

# THE THIRD VOICE

TRUTH IS THE VICTIM



DES BRADY

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## THE THIRD VOICE



### *Midnight.*

Elodie lay awake, listening to the rain whisper against the windows, soft and velvety, like moss brushed over glass. Marcus lay beside her, still, his body a long, cool line beneath the covers. He hadn't spoken all evening, not a word, and the silence between them stretched long and deep—with such finality she could no longer tell where it stopped and the dark of the room began.

*Why is it that I can't remember the last thing you said?*

The thought struck her with a dull ache, an unease she quickly swallowed.

Highgate House loomed, heavy with inherited furniture, the stale scent of dust and lives lived long before hers. She slid from the bed, the terracotta tiles cold beneath her feet. The house smelled of bleach and paint—months of incomplete renovations, materials scattered like detritus in the wind.

It should have felt like a gift, a fresh chapter in her tenuous relationship with Marcus. A place of healing. Of renewal. Instead, it felt suspended in time, caught between years and intentions, waiting for something she could never name.

A flicker at the end of the hallway drew her toward the mirror. Its once-glittering Art Deco frame, a serpent coiled around its edges, was discoloured and scarred, its surface mottled with black patches where the silver had rotted away. She adored its ancient patina, yet Marcus had dismissed it as junk the day they moved in.

*What a piece of shit. Even Mandy said that.*

He'd laughed at her for insisting it should remain, called it worthless. Yet he failed to realise its significance. To Elodie, it had become so much more than a mirror—it was almost a companion, offering solace in her sleepless nights. A solid, soothing presence. Giving voice to unnamed feelings as she stood before it, reflecting on her image.

A Third Voice.

Tonight, a faint shimmer rippled across the glass, like water disturbed by a zephyr. She backed away, heart skipping, and returned to the bedroom. Marcus lay quietly, but didn't roll toward her as he usually would. Even his breathing was too soft to be heard over the pattering rain.

*How cold he's become towards me.*

Slipping under the covers, she closed her eyes. As sleep tugged, her last thought was the gentle pulsing of the mirror as though it needed to talk.

*But, she thought, not tonight. Not yet.*

~

***Before***

The bequest from her Aunt Vera had been unexpected—a woman her mother spoke of in dismissive tones, saying she was odd, distant. A little ‘mad’ was the actual term she’d used. Elodie had noticed the intensity of the woman’s gaze in old sepia-toned photographs, joking to her mother that she looked possessed.

Ashbourne Glen was a pretty town, full of artists and creatives seeking a simpler life. Yet Elodie soon discovered that the anonymity of the city had been replaced by small-town politics and its chorus of whispering discontent.

Despite this, she had discovered kindred spirits and bonded with Mandy, a visual artist whose dark work resonated with her in unexpected ways—symbols and messages she could not quite decipher. Something that both excited her and triggered a memory.

Tonight, they were attending an annual fundraiser and Elodie had worn her backless dress, revealing her glorious tattoos. She liked being seen. How people’s eyes followed the rose petals down her spine, admired the sigils on her upper arms, recently inked on an impulse she couldn’t explain.

But her buoyant mood evaporated as scornful whispers drifted to her on the wind. Ones meant to cut, to wound.

*Oh... Highgate... that creepy place... you’d have to be mad to live there.*

*Yes... him and Mandy...*

Across the yard, Marcus stood talking, tight in a group. Mandy was there, laughing at something he’d said, head thrown back, touching his arm as she turned to leave—just a casual gesture, the kind anyone might make.

*Wasn’t it?*

*NO.*

It was far too familiar.

~

The fundraiser chatter gnawed at her as she paced darkly in the house that night.

*When did we last laugh together like that?*

*When was his face so unguarded?*

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Her voice of reason told her she was being unfair. Yet that felt flimsy now, and it didn't prevent another argument the next day, her words twisting like a knife into wounding accusations. Her isolation drove the wedge deeper.

It was then that she saw it, wandering the house in another midnight ramble. She stopped. Tilted her head.

*Did I walk past it, or was this something else?*

Elodie's reflection stared back from the mirror, yet that strange shimmer rippled. Her image seemed alive, taking on a life of its own. Words came, not her own, from a place she did not know. A deep well of mistrust—caustic, dripping with venom. With dark emotion.

*He doesn't love you.*

*He thinks only about her.*

*About them.*

Elodie jerked back instinctively, the words biting. But something summoned her and she reached out to touch the glass. The contact consumed her vision, sharp and blinding. Everything dissolved. Only the reflection remained—strangely smiling, the curl at the side of her mouth not hers.

Shaken, she quickly climbed the stairs. Marcus lay unmoved as she slipped under the covers, trembling.

And yet oddly energised.

~

Two days later a knock on the door disturbed her discourse with the mirror. She opened it to Mandy smiling and bearing a large parcel wrapped in brown paper.

'Hi Elodie, sorry to bother you. I promised Marcus something for the house,' she said, eyes bright. Elodie led her to the living room, past the fireplace, where Mandy unwrapped it—revealing a dark canvas of intertwining figures, sigils and symbols woven through limbs and shadows, faces overlapping.

'It's called *Renewal*,' Mandy announced. 'For your new beginning together.'

