



The Strange Disappearance of a Bollywood Star

Vaseem Khan

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Mumbai is a city that thrives on extravagant spectacles and larger-than-life characters.

But as Chopra is about to discover, even in the city of dreams, there is no guarantee of a happy ending. Rising star and incorrigible playboy Vikram Verma has disappeared, leaving his latest film in jeopardy. Hired by Verma's formidable mother to find him, Inspector Chopra and his sidekick, baby elephant Ganesha, embark on a journey deep into the world's most flamboyant movie industry. As they uncover feuding stars, failed investments and death threats, it seems that many people have a motive for wanting Verma out of the picture. And yet, as Chopra has long suspected, in Bollywood the truth is often stranger than fiction...

The Strange Disappearance of a Bollywood Star Details

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Author : Vaseem Khan

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From Reader Review The Strange Disappearance of a Bollywood Star for online ebook

Christine says

Vaseem Khan's vibrant Indian series continues with The Strange Disappearance of a Bollywood Star. Chopra has found his way into all of our hearts, together with his sidekick mini elephant and his family of Poppy and Irfan. This is a mystery series, with a hard edge of realism.

Anyone who has not discovered this series should start at the beginning and get to know Chopra and the city of Mumbai. Chopra was forced to retire from the police force, due to ill health. He has a heart problem. He now runs his own detective agency and has earned quite a reputation for discretion and reliability. Chopra is an honest man, with a passion for solving crime.

In this latest instalment, Chopra finds himself hired to find a missing Bollywood star. Vicky Verma was last seen during a performance on stage. Has Vicky been kidnapped? Is he in danger? Or is this part of an insurance scam? This case takes a harsh turn for Chopra, as he seeks the truth. Rangwella, Chopra's colleague in the detective agency, has a completely different case to get his teeth into. Rangwella delves into the eunuch community, the official third gender in India. He is asked to look into why a group of eunuchs are being hired to dance, sing and entertain a mysterious Master.

I was really fascinated by the portrayal of the eunuch community in Mumbai. I found myself researching online to find out more. There is quite a large population of castrated and transgender people, who have been given official status in India. In spite of this, they are still subject to discrimination and abuse. All very interesting. Well done Vaseem Khan on enlightening me on a subject, I knew nothing about.

Once again, Vaseem Khan proves he can write the most entertaining thrillers, combining good old fashioned detective work, with a touch of humour and realism. I must not forget that elephant. I now think it is perfectly normal for a private detective to be accompanied by a cute baby elephant. That is the magic of Chopra and the Baby Ganesh Agency series. Recommended.

K.J. Charles says

This is the second I've tried of this series which...okay, it's clearly cosy mystery. There's a detective with wacky sidekicks including amusing mother-in-law, adopted urchin, and small elephant, and lots of banter and domestic detail. Only, the first one I read was about a child trafficking ring, and this one has the hero unlawfully kidnapped by corrupt police and put in a hellhole prison where guards and inmates alike murder unchecked. The No.1 Ladies Sacred Games Agency.

Evidently this blend, which I am going to call cosy noir, works for many readers, and there is an obvious issue with any cosy mystery erasing real suffering, so I do kind of see what the idea is here. Plus the author has a lovely warm style and these are completely fun reads with a cute elephant--until the horror starts. I find the disjunct unmanageable as a reader and am DNFing accordingly because I wanted an actually cosy read not involving a potential twenty years of horrific abuse in prison, but YMMV.

Heads up that this features hijra in a way that bothered me, details in spoiler (view spoiler)

Renita D'Silva says

Wonderful

Judy says

Fun read to start the year. Third book in series about inspector Chopra and his baby elephant. Actually two mysteries/ investigations one involving Bollywood star and other involving the eunuch community. Adding India culture and society.

Kat says

Another brilliant installment from the wonderful Inspector Chopra & his sidekick elephant, Ganesha. I can't recommend these highly enough for any cosy crime fan.

Susan says

Handsome, arrogant star Vicky Verma disappears from a promotional concert he's giving to publicize the epic film which, it is hoped, will be another huge success. Just Vicky acting out again, no doubt! But his mother, a former star herself, is sure he's been kidnapped, and retired Inspector Chopra is forced to agree with her. As he tracks the culprits, he runs into serious danger himself, and is even parted from his faithful elephant Ganesha. Meanwhile, his assistant at his detective agency finds his assumptions about life challenged when he finds himself working for, and with, Mumbai's community of eunuchs. Another winner from Khan.

