

**Interactive Novel Writing Contest**  
**BRANCH 1**  
**(Social mystery with romance)**

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**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.

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Questions:

- Why did Martha shriek hysterically when she saw Charu?
- What if Vincent Uncle did not go to Egypt?
- 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.'*

*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.*

Rules:

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

## 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. Rumors 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 breathtaking 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 demeanor. 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 endeavors, 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: *The cottage by Kutta Lake* by Revathi Bhasker

<https://storymirror.com/read/english/story/the-cottage-by-kutta-lake/3ar5olet>

- Charu found herself in front of a white building that looked like a huge whale and peeped through its windows.
- The inside looked like a den plus lab with heavy activity going on. Supervisors were dressed in white and workers in blue and going about like zombies, as if they were under the influence of drugs. She could not make out exactly what they were mining but they looked like precious gems.
- Through another window she saw the infamous Mafia boss who was in the news, released from the jail a week ago!
- She checked her oxygen and went for the surface of the lake. As she ascended she realised that she was on the left bank of the lake, a thought flashed in her mind – may be this is the “opposite of right” which was mentioned in the clue.
- Yuvaan and Abhay found her with the help of the rescue team in no time.
- On the motor boat with Abhay and Yuvaan, Charu told all that she saw under the lake. All of a sudden, another boat appeared from seemingly nowhere and hit the side where Charu was. A strong hand tried to pull Charu away but she landed a quick punch on the assailant who rolled back in pain and had to let go of her.
- Abhay, quick on the uptake, got his team to chase the boat and nab all those in it.
- Charu and Yuvaan joined Abhay to see the men lined up for identification. When Charu saw the last man in the line, her jaw dropped. ‘Oh my God! How can you be one of them?’ she exclaimed. Abhay and Yuvaan too were shocked to see him.

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

### Questions

1. Who was the last man in the line and why were they shocked to see him?
2. While bigger forces are at play, how does jealous Abhay manipulate the situation to his benefit to win over Charu's heart?

## PROMPT 7

The last man in the line is Ruth, the son of Martha, who tried to kidnap Charu on the orders of the mafia boss.

Abhay accuses Yuvaan that he is responsible for Charu's disappearance in the lake and he informed Ruth about their whereabouts. Ruth keeps looking at Yuvaan during the interrogation adding fuel to Abhay's allegations.

Charu, however, refuses to believe that Yuvaan is involved in the conspiracy. But Abhay is hellbent on convincing her that Yuvaan has definitely a part to play in all events leading to the underworld mafia don in a strange way. So Yuvaan is arrested for further investigation.

The cold rivalry between Yuvaan and Abhay now shapes into open war. Charu is isolated with his best friend arrested and is most vulnerable at this point. She feels like abandoning her quest and going back to New York.

After he reaches home, Abhay removes the sword "Khopesh" from his vault and grins lopsidedly.

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

Questions

1. What activity is happening in the submarine den under the lake?
2. Why does the mafia boss want the sword? What is the connection of the sword to the underground operations in the den?



## PROMPT 8

Ruth, who tries to kidnap Charu, is the right hand of the mafia boss. He had kidnapped Uncle Vincent and kept him in the underwater den in a cell because Uncle Vincent found out Ruth's connection to the Mafia Boss and his underworld dealings. He had lied to Charu that Uncle Vincent has gone to Egypt.

In the submarine den under the lake, drug manufacturing is going on. The mafia is growing a special type of aquatic plant which produces hallucinations and illusions. If used in the right quantity and mixed with other elements, it could be used as a mind-control drug. What appeared to be mining to Charu was actually extracting the pulp from the thin stem/tendrils of this aquatic plant. Workers in blue uniforms were induced with drugs to perform their duties without asking questions and supervised by those dressed in white, the don's trusted personnel.

The don wants Khopesh (sword) desperately. He had found with great difficulty from the original owner that the drug-making formula is hidden in a vault. The key to open the vault is the code engraved on the blade of the Khopesh that is like a QR code when inserted into the slot on the tip.

In the meantime, the tussle between Yuvaan and Abhay intensifies. Both are at loggerheads to destroy each other. Charu is sandwiched between the two. She finds the truth about Abhay who has replaced the sword in the museum with a fake one and that he is about to strike a deal with the mafia don for a handsome amount of money.

