



The BTB Chronicles

Featuring 28 Micro Stories on the theme "Something seemed fishy"

Curated by: Anupama Dalmia

Illustration by: Siya Choudhary



The BTB Chronicles

Featured Writers:

Munirah Plumber
Shailaja Pai
Anwee Mazumdar
Kapil Popat
Shweta Singh
Sangeeta Srivastava
Rinki Singh Mankotia
Maneet Gulati Ahuja
Shikha Madan
Pooja Gupta
Khushboo Tanna
Sonal Singh
Smitha N Kini
Natasha Sequeira
Sheetal Ashpalia

Featured Young Writers:

Shreyas Saboo
Reya Jain
Parth Palod
Anusha Patel
Vanya Nath
Suryanshu Mukherjee
Saumaya Gupta
Mayuk Doshi
Netra Prakash
Rajit Singh Gour
Rishika Thakur
Kalandika Bhati
Ananya Alope



From the Founder's Diary

Beyond the Box was never my dream! I know many of you might be thinking it to be otherwise. But, that's life – a never ending journey of self discovery. A casual attempt at exploring mentoring in May 2017 turned out to be a life changing experience for me. Urged by some friends, I conducted a 3-day creative writing summer workshop for 25 kids. During the span of those three days, I realized that this was my calling. Working with kids always came very naturally to me and we connected instantly with each other. While conducting this workshop, I realized that kids are unwittingly forced to imagine and express in a certain way most of the times by adults which curbs their creativity. I took it upon myself to provide children an environment where they can express without being judged and bloom to their full potential at their own comfortable pace. This led to regular classes and soon I began to get invited by schools and corporates for conducting workshops on creative writing and communication. When the work started increasing in this space, it was time to make it streamlined and that is how "Beyond the Box" took birth.

Today, we are a small team of 4 members but with a clear vision – to help everyone, kids and adults alike, unbox the joy of writing. We are glad that many of our students have got published in coveted magazines and newspapers, and have also won numerous National level writing competitions. But, more than this, what gives us immense satisfaction is when we see our students become more perceptive, observant and thinking individuals because of our holistic approach. We have lots lined up in the coming months for the BTB family and "BTB Chronicles" is one such initiative which we came up with for all the writers and readers out there.

This is a theme based e-periodical which will give the readers memorable creative pieces to cherish and the writers an opportunity to learn and reach out to a wider audience. We conducted a Micro-Fiction contest in which the prompt given was "Something seemed fishy". Our first edition of "BTB Chronicles" features 28 brilliant stories selected out of 78 wonderful entries that were received for this contest. These stories have been churned out from the pens of talented writers across all age groups.

We hope you enjoy reading them as much as we have!

Anupama Dalmia

Founder & Chief Mentor, Beyond the Box



A HORRIFYING TRICK

by Shreyas Saboo, 10 years old

We were waiting with bated breath. Finally, the curtains moved aside to show the magician. Everyone cheered and whooped with laughter. The magician raised his hand for silence and the audience obeyed.

"For my first trick, I need a volunteer", he said immediately picking up someone from the crowd near the stage. The magician lay him on the bed, put a box over him and revealed a portable sawmill. He advanced the machine towards the volunteer who didn't seem the least bit afraid and set it into motion.

He slowly brought it down and when he finished bringing it through, I noticed the magician's face frozen in horror. Something seemed fishy. There was blood on the sawmill.

A SPECIAL BIRTHDAY

by Reya Jain, 9 years old

It was Shreya's birthday and she was excited for the presents and goodies she would be receiving. She invited her friends for a brunch at the popular FLECHAZO restaurant in her city. The kids had a ball and went back joyful.

Shreya loved her gifts but she was also gloomy because she had not received anything from her parents. "Mom and dad, it seems you do not have anything for me this time", she complained grumpily. But, they ignored her.

Later, Shreya tried to absorb the talk between her parents but couldn't figure out anything. She contemplated for a while and felt that something seemed fishy. She was lost in her thoughts and drifted to sleep.

