

BLOOD ON OUR HANDS

By Gorden Schweers

Socrates whispered softly in the boy's ear - *The truth will set you free.*

Madison made no apology for having an impressionable temperament. Rather he considered it somewhat clever on his part to be so easily influenced by popular films and movie stars. If the protagonist in a smash hit spoke with a certain accent, Madison could be heard speaking with the same inflexion as the actor for days after taking in the film. It would take time for his impersonation to pass out of his blood stream before he resumed his life as little more than an average Joe with a job in a warehouse. One film in particular made a lasting impression on Madison. It was premiered in the movie theaters around the lower mainland just when the schools of salmon were returning to spawn in one of the many rivers feeding in to the city's Burrard Inlet. The Madisons had sat in the comfortable chairs of an Ogden theater, watching Brad Pitt spin cast with superb artistry in Robert Redford's *A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT*. No sooner had they left the theater than Madison vowed in front of his two boys he'd outdo Brad Pitt in fly fishing. He would, he told his sons in the car on the way back home, teach himself how to cast silk line for hundreds of feet just like Pitt had done in the movie and they would see – he'd haul in some mighty hefty silvers for Sunday dinner.

This quirk in Madison's character might have been an amusing distraction except for the problems it was creating for his sons. Especially for Junior who was the youngest of the boys. He was too immature to see through the bad example set by his father and consequently picked up the habit of mimicking the misdeeds of older boys at school. He was always getting sent to the principal's office as a result.

Antoine on the other hand was disconcerted by what he saw happening in his family and approached Philip Socrates for guidance. As the school's guidance counselor, Mr. Socrates looked like W. C. Fields and even acted a bit like him on occasion. To deal with his drinking issue, the math teacher had taken the job as a counselor in the school system for the last two or three years before retirement. Amongst the students, he had the reputation for being something of a put on. But Antoine had no choice if he was to air his misgivings and seek mature advice.

The counseling office was just wide enough for Mr. Socrates to slip his rotund waist around one side of his desk. He was finishing up his lunch when Antoine entered the office after knocking softly on the door. The room was filled with the aroma of an egg salad sandwich.

"And what can I do for Mr. Madison today?" the counselor asked with a raspy drawl. "Take a load off your feet my little chickadee and have a chair."

Antoine made himself comfortable. Bits of an egg sandwich were sticking to Mr. Socrates' upper lip. A half-finished cigar lay in an ashtray next to a paper cup filled with pens and pencils. As a decorative touch, a bowler hat was hanging from one bare wall.

After a short pause, Antoine stated his grievances by describing the situation where the adults in his life were always imitating each other. He described this as if it was akin to a personal crisis. Antoine pleaded his case: Weren't there any adults in the world who were happy *just to be themselves* and not have to pretend they were someone else? Mr. Socrates was impressed. He jabbed one of his stubby fingers in the air and said:

"Now that my young *Seeker of Truth* is one fine metaphysical question. What grade are you in? Grade Five. Yes, that must be Mrs. Sharron's home room class. She's lucky to have a student like you who can think in such abstract terms. I remember when I was in the fifth grade. I was infatuated with one of the young ladies. It was a wonderful year. How about you, Antoine?"

"What about me?" the boy replied. "What about my father? Is it right for people to go around pretending they aren't who they are? Isn't that what some people would call *two-faced*?"

It was obvious the boy wasn't going to leave without some concrete answers. Mr. Socrates covered his mouth when he burped down his lunch for one last time. It was time to slip in to his Psychology 101 persona.

"My young Solomon, what you've described," he submitted, "is called the chain of command. Its one of the most important aspects in our present social order."

"It is?" asked an incredulous Antoine.

"Yes. Very much so. Without one man following the example of the next man ahead of himself our social contract would fall apart. Confucius was quoted as saying *Know Thy Place*. That's good advice in any age." The counselor smiled at the boy.

