

**An Old Secret**

By Jim Martyka

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### Cast of Characters

**GLADYS** - The leader of the group; a worry wart with a cranky side.

**BERTHA** - Sweet and innocent and definitely in her own universe.

**MARTHA** - Level-headed, loving and protective; Pete's sister.

**PETE** - Goofy hillbilly, not all there but sweet and charming in his own way; Martha's brother

### Scene

A cabin in the forest outside of town.

### Time

Daytime

An Old Secret

*GLADYS, BERTHA and MARTHA, all dressed very conservatively in all black, are cleaning the living room of a modest cabin, circa the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. They clean in silence for a while.*

GLADYS: *(angry yelling)* I can't believe he's here!

MARTHA: Shh, he'll hear you.

GLADYS: I don't care if he does. Him just showing up like this. It's, it's...

BERTHA: Delightful!

GLADYS: Quiet Bertha! It's rude. That's what it is. Just plain rude.

MARTHA: He's family. He's my brother. He just...wanted to surprise me, I guess.

BERTHA: I like him.

MARTHA: Thank you Bertha.

GLADYS: Quiet Bertha!

MARTHA: Oh Gladys, leave her alone. And honestly, I don't know why you're getting so upset.

GLADYS: We knew that when we chose this life with each other, when we created this safe place for others like us, that we couldn't have visitors, at least not any...normal people.

BERTHA: Oooh, that's right, we did, didn't we? *(giggles)* Well, then he has to go.

GLADYS: Thank you Bertha.

MARTHA: Quiet Bertha. He's my brother. What am I supposed to do?

BERTHA: Offer him tea.

GLADYS: No. Bertha, we just said he had to go.

BERTHA: Yes, after tea, he has to go!

***BERTHA continues to clean, humming to herself. GLADYS and MARTHA just stop to look at her for a second and then continue.***

MARTHA: He's harmless.

GLADYS: No! He's not harmless. None of them are harmless, don't you understand? They hate us for what we are!

MARTHA: Gladys, I do understand. Sweetie, I do. But seriously, look at him and listen to him. I love him, but, well, he's rather dim.

BERTHA: *(over her shoulder)* I think he's wonderful.

***GLADYS snaps her fingers and BERTHA immediately turns around and goes back to cleaning.***

GLADYS: It doesn't matter, Martha. If he ever suspected--

***PETE walks in with a rather large sandwich. He is a goofy schlep in his twenties, not all there but sweet and charming in his own way.***

PETE: S'pected what?

BERTHA: WHO ARE YOU?!

***BERTHA starts to go after him with her broom. MARTHA claps her hand and BERTHA instantly drops the broom.***

MARTHA: No, Bertha, this is my brother Pete, remember?

BERTHA: Oh right! *(beat)* Would you like some tea?

GLADYS: No! Hahaha...er...I'm sure Mr. Laudel can't stay too long, right Mr. Laudel?

PETE: Yep, unfortunately I can only stay for the weekend or thereabouts.

BERTHA: Yay!

***BERTHA claps and GLADYS drops whatever she's cleaning and stares, wide-eyed at MARTHA.***

MARTHA: Uhh, we'll talk about that later, okay Petey?

PETE: *(walking around)* Sure. Say, this is quite the spread you got here, Marty.

MARTHA: Please don't call me that.

BERTHA: Who's Marty?

GLADYS: Quiet Bertha.

BERTHA: *(whispering to Gladys)* Do you think Marty will want some tea?

***PETE turns to BERTHA and GLADYS.***

PETE: So, this is Marty's place, but where do you two live? When I was hiking up here, I didn't see another house for miles. Marty, you got yourself good and buried in these woods, yessiree.

BERTHA: Why, silly, we live here with--

MARTHA: Uhh, Petey, how did you find this place anyway?

PETE: Well, that WAS an adventure, I tell you what. Hoo doggies, an adventure indeed.

***PETE sits down and lights up his pipe, remains silent. Long beat as they wait for him to go on, but nothing.***

GLADYS: Okay. Well, what brings you up here, Mr. Laudel?

PETE: You mean, other than seeing my annoying older sis! Haha!

MARTHA: Very funny, Petey.

PETE: Well, Marty, to be honest, there's a lot of talk about you around town.

***GLADYS looks very concerned.***

MARTHA: What do you--

BERTHA: Ha! Annoying older sister! Hahaha!

***GLADYS whacks BERTHA with her cleaning rag.***

MARTHA: What do you mean, talk around town?

PETE: Ahh, there's no need for me to get into all that.

***MARTHA touches PETE on his shoulders.***

MARTHA: Tell us.

PETE: Well, I thought it was real weird when you left. And then mom and pop got all angry at you and said you was sick in the head. I tried to ask what that meant and they said I ain't sposed to talk about you no more. You was dead. Well, I knew you wasn't dead, but I couldn't figger what they was all cross about.

BERTHA: *(whispering to Gladys)* We're not dead, are we?

GLADYS: You're going to be if you don't hush up.

PETE: And then I started to hear other folks talk about you. They was saying you had a disease and you were with two other

gals that also had a disease. They was saying all kinds of nasty things. And then they started to say you was kicked—saaayyy, you must be the two other gals, then, huh?

