

Mighty Michael and the Blasted Biofilm



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Chapter One

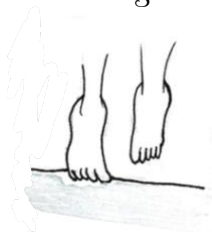


The humongous clock outside the window struck six. Bong. Bong. Bong. Bong. Bong. Bing. (Just kidding. It also went Bong, as most humongous clocks do.)

The bed stirred. It contained a young child, no older than thirteen. They tossed and turned, turned and tossed. An eye winked open. A single, bright green eye gazed, dazzled by the shining magnificence of the red-hot sun, peering through the clouds and into the room. The child bathed in the incandescent glow of the shimmering star of the morning. They squirmed under the covers, deciding to get up at the request of the world's longest running natural alarm clock.

The child's eyes darted from left to right, surveying the room, as if they hadn't spent countless nights here. A big yawn escaped from their tired little mouth. Another bout of stirring.

The child's feet touched the floor. Yowch! Cold. Freezing. The legs darted back up into the comfy heat of the bed. Slowly, gently, toe-by-toe the foot greeted the cool floor. Then the other. The child stretched, arms held out wide, like a sleepy scarecrow.



Figures outside flitted by the window. Their shadows danced across the floor of the child's room. They tangoed as they touched, silently

shimmying from left to right. The child raised a hand to their eye, tentatively sweeping the sleep from within.

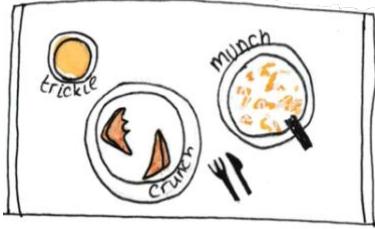
The door clicked. The child's head shot up. A woman clad in shades of blue strode into the room. A large woman, not tall, but big. Strong. Sturdy. Solid. She had a kind face. Which was fitting, after all, as she was a kind woman. She was carrying a tray, which upon it held a balanced breakfast of toast, butter, cereal and orange juice. 'Now then.' she boomed, with a beaming smile. 'How are we this morning?'

The child shrugged. If they had to think, they honestly didn't know. A firm, but gentle hand clasped theirs. This had been the routine most mornings. Usually, it would be called a back and forth. Between the two of them, however, it was all back. No forth.



‘You can talk to me,’ she said. ‘When you’re ready.’

A small, minute smile stretched across the child’s face. They understood. How long had it been? They had been able to talk before. Words used to spill out of their mouth uncontrollably! Sometimes, they remembered, they had to be told to stop!



The seconds passed. There was peaceful silence, soon to be interrupted by breakfast. The child **CRUNCHED** into their buttered toast. They **MUNCHED** on their crispy

cereal. And the orange juice **TRICKLED** down their throat, all the way down into their belly. The large woman watched. She smiled a smile so bright it could have lit up all the Christmas lights in London for three weeks. That bright.

Breakfast was soon finished. It was time for the kind lady to leave. And she did. Once again, the room was silent. It had been silent before, thought the child. This silence was different, the thought continued. A lonely silence.

With breakfast out of the way, it was time to wash their hands. This was the worst part.

Chapter Two

Truth be told, the child didn't like handwashing. Not that they were afraid of water. In fact, they loved the water. They liked showers. They liked swimming. They even liked sipping it from a nice cool glass. The water was fine. It wasn't the sink either. It was what lurked beneath the sink. That's what it did. It lurked. It waited. It festered. It spread. It also had a name.

Biofilm. That was what the child knew waited for them below the plughole of the sink. It bubbled and burped. It squelched and it squirmed. It even crinkled and churned, along with many other repulsive words. Words that haven't even been thought of yet. That is how foul the Biofilm was.

The tap turned. The water flowed. Slowly, the hands of the child edged towards the basin. The water splished and splashed as it crashed against the ceramic. But now, thought the child, now the most dreadful thing was going to happen.

It didn't happen all at once. It never, ever does. It moved slower than a tortoise at first. One by one, the frightful fingers of the Biofilm reached through the plughole. They slid along the sink like slugs, leaving slimy trails as they went. More, and more, the ghastly globs filled the sink, stopping the water from flowing.



