

Interactive Novel Writing Contest
BRANCH 3
(Fantasy - Alternate World)

PROMPT 1

Charu was informed her grandmother was seriously ill. It has been six months since Charu started her studies at NYU Law School, which she had joined amidst many refusals and objections.

She took the immediate next flight from New York to her native place Fort Kochi and landed at Cochin International Airport.

Charu never liked her life at Fort Kochi. The old home, the ancient traditions and the old lifestyle. She lost her mother when she was 12 and it was her grandmother who raised her. Her father, Mr. Mani Oomen, was a carpet exporter. He has two stores at Fort Kochi and one at Ernakulam. When Charu disclosed her interest to study law, he refused her decision outright. And now she is going back to the same place. Her mind was full of thoughts and she was in no mood to think about anything else except her return date from India.

From the airport, she took a self-driven taxi and drove to Fort Kochi, 20 k.m. away from the airport. It was 7 p.m. and the lights were all lit. She directly went to her grandmother's room and saw her, there were many machines attached to her. There was a nurse beside grandmother's bed. Charu went to her room and slept soon, as she was exhausted.

The next morning, she took a stroll to David Hall Road. The weather was breezy and the birds were chirping good. On David Hall Road, she saw the library open. There was a book store attached to the library.

'Old books for sale. Rs. 250 per KG,' a board declared before the gate. She grinned. An avid reader that she was and since had nothing to do, she went inside the store. She picked seven books, paid for them at the counter and headed home.

The maid gave her a cup of coffee. Sipping her coffee, she started checking the books. The fifth book's cover intrigued her. It was a beautiful abstract painting of a woman with no eyes but had tears, nose and lips.

She skimmed through the pages. At page 67 there was a polaroid photograph of an old villa. She took out the photo and examined it. On its backside there was an alpha-numeric code written with a small map that showed directions to the villa. The code read: MV02FK09. The map had a starting point at 'Hotel AB***' and extended till the villa. The end point was a drawing of the villa that read 'Home.'

The photograph created a bug in Charu's mind. She was thrilled.

Please pick up any question to write your story.

1. Who is Sheryl Varghese?
2. Does she know about this photograph?
3. Will she be able to crack the code?
4. Could she be still alive?

PROMPT 2

There was a swirl of thoughts going around in Charu's mind – the sword, Sheryl wishing for a mountain and more importantly her being the spitting image of Sheryl. She wanted to find out more and thus went back to Uncle Vincent's house but she was in for disappointment. Ruth, the son of the caretaker Martha, told her that Uncle Vincent has left suddenly for Egypt.

Charu was surprised as he did not tell her anything about going to Egypt when she last met him. She then asked for his contact details in Egypt and it was in for Ruth to be surprised now at the urgency of Charu to meet Uncle Vincent. He asked Charu to take a seat and went in to call his mother Martha.

The moment Martha came in and saw Charu, she started shrieking. She called Charu as "Sherry" again and again and fainted. A frightened Charu rushed back home with more questions than answers in her mind.

Questions:

1. Why did Martha shriek hysterically when she saw Charu?
2. What if Vincent Uncle did not go to Egypt?
3. What if the sword vanished from the museum?

PROMPT 3

Recap:

*Charu comes to India from New York to visit her ailing grandmother. She buys some books. In one book, on page 67 there is a polaroid photograph of an old villa. On its backside there is an alpha-numeric code written with a small map that showed directions to the villa. The code read: MV02FK09. The map had a starting point at 'Hotel AB***' and extended till the villa. The end point was a drawing of the villa that read 'Home.'*

In her sleep, she hears voices calling her as Sheryl. She asks the 85-year-old Vincent Uncle who tells that Sheryl Verghese had wanted to have a mountain named after her maiden family name. Her husband Anthony Delsworth could not do that, so he built a magnificent hotel and named it Mount Verghese. Their descendants sold the hotel. It was converted to a mall called The City Mall. The destination called Home on the map is now a museum. In the museum, Charu reads a book in which there is a chapter titled Hotel Mount Verghese. The details shake her up. Charu realises she is a dead ringer for Sheryl Varghese. In one photo, in Anthony's hand there is a sword on which it was engraved MV02FK09. She then heard the voice again in her head 'Welcome Home, Sheryl Verghese.'

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Rules:

- Please use the story [The Journey Within](#) as the base and take the story forward.
- Other rules as given for previous prompt.

About grandmother

Charu's grandmother, suffering from multiple-organ disorders expired. Mani Oomen, Charu, close relatives and family friends bid farewell to grand mother with prayers and fond remembrances. The visit to India was for grandmother, but then the eternal question of identity: *Who am I* is a deeply philosophical and significant question to all humanity. After the rite of passage, Charu got back to her quest in due earnest.