***GLADYS shakes her head "No" while BERTHA nods "Yes."***

PETE: Anyhoo, they said you wasn't allowed back in town, that y'all were outcasts or somethin'. People was saying you was degenerates and were going to umm "ruin the moral fabric of this Christian town." Well, you still my big sis so that got me plumb mad and I started telling people to—pardon my language ladies—to shut up! Then, Mr. Ferrel, he's the grocer I do some bagging for, well he told me to go see for myself and so, well, so I did. (beat) Marty, you don't look sick. None of y'all do.

***GLADYS seizes the opportunity.***

GLADYS: Oh we are!

MARTHA: Gladys...

GLADYS: Yes, Mr. Laudel, we are very sick indeed.

BERTHA: (terrified) I knew it! Ahhhhh...

***BERTHA runs out of the room screaming. Meanwhile, PETE looks rather concerned.***

PETE: Well, umm, what kind of disease?

MARTHA: No, Pete, it's not what you think. We're—

GLADYS: We're so sick. It's awful and that's why we're up here. We had to get away from everyone, to ...to, well, save them from—

***We hear BERTHA running around the kitchen (offstage) screaming.***

GLADYS: Martha, can you please...

**MARTHA sighs and walks to the kitchen door. She opens it and yells at BERTHA.**

MARTHA: Bertha, peace!

**The yelling stops and MARTHA walks back to GLADYS and PETE. She sighs and sits down, putting her head in her hands.**

GLADYS: Anyway, Mr. Laudel, as I was saying, we're trying to protect the town from catching this uhh, plague that we've contracted. It's horrible, oh it's horrible. That pain is unbearable, but we do this for the good of the town. We are but humble martyrs. But it's a rough life, with just us three all along. We are so lonely and desperate. All we have is just ourselves to entertain each other day and night, night and day. And this fever gets us so hot, and these clothes are so restricting that we have to--

MARTHA: Okay, that's plenty, dear.

GLADYS: It's not safe for them, it's not safe for anyone. In fact, Mr. Laudel, it's not safe for you to even be here.

PETE: Uhh, oh my lord! Marty, is this true?

**MARTHA shrugs her shoulders, defeated.**

MARTHA: *(sighing)* Yep, we're doomed alright. *(beat)* You should probably get going Petey.

PETE: *(a little scared now)* Yeah, uhh, I guess you're right.

**BERTHA walks in with a tray, a pot and cups.**

BERTHA: Who wants a nice cup of tea?

GLADYS: Bertha, Mr. Laudel here was just leaving.

**PETE is making his way to the door.**

PETE: Yes, thank you anyway though, ma'am.



BERTHA: (*sighing*) Nobody ever wants tea.

PETE: Well, ladies, I'm really sorry about everything and well, I hope you get better.

MARTHA: Petey...

***All eyes turn to MARTHA. Long beat.***

MARTHA: You take care of yourself, okay?

PETE: You too. I love you, sis.

MARTHA: I love you too.

***They all walk PETE to the door. Right before he leaves, he stops.***

PETE: Wait, you never said what disease it was y'all had anyway.

***Before they can stop her.***

BERTHA: We're lesbians.

***Beat.***

PETE: Oh, well, that doesn't sound so bad. Good luck to all ya'll.

***PETE waves and exits. GLADYS calls out after him.***

GLADYS: (*yelling*) Remember, tell the other townspeople to stay away from us!

***She closes the door and all three ladies sit down. BERTHA is drinking tea. They sit in silence for a moment or two.***

BERTHA: Well, I think he was very pleasant.

GLADYS: You know, now that he found us, he's going to tell people where we live. Oh, not with any ill intent, of course, the sweet man, just...

MARTHA: Yeah, I know. Like I said, he's dim.

***They sit in silence for another beat or two.***

BERTHA: This is good tea.

GLADYS: Things might get rather challenging.

MARTHA: We'll be ready. We knew this was coming eventually. We should probably brush up on our defensive spells though.

GLADYS: Yes, and we'll need more of the potions. Do we have everything we need?

MARTHA: That depends. Bertha, did you get everything off the list I gave you?

BERTHA: Everything except the lizard heart and the unicorn tears. I couldn't catch the unicorn and well, I didn't want to hurt the poor little lizard.

MARTHA: That's okay, dear.

GLADYS: We'll have to make due. Oh, speaking of which, well done on the "Peace" spell to quiet Bertha down before. That worked beautifully.

BERTHA: I *thought* you used a spell on me!

MARTHA: Oh thank you, even I was surprised how easily that worked.

GLADYS: And you Bertha, nice job of covering with the "we're lesbians" excuse. I think he bought it and who knows, that might just buy us at least a little time.

MARTHA: Yes, well done indeed. If they think we're lesbians, they just might be confused or disturbed and decide to leave us alone...I don't think they burn lesbians.

BERTHA: Thank you.

GLADYS: Well, I'm going to start putting together some of the things we'll need for the potions just in case.

MARTHA: I'm going to go study a bit more, see if I can find any group spells that might help us.

***They both get up and leave.***

BERTHA: I guess I'll sit here and finish my tea.

***She takes another sip or two.***

BERTHA: Wait, we're not lesbians?!

***LIGHTS.***