The child, in a fit of panic, backed away from the sink. Stricken with fear, they launched like a rocket back into their bed. They clutched the covers. Would this be enough? Would this keep them safe? No.

The biofilm spilled over the edge, along with the water. The ooze and pus rapidly multiplied across the once cool and frosty floor. Straight to the bed. The covers flew over the child's head, a protective blanket against the tidal wave of filth that was about to descend.





The door flew open. The kind lady had returned. She knew not what to make of what she could see. The tap was running, and the child huddled under the covers. Whatever was the matter? Her eyes scanned the room. It took her a few moments, but then it dawned on her. Biofilm.

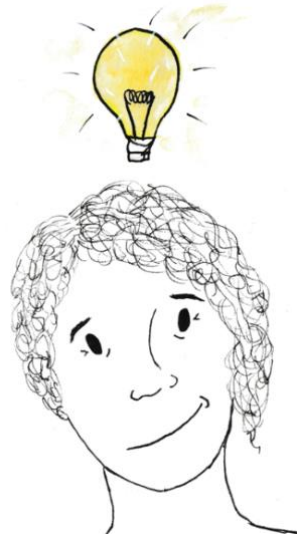
She knew she should never have mentioned it.
With a flick of her wrist, the water stopped.

The mattress cushioned her bottom as she sat beside the child. Her usual kind smile had wrinkled into a small sadness.

‘I’m sorry.’ she began, ‘I didn’t mean to scare you.’

It was true. She hadn’t. She only wanted to warn the child to keep safe around the water. She thought she had been helpful in teaching her. How could she mend this moment?

Ding! A lightbulb turned on in her head. An idea! A most marvellous idea had taken shape in her head. Her usual kind smile smoothed her face out. ‘Wait just a moment’ she said, ‘I’ll be right back.’

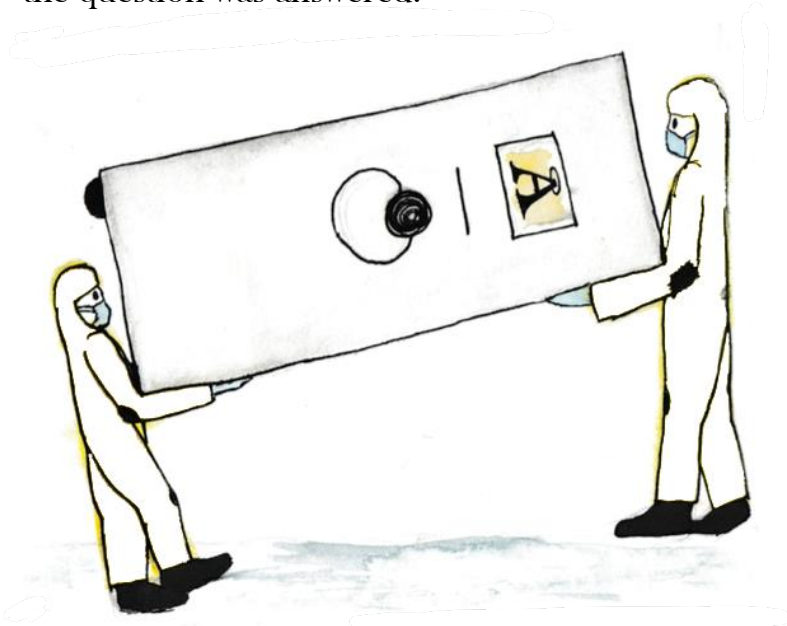




The child peeked over the covers. She had gone. So had the Biofilm. Their breathing returned to normal, along with their little heartbeat. Before it had been beating like a million little grasshoppers hopping on the world's biggest bongo drum! Dum-dum-dum-dum-dum-dum-dum! Now it had returned to its usual beat, like a proud horse trotting down a cobbled street. Trot-trot. Trot-trot. Trot-trot.

Pulling the covers down, the child stepped off the bed and slinked across to the door. What did the kind lady mean by 'wait a moment'? Just as the

thought fired from the idea cannon of their brain,
the question was answered.



Two large, broad figures, all dressed in white, stomped down the corridor. What were they carrying in their hands? It was big. It was big and black. It was big and black and shiny. It was SO big they had to carry it sideways. So big, that when they sat it up, neither of the figures could reach the top, not even on their tippy-toes.