PROMPT 4

Base story: *The Mystery of Hotel Mount Verghese - Part 2* by Ketaki Bakshi

URL:

<https://storymirror.com/read/english/story/the-mystery-of-hotel-mount-verghese-part-2/5hkf45z0>

Base Story Summary & Prompt

Charu reads about a robbery of a sword which once belonged to Verghese. Inspector Abhay was investigating the case and he happened to be her good friend during her law practice, before her departure to New York. Charu meets Abhay and they lay out all the details in front of them.

The sword was of Egyptian origin; precisely it was called 'Khopesh'. It was in use till the 3rd millennium BC. It had a very peculiar shape; curved outside, it looked like a question mark. It was adorned with a very distinctive symbol on the handle; a hooded cobra, with 8 beautiful jewels encircling it.

They both study the map of Fort Kochi- it had a huge labyrinth on one side and the other side had a huge lake with its placid blue water. Rumours had it that one lady was murdered and it was her soul that kept the area haunted. A sudden chill rose through Charu's spine. These details were fed to her by Uncle Vincent.....!!!!

When the plumber is called by Ruth to unclog their washroom, Ruth's mother Martha says strange words:

'Lake... brought in...the tomb...with serpent'

'They don't know...water has memory...Mother Nature won't forgive...'

'...you all will pay...! Sword vanished...did it not?'

They decide to visit the museum again.

The curator had shown them the case which was locked with the sword. The case too had the symbol of a hooded cobra and was extremely beautiful. Inside was a small pyramid, shining bright with breath-taking aesthetics.

Keeping it in the pocket, Charu and Abhay left to find the city mall and reached UG4, which led them to a dark hidden corridor with a secret kitchen.

In the kitchen, behind one of the unassuming racks, they discover a hidden dark corridor, at the end stood a very peculiar door, which had a hooded cobra engraved over it and the place above its hood was vacant. She took the small ivory-made pyramid from him and pressed it in the groove. The door opened with a loud Crack...!

Suddenly Charu's gaze fell over a half-finished idol of a lady. It looked vaguely familiar. It seemed exactly similar to the cover page of the book she had read. An idol of a lady without eyes.

Behind the idol, was a partially visible safe, which had the same marking of a hooded cobra on it. It was a neatly rolled Papyrus. It read...

'Listen to what Mother Nature says...Water always makes ways...follow the opposite of right and the sun God makes the hidden world shine bright...!'

Questions:

1. What does the clue mean?
2. What all are there in the lake?

About Yuvaan

Yuvaan is Charu's childhood friend who had stood with her through thick and thin. Though they grew adrift recently focusing on developing their individual careers, she knew in her heart that he was someone who truly understood her mind, her impulses, and her ambition. He was the son of a local corporator around Fort Kochi and had an inherent street smartness about him. He knew the right people at the right places. The perfect man for the job in hand.

PROMPT 5

Base story: *Vanished Into Thin Air... Or Water!* by Vikram Patwari

URL:

<https://storymirror.com/read/english/story/vanished-into-thin-air-or-water/q344oyui>

Base Story Summary:

- Solving the clue about water and going opposite of right, Charu and Abhay decide to explore the lake along with Yuvaan.
- Abhay is attracted to Charu and he is jealous of Yuvaan's closeness with Charu. She desperately tried to hide her smile as she sensed a slight sense of jealousy in Abhay's questioning and demeanour. Did somehow, somewhere, some seed of romance start to germinate in their exciting adventure so far? Anyways, how far would romantic interludes fit in their enigmatic, action filled endeavours, she wasn't sure.
- In City Mall, Vincent is aware of all the developments made by Charu. He says that he will let them explore the way until very end and then snatch the prize at the end. The Boss grins wickedly.
- Three days later, Charu, Abhay and Yuvaan set out on a boat and all the gears to explore the lake. After an unsuccessful attempt, they reach a more secluded area of the lake which is densely covered.
- Charu and Yuvaan both put on their suits, equipment, gave a thumbs up sign to Abhay and dived into the 'shining bright' part of the lake. They go into the water with diving gear. After 40 mins, as Abhay is getting worried about them, Yuvaan surfaces.
- Yuvaan informs Abhay that Charu went missing. Yuvaan said, "She was right in front of me, but mysteriously vanished into thin air... or water."
- Abhay starts blaming Yuvaan that he is responsible for Charu's disappearance. Yuvaan explains that he was not, but Abhay is not convinced.

(Please do not repeat the base story in your submission).

Prompt Questions.

1. What caused Charu to disappear in the lake? Is Yuvaan telling the truth that he doesn't know how Charu disappeared?
2. Why is the lake important? What role does it play in the story?

