

The
OTHER
SIDE
Of
VISIBLE



JANET KELLER RICHARDS

Author's Website:

www.janetkellerrichards.com

Facebook Page:

Janet Keller Richards, username @othersideofvisible

(This information is correct at the time of printing.)

The Other Side Of Visible is copyright © 2017 Janet Keller Richards. All rights reserved. Except in the case of brief quotations embodied in articles or reviews, no part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever, including electronically or in printed form, without prior written permission from the author.

In other words . . . writers spend *thousands of hours* creating literary works. For their sakes, please honor copyright laws, and don't share their ebooks electronically, except to your own personal devices. Thank you!

Cover photograph ID 32418970 © Lonely11 | Dreamstime.com

Cover design by Endless Press, www.endlesspress.org

This novel is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, agencies, or to persons living or dead is entirely coincidental and beyond the intent of the author.

ISBN Paperback: 978-0-9857450-2-8

Printed in the United States of America

23 22 21 20 19 18 17

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CHAPTER TEN

Shin leaped out of her seat and opened her natural eyes, too stunned to know what to do. “Holy smoke!”

“Stay there, Shin.” Old man Oscar extended a calming hand in midair, his face lit up with a smile. “Everything’s all right. Just stay there.”

Sitting down again, she looked away from Oscar and shut her earth eyes. She was suspended in space against a thick, soft wall. It was tinted in some incredible hue she’d never before laid eyes on—not at all like the dreary grays or blacks of Earth. And it was humungous. The membrane-like barrier stretched up and down, left and right, as far as she could see.

Shin felt herself being pulled into its gel-like substance. Almost as quickly, something pushed her through and she was standing on a hard surface on the other side.

Weird! She took inventory of her body to make sure she’d made it safely through the bizarre wall in one piece. Nothing had changed. Or had it? Glancing down at her arms, she noticed there seemed to be a new tone to her skin. Shin looked back at the membrane. Its hue was identical to the new shade on her arms, as if some of its gel had stuck to her body.

She scanned her surroundings and saw no buildings, no terrain, no vegetation. Only a vast, flat surface in the middle of nowhere.

A bright mistiness floated lightly around her body. Shin waved her hand through its cloud-like haze. It curled around her fingers. Dipping her hand up and down, the mist repeated her exact movements. She swung her arm in a wider circle. It followed her motion and swirled in a large, graceful arc.

Glancing up from her hand, Shin startled. During the short time she’d been playing with the mist around her waist, the remainder of its substance had been rapidly expanding. *Quite* rapidly. No longer just around her body, it was billowing high and wide and deep and resembled a gigantic system of thunderhead storm clouds. Continuing to shoot upward and outward, its size

increased so quickly, that by the time Shin was able to grasp what was happening, the cloud's mistiness had already taken over the whole atmosphere. Turning full circle, she could see nothing else. She was entirely surrounded.

And right away, it began to brighten. As a great flash erupted within its expanse, the cloud's once gentle glow transformed into a vivid radiance. After a second explosion of light the whole mass became a glare so blinding, Shin instinctively squinted hard and shielded her face with her hands.

At that moment she was struck with the familiarity of the whole scene. *This is the nightmare I had! It exists!* In her dreams she'd stood inside the same kind of violent light, feeling utterly exposed.

Being in such brilliance was the opposite of staying cloaked. She wanted to bail—to run away. Oscar's words popped into her mind. He'd said no one *had* to stay in this place. She could open her earth eyes and forget the whole thing. It would be easy to leave, to get away from the powerful blaze of white.

Following on the heel of those thoughts came another one. It was the sort of rare thought that rose up from somewhere deep inside the middle of desires, the type of thought that cut through confusion and distraction—not at all a normal thought for someone whose goal in life was to remain invisible. And this was her thought: *I am so tired of running.*

Ever since escaping from foster care Shin had lived like a fugitive, camouflaged in plain view, avoiding people and places, terrified of authorities, dreading danger, and scared stiff of being caught. Her life existed in round-the-clock surveillance, constant self-protection, and a never-ending vigilance.