And if it was big for the big grown-ups, then you can only imagine how large it was for the child. It

stood there, spotless and shining. Gleaming and glistening.

If the child could have spoken in that moment, they still wouldn't have said anything. They simply gazed in awe at the enormously humongous black box on the wall. Something was sticking out of it. It was like a big bowl. A small rectangle about the size of an envelope flashed and flickered. The figures then took out their clean, pristine tools and tinkered with it.

Chapter Three



A. That is what the child saw flashing on the screen. A large A, surrounded by gold. A for what? Amazingly big? Astoundingly huge? Astonishingly massive? They had no clue. The very same second that one of the figures stopped, they looked in the child's direction.

They ducked out of sight. Under the window. They breathed a heavy sigh of relief. The relief didn't last long, as the feeling of curiosity brewed

and stewed within. They just **HAD** to know what that big, black box was, they just had to.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. There wasn't a clock to be found in the room, it was inside the young one's mind. Each second feeling longer and longer until a minute stretched out into what felt like a month. The rustling and clanging outside. The hustle and bustle. The oohs and aahs. Each sound adding more and more to the swelling feeling of 'I need to know!' inside. That feeling was fit to burst.

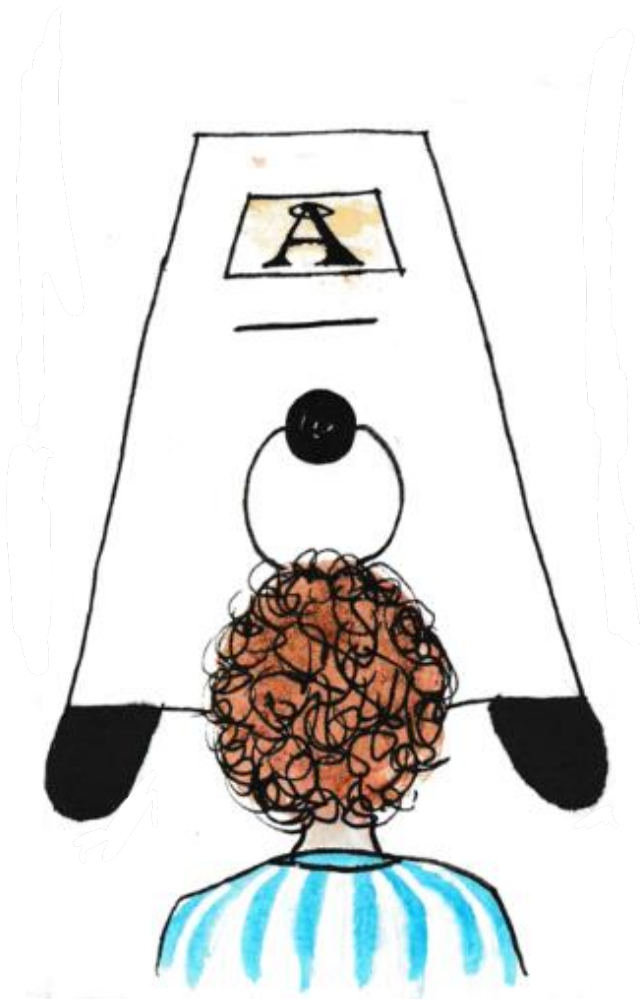
Then, all at once, it stopped. There was nothing more to be heard as the hallway returned to its silent vigil, peacefully watching over who came and went. It was now safe to take another peek.

Inch-by-inch, millimetre-by-millimetre, the child crept up the wall. Their eyes transfixed on the big, black, and shiny box, and good heavens was this box shiny! The child slinked along the wall to the doorhandle, not once taking their eyes off the shiny specimen across from them. As the handle turned, the sense of curiosity blazed into the fire of fascination.

It was there. It was there! It was no more than ten steps away now! One step. Look out for anyone watching. No? Nothing? Second step. Still nothing? Good. Third step. The size of the thing facing the child was now truly tremendous.

Fourth step. Did they hear something? No, surely not, no one was around. Fifth step. No, there definitely was. What was it? Sixth step. It was getting louder now. Seventh step. The hairs on the back of their arms were on edge now.

