SHHH
FADE IN:

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 old-fashioned 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 approaching. 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
Wrestling.

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:
I’ve long been thinking about suicide.

Eyes are bouncing from person to person.

This family gets more dysfunctional by the minute.

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.

Sick...

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

He’s vomiting blood.

Brad moves toward the front door.

Get him into my car. I’m gettin’ him to emergency.

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

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.

Coroners will do an autopsy. But it looks like food poisoning. Has anybody else been sick?

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 all the food poisoning.

She looks up. All eyes are on her now.

FADE OUT.

THE END.