

CHAPTER SAMPLER

Everybody loves a  
good ghost story.

# 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.



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**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.

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*To Naomi*

*For all your support and encouragement*

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# 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.

## CHAPTER SAMPLER

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!

## CHAPTER SAMPLER

“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.