

A purple-tinted photograph of a walkway under a bridge with arches. The walkway is paved and has a metal railing on the left side. The bridge structure is made of dark metal beams and arches. In the background, there are trees and a building. The overall mood is quiet and somewhat somber.

*The
Long Kept
Secret
Leah Jansen*



The Long Kept Secret

By: Leah Jansen

Designed to be Worthy



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Dedicated to:

My Friends & Family



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Chapter 1

“Moving to another World”

“Ariel,” Dad called as I was sitting on my bed reading a book. Rain was striking the stained ceiling of the two bedroom trailer we lived in. It seemed only moments before it would collapse.

“Yeah?” I answered.

“Come to the kitchen please. Your mom and I want to talk to you about something.” There was something strange about the way he said ‘something’, that made my stomach feel as if it had turned upside down. “Oh, no” I thought. “Did they find out about the D minus I got on my Spanish quiz? Or maybe the red pen stain I had tried to hide by placing the footstool in the middle of the living room floor?”

Little did I know, it had absolutely nothing to do with either one of those subjects. It was

something far different than what I would have ever imagined!

Reluctantly, I made my way across my messy floor and through the house to the kitchen. Dad and Mom were sitting at the table. Mom had a strange look on her face, one that usually meant she was thinking about a very important decision. Through what I could see, they weren't angry or sad, which was a good sign. I sat down on the third mismatched chair that was sitting around the small wooden table my grandfather had made. He had kindly given it to my parents as a wedding gift. On the underneath of the right corner, it had "TJD & TAD Forever" engraved in small jagged letters.

"Your mom and I have been discussing this for a few months now, and we feel that it's the right time to move forward," Dad said, while mom gave a reassuring nod in his direction. Then he began to go on and on and on about how finances had been tough for a long time.

"Hey, Dad?" I interrupted. "Could you please just tell me what the whole point of this discussion is?" I asked anxiously.

"We have decided that we are going to move to a bigger house." He said.

Wow. Totally not what I had been expecting. "WHAT? Are you serious? 'Cause if you're joking, this is totally NOT funny!" I said with a hopeful look on my face.

"No, Ariel, I'm not joking. The new house is right next to Skyline High School, in Oakland. So, next semester you will be attending school there. We have researched the school, and actually, it sounds like their volleyball team is one of the best

in California. It's only about twenty minutes away from here."

I couldn't believe my ears! Moving is what I had always dreamed of. Now I could have a bigger room and possibly even a dresser for my clothes instead of that nasty old box! I jumped up out of my seat and vigorously hugged my mom.

"When will we be moving?" I asked.

"Hopefully two weeks from now we will be settled into our new house. It's a medium sized two-story house. You'll have a much bigger bedroom, to yourself of course, and your own bathroom," Dad said. I could tell he was quite please with my reaction.

I had always imagined living in an actual house, and in two weeks my wish would come true! It would be like moving to another world entirely! Jumping with excitement, I reached into my pocket, pulled out my phone, and texted my friend Joanna to tell her the exciting news. Joanna and I had been best friends since first grade. I often wondered how I would have endured our gloomy, run-down school if we had never met. I probably would have died, I thought, laughing to myself.

I ran over to my dad next and gave him a big bear hug. It had been a long time since all three of us had been so happy!

"Thank you, Dad! Will I be able to be on the volleyball team? When does volleyball start? What does my bedroom look like? When..."

Mom interrupted me, "Whoa, slow down, Little Missy! All of your questions will be answered. Just not right now! Right now, I want you to go and start packing."

“Already?” I exclaimed.

“Well, the sooner the better!” Dad said, smiling.

I screamed with excitement, and then laughed, seeing that both Mom and Dad were still covering their ears.

“Ok, now that I’m completely deaf in my right ear, I want you to go pack like your mother told you,” Dad urged, smiling from ear to ear.



Chapter 2

“I’ve Never Seen Anything Like It!”

