

CHAPTER SAMPLER

# Genie Meanie

Mahtab  
Narsimhan



illustrated by  
Michelle Simpson

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Published in Canada and the United States in 2021 by Orca Book Publishers.  
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## Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Genie meanie / Mahtab Narsimhan ; illustrated by Michelle Simpson.  
Names: Narsimhan, Mahtab, author. | Simpson, Michelle (Illustrator), illustrator.  
Series: Orca echoes.

Description: Series statement: Orca echoes

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20200182250 | Canadiana (ebook) 20200182285 |  
ISBN 9781459823983 (softcover) | ISBN 9781459823990 (PDF) | ISBN 9781459824003 (EPUB)  
Classification: LCC PS8627.A77 G46 2021 | DDC jc813/.6—dc23

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020931805

**Summary:** In this partially illustrated chapter book, an eight-year-old girl confronts a bully with the help of a genie she discovers has been living in a spice bottle her grandmother left her.

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Orca Book Publishers gratefully acknowledges the support for its publishing programs provided by the following agencies: the Government of Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts and the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council and the Book Publishing Tax Credit.

Cover artwork and interior illustrations by Michelle Simpson  
Author photo by Dean Macdonnell of Macdonnell Photography  
Edited by Liz Kemp

Printed and bound in Canada.

24 23 22 21 • 1 2 3 4

# CHAPTER SAMPLER

*For Rahul and Aftab.*

# CHAPTER SAMPLER



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### *Chapter One*

I missed Gran so much, it was like having a stomachache that wouldn't quit. No one could fill the hole in my heart that she'd left when she died. Not Grandpa, who was visiting from India, and not my parents or my best friend, Bai Leng. Grandpa had brought a box of treasures Gran wanted me to have, but this made me miss her even more.

Gran was the only one who'd understood that school was tough. Kids could

## CHAPTER SAMPLER

be super mean. She'd encouraged me to stand up for myself if anyone tried to bully me. *Never give up trying to do the right thing, no matter how hard it is*, she would say. *But try not to hurt anyone either*. How was I going to face another year of school without her?

I frowned at the odds and ends I'd tipped out of the box onto my bed. Why had Gran left these things for me? A crow's feather, a yellow pencil stub, a necklace made of wrinkled brown beads, a rusty key and a small glass bottle with some kind of spice in it. I searched for a note. Nothing.

What was I going to do with the spice? Mom didn't let me use the stove—Gran had known that. All of this stuff was junk—wait a minute. I stared at the bottle. It was labeled *Zayn Garam Masala*. A wisp of blue smoke seemed to waft

## CHAPTER SAMPLER

up and down inside it, and I had the weirdest feeling it was trying to escape.



I rattled the bottle.

*Oi! Stop!*

Startled, I looked around. “Who said that?” My desk and chair returned my gaze mutely.

“Kiara!” Mom called from downstairs. “Dinner’s ready!”

## CHAPTER SAMPLER

I was dying to examine the bottle more closely, but Mom liked everyone at the dinner table on time. I scooped up Gran's things and put them back into the box. Except the bottle of garam masala. I picked it up. "Ouch!" It was so hot, I dropped it. "Oh no!" Luckily it landed on the carpet with a thud.

*Watch it, butterfingers!*

"What? Who? Come out and show yourself!" I said, inching toward the door. Bai had texted to let me know he was back from his vacation in China and had precisely one day to get ready for school. I needed to ask if he knew anything about ghosts, because either my room was haunted or I was losing it, but I'd have to wait until tomorrow.

No one appeared. *I* was the only kid in this house. But the voice I was hearing

## CHAPTER SAMPLER

in my head also belonged to a kid. It kind of sounded like this horrible boy in my class, Matt.

I gazed at my reflection in the mirror. Brown eyes stared back at me from under a mass of wriggly black hair. “Kiara, you’re only eight and you’re losing your mind,” I said to myself. “That’s sad!”

*Yup!* the voice in my head agreed.



## CHAPTER SAMPLER

I picked up the bottle, which was barely warm now, and put it on the desk. *This was so weird.*

“Kiara Prasad, I want you at the dinner table, now!” Mom’s voice had a sharp edge.

I glanced at the bottle once more before I left the room.

The smoke inside was now blood red.