SueKich says

The strange disappearance of Chopra's charm.

One hates to be churlish about the charming Baby Ganesh Agency series, but here, in the third instalment, Vaseem Khan forgoes much of the strong sense of place and character that had made his first two Chopra books such a delight and focuses instead on the two convoluted, disconnected and exceedingly daft plots. Certainly, there are glimpses of the warmth and humour that shone through the previous stories but for me the balance of investigation-to-charm ratio wasn't quite right and I found this disappointing.

Chloe says

I am in love with this series. I am in love with The Chopras and this yummy baby elephant. I love Mumbai (or as I call it "Bombay"). In the latest installment, Mr. Khan has burst out; layering #3 with even more details and making the entire location and characters become even more vivid. I read it with a Bombay map (and I use maps quite a lot when I read) so I knew just where we were most of the time. My map was dated - thus some things had not yet been built but I now know residential locations, localities and destinations. (And I confess, I love the appearance of a map in the front of any book set in a real place; with the glossary, the reader becomes a true participant in the tale). But an updated map is easy to find (Google helps!) and this is super third book establishes The Baby Ganesh Agency to the numerous thriller/detective series that have become popular. Keating started this trend many years ago, but few others have located the action in Mumbai and the window opened by Vaseem Khan on this fabulous city is so good it delights me. The ending was a surprise and I did not see it coming - always the sign of good mystery. I can only hope that Mr. Khan has many more Ganeshas in the wings. I await another adventure with all the cast assembled and I hope others discover this series and love it just as much as I do.

G.J. says

I loved the first two books in this series and was really looking forward to the third. Vaseem Khan can certainly write well and at times his turn of phrase makes you want to laugh out loud. Sadly for me though this one was let down slightly by its flimsy plot, such a pity. I also found there was an overload of info on Bollywood of which I was not convinced enhanced the book in any way. Rangwalla was given a rather odd case to "solve" and Poppy was quite active in this third novel. I can't put my finger on it, but this book just did not quite deliver on the fun, magic and charm of the first two for me.

Julie Morris says

This is the third book in the Baby Ganesh Agency series by Vaseem Khan, but the first one I have read (I'd like to say it's because I'm a maverick, but really it's just because of my self-imposed book-buying moratorium and the fact that I was given this as a birthday gift!). It doesn't appear to matter that I am reading them out of sequence, this book functions perfectly as a standalone novel, but I will definitely be going back to read the first two.

The central character of the novel is Inspector Chopra, a retired police officer-turned-private detective in Mumbai and the plot follows him as he tries to unravel the mystery of the kidnapping of a famous but wayward Bollywood actor. He is helped, and sometimes amusingly hindered, in his efforts by a colourful cast of supporting characters, including his cute little elephant sidekick, Ganesha, about whom there is more than a whiff of the supernatural – he appears to have attributes not bestowed on your average baby elephant.

This book is a light-hearted detective story, along the lines of Alistair McCall Smith's No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency series or the Agatha Raisin books by M.C. Beaton and I believe fans of those series would enjoy Vaseem Khan's work. The main kidnapping plot is fun and frenzied, with enough twists and turns to keep the grey matter occupied, but the main joys of the book are the characters and the fabulous, exotic setting of Mumbai. The author truly does a wonderful job of bringing all the life and flavour of Mumbai alive in this book, and anyone who likes their stories set in an far-flung location, that is really captured as if it were an additional character in the tale, will not be disappointed.

Inspector Chopra is a character who is very easy to warm to, which is important for the central protagonist in a book of this nature – we need to be rooting for the hero. He is honest, unassuming, moral but very pragmatic and with a healthy dose of impatience for his old colleagues in the police force and their rules and regulations when they get in the way of his pursuing the case – I really liked that about him. His wife, Poppy, I think perhaps was my favourite character. Not the subservient Indian housewife in a supporting role that you might expect to find, but an independent and feisty woman who is a true partner and support to Chopra, a woman after my own heart. I love writers who include strong and equal female characters in their work.

There is a lovely sub-plot in the book involving flamboyant eunuchs, a long-buried secret and Chopra's ex-policeman colleague in a 'fish-out-of-water' situation that had me grinning from ear to ear. Fantastic fun.

This is a sweet, easy and amusing read with characters you will love, and imbued throughout with all the spice and spectacle of India. If you are looking for a book to warm your cockles and cheer you up, you couldn't do much better.