Two weeks later, when we pulled into our new neighborhood, my attention immediately shifted towards the beautiful houses. It seemed as if each and every one of them had a different characteristic. One had lavish flowers all around the house, whereas the next had green shutters and deep blue siding.

“I can’t believe this is where my new home will be!” I mused.

“Here we are,” Dad said, as we pulled into the driveway of our new house.

“It’s so beautiful,” I thought. It was a cozy two-story house with pale green siding. It had a small porch that wrapped about halfway around the house. There were two little boys, probably

about the age of ten, playing with a football at the house beside ours. They looked our way and waved, and then started wrestling with each other.

“Oh, Mom and Dad. It’s so beautiful!” I exclaimed, as I jumped out of the car, completely forgetting about all of the boxes that needed to be carried.

“We thought you’d like it!” Mom agreed, smiling. “I think we will all enjoy our new home! What do you think, Tom?”

“Oh, I think it’ll do,” Dad replied, winking at me.

We walked up the sidewalk towards the house. Dad opened the door, and the three of us walked in.

“Wow,” I thought, “It’s so roomy! I’ve never seen anything like it!” When I first walked in, there was a small, but stunning, staircase that led up to the second floor. To the right of the staircase, was the living room. Through the living room, was the dining room, which was painted a beautiful chestnut color. Overwhelmed by the new house, I walked into the kitchen. It had newly painted cup boards, a marble countertop, and a big, glossy black refrigerator. And, of course, there was everything else you might find in a normal kitchen.

“Dad, could you please show me my room?” I asked, walking to the family room, where Dad was showing Mom the new cream colored carpet. After seeing the downstairs, I was quite anxious to see my room.

“Alright, follow me.” he said.

We walked upstairs where I saw two rooms; the first one was huge! It had a massive closet that

connected at the end of the room, and a spotless bathroom.

“This is our room,” Dad said, pointing to the room I had been admiring. “And this one is yours,” he said pointing to the other.

I walked into my room across the hallway. It wasn't nearly as big as Mom and Dad's room, but it was plenty big enough for me. The room was painted a French Lilac, with white baseboards, and two adorable windows with window seats that filled an entire wall! At the right end of the room was a medium-sized closet, with several shelves hidden in the back. The left side had a bathroom connected; it was similar to the previous room, but slightly smaller.

“I absolutely love it, Mom and Dad! Thank you so much!” I said, tackling my parents with more bear hugs.

“We are so glad you like it, Ariel! Hopefully you'll adjust to school as quickly as you have adjusted to the house,” Mom said, hugging me back.

“Now that we've seen the entire house, how about we go unload the stuff from the car?” Dad interrupted, ruining the moment.

I groaned. I had been so distracted, that I had forgotten how much work was ahead of us.

“Just think of it this way, Sweetie; the quicker we get it done, the quicker we can relax!” Mom encouraged.



Chapter 3

The Next Step

School. It was the first thought I had waking up the next Monday morning. I wondered how it was going to be. Would I fit in? Are the teachers nice? How much homework will I have? What kind of people will I hang out with? Thousands of questions were swarming around in my head as I got out of bed. And yet, I didn't have an answer to any of them!

I quickly got changed and ran down the stairs to the kitchen for breakfast. I hope the cafeteria food is good, I wondered while eating leftover sausage patties and eggs.

"Ariel, are you ready for school?" Dad's voice echoed from his bathroom upstairs.

"Yeah, just about. I just need to get my shoes on." I yelled up the steps.

“Ok, I’ll be down in a minute. Start taking your stuff out to the car, please.” he instructed.

“Thanks for making eggs, Momma. I love you and hope you feel better!” I hugged my sleep-deprived mom. Apparently, she had been up all night with a bad headache.

“You’re welcome. I hope your first day at the new school goes well,” Mom encouraged smiling and then she yawned.

I walked outside, opened the door of the car, and flung my black backpack into the cold car. After about five minutes of waiting, my dad finally emerged from the garage.