PROMPT 6

Base story: *Startling Revelations & Strange Creatures* by Vikram Patwari (branch 1)

<https://storymirror.com/read/story/english/zoalgzfo/startling-revelations-strange-creatures/detail>

- Charu got sucked by a luminous object in the lake. Yuvaan could not trace her, he returned to the surface.
- In the new place, Charu saw a lot of people, many in multiples.
- Charu pleaded that she wants to see the creatures in their actual forms. They turned into random smoky, jelly-like shapes. To the voice in her ahead, Charu asked to take the form of the Museum Executive and it does.
- The Museum-Executive-form leader connected Charu to Abhay on the phone and Charu explained her situation. Both Abhay and Yuvaan reached the strange world.
- The creatures are Mermitans from the planet Antrina which has two races: the Mermitans, who live in water and the Zygotas, who live on land.
- Goddess Athena of the Mermitans had reincarnated as Sheryl Verghese on earth, brought a pound of minerals from her planet and had acquired the divine sword 'Khopesh' from Egypt. Using the sword, she had created a divine gateway between Earth and planet Antrina. She had summoned her race members to earth.
- After they finished their purpose, Sheryl had wanted to send them back, but the mound which had the gateway collapsed. Sheryl was not aware that she had lost her powers after marriage. And then she died, said the leader.
- Sheryl was reborn as Charu, who can help the creatures go back to their planet.
- One of the Mermitans transformed into the shape of an extremely beautiful lady. The face reminded Charu of something vaguely familiar in recent times; 'The Abstract painting of the woman on the cover of the book', 'The half-finished idol in the kitchen in UG4'.

Note: Please read all previous branch 1 prompts to maintain continuity.

Questions

1. Who is the beautiful lady in the painting on the book cover?
2. Is Vincent a Zygotas? How is Martha connected to the Zygotas?

PROMPT 7

Base story: *King Zygote & King Mermitan - Game On* by Vikram Patwari

- King Mermitan shows Charu a lady and tells her mother looked like the lady. Then, he explains Charu's past: Sheryl Verghese's husband, Anthony Delsworth, had amassed wealth. Anthony's brother killed Anthony and Sheryl, but in her dying moments, Sheryl had transferred Charu to the Oomens, who raised Charu as their own child.
- King Mermitan discloses why the Zygotes did not communicate with Charu all these years. Sheryl had married and lost her powers when she was 25, so they waited until she was 25. They were the reason behind the voices she has been hearing.
- He also says: 'Not only the voices in your head. The bookstall, the book, the pic of the villa, the Museum, the book in the Museum, the half-finished idol, the papyrus; All these were clue points created by the Zygotes and us parallelly.' In fact, the book that Charu had picked up at the book story was a Zygote.
- The Zygotes would trace the missing sword: either a human or a Zygote has stolen it. Only one, either the Mermitans or the Zygotes, can go back to their world. King Mermitan is the only Mermitan who can survive on land and water.
- King Mermitan gives Charu an illuminating object through which he will be communicating with her. Picking it up, she, Yuvaan and Abhay reach the surface of the lake.
- Yuvaan took the motorboat's control and rode towards the starting point. After reaching there, Yuvaan tells them he will return the boat and the equipment and asks Charu / Abhay to carry on.
- One of the scuba suits that they wore transforms into a cloud out of which King Zygote appears. He and the trio visited the kingdom down the water, understood the situation and explains the same to fellow Zygotes.
- It will be the mound that Charu in Sheryl's form will plunge the sword into, which will decide which race will go back to their world.
- A Zygote turns into a big glass cabin; Martha and Ruth are enclosed in it. Martha pleads for freedom when shouting that she has been serving Vincent, but why does King Zygote say she served himself? King Zygote replies Vincent died a long ago and was in Vincent's form all this time.
- Listening to this, Martha collapses and King Zygote orders other Zygotes to take the forms of Martha and Ruth, reach their home and wait for Charu.

[Note: Please read all previous branch 3 prompts to maintain continuity].

Questions

1. What if, overwhelmed by the discourse of reincarnation and the two races competing to return to their world, Charu decides to give up her quest and not get involved in the whole saga?
2. What if the sword is stolen from the Zygotes?

PROMPT 8

Charu for a reason asked her father Mani Oomen if she is his daughter. Though surprised, Oomen calms down Charu without replying. Back in her mind, the ancestry story that the Mermitans told Charu is found with some loose ends that did not make sense.

Charu then had some strange thoughts and having emotions being the prominent one. Her thoughts of being a pampered daughter if her mother was alive made her drool in her mind. The very memory of her mother saying that she is a gift of God but was not born from the womb oiled her thoughts. In another incident, when Charu knew that her DNA doesn't match with that of Mani Oomen's the present incidents made her forcibly stay back and fulfil the responsibility.

