

The Man behind the Glass

By Aditya Undru

Deep looked curiously at the man, his face pressed against the glass. The man on the other side of the glass seemed like a normal person. “Papa,” he asked, “he looks exactly like anyone else, why is he here?”

His father smiled. “That man is sick, Deep.” He said. Their cat, Bluu, walked silently beside them.

“So what if he is sick, Papa?” asked the child curiously, “I get sick sometimes, but I am not behind the glass like this.”

“That is because the germs which cause your sickness are different,” said his father patiently.

“Are they bigger?”

“No, but they are not easy to kill. You remember when you got a fever last time, and you had to take medicines? You soon got better. That will not happen to that man.”

Deep was curious, and was lost in thought as his father guided him along the corridor of the facility. The year was 2050 and the people in here were all patients who were infected by drug-resistant strains of various disease-causing bacteria. Since they cannot be treated, they are kept in air-tight rooms and are isolated from the rest of the world. They are allowed to talk to people only when everyone is wearing full-body protective clothing. The world was no longer the way it was 25 years ago.

“But Papa, we don’t always take medicine immediately. Sometimes I get better by myself. Maybe that man can too,” said Deep.

“Yes, but we cannot be sure. If he gets out and even if one of his germs infects another person, it is dangerous,” said his father.

“But why won’t the medicines work on him?” asked Deep again.

“So many questions, Deep!” his father was irritated. “You know how Bluu used to love the tuna plasma? He used to sit still for it whenever you needed him to. He does not do that anymore. Why is that?”

“You said it’s because I fed it to him way too many times.” Deep frowned.

“Yes, had you given him that food only when you needed to, he would still be obeying you. But he got so used to eating tuna plasma that he doesn’t care for it anymore,” said his father. “In the same way, if you overuse medicine even when you don’t need to, the germs will slowly become resistant to it.”

“Are you saying that the microbes too can get bored of the medicines?” Deep asked.

“Not get bored, but their population can evolve. When you take antimicrobials, they kill the germs. But you need to finish all the tablets. Otherwise, the stronger germs still remain, grow and spread to other people. It is difficult to treat these germs with our existing medicines,” said his father.

Deep thought about it harder. He definitely did not want to be one of the people locked up in the rooms, but he was more scared of getting a fever which will never go down.

“It is bad enough that I can’t shoo Bluu away. I never want to let the germs become the same with me.” He thought to himself as the holographic door dissipated to let them go. Bluu followed nonchalantly.

The man behind the glass watched on.



From this story, try answering the following questions:

1. Write a character sketch of the man behind the glass. Rewrite the story from his point of view.

(A character sketch is a note that helps the reader create a mental image of the person – physical attributes, mannerisms, outward personality, and inner character.)

2. How will you avoid becoming the man behind the glass?

Additional questions:

This story is a part of the World AMR Awareness Week 2024 campaign by CSIR-CCMB and Superheroes against Superbugs.

CSIR-CCMB is a premier biology research institute in Hyderabad.

Superheroes against Superbugs is an educational and public engagement initiative on antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in India.