Eighth step. The once calm breaths of the child had sped up rapidly. Ninth step. At this point, one would think the child was mimicking a choo-choo train with how fast their breaths were going. Tenth step.



There it stood. The child looked up. It seemed to go on forever. The long, shiny blackness stretched on to eternity. And as a small, soft hand reached out to touch the round glass basin, it spoke.

Chapter Four

‘WHO APPROACHES?’ demanded the voice. The child frantically spun their head left and right. Surely not. Did this box... speak? No one else was around. No one could confirm nor deny their suspicion. This box... this big, black, shiny box... spoke?

‘WHO APPROACHES?’ the box inquired a second time. Its voice echoed down the hallway, its tone ringing with authority. The child waved a tiny hand before the colossal contraption. ‘AH. HOW RUDE OF ME.’ the sound changed. It became almost gentle, soothing at this point, yet the volume had not changed one bit. For the sake of not blowing out your imaginary eardrums, the box shall now stop speaking in all capitals, but keep in mind the volume for now.

‘Hello, young one.’ the voice greeted the child. For a box, the child thought, it spoke very well indeed, now taking on an almost regal and royal air.

‘My most humble apologies. I’ve not got the best sight, you see. No eyes, only sensors.’ a small light

blipped from inside the basin, as if to confirm his claims. The box may not have eyes, but the child did. Those eyes were widening in amazement with a thousand tiny twinkles, not unlike a certain nursery rhyme star.

‘A certain someone told me all about you,’ the box declared, ‘And how I can be of assistance to thee.’ The child gasped. How could the box know about them? It was a box! True, it was a talking box, but there had to be a limit to how much surprise one could go through in a few minutes. ‘But.’ it continued.

‘It would only be fair if I were to introduce myself likewise,’ it rumbled. ‘I shall assist thee in all manners water and washing! When I speak, the woosh and swirls of a thousand sinks shall answer! I am Michael, vanguard of the Angel Guard!’

Hold. The. Phone. The child was now reeling. What was this box blabbering on about? Michael? It had a name? Sinks? Angels? They gripped their head, as if to keep all the information held inside from escaping through their ears. Shaking their head awake, they turned

to “Michael” once again. Surely this was just some weird dream.

But it wasn't, was it? It was still there, it was still speaking, it was still... Michael?

‘Out with it! State thy name!’ barked Michael, his royal sound mixing with that of a captain issuing orders to his mighty platoon. The child simply opened their mouth, but no sound came out. The light inside the basin blushed bright red, like the ripest tomato in the allotment.


‘Ah. Um. Oh. How simply embarrassing! I was informed of this also!’ thus spoke Michael, now as embarrassed as a large unit attached to the wall could possibly be.

‘My sincerest apologies. Of course. I shall now introduce myself and mine purpose fully.’ said Michael, his voice topped with sincerity, ‘Place thine hands within mine own washbasin.’

The child hesitated. Put *their* hands in *there*? As they quivered, Michael sensed their apprehensiveness.

‘Do not be afraid, child.’ he reassured, ‘simply place thine hands within mine basin and I shall absolve thee of thy dirt.’

Chapter Five



The child reluctantly obeyed. Their hands reached out into the basin. **SQUIRT.** A dollop of soap spread across their hands. **FSSSSSH.** A gleaming blade of water slashed through the air. It gently caressed the hands of the child. The envelope-sized screen flashed. It now displayed instructions. Handwashing instructions!

‘Obey these tenets, child.’ instructed Michael, ‘These six simple steps for handwashing, and you shall protect not only thine own self, but your companions and relations too.’ One by one, Michael’s video screen guided the child through all the nooks and crannies of their hands, making sure every spot was now spot-less!

KACHUNK. A paper towel was dispensed from just above the basin, at just the right height for the child to reach. Observing the paper towel for a moment, the child noticed it hung from Michael’s slot with a sense of pride, much like medals on a celebrated war hero. Had the box been involved in some fight against bacteria? Now was not the time to think of that. Now was the time for drying.