She posed the same to Goddess Athena to which Athena informed about the existence of planet Antrina. Charu understood that the two races of planet Antrina lost their ability to have emotions snatched by an evil eclipse. Earth plants emotions to them.

The goddess also told Charu that only one of the races has the power to absorb emotions and Charu has to find the right race who can absorb emotions and send them back to their planet.

Something unexpected started a whirlwind in Charu's mind.

Questions:

1. What does the code MV02FK09 mean?
2. Did Goddess Athena already plan Charu's choice?

PROMPT 9

The beautiful lady in the painting on the book cover is abstract art that resembles Sheryl and Charu. The book was left by the planetary races so that Charu would meet them. It is not in a physical form that regular people can see and pick it up. That's where the quest had started.

Goddess Athena of the Mermitans had reincarnated as Sheryl Verghese on earth. She has only one chance to reincarnate as a human. Unaware about losing the powers, Sheryl married Anthony Delsworth, a human.

Anthony's brother and Uncle Vincent were planning to acquire the sword by any means to use it for evil purposes. When a drift between Sheryl, Vincent and Anthony's brother ignited, before Sheryl was killed and that she knew she has no powers left, Charu was given away to the Oomens.

Goddess Athena, who is still in her original form in the planet Antrina, keeps communicating with Charu through her mind after Sheryl's death. This is how Charu is also in a way being controlled.

Though Sheryl lost the powers, her DNA is not human like as she is from planet Antrina. Charu acquired the same non-human DNA. The DNA specialist also confirms the same during the DNA test, that which Charu got it done to validate herself.

Meanwhile, the original Martha and Ruth who are captured by the Zygotes are still arrested in the cabins. The Zygotes who took the form of Martha and Ruth, living in their house are waiting for Charu's decision to send back them to their planet. This is why they do no harm to Charu.

After knowing that she is not a human and wanting to check the cave where the code is engraved, Charu meets Ruth and asks him to accompany her to the cave. Once she sees the code and tries to analyse, the eclipse happens. After the passing of the eclipse, she sees Ruth taking the form of a Zygote. A shocking Charu then understands that Ruth is in captive.

Charu recollects what the Mermitan told about the Zygotes, that they lived near the ancient cave at Mount Varghese. Goddess Athena's prompting is also heard inside Charu's mind. Charu tries to enquire about the caves with her father Mani Oomen. But then again, her actuality keeps poking her mind. If not Oomen's, whose bloodline does she share with?

She accidentally sees a DNA specialist doctor's clinic and heads for a DNA test. She gets muffled when the DNA specialist informs that her DNA is not like the normal humans and in turn, asks who actually Charu is? Even her DNA code did not help her.

She goes to visit the Katipalla caves, mesmerised by the beauty of the cravings inside she looks around and finds the code engraved as Sheryl Code MV02FK09.

02 & 09 denote the date when the cursed eclipse will move away for a short period from planet Antrina and move towards its neighbouring planet - Mars. It wasn't long before that it reached Earth as well. That's solely why the goddess got it engraved in the sword to suggest the opportune time to open the gateway. A time when the planet Antrina will be free from the evil gaze of the eclipse and the selected race can successfully return safely.

Abhay could not attend Charu's grandmother's funeral due to the heavy workload pressure. He wanted to meet her in person when he got some free time and wanted to console her and offer his condolences. Not only this, he wanted to express his feelings to Charu.

It was Yuvaan who had seen the scuba suit along with Charu. Abhay hadn't seen it and was still under the impression that Charu is human. On the other hand, a question triggered in Yuvaan's mind: Who is Charu?

Yuvaan had a plan. After bidding goodbye to Charu & Abhay at the lake, he decided to dig out facts about Charu. As the son of a corporator, he had access to anything in the city. He reaches the museum and goes into the archive section that is not accessible to common people. The archive section is highly disorganized and Yuvaan had to scour through registers, files and even loose papers tied together with rubber bands. Undaunted, Yuvaan visited the museum for a few days and then he came across an archive text. It explained the code that Sheryl wrote in her diary and enlightened Yuvaan that Charu is not human. He was surprised but then headed out to meet Charu to reveal this info.

The Zygotes in the cave surprise Charu with their entry. King Zygote reveals that he is aware of the code inscribed here. As they talk to each other, both worry about their roots and existence. With a confused mindset and no clarity in her mind, she moves out of the cave. Did her mind give a clue that Zygotes are the right heir to go to the planet? Nevertheless, she walks away.

She sees both Abhay and Yuvaan outside the cave, walking towards her.

Questions:

1. Was Goddess Athena planning to take Zygotes to the planet? Is Charu deliberately pretending that she doesn't know that Zygotes can emote?
2. Is Charu really not a human? If not, is she a Zygote or Mermitan? She has emotions. Are her emotions played by someone else?