Eva says

They are an unlikely duo: Inspector Ashwin Chopra (Retd) and Ganesha, the baby elephant. Yet they are the two characters that make this series irresistible. Chopra, a retired police officer, is the owner of the Baby Ganesh Detective Agency. And Ganesha, his baby elephant, helps him. Chopra is asked to investigate the disappearance of Bollywood star Vicky Verma, while his assistant inspector Rangwalla delves into the Mumbai euneuch community.

I love to read these books, real feel good for me. They are well written, contain one or two mysteries to solve, and yet there is always more then meets the eye. Vaseem Khan fills his stories with all sorts of background information on contemporary India. He paints an intriguing picture of a society that sometimes seems to be on the verge of collapse. Corruption, inequality, so many people living on the verge of starvation, discrimination and chaos. And most of all in every aspect in life it does not matter what you are able to do, but who your family is. The rich and famous are all-powerful and seem to get away with murder. Literally. An extremely frustrating life for a private detective, or a policeman for that matter. Yet Chopra seems to navigate through all of this, and still retain his lust for life.

In this part of the series there's a lot of information about Bollywood. Not so very different from Hollywood I think. But there's also a focus on the euneuch community and how they are regarded. It paints a shocking picture, and makes me want to read more about it. It also shows a society in which justice is a privilege only for the rich and powerful. If you as much look at someone powerful the wrong way, you may find yourself locked away in some hellhole prison for the rest of your life, without any of your relatives knowing what has become of you. I sincerely hope present day India is a little less brutal than this, but I fear it might not be.

That being said, I liked this third part in the series a little less, because somehow the plot of the two mysteries involved is just not as good. Still, an interesting and enjoyable read.

Adiba Jaigirdar says

Full disclosure: I went into this book without having read the two previous ones. I figured I wouldn't be at a huge disadvantage, since each book seems to follow its own individual mystery. I think I was mostly right. There were references to previous books, but nothing huge that I missed out on (I think & hope).

So I really, really wanted to like this book. A mystery about Bollywood? Kind of sounded amazing! And if I'm honest, there were some *really* enjoyable things about this book. For one, I loved the baby elephant. Unsurprisingly. ~~I have a baby elephant teddy I sleep with every night. Yes, I'm an adult woman. Shut up.~~ I really loved our intro to the world of Bollywood. The set up of the Bollywood Taj Mahal vs. real Taj Mahal was pretty brilliant. The mystery surrounding Vikram Verma's disappearance was interesting enough to really pique my interest.

But then, things kind of started falling apart. For one, I found Chopra's recounting of what was happening at the end of various chapters jarring, especially for a mystery novel. It felt a little condescending - like this was information we had to be fed even though he was literally going over *what had just happened!* I also found the alternate story line of Rangwalla... well, weird. Are we supposed to feel sympathetic that Chopra and Rangwalla are so willing to lend a helpful hand to the eunuchs, even though Rangwalla speaks of them rather crassly, feeling grossed out at the mere thought of touching them? Um. I think not. Moreover, the mystery of the master was totally underwhelming, and I mostly skimmed through those chapters.

There were more things in the book that just felt out of place and jarring. Irfan and the 'crazy lady' was a random storyline that had no relevance to either plots. The sudden change of narrative from Poppy to "Shoot-'em-up-Sherwal" was odd, and too convenient. For a mystery novel, this book honestly did not have enough mystery. We are not left to wonder why such and such happened, instead we're taken right into different narratives of various characters to tell us their exact thoughts and motivations. Which is something I totally do *not* want in a mystery.

The female characters, who were mostly unimportant to the story, also kind of bothered me. They seem to fit two very stereotypical and polarised archetypes: the woman who is totally sexualised, and the woman who is totally de-sexualised. Of course, many of the female characters weren't major throughout the book, so I guess we can brush over at least a few of the lazy archetypes, but the fact that Poppy's only use during this book was to be sexualised and distract guards was... well... problematic, to say the least.

The more we delved into the novel, the more unrealistic the mystery became as well. And while I can suspend disbelief for many things, this novel wanted me to do it for *too long* and for *too many things*. I appreciated the attempt to explore India's corruption, especially in regards to the police force, prison, etc. But it was a half-hearted attempt that left a lot to be desired.

The unravelling of the mystery itself happened far too fast. For a book that was supposed to be about Vikram Verma's disappearance, we spent a large portion of the book dedicated to... well, not that mystery. So once we get to the end, when we *are* figuring out Vikram Verma's disappearance, it felt too rushed.