I arrived at my new school about fifteen minutes later. As I walked through the main doors, it seemed as if everyone stopped. They were all staring at me, and silently telling me I didn’t belong here, or so I thought. Shyly, I walked to my locker. Placing all the books I didn’t currently need in the locker, I looked at the sheet of paper in my hand. The guidance counselor had given it to me a few minutes earlier. In small print letters, it told me what classes I was to have each day. First English, then History, then Algebra II, then...BAM!

“Ouch!” I groaned, as I looked up to see what I had run into.

“Um, are you ok?” a tall, skinny girl with brown hair and green eyes asked. Apparently, I had run into her locker door which had been hanging open.

“Ha-ha, yeah, thanks! Sorry about that, I’m trying to find English class. I guess watching where I’m going would help,” I added.

“No problem,” she smiled. “Hey, I have English. Is your class with Miss Rodger?”

“Um...Yeah, I guess so. Yep, that’s what it says here.”

“Ok. Well, just follow me. My name’s Shalissa, by the way,” she smiled.

“I’m Ariel. I just moved here a couple of days ago.”

“Cool, where are you from?”

“San Francisco, California,” I answered.

“I love San Francisco! It’s such a beautiful city. Why would you move here?” she asked, with a bemused look.

“Well, I didn’t exactly live in a nice house. Trust me, I’m more than glad I moved here. Big cities aren’t all they’re piped up to be,” I offered, remembering our old, unpleasant, two bedroom trailer.

“Got’cha,” she said. “Here’s Miss Rodger’s classroom; you can sit next to me.”

Maybe this won’t be so bad after all, I thought.

Miss Rodger was a skinny brunette, probably just barely in her thirties. She seemed nice at first, until she assigned an essay. I looked over at Shalissa who, rolling her eyes, smiled at me.

The rest of the day went about the same. Meeting new teachers, and getting assigned tons of homework.

I got home around four, finding my mom vacuuming the living room.

“Hey Mamma, how ya feelin’?” I asked.

“Hi, Sweetie, how was school? I’m feeling much better now.”

“School was good; I met this girl named Shalissa. She showed me around the school and I sat with her at lunch. She seemed really nice.”

“Well, good. I knew you’d find friends quickly!” she said, smiling.

I groaned, remembering all the homework.

“Oh, and you’ll never guess! Every single teacher assigned us homework on the first day of the new semester!” I complained. Why do we have to have so much homework? I can’t wait till I graduate, I thought.

“Well, you’d better get started on it right away then! The sooner you get it done, the better!” she reminded.

“Wow, I know you too well. That’s exactly what I thought you were going to say. Instead of having sympathy for me like any other parent, you just tell me to get it done.” I retorted, quite frustrated.

The next few weeks dragged by slowly. School was tough, and it seemed to take up most of the day. Thankfully, I made more friends at school and hung out with them on the weekends.

I often wondered about my biological dad. Mom said he left when I was three years old, and she hadn’t seen him since. Tom had come into our family when I was about eight years old, and since then he had been my ‘father figure’. I never had the guts to confront my mom with my questions, because anytime I brought him up, she got all teary-eyed. I had never met my father. Actually I didn’t even know his name, or hardly anything else about him. Once, I had bravely asked mom about him, but she just got this far off look on her face

and she told me he was a rich builder. Although I was more than slightly curious about him, I didn't spend my days wondering what it would be like if he hadn't left.



Chapter 4

Kidnapped

Thursday was a tough day at school, especially because my Spanish test went poorly. At least, I didn't think it went well. We had to memorize the proper use of each verb, and by the time we took the test all of the words had run together like a blur in my brain. To blow off steam, I decided to go outside and play volleyball with Shalissa. She had come home with me to hang out for the afternoon.

"Ariel, check this out!" she said, throwing the volleyball up into the air. She was apparently trying to show me her serve, but she ended up completely missing the ball. "Wait, I've got this!" she squealed, with a determined face.

