

CHAPTER SAMPLER

Genie Meanie

Mahtab
Narsimhan



illustrated by
Michelle Simpson

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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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For Rahul and Aftab.

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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

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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

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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!”

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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

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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.



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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.