

CHAPTER ONE

Spring of 1967

Meet Rev

Reverend Perlie Johnson of Mount Olive Baptist Church eased his aching body onto the purple seat cushion of the old African wooden chair. He breathed a sigh of relief that at last he could sit down. The chair, with its detailed Egyptian carvings on the back, wasn't the type of chair you would ordinarily find at a church pulpit. It stood out and was a bit much for most traditional Baptist churches. However, it supported Reverend Johnson's heavy frame and aching back. At sixty-seven, Rev, as he was called by his congregation, didn't care what others thought of him.

He was drained of energy, for the Holy Spirit had descended on him. It wasn't the first time this had happened in his forty years of preaching. This Sunday morning he felt tired and old. Maybe, he thought, it was time to retire from the only thing that he loved and knew how to do—preach. The problem was who would take his place? God had not granted him the gift of a son, and he was not about to turn his church over to any of the up and coming young ministers who thought they knew everything. No, somehow he had to find the way to go on until God was ready for him to stop.

He had been wrestling all week with how to get a message across to his congregation. It all started with a conversation he had had earlier in the week with his right-hand man, Deacon Willie Coleman.

"Rev, you heard about all that mess going on at Howard U?"

Deacon Coleman asked.

"You mean those militants or Black Panthers, whatever they call themselves, stirring up the young people on the campuses across the country?" Rev replied.

"Yeah, they're the ones," Coleman confirmed.

"They're at Howard, uh."

"Yeah, they're the ones that closed down the administration building."

"What's wrong with the president and deans over there, letting those rabble-rousers on the campus? They're a bad influence on the young people, teaching bigotry, hate and separatism. We got to do something."

"I don't know how much you can do, or anyone else for that matter," the deacon replied. "This movement is strong. It could turn out to be a pretty nasty fight. Do you want the church to be involved in that type of battle? You never know what side people will take."

"You got a point there, Coleman. The least I can do is start right here with our church family. We have to make sure our members, and especially the young people, are not involved in any of these goings-on. If they are, I want them to get out!" Reverend raised his voice. "The only cause they need to serve is the Lord's! That damn war in Vietnam isn't helping this country any. Our young boys are being sent over to some foreign country to be killed, maimed and hooked on drugs. What's this country coming to?"

"I don't know, Rev. Things haven't been right since Kennedy was assassinated."

“I tell you it’s nothing but the devil taking over the minds of our young folks. Look at how they’re dressing. Any young woman with any respect for herself would not go prancing around in those skirts that stop at least ten inches above the knee. If she bends over, you would see what God gave her. They better not try and wear any of that mess around here. Thank God my granddaughter Lindy is not involved or influenced by any of that mess.”

Deacon Coleman could see how riled up his minister was. “Now, Rev, the movement has some good points. It is giving our kids a sense of their roots, self-esteem, and taking pride in how they look,” the deacon said, readying himself for a challenge as he looked the Reverend dead in the eye.

“I don’t mind them taking pride in themselves, but they cross the line when they foster violence, anti-white messages, and disrespect what we worked for all these years. That’s all I am saying. These Black Power people are wearing those loud-colored African dashiki shirts, and if that isn’t bad enough, look how they are wearing their hair. It is a disgrace to the Negro race.”

“We are not called Negroes anymore, Rev. We are black folks,” Deacon Coleman pointed out. “Don’t you listen to the Godfather of Soul, James Brown? ‘Say it loud, we’re black and we’re proud!’” He laughed. He liked to taunt his old friend.

“Black? Man, there is not a black spot on me, or you for that matter. We are colored folks, Negroes, and don’t you forget that,” Reverend Johnson chided him.

After that conversation, Rev went into prayer and asked God to show him or tell him what to do. During the week, he worked on changing his sermon, but the words he wanted wouldn’t come. On Sunday morning, he proceeded with his original sermon, “Getting Your House in Order,” when midway through the message, he felt the Holy Spirit rise up in him. He always knew when it happened. He would get hot, hotter than normal. Even his voice changed. Then the words would just pour out of him. Rev came from behind the pulpit and stared out at the congregation. They knew the Spirit was upon him. They had witnessed this many times.

Chapter Two: Meet Margaret Johnson Lee

Margaret knew nothing about her mother’s people. She’d been raised by her paternal grandmother and her father. Her grandmother died when Margaret was in high school. Her father had left his job as a postal clerk to become a full-time minister, and Margaret assumed her rightful role as first lady of Mt. Olive Baptist Church.

Margaret attended DC Teacher’s College. In her senior year, she met Benjamin Lee, a young doctor just starting his residency at Freedmen’s hospital. He was a few years older than she was, but it was the kind of match that her father expected of her. Benjamin was a devout Christian, and at one time had thought about going to theological school.

They married soon after she finished college, and she was pregnant before they were married a year. Her husband never got a chance to see

or hold his baby daughter. In one of the worst snowstorms of the century, Benjamin Lee returning home from the hospital was involved in a four-car collision. He died instantly. The baby was born two months after the fatal accident.

The voices in Margaret's head started the day her father brought her and the baby home from the hospital. Margaret was in her room when she heard someone say, "He loves that baby more than you."

"No!" she'd cried out. "That's not true."

"He calls her his little angel."

"Papa loves me. Go away."

No matter how hard she tried, she could not get the voice to go away. One time the voice told her to get rid of the baby; then Papa and she could be happy again. She fought it. The voice called her names: whore, bitch, stupid.

