxy. He looks at all the astral bodies and confirms they are where they ought to be. Yet he feels unusually uneasy and soon realises why: there is something new. He blinks. He checks again. There it is.

A thrill of fear and excitement runs down Arman's spine as he goes online to check all the star charts until he, hardly believing it, confirms his discovery. In his excitement he passes out in the act of

nephews and nieces.

Miraculously Vicky has been treating each terrible offering with an indulgent shake of his head or a fond, "Oh, honey." So far as anyone can tell he is not being sarcastic.

He cuts off a hapless sub-editor mid-flow, "Those were terrible. I should have you all killed. Haha!"

"Haha!" echoes the room, more than one voice choking with tears.

"Lucky for you, last night I received an email from one of our employees... someone who works in accounts, imagine! Anyway, you should all have

– seemed to think he was sending it to some geeky NASA mailing list or whatever. But we got it instead, and it's amazing! Check it out!" He shows off the attached picture on his tablet, with an excited grin. "It's a star! A real star! And we found it!"

The room is silent. Someone tries for a nervous giggle and is immediately silenced before Vicky notices.

"Yeah, Vicky... that's real nice. Real trick," a marketing wretch begins. "But, well, um. What?"

"I know, right?" Vicky is stroking the blurred image of the star like a new kitten. "While She, Buzz and Filthy Rag are looking for grainy shots of Emma Watson au naturel, we've got a real, previously unknown star. I want this on the cover. KC!"

The chief photographer snaps to attention, startled to have been singled out. "Yeah, Vicky?"

"What's the biggest radio telescope we have?"

"Um." KC is sweating. "We... don't have any?"

"OK, flip off, you're fired. I want a radio telescope. Biggest one we can get shipped over quietly. I'm not letting those sharks at Buzz figure out what we're doing. This little baby's going to get the best glamour shots a star could ask for. We're going the whole nine yards with this one, believe."

"That's great, Vicky," Tina from accounts says as KC is thrown into an unmarked black sack and taken away by security. "But you said it was one of my guys who found this? What was his name?"

"Well, it's in the email, right? But yeah, thanks for reminding me, we should totally name this monster after him. Arman, I see it is. Yeah, that's good. I can see the cover already. 'ARMAN,' in big letters. 'This new star is scorchin' hot!' I adore it!"

"Actually," the sub-editor from earlier says, having finished reading Arman's email. "It says here it's actually a very cold star so –"

At a signal from Vicky the sub-editor is picked up by the armpits and thrown out the window.

"I really hate a pedant, don't you, darlings?" Vicky sighs.

Zoheb Mashiur is a prematurely balding man with bad facial hair and so does his best to avoid people. Ruin his efforts by writing to zoheb.mashiur@gmail.com.



telling all the other nerds about it.

It is the next day and Vicky's board meeting is not going stellar. The execs in their perfect hair and suits have the aspect of sacrificial lambs. One by one they suggest their discoveries: a blonde with big blue eyes and the singing abilities of a drainpipe, a few people who leaked their own questionable videos, a pubescent boy who can say "Woah" very slowly, and several

seen it, he CC'd everyone."

"Of course, Vicky baby!" "Saw it this morning!" "You bet!" and similar responses, though everyone at the table has work emails marked as spam. They pull out their smartphones in a frantic attempt to wise up before it is too late.

"Yeah, it's great, isn't it? The poor boy – I think his name is Armando or Emanuelle or something sexy like that