It was midnight when the doorbell rang. Shreya woke up with anticipation and opened the door. It was a gear bicycle which she had always wished for. She was jubilant and thanked her parents.

AN UNPLANNED ADVENTURE

by Parth Palod, 9 years old

One day Akbar, a poor sailor, went on a sea voyage. The journey seemed to go on and on and it was all smooth sailing until the clouds went dark all of a sudden. In no time, he was engulfed by a huge storm and there was lightning and heavy rainfall. His ship was destroyed and the next day, he was found on an island in an unconscious state.

When he woke up finally, he felt that something seemed fishy on the island. There was fog everywhere and a tiny house was faintly visible. When he went inside it, he realized that the island was exquisite and huge. He started exploring the house and figured that everything in there was double of its usual size.

It was magical. He found a treasury there, so he collected money in his bag merrily and bought a new ship to head back home.

THE DREAM

by Anusha Patel, 9 years old

Hia loved rainbows but she had never seen one in real. She had only got a glimpse of it on the screen. One day, when she was on a trip to New York with her friends, she was driving her car when it suddenly broke down.

When she went to check the bonnet, four clowns came out of the blue and caught her. She realized her friends were nowhere around and she collapsed in fear. After a few hours, she found herself on her bed alone and was terrified.

The next day, the clowns appeared again and forcibly took her somewhere. She assumed they were taking her to some dungeon but to her surprise she was at a beautiful place where she could see a real rainbow.

It turned out that her friends were the clowns and had planned this surprise for her.

THE MORNING MYSTERY

by Vanya Nath, 10 years old

"Rise & Shine," mum called out as she passed Alisha's door. Alisha woke up thinking it was time for school. When she hopped out of her bed, it was 7:00 AM. She looked out for any signs of the arrival of her bus, but instead saw her brother giggling in the garden. Few minutes later, it occurred to her that her vacation had started and she didn't have to go to school.

Alisha freshened up and went to see what was up with her brother. She heard a rattling sound from the bushes. She heard footsteps marching towards the garage and swiftly turned around. She was frightened to see a clown and fell on her face while trying to escape. Something seemed fishy, so she slowly limped towards the clown which was now still and found a blue shoe behind it. It was marked 'Rohan'. She ran and caught the shoe along with the mischief maker. "April fool", screamed her brother leaving Alisha feeling silly about her morning mystery.

THE FISHY TOMB

by Suryanshu Mukherjee, 11 years old

Kylie was an archaeologist who took up the task of unearthing the secrets of a bizarre tomb. The assignment required her to visit the tomb at odd hours when no cabs were available. She noticed a jeep while waiting on the road and asked for a lift as she had no other way to get there.

Something seemed fishy about the driver, so she kept chanting silent prayers during the journey. Once she reached the tomb, she saw a handful of people around. She asked them where the entrance was but no one responded to her query. While walking around, she accidentally pushed a limestone which revealed an eerie secret door. "Don't utter a word about this" was scribbled on it in hieroglyphics.

She screamed and died on the spot. She was soon dragged by the driver to give company to the other archaeologists lying around in the secret dungeon.

TOWN OF BUBBLEBOON

by Saumaya Gupta, 11 years old

Long time ago, something weird happened in the town of 'Bubbleboon'. It all started when some migrants came to the town. Over the course of the next few days, people started going missing!

The worried kith and kin went to the Mayor KingBoon and narrated their ordeal. Kingboon was shocked and instructed his men to call Bubbletin who was hands down the best detective in town. Going by the information he could gather, Bubbletin asked for the count of the people (migrants) who had come to the town and the area they were living in. After interviewing the suspects, something seemed fishy to him.

While the migrants were away, he secretly checked their rooms. To his horror, he saw bloodstains near their trunks. When he opened them, there were dead bodies of the missing people!

Suddenly the power supply went off and Adam lamented, "No, I missed the climax of my movie!"

