



CHAPTER SAMPLER

# CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR

MAHTAB NARSIMHAN

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**Summary:** In this high-interest accessible novel for teen readers, a lonely teen stumbles onto a website that makes wishes come true.

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*For my squad:*

*Deborah, Frieda, Helaine and Karen*

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## Chapter One

Eshana stared at the computer screen. The words in front of her made no sense. Her mind was back at school. Why hadn't she tied her shoelace? Of course Cara captured her face-plant in the lunchroom with her phone.

Eshana knew this wasn't over. Cara would use this to embarrass her.

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"*I wish* I'd been more careful," said Eshana to herself. "*I wish* I could have today to do over."

Without realizing it, she'd typed the words *I wish* in the search bar. A link to a website called *I-WISH* was at the top of the list of hits. An animated wizard next to the link smiled. He looked harmless, but did she dare enter this website? It was a bad idea to join unknown websites. Anything could happen. The last thing she needed was for her computer to get hacked. Or destroyed by a virus.

Eshana closed the browser and went back to her math homework. She loved math. Numbers did not act weird. They behaved as they should. Not like people. Sometimes

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they said they were your friend. But acted like your enemy.

All the things that had gone wrong that day played over and over in her head. “I wish—” she started to say and then opened the browser again. This time she did not hesitate. She clicked on the link.

The website layout looked like fairyland. Eshana smiled. It reminded her of the books she used to read when she was much younger. She’d had enough of tenth grade and of jerks like Cara. She needed fun and simple. This was perfect.

A wishing well stood in the center of the home page. Words floated out of it, stayed on the screen for a few seconds, then vanished.

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*Welcome, one and all! This is a safe place.  
Look around, explore and make friends. Enjoy!*

A castle nestled in a forest. The pathway was lit by fairy lights. Tree trunks had little doorways. In another corner was an inn called The Red Rabbit. A waterfall shimmered at the bottom right of the screen. As Eshana moved her cursor, messages appeared. *Knock Here, Enter Here* and, the best one, *Make a Wish*.

To the right of the screen there was a chat bar. She saw names like Black Kitten, Ghost Who Walks and Beetle King. One of them made her smile. It was her favorite afternoon snack, Tea & Toast. The avatar was a piece of toast.

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It all seemed friendly and harmless. But her computer science teacher had warned her about websites designed to lure you in. This was probably the kind of thing she meant.

Her phone pinged. Eshana's best friend, Pia, had forwarded her a video clip. It was Eshana face-planting in slow motion.

*Cara is sending this to everyone. What a loser. Let's start planning our revenge.*

I hate her.

After replying, Eshana dropped the phone on her bed. Cara was the worst. And Eshana was her latest victim. *Everyone* would see the meme. Her life would suck even more.

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A box popped up in the middle of the computer screen. It was asking her to fill in a name and upload a picture. Eshana typed in *Raven*, leaving the picture blank. It was Pia's name for her because of her black hair. Who knew what would happen next? Anything was better than thinking about her crappy day.

She started a private chat with Tea & Toast.

Hi, Tea & Toast. Cool name! I'm Raven.

*Hey, Raven! Thanks. Call me T&T.*

What's the deal here? Is it legit?

*It's fun. But I don't hang out long.*

Have you made any wishes yet? I have a gazillion.

*Go slow. Look around first.*

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Eshana was feeling reckless. The fact that no one could see her felt awesome. She could be whomever she wanted.

**Nah! Don't know slow. Who runs this chat room?**

Before T&T could reply, a wizard avatar joined their chat.

*Welcome to my website, Raven! If you have any wishes, you're in the right place!*

**Dude, private chat! Who're you?**

*Call me Wise One. I'm your guide within I-WISH. How can I help you?*

Now things were getting interesting.

**EVERY WISH  
HAS A COST.**

Eshana is a bit of a social misfit. She feels more comfortable talking to people online than in person. One day she discovers a website that claims to make users' dreams come true. Eshana starts talking with someone called Wise One on the site and admits to them how hard it is to make friends. So she is very surprised the next day at school when suddenly everyone wants to talk to her. But then, after telling Wise One about a girl who has been bullying her, something terrible happens. Are Eshana's wishes really coming true? Is it worth the cost?

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