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In the Spotlight: Rich Divorces

By Anna Malpas

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This week, two tabloids have been reporting that Russian-born model Natalia Vodianova is about to get divorced from her husband, British aristocrat Justin Portman.

Vodianova, 28, has the ultimate rags-to-riches story, going from a market worker in Nizhny Novgorod — usually described as "grim" in magazine profiles — to a top model and marriage to someone with a title.

Still childlike and gamine after three children, Vodianova features on the cover of this month's Russian Vogue.

Although her family lives in Britain, Vodianova often visits Russia and is popular as a local girl made good. She appears at charity galas, and last year, co-hosted the Eurovision Song Contest, where she was introduced as the "most beautiful girl in the world."

Two tabloids published long stories on her this week. Komsomolskaya Pravda's was headlined "Natalia Vodianova will pay her husband $10 million for a divorce." It alleged that Vodianova would have to pay her husband the money to retain access to their three children —

something that sounds unlikely to happen in a British court.

The article was the latest in a series of divorce rumors that first surfaced in February. You have to take such reports with a large pinch of salt, though.

The tabloids regularly report the upcoming wedding of model Naomi Campbell and her Russian boyfriend, property developer Vladislav Doronin, without a ring appearing on her finger. The same goes for fashion designer Dasha Zhukova and her partner, billionaire Roman Abramovich.

Portman gave an ambiguous answer, when contacted by KP on Thursday. "We are not divorced yet," it quoted him as saying, in comments translated into Russian. But he went on to say: "I don't want to divorce Natasha. I haven't talked about a divorce, and Natasha has not said anything of the kind either."

Portman, who has the "honourable" courtesy title, is a half brother of Viscount Portman, a superwealthy property developer. He is sometimes described as a professional artist.

KP cited "friends of Natalia from Nizhny Novgorod" as saying Portman is not as rich as Russians assume he is and has a taste for gambling, while Vodianova is the family's main wage earner.

Vodianova has a new man in her life, they said, naming him as a producer called Andrei.

Tvoi Den goes further in its story, headlined "Vodianova has left her family for a Channel One director."

Its paparazzi snapped Vodianova exiting a swanky fitness club with straggly wet hair, along with a similarly unkempt man it names as Andrei Boltenko. They look happy, but the photographs are not particularly compromising.

But the tabloid quotes a gym worker as saying they behaved "as if they were on honeymoon."

It also cites Vodianova's stepfather, Alexander, who says: "It will be really unpleasant if this divorce happens. Maybe they will work things out." But Vodianova's mother tells the paper that she has never heard of Boltenko.

Boltenko is Channel One's top production director, who organized broadcasts of Eurovision and President Dmitry Medvedev's inauguration, the channel's web site says. His latest project is a show called "Hello Girls," where women from one profession — police, hairdressers and so on — compete in talent contests.

Boltenko has "unique charisma," Tvoi Den swoons.

If you believe the tabloid, he also has a very complicated love life.

His "secret romance" with Vodianova began in 2006, it alleges, citing Kommersant columnist Natalya Radulova. "In television circles, this has not been a secret for a long time," she says.

Yet just over a month ago, the tabloid wrote that Boltenko was dating Sovremennik Theater

actress Marina Alexandrova. In July, it snapped them supermarket shopping together and said she had left her husband for him.

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