She was like the stray dogs that frequented the trash bins at the zoo. They were too frightened to allow anyone to come close, yet she could tell they wanted to be loved, wanted desperately to find their pack. She'd seen the fear in the eyes of those nervous mutts, and she could identify with the twitching in their muscles and their readiness to run if anyone came near.

But what if the things Oscar had said about this bizarre world were true? What if there *was* a family in this place? No family in their right mind would ever like her instantly, she knew that much. But what if they didn't outright reject her? She might be able to work her way into being allowed to stay.

Though nothing made sense to her well-developed cloaking skills, a stony stubbornness set itself in Shin's gut, and she made her decision. In spite of the blinding atmosphere, she would stick it out.

In this particular instance the part of Shin's personality that was headstrong was to her benefit, since the second she looked down and caught sight of herself, a stab of fear coursed through her body. Standing in the midst of such a vigorous light, everything about her was highly visible, every flaw strikingly exposed. She was as conspicuous as a raven in a snowstorm.

Panic surged into her throat. But the possibility of being able to meet that family flooded her mind, and it was just the shot of courage she needed. *I won't run*. She set her jaw and said it out loud. "I WON'T run."

Sitting down on the surface, Shin tucked her legs underneath her, folded her arms across her chest, and closed her eyes to wait for something or someone to show up.

"Look up, Amber."

Only a few seconds passed before the voice spoke, calling her by her real name. She raised her head just enough to see the form of a man silhouetted against the light.

Leaning down, he offered his hand to pull her up.

She stood on her own strength, her head lowered and her eyes on the ground. Images of taunting hoodlums from the streets passed through her mind.

"My eyes, dear one. Here are my eyes."

He was standing in front of her. She could tell by his motions he was gesturing toward his own face.

"Find my eyes, Amber."

Anything but the eyes. Asking her to fight a wild animal was an easier proposition. On the streets, eyes turned in Shin's direction meant someone wanted to use her, or sell her for a profit, or get rid of her like food gone rotten. Or worse, they wanted to lock her up in foster care and throw away the key. Eyes were gates to a private garden. Once people looked in her eyes they had permission to walk right into her life. She wasn't sure she wanted to give this stranger access.

"They won't harm you."

She'd come this far. How could she turn back now? Shin sighed, desperately wishing for these eyes to be different. Daring with a shred of hope they *were* different, she pulled up and forced herself to look into the face of the man standing before her.

What she saw became her undoing. Suddenly her need became as palpable as the one who stood with his eyes focused on her, and it was too much for her to bear.

In Earth's realm Shin reacted by crying, which soon turned into sobbing with loud and choking wails. Oscar moved closer and placed a gentle hand on her shoulder. Her guard down, Shin unconsciously leaned against his side for support.

With grandfatherly comfort he pulled her to himself and held her, soothed her. "Let it all out, my dear. It's all right, just let it come."

Shin wept for quite some time as the stranger in OtherSide held her gaze. Tenderness flowed through her like a living, moving stream. His eyes washed her within, back and forth, back and forth, loosening filth and contamination. In the same way that rainwater carried debris away, the sediment of her pain and sadness was being lifted out and swept away.

The man's eyes held dreams of the future and other good things she couldn't quite recognize because they were new and foreign to her present way of thinking. But with each passing minute the power of his fixed affection lightened everything within her. Impurities were fading away and at last, Shin was clean; her internal stain was gone.

She stood staring into his eyes. They were as deep as an ocean, and she was floating on their gentle waves of peace.

All at once he leaned over, scooped her up into his strong arms, and laughed. “Amber Grace McConnell, welcome! I’m your brother, the Light Prince. I’m so glad to finally meet you here in OtherSide!” After a long embrace he set her down again on her feet.