I watched, trying but failing to hold back laughter. Shalissa had never played volleyball in her

life, so there was no telling where the ball would go next.

As it turned out, she did a nearly perfect serve- probably more luck than anything, but it hit the top of a fence post next to the neighbor's garden. From there, it ricocheted and hit the neighbor's roof and slid down into their back yard.

"Oops!" Shalissa eked, with a look worth a thousand words. "I'll, uh, just go and get that," she said, looking around to make sure nobody saw her.

Meanwhile, I noticed that a shiny black Hummer with tinted windows was slowly driving by the houses in the neighborhood.

"That's strange," I thought.

When it arrived in front of my house it stopped. The front window slowly rolled down. A lady was sitting in the driver's seat. She looked like she was in her mid-thirties with short, black, choppy hair.

"Excuse me?" she called out the window. Whatever she said next, I did not hear.

Thinking the very least of the situation, I walked over to the hummer.

"Yes, Ma'am?" I replied.

The lady had a sheet of paper with a picture of a small white poodle. Above it, in big black words it said "Missing".

"Have you perchance seen this dog running around in your neighborhood?" she queried.

When I stepped closer to see if I recognized the dog in any way, the side door opened. Before I could catch a glimpse of who opened the door, I felt a blow on the back of my head. Everything went black, and I dropped to the ground.



Chapter 5

Missing

Shalissa finally found the ball; It had been hiding in the bushes behind the neighbor's house. Ducking her head to the side, she cried out, "Stupid bush. Why do you have to be there?"

She couldn't reach it, so she tried lying on her stomach and crawling underneath. As a result, her hair getting stuck in the bush.

She moaned, "Ok, one...two...THREE!"

When she yelled three, she flung herself underneath the bush and reached her hand as far beneath as she thought was possible. Something slimy touched her wrist. Putting her arm back on last time, she felt the volleyball.

"Finally!" she shouted.

Feeling as if she could now conquer anything, she stood up. She walked past the house,

gawking at a window which reflected her disheveled, monstrous hair and scraped up face.

“You have no idea how hard that was! I feel like I just got hit by a train.” she said, looking up and noticing she was talking to herself. “Ariel, Hello? Hellooooooo? Where are you?”

Where could she be? She’s probably just playing a joke on me. I bet she’s going to jump out behind a tree and try to scare me. “Ariel it isn’t funny anymore!” she shouted, but there was no reply. Maybe she went to use the bathroom or something,” she thought, “I’ll just wait for her.”

Fifteen minutes later, Shalissa grew extremely worried. She sprinted towards the house, opened the door, and called in Ariel’s name.

There was absolutely no answer!

“What should I do?” she pondered. “I guess I should call the police.” she searched for the home phone, finding it on the kitchen counter, and dialed 911.

“911, what is your emergency?” a lady with a high pitched voice asked.

“I’d like to report a missing girl,” she responded.



Chapter 6

Troubling News

Sitting at his desk, the President of the United States was having a meeting with the Prime Minister of England. A knock, resounded from the door.

“Yes?” the President begged.

The door opened, and the secretary, a lady with long, glossy, black hair, walked in. She wore a troubled look on her face.

“This better be important, Tonya,” he said.

“Mister President, may I speak with you a moment? It is dreadfully important!” Tonya replied.

“Would you be so kind as to wait out in the hallway a moment?” he asked the Prime Minister. He ushered him out into the hall, and closed the door.

“What is it, Tonya?”

“Mr. President, we have just received word that your daughter, Ariel, has gone missing. We have reason to believe she has been kidnapped” she informed him, sorrowfully.

Ariel? Missing? But, he hadn't been in touch with Ariel and her mom, his first love, since Ariel was three! Numerous times, he had sent letters and money to Ariel. The result was always the same; getting the letters back with 'return to sender' stamped on the front.