From reading the rest of the reviews here, it seems that many people enjoyed the previous two books better than this one. So I might go back and give them a shot, despite my overall disappointment with this one. We'll see!

Louise says

I very much enjoyed this 3rd Baby Ganesh Agency mystery. At times touching, and at times crazy - it was a fun read. Inspector Chopra finds himself in very great trouble while trying to solve a Bollywood kidnapping, while his employee Rangwalla must solve a very unusual mystery on his own. The strong supporting cast, including Poppy, Irfan, and of course Ganesh, are back in full force to round out the story.

Julie says

The Strange Disappearance of a Bollywood Star by Vaseem Kahn is a 2017 Redhook/ Mullholland Books publication.

Zany and thought provoking-

Inspector Chopra and his sidekick, baby elephant Ganesha, find themselves embroiled in the underbelly of the Bollywood film industry when the hottest heartthrob Vikram Verma mysteriously disappears. His famous mother is desperate to locate her son, but instead of going to the police, she hires Chopra.

While Chopra is navigating his way through his investigation, Chopra's assistant, Rangwalla is investigating a case where eunuchs housed in a slum, overseen by the Queen of Mysore, are being taken to a mansion to engage in various avenues of performance arts over the weekend, then brought back home. Something smells fishy and the Queen wants to find out what is really going on.

The title of this book and that eye-popping cover caught my attention, and so on a whim, I checked it out of the library. I did not notice, until after I had finished the book, that it was the third book in a series. Oh well- it reads fine as a stand- alone and I now have a little incentive to check out the first two books of these series.

I really enjoyed the cultural details in this novel, the vibrant descriptions of Mumbai, and the charming baby elephant, Ganesha.

But, despite the obvious cultural differences, the movie industry, whether it is Hollywood or Bollywood, is still just smoke and mirrors, exactly like you've always heard. But, despite being a seasoned police officer and private detective, Chopra still experiences some disillusionment as he searches for Vicky.

By stark contrast, the reader is taken to the seamier side, which is a different and very sobering reality check for the reader. Rangwalla's case is heartbreakingly tragic, and while I loved the redemptive aspects, and the life lessons applied to Chopra's case, this one made a larger impact on me.

Overall, I enjoyed this novel, which served as a nice escape into another culture, and the mild humor, plus, its use of terms and names I don't see or hear every day provided me with a chance to learn new words and even prompted me to do a few Google searches and to add a Bollywood film to my Netflix queue, just out of curiosity. So, it was also a learning experience.

I also liked how the author added a moral to the story, which provided the characters a chance to develop and grow. While that may seem a tad cliché, it still worked as a cautionary tale.

I would be remiss if I didn't give Ganesha at least an honorable mention. The elephant is an unusual pet to adopt, but he was hilarious and added much charm to the story.

The two mysteries included are not violently graphic, but there is an emotional tug from time to time. The language is mild as well, making this a novel that leans a little in the 'cozy' direction and is one nearly any mystery lover could get into and enjoy. So, on occasion, following one of my whims pays off!

I will definitely check out the first two books in the series, which I hope will keep me contented until the fourth book is released.

Annet says

On a sultry March evening, in the great hive-city of Mumbai, Inspector Ashwin Chopra (Retd) was once again discovering the futility of reasoned discourse with his fellow countrymen... "He is an elephant," he said sternly. "Elephants do not eat hot dogs. They are herbivores. In other words: vegetarian." "Hah!" said the hot-dog vendor, snapping his tongs triumphantly in the air.... "These are vegetarian." Chopra looked down at the sizzling griddle. "Did you take the hot dogs", he asked. Ganesha blinked rapidly, then twirled his trunk in the air, rocking back and forth... ears flapping, as Chopra glared. he recognized the signs.

I am a fan of Inspector Chopra and his sidekick baby elephant Ganesha and his stubborn and charming wife Poppy! These books have a hint of crime, a hint of humor, a hint of culture, social justice and of India, Mumbai. Love reading these books. And who can resist an exceptionally cute and intelligent baby elephant, who helps Chopra in all his explorations.

Two mysteries in this book: Rising star and incorrigible playboy Vikram Verma has disappeared, leaving his latest Bollywood film in jeopardy. Hired by Verma's formidable mother, former Bollywood star, to find him, Inspector Chopra and his baby elephant Ganesha embark on a journey deep into the world's most flamboyant movie industry. His assistant inspector Rangwalla gets involved in the strange world and a community of eunuchs, who ask him to help solve a mystery.

I would recommend this series to everyone!
