

## **Varsha**

Varsha (mid-fifties, working class Punjabi. Varsha and her husband are both recovering from Covid. Their son Rohan is in his early twenties)

### **Why not me?- Sequel to 'Crossing the line'**

**Varsha (mid-fifties, working class Punjabi. Varsha and her husband are both recovering from Covid. Their son Rohan is in his early twenties)**

## **Varsha**

My friend Beryl is a saint. First, she was distributing food to NHS staff. (They loved my daal!). Now she is coordinating ladies to sew masks, to sell for NHS charity. I told my son, Rohan,

**'Get my old Singer out from the loft. The NHS saved your father and me. It's my turn to help.'**

People donate lovely remnants from the market (*displaying her masks*) -I kept this African 'kitenge' one for myself- reminds me of the kurtas we wore in Uganda. And this butterfly mask is my favourite. I said to my husband,

**'Come outside and look at the 'painted ladies' dancing among the flowers! Long distant migrants like us. They have travelled from the deserts of Africa via Asia to get here'.**

He's not interested in butterflies. His eyes are glued to 'Breaking News'. Now he's worried about the second wave of corona that is sweeping the country! I said,

**'Thanks to God we survived the first wave. Beryl says we need to live a little now'.**

He said, **'When she tells you to jump off the cliff, will you do that too?'**

Beryl's son is 'fresher' at Uni and was in full lock down in the first week. Most of his hall of residence had tested positive. She said,

**'Youth is on their side and they will be fine'**

She and her husband still have 'date' nights. He cooks lamb couscous, and they watch box sets! They're going 'wild swimming' and they've walked the Great Wall of China together, without leaving London'. She showed me on her fit bit.

Rohan says the English have the right attitude. Not like what he calls **'the Asian 'fear of living thing!'**

I am not scared of living, but my **'life partner'** is scared of dying.

He is under the quilt on the sofa. Always tired and he gets breathless from climbing upstairs to bathroom. Our GP, she is Gujarati from Uganda, says it could be **'long covid'**, plus he has his other problems-diabetes, heart, BP.

We both caught the virus at the same time, but because I was on the Principle trial Rohan says I **'lucked out'**. My symptoms were like mild flu (I always have a flu jab) and they gave me some extra medicine. I was fine in 3 weeks.

I thought we were winning the race but that was only the first round.

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Rohan is fed up of 'remote working' and living upstairs. He says he's on Duolingo on his phone, learning French- He wants to **'smash'** Therese in the Diamond league. I can't hear the 'pings', so I know he's really looking at flats.

I heard him whispering to the Estate Agents when I was doing my sun salutations on zoom.

I sew masks till 3am and watch my 'box sets' alone on Rohan's Ipad. Old episodes of **'kyonki saas bhi kabhu bahu thi'** - **'Because mother in law was a daughter in law once'**. Now she wants to rule over her son's wife. I told Rohan

**'I can introduce you to a good Punjabi girl and you can have a zoom date'.**

**'I don't want to date on zoom mum, but to meet people in the flesh. And she might not be Punjabi'**

I said, **'We don't mind English girl. Wait till there's a vaccine, then you can move out and be free'.**

I know I will be a soft mother in law.

He says the goal post keeps changing on the vaccine.

**'I'll never be 23 again and I'll have wasted my youth in your attic!'**

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Gabriel invited Rohan to Bournemouth. To stay in air b and b with some of their friends. He is eco warrior and picks litter from the beach. I said

**'Why don't you go? Enjoy for few days'**

He said, **'Mum, they don't think Covid is serious. They think it's the Govt trying to stop the young from being free. Or big pharma companies wanting to make more money. They think if they all get infected, it will help herd immunity'**

**'Take a video of your dad and post on your instagram. Show them how serious it is.'**

They have forgotten the days of all those people on ventilators on the news. All those extra deaths. So many from our communities.

He didn't go. He's a good boy. Still shielding us because he says even though we now have antibodies, with his father's co morbidities we can't be sure that we won't be reinfected.

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Today Rohan said that he is joining the vaccine register. Asians aren't volunteering and they need that data. The only way out of this is if they find a vaccine that works for everyone.

I said, **'Let others who have more children do it. Why you? My only child.'**

**'Why not me? You went on a trial'**

**'Yes, but I was already ill so like you say it was 'no brainer''**

**'Mum we're over-represented in illness and under-represented in research. They want people of all ages. Even with pre-conditions'**

He is Taurus. Horoscope says stubborn and a dark horse. Slow moving but quick witted.

Yes, **Why Not Him?**

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Now he is getting his first dose. Then he has to download app on phone. Fill in data every few days. There is 24-hour helpline and they will monitor him for a year.

I asked him

**'How can they expect Asians who don't speak English to sign up with all this red tape?'**

**'Exactly mum. Research needs to shake it up and include them'**

Like our 'mango man' who posted on Whatsapp that everyone will be forcibly injected with vaccine and they will get corona.

**'Tell him it's not a 'live' vaccine mum, and won't be mandated'**

He knows the big words. We can't argue.

**'And don't let dad eat too many mangos when I'm gone!'**

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He has found a nice flat. Over-looking the river. He says he will work out **'risk/benefit'** ratio before doing anything.

I have packed him few tupperwares of my daal to freeze, otherwise he will only cook expensive pasta from that Ottolenghi.

He bought us 'fit bits' and says we have to count our steps.

When I was young, I wanted to climb Kilimanjaro.