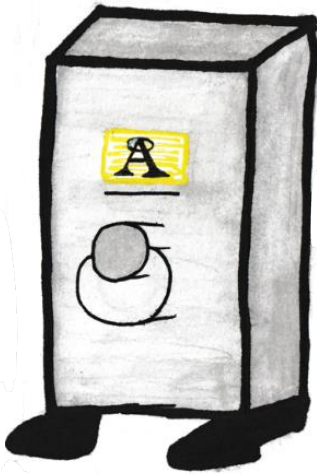
They grabbed it, nodding in thanks to Michael. Drying the very last spots of their hands, the child disposed of the paper towel in a nearby bin.

‘Now, child.’ Michael’s voice, despite still being very loud, lowered itself ever so slightly, as low as a box with a very loud voice could whisper. ‘I must inform thee of my mission.’ The child gasped. A mission? They felt very trusted indeed, to be told Michael’s mission. And so, huddling close, they listened to what he had to say.

Chapter Six

‘Biofilm.’ Michael muttered, his voice thick with disdain, ‘Blasted biofilm. I am on a mission to rid the world of it’s terrible, tenebrous tendrils forever.’ The child couldn’t believe their ears. He had been sent to help them? Was *this* what the kind lady had planned all along? Jumping for joy, the child came to their senses, restraining their body from flailing around with endless glee. They would finally be safe!

‘At my disposal,’ Michael now spoke with a certain swagger, coolly dispensing information with ease, ‘I have plenty of tools to extinguish their ilk. Flush them down the drain, even.’ Whenever Michael spoke, the whole world listened. Such a powerful voice, commanding respect whenever its soundwave reached your ears.



‘Very well. Lead the way, young one. Take me to this verminous, vile bile that clogs your pipes’. Without a second to lose, the child dashed back into their room. Pointing feverishly at the plughole that contained the vomit-inducing, squelching, rotten scum. Michael knew in an instant. Not just that the sink

contained the wretched filth, but also how to get rid of it. Connecting to the pipes, he began to rumble.

‘Steel thyself, squire.’ he said, although the child looked at him, bemused. ‘I mean ready thine self. Prepare.’

A blistering heat scorched through the pipes. The biofilm was blasted to bits, and when I say bits, I mean tiny, a true smidgeon of miniscule biofilm particles remained. Then no more. It ceased to be.

‘Impressed?’ chirped Michael, pleased with himself. The child sat, slack-jawed with awe. ‘And if that was enough to satisfy, then be ready, for my

arsenal is vast,' he boasted, 'with plenty of methods to get rid of this murky menace.'

'And what's more' there was more? 'I am but the first of many, soon my brothers and I shall deploy all over. With our communication, co-ordination and concentration, we shall get rid of this pernicky pus, once and for all!' spoke Michael, positioning himself against his original space in the wall, somehow triumphantly. His work was done, for today. However, as the hallway returned to its standard silent state, a familiar voice boomed.

Chapter Seven

‘Well, well! I see you’ve met Michael!’ there she stood, with her strong, sturdy arms planted solidly on her sides. That same, bright beaming smile that could put the sun out of a job lit up the entire corridor. ‘Did you have fun?’

The reply had the child nodding like a bobblehead on a rumbly car, and so the kind lady got the message loud and clear. She was right after all. This idea had been the best she’d ever had. A complete and total success.

Looking him up and down, the child waited expectantly, willing Michael to speak. Say something! But nothing came.

He was silent. Ah! Of course! Their mind came up with the perfect answer! Michael was on a mission! Michael would never blow his cover around grown-ups! Their lips curled into a wry smile, content with their secret findings.



‘Hm?’ the kind lady’s eyes swept across the hallway to Michael, almost expecting him to do

something herself. But alas, there he stood, like a knight in his gleaming black armour. Ready to beat back the blasted biofilm at any moment.

The child waved. A goodbye, but without a hint of sadness, for they knew that this was the beginning of a promising partnership. Between human and giant clinical washbasin. It was an unlikely partnership, but a good one, nonetheless.

In time, the young child grew to like handwashing. It was their time of day to spend with their unlikely friend. No words were exchanged, but friends don't always need to speak to have a good time, right?

With the scabby scourge vanquished, the child was able to look at the sink without fear or hesitation. They also took great pleasure knowing that soon, around the country, no, around the world, many other children, just like them, would be able to feel the same way.

And with that lovely little piece of knowledge, they drifted off into a deep, peaceful sleep.

