

CHAPTER SAMPLER

Everybody loves a
good ghost story.

A ghostly figure in a white dress is centered in the upper half of the image. The figure is translucent and appears to be floating. The background is a vibrant red with intricate, faint floral and mandala patterns. The lower half of the image is black, creating a stark contrast with the red above.

Ghost Queen

MAHTAB NARSIMHAN

“Hey, Ghosties, this is the Ghost Queen tuning in from the most haunted place in India!”

Malika’s ghost-hunter channel is almost popular enough to start earning money to support her family. All she needs is one viral video—and she knows exactly where she’s going to get it. Bhangarh Fort is the most haunted place in India, rumored to be home to a cursed princess and her captor. Malika convinces her boyfriend to sneak into the fort with her and record the experience. When the fort lives up to the ghostly rumors, Malika is left wondering if this will be her most viral video yet or her last.



\$10.95
RL 1.9



ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS
orcabook.com

ISBN 978-1-4598-4165-9



9 781459 841659

Ultra-Readable
PAGE
TURNER

CHAPTER SAMPLER

Orca Book Publishers is proud of the excellent work our authors and illustrators do and of the important stories they create. If you are reading this book and did not purchase it or did not check it out from a library provider, then the contributors have not received royalties for this book. Unless purchased as part of a multi-user subscription, the ebook you are reading is licensed for single use only and may not be copied, printed, resold or given away.

Orca is busy making accessible editions of our books. Please visit orcabook.com to find out which books have these added features. If you are interested in using this book in a classroom setting, we have a reading app with multi-user, simultaneous access to our books. For more information, please contact digital@orcabook.com.

You can also purchase our books at various online vendors or brick-and-mortar bookstores, ensuring the creative minds that made the books get paid for their efforts.

CHAPTER SAMPLER

CHAPTER SAMPLER

Ghost Queen

MAHTAB NARSIMHAN



ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS

CHAPTER SAMPLER

Copyright © Mahtab Narsimhan 2025

Published in Canada and the United States
in 2025 by Orca Book Publishers.
orcabook.com

All rights are reserved, including those for text and data mining, AI training and similar technologies. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system now known or to be invented, without permission in writing from the publisher. The publisher expressly prohibits the use of this work in connection with the development of any software program, including, without limitation, training a machine-learning or generative artificial intelligence (AI) system.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Ghost queen / Mahtab Narsimhan.

Names: Narsimhan, Mahtab, author.

Series: Orca anchor.

Description: Series statement: Orca anchor

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20240320697 | Canadiana (ebook) 20240320700 |
ISBN 9781459841659 (softcover) | ISBN 9781459841666 (PDF) | ISBN 9781459841673 (EPUB)

Subjects: LCGFT: Novels.

Classification: LCC PS8627.A77 G56 2025 | DDC jC813/.6—dc23

Library of Congress Control Number: 2024933247

Summary: In this high-interest accessible novel for teen readers, teen vlogger Malika and her boyfriend risk spending the night in a haunted fort in the hopes of meeting the famous ghost of a cursed Indian princess.

Orca Book Publishers is committed to reducing the consumption of nonrenewable resources in the production of our books. We make every effort to use materials that support a sustainable future.

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.

Design by Ella Collier.

Edited by Gabrielle Prendergast.

Cover photography by Getty Images / David Wall.

Author photo by Shimon Karmel.

Printed and bound in Canada.

CHAPTER SAMPLER

To Naomi

For all your support and encouragement

CHAPTER SAMPLER

Chapter One

Today she would convince him. Or die trying! The monsoon season had started. Delhi was dripping. Their local dhaba was busy today. Malika sipped masala chai from a clay cup. She would have liked to be in a fancy coffee shop. She couldn't afford it. Yet.

Malika's boyfriend, Veer, scrolled through news on his phone. He helped her create content for their channel, *Ghost Queen*, on VidVibe. It was a popular platform for videos.

Veer was a knockout. All the girls in the dhaba were looking at him. And he was *her* boyfriend.

“*Ghost Queen* has 48,000 fans!” Malika said. “If we hit 50,000, we make good money. Ideas?”

Veer flashed her a warm smile. “You’ve already thought of an idea. Spill.”