TOM'S FRIGHT OF A NIGHT

by Mayuk Doshi, 11 years old

It was around 8:30 in the night when Tom was doing his homework post dinner. He was alone in his room as his parents were in the living room completing some important chores. Tom was engrossed in his work when suddenly, the lights went out. Tom was afraid of the dark and hence, picked up his flashlight which was right there on his study table.

He ran to his parents but found no one around. He wondered if this was a prank and frantically looked around. The next moment he felt something pass by him at bullet speed. He felt a tingle down his spine. As he passed the staircase to the basement, something seemed fishy. He decided to get to the bottom of this. He went down the basement, only to find everybody at home unconscious. Again, something passed by him. He screamed and realized it was a horrifying dream.

As he took sips of water sitting on his bed, the lights went out.

THE MYSTERIOUS PHONE CALLS

by Netra Prakash, 11 years old

My sister Candace was acting strange – always in her room with the door closed, talking to someone on the phone, receiving packages that she never let me open. Something seemed fishy. Had Candace joined the gang of teenagers vandalizing houses around town, I wondered? That would explain her odd behaviour.

I took a walk in the park to think. The next day was my birthday and I didn't want to be worrying about it then. I could tell my parents about this but Candace was my sister after all. Did I really want to get her into trouble? I reached home undecided about what to do. I noticed many bikes parked outside. Had Candace invited her gang home?! I entered the house with trepidation but was caught unaware with a loud 'SURPRISE!'. My friends jumped out and started singing the 'Happy birthday' song.

I'd imagined Candace joining a delinquent gang, but she was just planning a party for me!

THE GIFT

by Rishika Thakur, 15 years old

"We'll be there in about an hour or so." said my Mom hanging up the phone.

My sister and I exchanged puzzled glances. We were completely befuddled. Something seemed fishy. But we couldn't make out what. It had been so for a while now. My parents kept talking to this mysterious 'unknown caller'. Our curious queries were left unanswered as my parents exited the house.

An hour passed, then another. They weren't back yet.

"Where on earth are they?" asked my sister, growing restless.

On cue, the door opened and in walked my parents.

"Kids, we're home!" exclaimed Mom.

We rushed to meet them and stopped dead in our tracks. Dad held a dog in his arms!

"Wh-what?" I sputtered. "Surprise!" they said in unison. We stood there flabbergasted as the little furball was placed on the floor. He dashed around the house and licked my feet. He was the cutest thing we'd ever seen!

SWEET REVENGE

by Kalandika Bhati, 13 years old

It was a sunny Friday. Abby and Lily were sitting in the Cheesecake Factory. The twins, Lacey and Isabel, sent them a text. 'You are invited to our house for our birthday sleepover tomorrow at 5:15 PM. See you. '

When Abby and Lily arrived for the party, Mrs. Gonzalves informed them that the twins had been missing for the whole day after they had gone to the nearby convenience store in the morning. Abby and Lily looked at each other shocked. Something seemed fishy.

They rushed to the store where they found a note at the billing counter. They had a sense of foreboding creeping in. They followed the instructions on it which led them to a luxurious bungalow. They were panicky and searched everywhere, and finally spotted the twins behind the boxes in the attic. It was a prank! Abby and Lily began to plot their sweet revenge.

THE LOCKET

by Ananya Alope, 15 years old

It was a cold night. In my sleepy state, I went to the washroom and my eyes fell on a delicate golden locket. I was surprised and picked it up to examine it. A cool breeze passed over me even though the windows were closed. Something seemed fishy. Trembling with fear, I tried to open the door but couldn't. I called for help but no one came to my rescue. Cold sweat broke over me. Precisely at this moment, a voice reached me, "thi-i-ef!"

My heart was racing fast. Behind me, a woman in white dress was laughing noiselessly. I fell on the floor, crawling away. She kept saying, "Sweet thief. Darling!" Suddenly, she fell on me and slapped me hard. With a violent scream, I passed out. For two days, I was gripped by fever and delirium. In the meanwhile, all horror books had been thrown out of my bedroom. Six years have passed since then; she has not visited me again.

