

VACCA

By Farah Najib

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Did you know, the word vaccine comes from the Latin ‘vacca’ – which means cow. That’s cause back in the day some guy figured out that if he gave people cowpox – ew - then later they’d be immune from smallpox as well. Mad.

But apparently infectious diseases aren’t ‘good date chat’. Whatever. *I* thought it was interesting. And anyway, it’s kind of an unavoidable topic right now, isn’t it?

But yeh. I went on a date.

Well – can you even call sitting awkwardly on a patch of grass two metres away from someone a date? I dunno. Didn’t think I’d be doing that any time soon to be fair. Since Dad came out of hospital, I’ve been kind of paranoid. It feels like a weird kind of miracle that me or Mum didn’t catch Covid when he had it, so I don’t wanna risk it now. I’ve barely even seen anyone since lockdown eased months ago, I’ve just got a little exclusive list of people who I trust. It’s got 3 of my best girl mates on it, and...(cooly) Adio.

We’ve been chatting for a few months now - (*slightly embarrassed*) we met on one of the apps. Obvs. But honestly, we’ve been messaging, like, 24/7. We even started doing phone calls and Facetime and that. We get on so so well, he’s proper interesting and has the same humour as me, we have bare jokes. Then recently he asked if I finally wanted to meet up face to face. I *really* wanted to, but I started feeling a bit anxious.

I chatted to Mum about it, and she was all like, ‘you’re young, you’ve got to live your life, darling!’. And I reckon Dad’s just happy when I’m out the house, ‘cause I’ve been so fussy around him since he was sick and I feel like it’s getting on his nerves.

So yeah, we plan to meet up, and the day comes and I feel *proper* nervous. It’s a sunny day though, which is lucky - I said no to a pub ‘cause I just don’t feel up for being around loads of people like that right now. I get to the park early, so I buy one of those little G&T tinnies, to calm my nerves a bit to be honest. And when he arrives I’m like *yes*, because he looks *just* as good as his photos, actually probably even fitter in person. (*beat*) Not to be shallow.

It’s awkward for a minute ‘cause obviously you can’t even do a hug-hello or anything, but we sit down and start chatting and basically forget about the massive gap between us. The conversation flows and I’m laughing like I haven’t laughed in literally months.

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But obviously we get onto the subject of coronavirus, because how can you not, it's like...conversational glue. And then I say the thing about the cows, and he laughs and says the thing about infectious diseases not being good date chat, but then it all goes a bit awkward.

Beat.

I just said that I think it's amazing how they've started developing vaccines so fast, and how I'm properly just like, in *awe* at what doctors do. 'Cause I am! And I tell him how I've been doing loads of research and reading, and I'm thinking of *possibly* signing up to take part in one of the trials. I haven't decided for sure yet, not at all, but I just feel like...if I can play even a small part in people not having to go through what we went through with Dad, and for life to get back to normal a bit – well, I wanna do that, d'you know what I mean.

But Adio is like, completely shocked, and he says to me - why the hell would you wanna do that?

And he starts going off on one. He's not an anti-vaxxer, he keeps saying, he'll deffo have a vaccine when there is one – but how *have* they managed to develop it so quickly? He's like, surely that means it's dodgy? He's seen some 'articles', - *questionable* fake news, conspiracy theories, really – saying that doctors are targeting all the black people in the UK to test on before anyone else. Says he doesn't wanna be a guinea pig – exact same thing Dad's said to me before. Why should he trust them?

Beat.

Obviously, I *completely* get where he's coming from. Especially with everything that's happened this year. It's easy to feel like our lives don't matter. He shows me some of the stuff he's been reading, and I *gently* point out that they aren't actually from verified sources. A couple of them have even got those new 'false information' warnings at the bottom. It's just not true. Do not believe everything random you see on Insta. It's like, a factory of lies.

But at the end of the day, how will they know if a vaccine will work on people like us, and be safe for people like us, if they've only tested it on white people?

He goes all quiet then, and mumbles, like, yeah, yeah, true, true.

Then I show him some of the stuff I've read. The thing about the trials being rushed is the one people get most prang about – I get it. But it's not like

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they're cutting corners. All the safety stuff's the same, it's just been bumped to the top of the list 'cause of the urgency of the situation.

I joke to him – maybe we can sign up together - for our next date! Quick vaccine trial, spot of dinner, cheeky pub trip, home by 10pm curfew. Sounds lit.

He laughs.

We're meeting up again next week. No trial yet, but...we'll see.