*Note – this is a social mystery / crime-based thriller with a romance angle and if you are attempting this branch, be careful not to include any sci-fi or fantasy elements. You can attempt a different question/course in the other two branches.*

Questions:

1. Finding the truth about Abhay, how does Charu stop the deal, retrieve the sword from him, and free Yuvaan?
2. Who is the Mafia Boss and what is his connection with Charu?

## About grandmother

[Ref: The Mystery by Ranjani Ramesh -

<https://storymirror.com/read/english/story/the-mystery/jekbp7vd>]

Charu's connection with her grandmother was deep-rooted. Charu couldn't forget the care and love with which she was brought up by her grandmother. The huge loss of her mother was more than ably filled by her dearest grandmother.

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Neck-deep in her quest to solve the mystery triggered by the code and sword, Charu had a welcome development. Her grandmother who was seriously ill slowly recovered. Though she still needed medical attention, doctors suggested that she was out of danger and her health is stable. This was very encouraging news to Charu.

## PROMPT 9

Sheryl had tried to separate from her evil and greedy husband, Anthony Delsworth. She was in love with Oomen, one of her estate's trusted servants, and wanted to start a new life with him. But Anthony Delsworth refused to divorce her and did not allow her to start a new life with Oomen.

Charu is the illegitimate daughter of Sheryl and Oomen. Anthony constantly tortured Sheryl, a biotechnologist, to hand over to him her life research of the invention of a complex mind control drug. To protect Charu from Anthony Delsworth and her life research, Sheryl sent her daughter far away with Oomen. Anthony Delsworth in his desperate attempts to retrieve what Sheryl has been hiding from him continued to torture Sheryl.

With Charu sent away and having no leverage over Sheryl, Anthony in his desperate attempts to retrieve the formula from Sheryl murdered her and was sentenced for life. With Anthony locked up in jail, Mani Oomen returned to Fort Kochi with Charu and kept her away from anything and everything that had any trace of Sheryl. Man had the good intention of protecting her until present day when he was confronted by Charu and had to reveal the truth about her mother Sheryl.

Sheryl used to take Charu with her to the library when she was five years old. She knew one day her daughter would come back to the library, she believed that memories are only suppressed, they never go away really. Thus, she left a clue in her favourite unconventional story book titled "Ceto's tears" the cover page of which is a painting of a woman with no eyes for her daughter knowing she would find the book one day.

And when Charu finds the book and the code, she sets forth a chain of action leading her to Hotel "Mount Verghese" which in turn was converted into a Mall, the old villa in the polaroid photograph converted now as "Fort Kochi Musuem" unearthing the clues and leading her to the Khopesh with the code "MV02FK09" engraved on it. Once she knew about her past, she understood what the code meant in the truest sense. The code was not only the key to open the vault but also a simple clue left by her mother; the alphabets representing the places and the numbers representing the floor/sections.

MV - Mount Verghese. 02 - Level 2 (basement where the sword was kept). FK - Fort Kochi. 09 - Section 9 ('Fort Kochi - Archives' section which has the book on the history of Verghese family titled, 'The Rich and Affluent from Fort Kochi's past').

The name of the notorious mafia boss is Darana. The grapevine was that his full name was Daniel Rashid Nagaratnam. But police records had noted he confessed that his family used to call him Daniel or Danny.

Using her connections, Charu gets Yuvaan out of custody on bail. Yuvaan and Charu install spyware in Abhay's mobile tracking his every moment.

While Yuvaan and Charu are becoming more vocal about their feelings for each other, Abhay is mad with jealousy. On the other hand, the deal with Darana is put on hold. Nothing is going right as per Abhay's plan. He decides to hide the Khopesh in a pit under some tree for the time being until he is back negotiating a deal with Darana.

Charu and Yuvaan retrieve the sword as they are following Abhay's every move. They celebrate their first success with a passionate kiss. Yuvaan promises Charu that he will keep her safe and love her forever.

Ruth who could easily come out of jail, thanks to Abhay, happens to watch Charu and Yuvaan laying their hands on the sword and professing their love. He duly informs this to Abhay, who together with Ruth, hatches a plan to kill Charu and Yuvaan.

*Note – this is a social mystery / crime-based thriller with a romance angle and if you are attempting this branch, be careful not to include any sci-fi or fantasy elements. You can attempt a different question/course in the other two branches.*

Questions:

1. What is Darana's connection with Charu, Sheryl and Anthony Delsworth?
2. Possessing the key to the vault, what will be Charu's next step?