A NEW RIVAL

by Munirah Plumber

Something seemed fishy! She sat in the corner, hurt. His face glowed with happiness as he brought someone home. The new entrant looked plain and simple; whereas she was glamorous and sexy. Her rival's arrival pleased everyone else. He had once liked her good looks and had often complimented her. Now, she was forgotten; a dirty, dusty corner was all she had.

She saw him take her out every day, while she stayed in the house for days together. She was angry and decided she would not let any injustice happen to herself. She broke her heel in anger and frustration as she stomped off.

Then, she heard the old shoe beside her comment, "His wife is expecting their first child. The doctor has advised her to wear flat footwear. Calm down, it's just a matter of a year before he starts admiring you again!" The stiletto stood there, shocked!

THE WIDOW

by Shailaja Pai

As a proud widow of an army martyr, her sole purpose in life was to see her only son serve their motherland. He was to appear for the army selection process soon but seemed withdrawn and preoccupied these days. His grave demeanor made her uneasy. Something seemed fishy.

When she accidentally overheard a phone conversation, her world came crashing down. He was a part of a terrorist organization and they were planning something big soon. She confronted him, but despairingly realized that her pleas and tears wouldn't deter him. What could she do, she wondered? Inform the police? But that would mean tarnishing their patriotic family's reputation.

Few days later, on his 21st birthday, she fed him his favourite 'kheer', suppressing a torrent of emotions. She broke down and sobbed hysterically as he collapsed in her arms. She had done it. One mother's loss would save hundreds of others from bereavement.

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

by Anwee Mazumder

"Mukti must be up to something," Maya thought looking at the closed door. Something seemed fishy to her. Curious, she knocked. Mukti opened the door. Maya was about to question her daughter-in-law, but Mukti couldn't wait and ran to puke. Maya was thrilled. Was it really happening?

An elixir from the Shiva temple! Thank god, she forced Mukti to gulp it. It worked. Mukti finally conceived.

Tired, Mukti spread on the bed. Maya caressed her head. "How are you feeling?" she asked with sparkling eyes. "Nauseated. Dizzy. Stomach still churning," Mukti replied in a low voice. "Take good rest. Now you need extra care," Maya showed concern.

Mukti was stunned with this sudden change of behavior. "Yes, rest and an antacid will do," she added.

Maya almost screamed, "Antacid"?

"Yes, that's what you take for indigestion right? Too much junk food at the mall last night did it I guess," Mukti explained matter-of-factly.

Now it was Maya's turn to feel nauseated. Dizzy. Lost.

THE FRUIT STORY

by Kapil Popat

"This boy has great tantrums when it comes to eating", exclaimed the exasperated mother. Her sister tried empathising with her. "Here give me that orange, let me try while you take a break", she reassured.

The boy willingly sat down and completed his orange. Something seemed fishy to the mother who kept inquiring. "He did not get up even once!" the amazed mother exclaimed. She shared with her sister that at times the boy would stop eating and abruptly claim that the fruit is sour. "And then I eat the remaining. The fruit is just fine. It is as sweet and juicy as it can be", she claimed.

The sister tried engaging with the boy on this after a few days. "Why do you trouble your mom when you have fruit, little one?" she cajoled him to answer. "What can I do? That is the only way she eats something on her own", replied the innocent angel.

SUCKERED

by Shweta Singh

They always came running when they saw that I was going to serve their favorite food. It was really gratifying to see this. Their eagerness to eat brought a smile to my face. But today they didn't come to eat their food. I looked at them and they pretended that they hadn't seen me and went about their way.

Something seemed fishy; they had never done this before.

Upon close observation, I finally ascertained the reason. They had become cannibals. Yes, cannibals! They had eaten their friend - the 'Sucker-Fish'. My pair of Gold Fishes along with one Dollar Fish and ironically one Angle Fish had eaten their friend during the night.

The last I had seen, it had been cleaning the ornaments in the aquarium. In the morning, it had disappeared without a trace, apparently eaten by its own cannibalistic friends. Poor guy got suckered.

