

### Chapter 3

Despite the unusual circumstances of my home and housemates, my childhood was safe and uncomplicated until I was seven-years-old, when my intuitive adroitness developed from something useful, a sixth sense lying dormant, just below the surface, into a frightening ability that forced me to see the darkest sides of those around me.

Mrs. Hazel moved into the house when I was five, about a year after Kente, and six months after Mr. Xui. She was a thick, dark brown Haitian woman with large, slightly crossed eyes. She made all of her own clothes from brightly colored cloths imported from the Islands or from Africa and wore her hair in tiny braids, which spiraled and zigzagged around her head like the strokes of a Van Gogh painting. Every three months she took a bus all the way to Cooper to have the braids taken out and reconfigured into a new pattern as no one in our provincial town could be trusted with such intimate work. To add variety between braidings, Mrs. Hazel would change the beads that dangled at the end of each tiny braid to match her colorful outfits. This in itself was quite a process, as there were about three-dozen tiny braids at any one time, each with at least two beads at the end. These beaded braids fascinated me, especially the clicking, rain-stick noise they made when Mrs. Hazel turned her head. I would follow her around when she moved through the house just listening to the swish of her long dress, the soft padding of her rough, bare feet on the wood floor, and the staccato tinkling of her beads, every part of her body in euphonious concert.