"No!" she would scream, and began to break up anything she could get her hands on. Margaret screamed to drown out the voices, but they would not stop. She slept, and spent most of her time in her room. She wouldn't even go to church on Sunday. Margaret stayed away from the baby. She could hear her crying at night. Papa would beg her to take care of the baby, but she was scared that she would hurt her. She couldn't tell him that. What would he do with her?

It was the worst period of Reverend Johnson's life since he had left Virginia. His daughter acted as if the devil possessed her, and he had a baby granddaughter who looked exactly like the woman he had been trying to get away from in his mind.

Rev got Deacon Coleman's wife to help him take care of the baby. He knew he could trust her and Deacon to keep quiet about Margaret's behavior. The tongues started to wag anyway, after Margaret refused to come to church or take on any of her old duties. The members of the church blamed her condition on the loss of her husband. Rev never told them anything different, because he really didn't know what was wrong with his daughter.

Chapter Three: Meet Lindy Lee

Lindy figured that the year she spent on the campus of Howard University didn't count, because she'd spent most of her awake time, if not in class, at Founder's Library or at home. Dorm life was not for her. Her first year living in the dormitory had been a nightmare. She was put in a large room with three other girls. One roommate spent most of her time in the student canteen playing bid whist, one cried for home constantly, and the third one talked about her boyfriend from sun-up to sundown. Lindy was what they called a bookworm. She had nothing in common with these girls.

She was a loner. It had always been that way. Her mother kept telling her that the other girls were jealous of her because of the way she looked. Lindy thought it was more because she was not like them. She didn't want to chase after boys. She'd rather read, study, and watch the stars.

Before sealing the box, Lindy pulled out a little stuffed collie dog. It was her favorite. She hugged it to her, and the day that she got it

flowed backed through her memory. Her grandfather had given it to her as a peace offering if she promised not to do those bad things anymore. Her eyes became cloudy as she remembered how that day in Sunday school she had picked up the coat of one of her Sunday school classmates. She began to rub the fur collar as if it was one of her stuffed animals. Bright pictures flashed before her eyes. She could see little Johnny Robinson lying on a table. There were bright lights all around him, and people dressed in white were standing over him. When little John's mother took the coat from Lindy, the only words that came out of her mouth were "His stomach is going to burst."

A couple of days later, her grandfather called her into his study and told her never to do that again. At first, Lindy didn't know what he was talking about. Nevertheless, he looked into her eyes and held her shoulders, shouting at her, "Don't ever tell anyone again about what's going to happen to them, or what has happened to them. I don't want them to think that the devil got you, too."

She stared at her grandfather as he kneeled at his chair and began to pray. As she left his study, she could hear him saying, "Please, God, don't let it happen again. I am your faithful servant. I have not broken my vows to serve only you. Spare this one."

That evening, her grandfather came to her room and said, "Remember your promise, Lindy." When she came home from school the next day, the collie dog was sitting on her bed.

Years later, Lindy learned that little Johnny had emergency surgery for appendicitis the same day she told his mother that his stomach was going to burst. The Robinson family never returned to the church. Lindy put the collie back into the box. *It's time to let go of the old and move on with life, she thought.* However, in her heart she knew that part of the old would always be with her.

Lindy crawled over to a corner of the attic. She moved one of the bricks from the wall, reached in, and pulled out a small book. It was her diary. She had to hide it because her mother often searched her room. She could never figure out what her mother was looking for. Lindy took the key off the chain she wore around her neck with the pendant her grandfather had given her. She turned the lock that recorded her life's secrets. She had no one to talk to about the strange occurrences, so she kept a diary recording whatever she saw, heard, felt and sensed that was beyond normal comprehension.

Lindy flipped through the pages of the diary until she came to the list.

By the time she was in her mid teens, she had devised a list of the many shades of colors she saw around people. She called them her rainbow eye colors. Beside each color she listed a series of words that corresponded to the color. If someone was "red," for instance, she discovered that it might mean that they were angry, energized, impulsive or sexual. People with blue around them like her grandfather like to talk a lot. What disturbed her was the black color around her mother's head and heart.

Lindy also recorded any unusual incident involving the eye colors that pertained to a person's health. She surmised that dark, murky colors indicated someone was ill or would eventually get a disease.

Sometimes she could actually see the diseased organs inside the body. So many times she wanted to tell the person or even try to help them, but Lindy remembered her promise to her grandfather. For this reason, she had decided to become a doctor.

She turned to the page in the diary dated March 10, 1963, and began to read the words that she had written four years before:

One of the girls in the dorm had a Ouija board. I didn't want to play. I had a bad feeling about the board. The other girls insisted and kept after me until I gave in. I sat in front of the Ouija board, and before I could put my hands on the indicator, it started moving. It spelled out the words "wake up." I screamed, not because the indicator was moving on its own, but because of those two words. The girls were all screaming and moving back from the table. The indicator began to move again. One of the girls grabbed the board and threw it in the trash. I looked at her in total bewilderment. "What did you do that for?" I asked.

"Did you see what it was doing?" the young girl with a deep southern accent screamed at me. She was shaking, she was so scared.

"Did you make that happen?" another one asked me.

"Of course not! I don't know what happened. I only wanted to see if it would continue to do it. Forget it. It's no big thing." I could hardly get the words out.

My voice quivered and I felt my jaws tighten up. I tried closing my mouth and it wouldn't. I just stood there with my mouth wide open and saliva running down the side of it. I couldn't talk. I pointed to my jaw. They looked at me as if I was a freak. The one with the deep Southern voice ran out of the room. She came back with the floor mentor who took me to Freedmen's Hospital.