Antoine was confused. It didn't seem right his father assumed the personalities of others through voice overs. He mentioned the effect this was having on his younger brother who had been sent to Mr. Socrates' office many times already this year.

"So Junior is your brother? Nice boy. But he'll grow out of it. I encouraged him to copy the attributes of those in our midst who have talent and vision."

Socrates was complacent, reflecting on the positive results his insights were having on the younger generation.

“Junior is far too impressionable,” Antoine said, expressing empathy for his brother. “He might as well be a lump of soft clay!”

The counselor waved aside the criticism.

“As for you,” Socrates continued with his inspirational sermon, “I would advise you never to forget the sacrifices your parents and teachers are making on your behalf. My mother gave me every possible opportunity to make a success of my life. I am deeply indebted to her.”

Mr. Socrates grew solemn, reflecting on the abuse he had suffered as a child from an alcoholic father.

“But I would also give you this one small caveat. No one has to accept patterns of behavior when deemed offensive. Even if your parents have given you every possible opportunity, at some point in your life you have to take the responsibility to *think for yourself*.”

The counselor was staring directly at his pupil. Antoine had his whole life ahead of himself. The wrong piece of advice could have disastrous consequences. The bell rang in the hallway for the next series of classes. Before Antoine could get up from his chair, Mr. Socrates rose from his and came to his side. Social standards dictated that a certain amount of physical space be kept between teachers and pupils. This expectation was being disregarded. Antoine was alarmed but Mr. Socrates put a pudgy hand on his shoulder to keep him seated. Bending down, he whispered softly in boy’s ear - *The truth will set you free*.

Antoine left the office not knowing if the advice he had been given was good or bad. He still had to live with his family members and tolerate them at the same time, just as they with him for that matter. But nevertheless, he filed away Mr. Socrates’ homily.

Coming back home from the Redford movie, Madison was as consistent as concrete. He sent Junior up to the attic to dig out his father’s old monogrammed fly rod. Grandpa Lee and their father shared the same names, a family trait designed to encourage the offspring to copy without question the ethics of their progenitors. It was highly successful in the Madison family.

With the fly rod in his father's possession, Junior sat down beside his brother and listened as his father regaled them with the promise of a fishing expedition to the mouth of the Seymour River. This tributary poured its glacial runoff in to the salt chuck at the northeast side of the Second Narrows Bridge. Even as they spoke, Madison assured his boys enormous schools of silver beauties were shooting up the rapids to spawn upstream.

"You really going to take us fishing?" Junior asked.

Madison turned the old rod over slowly, inspecting the spun fiberglass for cracks and the chrome eyelets held in place by lashings of waxed thread.

"Hmm, this rod is still in good shape," replied his father, snapping it like a buggy whip with his wrist. "Good action," he assured his two boys, speaking like a seasoned veteran in evaluating fishing rods. Then he spread his feet apart, as if positioning them on the banks of some remote Canadian river. The tip of the rod was cast in a horizontal sweep from one side of the room to the other. The sound it made was of the wind whistling down a canyon wall. In his free hand, Madison held an invisible strand of silk line. His countenance was a perfect caricature of Brad Pitt playing the character of Paul Maclean. Their father's animation of the actor's graceful and intrepid ballet was amazing to watch.

"Where are you going to practice, Dad?" Antoine asked, concerned his father was going to do irreparable damage to their frontal lobes before coming to his senses.

The rod whisked past with another menacing insinuation. First once, and then a second time; back and forth, so that neither of the boys dared move for fear of coming in contact with a backlash. Madison was repeating his new mantra for catching the big one, "Out and over, now tip, now slack and pause; boy oh baby watch that fly dance!" He thrust the point of the rod as far as he could towards the back of the living room wall. The tip of the rod then hit the ceiling. "Bang! We set the hook and listen to that first bite run off 50 yards from the reel!" He went so far as to mime the fight and supply the sound effect from the fishing reel losing hundreds of feet of mono filament "Zzzzzzzz.....zzzzzzzzz." The reel was spooling out its silken line across whirlpools of a river that was passing like a mirage before Madison's glazed concentration.

