SHHH

EXT. PICNIC GROUNDS - DAY

Your standard All-American picnic grounds, complete with a

CABIN.

A pretty woman, DINA (40), walks out of the cabin. Across the grassy area, carrying a bottle of beer to her dad.

She hands DAD (75) the beer. He's a bear of a man. He stands and stares at the brooding sky.

DAD Mean-looking clouds.

DINA Yeah, sinful. Now drink your Heineken.

At the picnic grounds, smoke rises from a small barbecue. COOPER, (44) a tall, angular man flips burgers.

Toasting the hamburger buns is the fat brother, MAXWELL (49). Max downs a bottle of beer as he works. At a table, spreading out the condiments is the bald, eldest brother, WILLIS (51).

Dad strolls to the grill. Cooper nods to his father.

COOPER Come to lend a hand?

DAD 'Course not. Just spectating. No secret what you kids think about my cookin'.

He shrugs and Cooper smiles.

COOPER You had other qualities, Pa. Go sit down. Take a load off.

DINA sets down a bowl of potato salad. Dad stares at the clouds. Cooper glances up at the sky.

DAD Weather's turning nasty.

COOPER Last time we picnicked here, it rained cats and dogs.

MAXWELL

I do remember dad's pork chops of death. The beef stew from hell. Hamburger from anoth--

COOPER -do not go there.

DAD

You tryin' to pick a fight with your old man? Huh, Max?

MAXWELL

Well, it has been a while since we had a go at it.

DAD

You seriously wanna tangle with me? Need I remind you I wrestled the likes of Killer Kowalksi and Lou Thesz.

MAXWELL

And Nature Boy Buddy Rogers. Gee, how could we forget. I also remember those bouts of botulism we used to get.

DAD

You kids got sick cuz you always drank pool water.

MAXWELL

No, it was under-cooked meat. We probably had salmonella.

WILLIS

Or E. coli.

DAD

Well, I can't be watching you damn kids every second.

COOPER

No one's blaming you, Pa.

WILLIS

Mama once told me I had my stomach pumped five times by age eight. Back and forth to the hospital. You'd think someone was poisoning us. DINA

Just call it good oldfashioned food poisoning and give it a rest... Dad learned his lesson. I guess that's why mom was master of the kitchen.

DAD She was an angel, bless her soul.

MAXWELL ...listeria, shigella, hepatitis, pin worms.

COOPER Hey, you can stop right there being a goddamn ass.

MAXWELL

Who's being an ass, Coop? Just saying what's on my mind. But speaking of ass, how do you get a tape worm's attention?

Max dips his middle finger into some barbecue sauce. Holds his oozing middle finger in front of Cooper.

MAXWELL (CONT'D) Stick this where the fuckin' sun don't shine.

COOPER You're a sick bastard. No wonder Beth left you.

DAD Geez m'knees. Enough already.

Dad see another son approching. BRAD, 56, tall and stocky. Dad hugs him and Brag hugs back.

DAD Look who finally showed up.

BRAD Good God, Dad, you're still as strong as a crazy grizzly.

DAD We thought you wouldn't make it. Thought you were still fighting in Iraq. BRAD Dad, I'm a cop. Not a soldier.

Brad greets his brothers. Hugs and high-fives.

BRAD (CONT'D) Had our monthly john bust. You'll never guess who got caught in the sting --

DINA (O.S.) Hey, big brother.

BRAD (turning) Hey, little sister.

They hug. Dina hands Brad a beer. He cheerfully accepts.

DAD Who got caught in the sting?

EXT. PICNIC GROUNDS - LATER

Everybody seated around the picnic table. Dad stands. Holds up a bottle of beer.

DAD

Thank you for coming. And thanks for leaving your damn spouses at home. Kids, too. Just the family here, like old times...good times. (glancing skywards) I know your mother is looking down behind that bitch of a cloud. So, to all of us...

COOPER Here here, to dad.

OTHERS

To dad.

HONK -- a sports car pulls near the picnic table. Out steps youngest son, J.R., (42), tan, preppy looking. He waves.

EXT. PICNIC GROUNDS - LATER

Sun is gone. Rain falls on a vacant picnic grounds.

INT. CABIN

Candle-lit interiors. A lot of one-on-one conversations.

DINA Daddy wants to play a game. For old time's sake.

MAXWELL

Poker.

COOPER I hate poker. Charades?

WILLIS Chutes and Ladders?

J.R.

Darts.

MAXWELL Darts? Do you see any dart boards around here?

BRAD

Wresting.

A collective GROAN. Dad drops his head, then looks up.

DAD I'm still head of this family, so I say what we play. We're gonna play 'To Tell a Secret.'

BRAD Oh yeah. Talk about deja vu.

MAXWELL I always hated that game.

COOPER Good, why not clear the air.

DAD There are things that need to be said.

Dina goes to a desk and pulls out sheets of paper. She grabs a fistful of pencils. Distributes to each family member.

DAD Object is to confess a secret, which to the best of your guys' and girl's ability, cannot be traced back to you.

J.R. Dad, we know the rules.

DINA J.R., let him finish.

Everybody looks at each other. Uneasiness in their faces.

DAD Rules are as follows: The secret has to be real. The secret has to be about you. The secret has to be substantial enough to spark conversation — so no dumb-ass thing about how you cheated on a test. And nobody has to own up to their secret, so it stays a secret. Unless you want to come clean.