“What! When? Who gave you this information?” he roared. “If anyone touches her, I will personally make sure he is thrown in jail, without food!”

“Well, Sir, the kidnappers have wasted no time in contacting us. Matter of fact, a man who calls himself Omar Ramos is on the phone right now, wishing to speak with you.”



Chapter 7

Held Hostage

I opened my eyes. Everything around me was hazy. My head felt as if it had been run over by a train. Gradually, things began to clear.

Racking my brain, I tried to remember my name.

“Ok, my name is Ariel. I’m fifteen, and I go to Skyline High School.” I told myself.

That much I could remember; everything up until today. Or wait, was it yesterday? What is today? I moved, realizing that I was tied to a chair. Where am I? I looked around, taking in my surroundings.

It was fairly dark, and the walls were old and splotchy. It looked as if it was an abandoned industrial factory. Graffiti decorated the walls surrounding me, a few random broken chairs lay on

the floor, and in the far corner of the room many boxes of different sizes were stacked.

Then, it all came back to me; the Hummer and that lady with the strange tiger tattoo asking about her 'missing poodle'.

Just then, I heard a few solitary set of footsteps. They were getting louder and louder. My vision was still blurry, but from what I could see there was a tall figure coming towards me.

"Hello, Ariel," the figure said in a deep voice. "How are you feeling?"

"Who are you?" I blurted out, taken aback.

"My name is Omar Ramos."

Peering towards the strange voice, I saw a large, tall man. He had dark hair, with big bushy eyebrows. His eyes were a pale grey, and there was a small, but evident, scar on his chin. He held a cell phone in his right hand.

Suddenly, I was furious! What does anyone want with me? They're probably some dumb worthless criminal who are going to try to blackmail my parents for money.

"I have lived in a nasty, rundown trailer up until a few weeks ago. In other words, my family has about zero money! Don't tell me you have some kind of idiotic scheme to blackmail my parents for money."

The man started laughing, yes laughing! "Ariel, have you ever wondered who your real father is?" He chose his words carefully, "I believe you will be very intrigued when you find out his occupation."

“I already know who he is: a greedy man who abandoned his family so he could keep all of his money for himself.”

“Tell me, what else do you know about him?” he asked with an amused look on his face. A look which screamed, “You spoiled rotten child, I don’t feel bad for you at all”.

“All I know is that he left us, and he’s off on his own building rich houses.” I stammered, heatedly.

“Hmm,” he looked at me closely, “Quite the interesting story your mother has been feeding you.”

“Oh, and you know more?” I blurted out sarcastically.

“Ariel, your father is the President of the United States.”

“Yeah, and big foot is my aunt.” I replied, rolling my eyes at his stupidity.

“I have the proof in my hand. The President is on the phone now waiting to talk to his daughter.” He uttered the words ‘President’ and ‘daughter’ with extra sarcasm.

“He can’t be serious?” I thought. He handed the phone to me.

“Hello?” I said, not knowing what I was doing.

“Ariel? Listen, Ariel. Just do what they say and everything will be alright. Are you ok?” the deep voice on the phone said.

“Um, who are you? This man here is kind of freaking me out and saying you’re the President of the United States?” There was a hint of question in my voice.

“I am the President, Ariel. Your mother didn’t tell you?”

What! Are you serious? My missing DAD is the President of the United States? Why didn’t mom tell me? How could she lie to me all these years? This is way too much for me to handle. I mean seriously, how much stress can a girl take? First, moving to a new school and adjusting, then getting KIDNAPPED, and then finding out that your dad who left you at the age of three is the President of the United States!

“Ok, ok,” Mr. Omar interrupted, grabbing the phone from me. “I dearly hate to interrupt the dramatic reunion, but I’m afraid I have some business to discuss with your father.”

“Listen to me, Mr. President,” Omar said, exasperated, “the deal is: I trade your precious little daughter for my friend Raheem Khan.”