THE PERFECT DATE NIGHT

by Sangeeta Srivastava

A decade of being married and a stressed corporate job had taken a toll on their relationship. This year, they had decided to celebrate their anniversary in Goa. Perfect date night on the beach side, sand on her feet and wind in her hair set the mood right. She walked towards the sea and waited for him with bated breath. She could faintly hear him call her out.

She turned around longing to be swept off her feet but found him panting. Something seemed fishy. Just then he murmured, "She pooped and it has leaked. Can you help with the cleaning please?"

She rushed to her 3-year-old daughter – her new date for every night.

THE SMART PARENT

by Rinki Singh Mankotia

Something seemed fishy. My night owls had started hitting their beds at 9 PM itself.

Unbelievable! I almost patted my back for being a smart and convincing parent.

They've been pestering me for getting a pet. Being the pet hater that I was, I told them that if they walk it and bathe it every day and if they make sure that it doesn't get onto our beds, I would be okay with having one in the house. Such a brilliant idea to dissuade them! I was amazed with my talent because I knew my kids were lazy bums and wouldn't dare to take on this big responsibility.

I walked inside their rooms to wish them 'good night' when I caught them happily playing with their little pet. I was dumbstruck!

It wasn't just fishy, it was a real fish and I was certainly smart but not the smartest.

THE BEAUTIFUL GIFT

by Maneet Gulati Ahuja

"Brandon, stick to our yard while playing," hollered Melissa.

"Don't you wander anywhere near the Mayer's house."

It had been two months; the Mayer's hardly got out of their home. From an amicable couple to a reticent one, they had changed. The occasional wailing of a child did emanate from their house. On one or other instance, Melissa had knocked on their door, wanting to check if everything was alright. The response had been languid. Melissa had formidable hunches. Something seemed fishy.

One Tuesday morning, Brandon climbed over the fence to fetch his ball. Curiosity took over the better of him. He peeped through the window, which was surprisingly open. He ran, terrified.

"What's the matter, Brandon?"

"They have a tiny monster with a weird face"

The secret was out.

"A child is God's gift, beautiful even with a cleft lip. It is nothing to be ashamed of." assured Melissa hugging Mrs. Mayer.

THE TRESPASSERS

by Shikha Madan

Sam and John were busy playing with the toy aeroplane. John marvelled at his masterpiece, as it flew away to the neighbour's mansion. Both of them climbed the wall to see a burly figure.

"No trespassing," shouted the grumpy gardener Mr. Grey.

"Oh! Mr. Grey, we just need to search for our aeroplane."

"Sorry, I can't allow anyone inside the premises until the owner is back."

The clever kids jumped in, when the gardener went for dinner.

"Look, it is stuck in the balcony," said an elated John after a tiring search.

Sam shinned up the tree to reach the balcony. In between the curtains, he could notice the balcony room, messily scattered. Something seemed fishy.

He broke in through the window. There was an eerie silence. A pungent smell enveloped the air.

"Jo....hn!!!" screeched Sam at the top of his lungs. In the closet, lay John in a pool of blood.

THE FAILED PLAN

by Pooja Gupta

Finally, the moment she had been eagerly waiting for had arrived. Neha was doubtful about whether the kids had slept, so she proceeded quietly towards their room. As she found them fast asleep, she heaved a sigh of relief. But, what about Manish? What if he was awake, she wondered? Fortunately, the whole family had hit the sack. She was completely alone now. She walked ahead. Though she was happy, she felt a tad bit guilty too. But her selfishness had overpowered her other emotions. Neha was about to accomplish her mission, when she saw Manish standing right in front of her. She was scared to death.

"Neha, I can't believe this. Though, something seemed fishy to me but I wasn't sure. You can't do this to me"

After a pause, they both burst into laughter.

Neha's plan was foiled. She wasn't happy sharing the plate of Maggi with Manish.