Everybody keeps a weary eye on each other, then writes. Dina checks her watch. Then collects the papers in a shoe box.

DINA Dad, you're first.

Dad sticks his hand in the box. Pulls out a paper and reads.

DAD I... had an affair with somebody here's spouse.

Eyes shift around the room.

J.R. Whew. Luckily I don't have a spouse.

BRAD True. But maybe that means you're suspect No. 1.

J.R. Come on. I wouldn't waste my time with your wives. WILLIS Whose wife you referring too?

DINA OK, let's keep going. J.R.

J.R. reaches into the box. Draws a slip of paper. Unfolds it.

J.R. I was the one who set fire to the church kitchen.

Again, the trading of uneasy glances.

WILLIS An arsonist in the family?

DAD That was back in 1980. Did you set fire to the church, J.R.?

J.R. Hell no. I just reading somebody else's messed-up secret.

BRAD Yes, but something about the way you read that...

J.R. What a crock.

COOPER You always had a thing for matches.

J.R. Why am I guilty of everything?

COOPER I'm just saying you liked matches.

BRAD Then again, wasn't it Max who got suspended from school for starting a real fire?

DAD Maxwell did get suspended. It was 1972. Bicentennial year. MAXWELL It was Joe Lee. He did it. I was just hanging out with him.

BRAD So you were an accomplice.

WILLIS Bicentennial was 1976.

MAXWELL Go to hell, Brad.

DINA All right. Moving along. Max, your turn.

Maxwell looks pissed. He takes a slip from the box. Reads:

MAXWELL I'm still in the closet.

Eyes roll back to J.R. His eyes widen.

J.R. Ah, fuck no. Don't you look my way. Just cause I'm not married. Tons of married people are closet homos.

MAXWELL Cooper's always had a delicate touch.

COOPER And you've been in prison, Maxxy Pad. That makes you someone who has had gay sex.

WILLIS OK, let's play something else.

BRAD What's the matter, Willis. We getting too close to a certain flame?

WILLIS Stay out of my business.

DINA

My turn.

Dina withdraws a slip of paper. Unfolds it.

DINA The Johnson boy down the street. The hit and run death. I'm sorry.

Dina frowns. Looks around. Everybody seems taken aback.

BRAD Somebody here ran over that Johnson kid and all this time, never blinked twice?

DAD That was back in 1978. Yeah, I remember. Ricky Johnson. He used to deliver our newspaper.

J.R. Early in the a.m. Now who here would have been up that early?

MAXWELL Yeah, who would leave early for work?

DAD Brad used to have an early shift at the LAPD.

Eyes swing toward Brad. Brad looks calm, smiles.

BRAD Why not me? I could possibly cover something like that up.

DINA You saying you...?

BRAD No, I'm innocent. I was tending to a call across town. It's documented.

DAD

Sick...

Dad looks weary. Brad looks at Cooper.

BRAD (CONT'D) Willis, you used to get home that time from Food Giant.

WILLIS

Ain't it interesting how cops bend the truth. Heck, Brad, you probably know every lie and every alibi in the book.

BRAD

Yeah, probably do. But I also know when someone is lying. I can read the eyes.

WILLIS Read the eyes? Come on.

BRAD Maybe I just found the killer.

WILLIS Pin another medal of valor on Brad's chest, why don't we.

Brad sits back and laughs.

MAXWELL How come Dina and Dad are immune from blame?

Heads turn to Max.

COOPER Let Dina be.

MAXWELL So her kid drowned in the family pool. Why pretend it didn't happen?

Brad pulls a hidden revolver. Trains it at Maxwell's head.

BRAD Best keep your mouth shut.

Max shrinks back.

DINA Trish died a long time ago. It's over. Brad, you're up.

Brad withdraws his revolver. Takes a breath. He looks stunned by his actions. Takes a note from the shoe box. Reads:

BRAD I've long been thinking about suicide.

Eyes are bouncing from person to person.

WILLIS This family gets more dysfunctional by the minute.

J.R. I hope whoever wrote this, comes forward. I'm serious.

Dad gets up and buckles, clutching his stomach. Dina and Cooper are first to help catch him.

DAD

Sick...

They carry him to the bathroom. That horrible vomit gurgle. Dina hurries out of the bathroom.

DINA He's vomiting blood.

Brad moves toward the front door.

BRAD Get him into my car. I'm gettin' him to emergency.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DAY

The family sits pensively. DR. PHILLIPS (early 60s) enters.

DR. PHILLIPS I'm so sorry. We tried, but his age worked against him.

The siblings sit in despair. Dina breaks into a sob. Cooper wraps a comforting arm around her.

DR. PHILLIPS (CONT'D) Coroners will do an autopsy. But it looks like food poisoning. Has anybody else been sick?

BRAD No. We all ate the same things. DR. PHILLIPS Again, my condolences.

Dr. Phillips leaves the room. Dina looks at her brothers. Brad walks away, then walks back. Cooper looks at Max.

COOPER

He committed suicide. Because of you, Max, with all your bullshit about food poisoning.

MAXWELL How do you know I didn't write that suicide note?

WILLIS

Did you?

DINA There was one unread secret.

J.R. There was?

DINA I have it. I've read it...

Dina pulls it from her pocket. Unfolds it. Looks at her brothers. Reads:

DINA ... I'm responsible for <u>all</u> the food poisoning.

She looks up. All eyes are on her now.

FADE OUT.

THE END.