Elodie gazed at her, expression unreadable.

'Marcus said it would suit the place,' Mandy said.

*How could she know such intimate details of their life?*

*And his preferences?*

Elodie could not take her eyes from the painting. It spoke of something buried deep, something dangerous. And the sigils pulled at her mind, stirring memories of something she couldn't quite name.

'What do you know about Highgate?' Elodie's voice trembled.

Mandy looked confused. Alarmed.

'Highgate? I'm not sure what you mean. Nothing really... um,' she said, tilting her head in a question. 'Anyway... Marcus admired it so I thought it belonged here. Is he around? I've been trying to reach him.'

Something tightened in Elodie's chest.

*Admired it?*

*Trying to reach him?*

'Yes,' Elodie said slowly. 'He's upstairs. But first...ah... there's something I need to show you. In the basement.'

Mandy hesitated. 'Basement?'

'It's important.' Elodie's voice was steady now, cold. 'You'll understand when you see it.'

She led Mandy through the house. Down the narrow stairs and into the damp darkness where the air grew thick with earth and rot. Elodie switched on the light, a single globe. Its weak illumination barely reached the corners, shadows stretching long and deep.

'Look,' she said, pointing at the rear wall.

Mandy stepped closer, squinting in the low glow. Then her breath caught. The symbols—*her* symbols—were splashed across paintings covering the wall. Impossible.

'I... I don't understand,' Mandy whispered. 'How—?'

'*You* painted these,' Elodie declared, pointing at her. 'Long ago.'

'No. No, I've never been down here. I didn't—'

'Don't lie to me.' Elodie's voice shook. 'You marked this house. Marked us. With my aunt. Made me do this...' she spat, rolling up her sleeve, revealing the same sigils on her upper arm.

'Elodie... I...' I don't know what you're talking about. I've never met your aunt or made you do anything. These aren't mine—wait.'

Mandy touched the paintings, dragging a finger across the canvas, then held it up, paint dripping from it.

'Look. These are still wet, still fresh. Your hands... look at the paint on them.'

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The mirror's voice thrummed through Elodie's skull, shaking her bones. Mandy's eyes caught the light, glistening for a moment, reflecting the mirror's distortion. Reflecting the symbols themselves.

*She lies.*

*Comes for you.*

*Take her now.*

'You're the witch,' Elodie screamed in horror.

'What? No—Elodie, *please*—'

The knife came swiftly. Once. Twice. Again.

Mandy crumpled against the wall, sliding across the paintings, smearing and obliterating the sigils like a tide washing away footprints. Elodie stood over her, breathing hard, hands shaking.

*Good.*

*Now come home.*

She climbed the stairs, driven now by some irresistible force. The mirror waited in anticipation, its surface glowing like the aurora rippling in the sky outside. She stopped before it, her reflection shifting and moving, the blood and paint staining her hands slowly disappearing.

'It's done,' she whispered. 'The witch is dead.'

The mirror pulsed with cold light. Her reflection smiled—but the smile wasn't hers. The curl at the corner of the mouth belonged to someone else.

*Yes, The Third Voice spoke with pleasure.*

*Now we are complete.*

~

Elodie sat beside Marcus on the bed, gently smoothing his hair. She had seen it now. Her jealousy had been real. The distance between them had been real. The fractures, real.

All of it so real yet so untrue.

'I just wanted to apologise,' she whispered close to his ear. 'I'm sorry I've been so difficult. It's been very stressful. I know you weren't having an affair.'

Satisfied he understood, she removed the knife from his ribs, blood dried and caked on its blade, placing it carefully on the bedside table.

Her eyes now moved to Mandy's body, white and lifeless beside him. The witch. The one The Third Voice had warned her about.

*She marked you.*

*Painted your cage.*

Elodie picked up the knife again, raised it high and plunged it into Mandy's chest, ensuring the spell was broken.

'There,' she said, breathing hard, eyes manic, her body glowing with satisfaction. 'The witch is exorcized. Never to rise. You warned me. I listened.'

She had found that which The Third Voice had promised.

*Renewal.*

As she stood before the fireplace gazing at Mandy's painting, its images shifted ominously, sigils spiralling, pulling at something inside. The mirror's surface rippled again then something moved behind the glass—not a reflection.

*It was a presence.*

In that moment, Elodie felt it as the mirror pulsed. Hungry, intense. Eyes glared from it with a force that made her shudder. Those eyes were Vera's. She grasped the mirror's frame, eyes wide, screaming Marcus' name.

Running, desperation driving every step, she snatched the blood-smeared paintings from the basement. Frantically feeding them into the fireplace, she watched the sigils blacken and bubble, like molten wax, their power destroyed. The fire climbed the walls as she shook with release.

Elodie braced herself before the mirror, heart hammering. She had to see it—the demise of The Third Voice. To witness the end.

Yet the Art Deco frame seemed to awaken, the serpent's head glinting accusingly. The mirror's surface restored—pristine, glittering, alive with purpose.

The Third Voice had risen anew. It would forever reign in the halls of Highgate House, its poisonous whispers of discontent haunting every corner. Falling to her knees, its epitaph rang loud in Elodie's ears—the final words she would ever hear:

*Venom spreads,  
And truth is the victim.*