THE SWADDLE

by Khushboo Tanna

There was a knock at the window when my car stopped at a traffic signal. It was a lady in tattered clothes. She was carrying a sleeping baby in a dirty cloth wrapped around her body. She showed me the baby's empty milk bottle and asked for some alms. Something seemed fishy because the baby should have been crying out of starvation instead of sleeping peacefully.

The lady had a veil to protect herself from the scorching sun, but the motionless, half naked baby was carelessly dangling from her wrap. She was nobody's mother. I took her picture with the baby and circulated it in all the nearby police stations and our social circle. A month later, I came across a column in the newspaper that flashed the news about a human trafficking racket being busted. I could picture a teary-eyed mother, safely taking her baby home, away from the realm of monsters.

NO FISH FOR TOM

by Sonal Singh

"Sniff! Sniff!"

6 year old Tom sniffed the air appreciatively. Wow! It smelt like fish.

"Yum! Yum! My favourite," he thought smacking his lips in anticipation.

It was nearing lunch time and Tom could not wait to dig into the scrumptious fish.

"Oh Mom, thank you," he thought happily. His stomach growled on cue.

The tantalizing scent of Fish permeated the house. Tom's heart did a happy purr. He loved Mom but on days that she cooked fish, he loved her more. Jauntily, he pushed open the kitchen door and peeked in. Something seemed fishy. There was neither Mom nor fish in the kitchen. Tom was bewildered.

"Tom! Oh Tom! Come here my baby. See this huge aquarium Daddy just bought us," called Mom, excitedly. "It has so many fishes in it," she added.

Poor Tom!

"Meow! Meow!" meowed Tom, looking up at Mom as he mournfully swished his tail.

CONVERSATIONS

by Smitha N. Kini

The mind shrieked in frustration, "Why aren't things going the right way or happening the way they should?"

The heart murmured, "Shhhh! Don't panic. Allow everything to happen. In due course of time, all will be fine."

The mind argued back, "How can you say that? I eavesdropped on their conversation. Something seemed fishy! You have been perfect always but now they say you are not."

The heart spoke with a smile, "Anything ain't fishy! Accept what is!"

The mind cried, "No, I won't. We have been together for so long and now I can see everything slipping away."

The heart retorted, "Do not lose hope, my friend. I strongly believe they will replace me soon so that the rest of you can live."

The mind sobbed, "But, you wouldn't be there. We'll miss you! I now realise why people trust your instincts. I now know why they love you!!"

THE SAFE HAVEN

by Sheetal Ashpalia

Something seemed fishy, she thought seeing them again. The boy and girl always stayed away from all social gatherings, refusing to mingle. They discouraged any personal questions and not much was known about them.

She entered the government aided hospital that she visited once a month. It was a busy morning and the nurse sent the next patient in. As she looked up, she was shocked to see them both again, the girl walking in pain, supported by the boy. The doctor took over and she looked at the reports. 'HIV positive' they read. No wonder! She had seen them hail a cab on several mornings. And she now understood their need for secrecy. Society would never let such patients live in peace, in dignity. The boy had given her all that and more, she could gather. He had created a safe haven for her with his love and unconditional support.

THE SURPRISE

by Natasha Sequeira

The dowager pondered in her rocking chair;
With wrinkled eyes, tattered bun hardly there.
She missed her children,
Both son and daughter.
She missed her grandkids' play and laughter!
Both children had settled in faraway lands,
Leaving her with ample time on her hands.
She lived for the moment when they would call home,
And view their grand babies via Skype on the phone.
Oh! How she wished she had the will to relocate,
To stay in those strange lands, leaving her ancestral home to its fate!
Alas, she was a strong woman and chose to abide alone.
It's just that off late both children had neglected to call home.
Something seemed fishy, though she couldn't fathom what.
She got her answer when one morning, on her door there was a knock.
"Happy Birthday, Mama Dearest."
Fulfilled was her birthday wish which was to celebrate with those nearest!

Contact information:

For queries, feedback and subscription requests, kindly reach out to us at
beyondthebox2019@gmail.com

Our Official Facebook Page: <http://www.facebook.com/beyondthebox2019>

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