

Three Sixes and a Forked Tongue or Cold Medicine and a Liar

James Tyler Toothman

Millions of Colors

(539pp)

979-898776321-6

Three Sixes and a Forked Tongue or Cold Medicine and a Liar is an intriguing coming-of-age horror novel in which outcast friends encounter witchcraft and grow apart.

A girl delves into witchcraft in the woods of West Virginia in James Tyler Toothman's horror novel *Three Sixes and a Forked Tongue or Cold Medicine and a Liar*.

In the 1970s, Priscilla is a good girl living through bad circumstances. Her father is abusive; her mother drinks too much. Priscilla tries to stay out of their way, go to church, and keep her head down. She pals around with her best friend Joseph most days.

One night, Priscilla and Joseph get lost in the woods. They are found by a local blind family whose members, despite their challenges, are thriving in their forest huts. Mathias, the elder of the clan, knows about Priscilla's circumstances due to small-town living.

It's in Mathias's library that Priscilla finds a book of witchcraft. Priscilla pledges her blood to the book, dreaming of revenge on those who have wronged her and Joseph. She explores drugs and sex as well. However, as she falls deeper into the spells, she moves up to harder, more serious craft and begins to grow away from the girl she was. Joseph watches his friend transform, unsure of what to make of her changes. He begins to fear for his own soul. Then the devil comes to town, complicating the situation further.

The book's packaging is part of its novelty; it includes black page edges, captivating images of potions, and witchcraft symbols on its inside covers. There are pages of black-and-white illustrations of the scenes at hand as well. In addition, song titles are inserted into some scenes, resulting in multimedia layers of atmosphere and drama that give this sometimes familiar story unique depth.

Though Priscilla is the heroine, Joseph serves as a narrator of sorts as well, contributing reflective chapters throughout from his lonely, rearward-gazing adult perspective. He sometimes rambles through the lessons he learned from his time in the woods; a decision he makes near the end of the book is at odds with his previous development. Still, both he and Priscilla change as they face the consequences of their choices. Their conversations are natural; they tease each other and incorporate local dialect. Some dated language is used around the topic of race, though, including too-frequent slurs.

Set in the backwoods, the appealingly packaged horror novel *Three Sixes and a Forked Tongue or Cold Medicine and a Liar* follows friends as they learn to live fully—and then face the consequences of their choices.

LEAH WEBSTER (December 13, 2023)

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