Malika blew him a kiss. He knew her well. *Ghost Queen* had started the previous year. It was *her* idea. She found ghost stories to investigate. The two of them would visit the site. They’d make content for their fans.

Often the “ghost” turned out to be a trick. Wind through the trees sounding like ghostly whispers. Or an animal scream that sounded human. They hadn’t found a ghost they didn’t

like—yet. But the content was fun to shoot. Their fans loved them!

“Bhangarh Fort!” Malika said.

“NO!” Veer said. “It’s the most haunted place in India. And it’s in Rajasthan. Too far to go.”

Malika took another sip of chai. She stared out the window. Her reflection stared back at her. Brown eyes. A pert nose. Long black hair in a neat braid. Not too bad even if she thought so herself. Veer certainly thought so!

Bhangarh Fort would be popular with their fans. If they earned money, she could help at home. Papa had recently been laid off. Ma was working two jobs to pay the bills. And put food on the table. She *had* to do better than them. University abroad. That was her dream!

“What if I pay for fuel and food?” Malika said. She had money from her summer tutoring job. “Can you borrow your dad’s car?”

“Why do you want to go so badly?” Veer asked. He frowned. “This is the *third* time you’ve brought it up.”

“Let me show you something,” said Malika. She’d known he would need convincing. So she’d done her homework. She wrote a number on a napkin. “Once we get 50,000 fans, VidVibe will put ads on our channel. And this is what we’ll make, *every month!*”

Veer’s eyes widened. “Is that in rupees or American dollars?”

“Rupees!” Malika said. She rolled her eyes. “We’re in India, in case you’d forgotten.”

She looked at the number again. American dollars would be sixty times more. A *huge* sum. All her dreams would come true.

“I wouldn’t say no to some decent cash for a change,” Veer said. “But Bhangarh Fort was in the news just last week. A tourist ran out screaming at midday. She said it was a dangerous place. That it should be shut down. You saw that article, right?”

Malika shrugged. Veer was right. The local newspaper had interviewed the tourist, who was from the UK. The woman said she’d heard sobbing from the palace building. She’d even felt an evil presence there. That story had been picked up by the *Bharat Times* blog. It had over a million views already.

"Everyone loves a good ghost story," Malika said. "People grow up with spooky stories. No matter what age, they still love reading them. *We* hunt ghosts. Match made in heaven! Please say yes!"

Veer said nothing. He swirled chai in his clay cup.

"It's the long weekend coming up," Malika said. "Borrow your dad's car. We head out on Saturday. Record all evening and night at Bhangarh Fort. We'll explore the local sights on Sunday. And we're back home on Monday. This is our chance to go big, Veer!"

Veer looked troubled. "They say it's a love story gone badly wrong—"

"Wait!" Malika said. She grabbed her phone. "Say it on camera. Our fans will get a

taste of what's to come. Make it exciting. Go!"

Veer looked unsure. But he forced an upbeat tone. "During the seventeenth century there lived a beautiful princess called Rani Ratnavati. And an evil tantrik—"

"Friends, in Hindi *rani* means 'princess' or 'queen.' *Tantrik* means 'magician,'" Malika said, switching the camera view to herself. She turned the camera back to Veer.

Veer continued. "The magician, Singhya, tried to cast a spell on her using a vial of her favorite perfume. The plan backfired somehow. She spurned his love. She threw the vial on a boulder. It rolled over him. Killed him. Before he died, he put a curse on her, on the fort and on the village. The city fell into ruin. She was trapped there forever."

Malika slid in beside Veer. They were both on camera. "Stay tuned, Ghosties! We're going to Bhangarh this weekend!"

Malika switched off her phone. She turned to Veer. "This story has love, hate, anger, revenge and ghosts! If we don't do it, someone else will. And we'll have lost out on ad revenue and fans. We could both do with some cash, Veer!"

"Enough already!" Veer said. He shook his head. "I can never say no to you."

Malika snuggled up to him. "Thanks, Veer. You won't regret this! Rani Rat, see you soon."

Veer kissed her. Malika kissed him back tenderly. She'd won, as she'd known she would. When she wanted something, *no one* could stop her.

No one.