Raheem Ramos was caught attempting to blow up a shopping mall in New York, New York; he was a suicide bomber. He believed in Allah, and like many other Iraqi’s, he thought that Allah wished for him to blow up thousands of innocent people. Mr. President knew that the exchange would never be able to happen. FBI agents were already swarming around the White House, making sure everything was ‘safe’ and ‘secure’.



Chapter 8

The Exchange

It was decided that the exchange was to take place near an abandoned train station. There was a sniper about three blocks away positioned on the rooftop. That building had been selected because it had a brick wall running along the rooftop, allowing a sniper perfect view of the exchange, without being seen.

“Where are you taking me?” I demanded.

“You are being exchanged for my brother, Raheem. He has been held prisoner by your government for too long.”

I was shoved into a car and blindfolded. The only sounds I could hear were the cars and trucks honking noisily around us and Omar talking in Arabic to two of his bodyguards. The car came to a halt, and I was roughly pulled from the back.

“Move!” they commanded. They removed my blindfold and I was told to walk towards the train station in front of me. There were about a dozen men wearing FBI jackets standing in front of the station. With them was Omar’s brother; he looked almost identical to Omar.

“It’s been a pleasure,” I mocked.

I walked forward at the same time as Omar’s brother. As we crossed, all of a sudden, there had been a shot. I was terrified and I looked down to see if I had been shot. I wasn’t feeling any pain, which was a positive sign.

Then, I looked behind me and saw Omar’s brother lying on the ground, bleeding. Shots began to fly everywhere! I screamed and ran towards the station, ducking inside. As I watched the bullets piercing into each man, I saw a strange figure in the distance. It seemed to be watching the fight unravel.

It was a short man who was nearly bald. He was holding a gun. His eyes stared at me, and mine stared back at him. Who was this man? Was he the one who fired the first shot?

He turned, and slowly walked away, and that was the last time I saw the strange bald man.



Chapter 9

The Reunion

In the end, I turned out ok, except for a few scrapes and the fact that I had seen many people die that day. During the small devastation, I was pulled, yet again, into another vehicle. This time though, it was a specially made FBI vehicle. There were men screaming into phones, with worried looks on their faces.

I hated to interrupt in the time of deadly confusion but, I couldn't wait. "Excuse me?" I blurted to the man in the driver's seat.

It seemed that he had forgotten I was here. "Yes, um, Ma'am?" he responded.

"Where am I going now?"

"We are taking you to your father."

WHAT! Who said I wanted to see my father? Why couldn't I see my mother? I didn't even know my father's name, for pity sakes!

We arrived at the White House about twenty minutes later, where I was escorted inside. I was so concerned and worried about meeting my father that I didn't seem to notice the beautiful décor along the walls and inside the huge rooms.

A lady, who must have been the secretary or something, told me to follow her. She opened the two doors ahead of us, and I saw a man sitting at his desk.

He stood up immediately and looked at me with hopeful eyes. "Ariel, I'm so sorry! Are you ok? Did they hurt you?"


"I'm fine," I replied angrily.

The rest of the day was to be expected. It was like any reunion you would see on a movie. But, the good thing was, in the end, everything turned out better than I thought it would. Dad, The President of the United States, and I started talking and "hanging out". Although our father/daughter bonding time was supervised by at least two tall men in dark suits, I was thankful I had finally met my dad. But, the whole getting use to them following you around at all times was a whole different story!



About the author

Leah Jansen lives in Greenville, South Carolina. She has three dogs, and enjoys reading, playing sports, and hanging out with friends.

A close-up, black and white photograph of a young girl's face in profile, looking down and to the right. She is holding a mobile phone to her ear with her right hand. The background is blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting. The overall tone is soft and contemplative.

"This young author debuts with a heartwarming story, full of emotion and intrigue. Readers are sure to relate to Ariel, a young all American teen girl!"

-Greg Jansen-

"I enjoyed this great read, about a young American girl, who went through a tragic time in her life, with great stamina!"

-Wendy Jansen-