Shin wasn’t used to being shown affection by another human being. Neither was she accustomed to anyone calling her by her real name. But even more unexpected was what the Light Prince had called himself.

“You’re my *brother?*”

“I am!” The prince smiled and then motioned to the soft wall behind her. “You passed through the Crimson Wall and now you’re my sister!” He positively glowed with pride.

Her face pinched with uncertainty. “But you’re a prince!” Shin startled herself by speaking her thoughts so openly.

“True, and you are the newest member of our royal family.”

“You’re part of that family Oscar talked about? And it’s *royal?*” If that was true, she’d never be allowed to join. For one thing, she hadn’t been born into a genuine bloodline. She’d been born into yuck. Plus, she knew as much about palaces and royal customs as cartoon characters knew about real life.

Raising her eyebrows, she gaped at the prince person who had just shocked her by giving her a big hug. He was confident and dignity oozed from his being. She inspected her scrubby clothing and glanced back at him. *I’ll never be royalty, and I’ll never be part of his family.* He was clean, with those incredibly kind eyes, a great beard, curly dark hair, and some sort of a radiating aura coming out of him. *I’m not anything like him.*

The Light Prince playfully mussed the hair on her head. “Little sister, you will need to learn how to think like a princess.”

There had to be a mistake. She’d never even dressed up in a princess costume. Once, a foster mom had put an old sheet over her head, cut two holes for eyes, and sent her trick-or-treating. She’d been a bedhead ghost, while everybody else in the neighborhood walked around in fancy-pants ninja outfits or fairytale princess gowns. As far as she was concerned, that pretty much described her place in life.

The prince looked at her, his face filled with the same kindness she'd seen on Earth in the eyes of Crazy Lady and old man Oscar.

"You and I have the same blood now, Amber. After you came through the Crimson Wall you wondered if some of it had stuck to your body. But in reality, it isn't *on* your skin. The crimson is now part of you, forever.

Shin looked at her arm. Sure enough, it still had that same, fabulous new tone.

"Now, come and look at my arm."

She felt weird and wrinkled her nose questioningly.

"Go on, take a look at my arm." Her prince brother held out his right arm for her to observe. "What do you see?"

"Uh, a few freckles. And hair."

"Underneath."

Studying his arm more closely, she saw the same shade in his veins that was now in her own. "You have the same stuff inside!"

The prince laughed. "Exactly. My dear, you are now royalty, just like me."

Before Shin could talk herself out of being noble, the Light Prince motioned for her to follow and then turned and walked away.

As she trailed after him, she noticed the hugely intense atmosphere was gone. The gentle, glowing mist was back, slowly circling around both of them. Shin shook her head. *What was up with that spooky monster cloud?*

"Bright light is only frightening when there's something to conceal." The prince turned around and looked straight into her eyes. "Dear one, there's no need to hide. You never have to run away again."

Shin stopped and stared. She couldn't remember a time when she hadn't hidden. Beginning at the age of two, when people in her house raised their voices and then started hitting each other, she quickly learned to disappear into a bedroom closet to bury herself under piles of clothing. Like a possum, she would pretend to be dead, staying perfectly still, until the only sound left in the house was a solid, rhythmic snoring. Then, and only then, she would uncloak herself and tiptoe into the kitchen to fix a bowl of cereal for dinner, or for whatever meal had gone by during her hidden time in the closet.

Ever since those days she'd worked hard to perfect the art of laying low. Of keeping out of sight. Of hiding.

He was watching her again. She lowered her eyes and tried to mask her discomfort.

Gently, he pulled her chin up until she couldn't avoid him. "You're safe now, Amber, and no matter what happens, you'll always be safe."

Shin forced a smile. Even though they'd just met, he seemed to know her inside and out. She wanted to feel secure, but it was all too new for her to trust.

With a nod he said to her, "Trust will come, don't worry. But right now, I have something to show you."