His narration continued: "We have a big one on the end of our line – boys – and its fight'n mad, jumping clear in the air!"

So we take our time – *take our time, boys* – coaxing it towards the shore! This is where my two *accomplices-in-crime* do their part!"

Madison grinned at his sons who were sitting before him with their heads bent down and out of danger.

“Just as my silver darling is getting hauled to shore, you scramble in to the rapids and retrieve a prize that’s long as a gator and just as full of fury!” The rod whipped over the heads of the boys and hung trembling in the dead air of the living room.

“Oh boy!” shouted Junior, jumping to his feet. “We’re going fishing! Dad’s taking us fishing!”

The fishing rod swung upwind, missing connection with Junior’s physiognomy by a few millimeters. Antoine laughed as he witnessed the near collision between the vacuum his brother had for a brain and the whip held by the aspiring avatar he had for a father.

“We almost had ourselves another headless horseman,” Antoine quipped. But Madison was too focused to take notice, preoccupied with the stance and demeanor of an expert fly caster. He had crossed *the threshold*. The weightless balance of the fishing rod was a balm to his heart and soul. Madison had made primal connection with the sacred rite of fly casting. He and Brad Pitt were blood brothers from this point onwards.

It is important to always have an alibi if asked questions afterward. With this in mind, Madison intended to *kill two birds with one stone* by keeping his word to his sons. Even innate skills can be lost without a followup. Therein each day after dinner the two boys participated in an odyssey to the nearest empty lot. In the middle of an open space, Madison practiced the winning cast that would send the fly line across the rapids of the mighty Seymour River. The trip was planned for the second Saturday of the month. In the place of feathers for a lure, Madison attached a tiny lead weight. After much practice, the line wobbled a little farther with each throw. For markers, he sent Junior and Antoine far out in the field. With his boys standing a dozen feet apart he tried in vain to make his lead shot land between them.

Junior cried encouragement to his father while Antoine choked with laughter at the whole performance. His father’s attempts to be a sportsman were nothing short of pathetic.

“Now you boys just watch this one,” Madison would shout before winding backwards with the rod. From the distance, he looked like a maestro conducting a symphony with a ten foot baton. On the apex of an arc, the lure climbed into the air only to fall far short of the intended target.

“Oh key-rist,” their father cursed, reeling the lure back again through the dust. Even this action was a source of amusement to Antoine. His father was frantically spinning the line back as if it was on the end of an egg beater. Somehow the old codger was going to justify his purpose on earth with a hand-me-down fly rod and an even older spin caster for a reel.

Madison tried again. And again. The routine was repeated dozens of times every evening for a week until the weekend came when the three of them piled in to their Chevy station wagon. The city was spread across an expanse of delta lands that were incised by inlets. Far beneath the interlocking girders of a modern bridge, the pristine Seymour flowed from the forested mountains to an industrial foreshore. In the back window of the station wagon, the fishing rod was bent in place like a tight bow. Madison was in a good mood, deepening his voice to a baritone and singing ‘*What should we do with the drunken sailor, he ho and up she rises, he ho and up...*’ Junior looked to the right and left at the passing traffic, wondering if any of the other motorists noticed *the Madison boys* were going on a fishing expedition together. When they reached the apex of the bridge, Antoine was spell bound for a split second by the expanse of mountains and the congestion of buildings crowding both shorelines. But in an instant the panorama was gone again and Antoine was left peering over the edge of a steel parapet. At the base of the bridge, the Seymour was flowing in to the sea like an artery of liquid jade. Madison assured his boys that salmon in the tens of thousands were sashaying up the river to complete their life cycles. *Spawn and die* Madison boasted *Spawn and die*. In a flash, the image of the river vanished as the car sped off the bridge on to #23 cloverleaf. The experience of a lifetime awaited the boys.

Madison parked the car at the end of a narrow gauge bridge that traversed the river. He kept up his monologue as they made their way down an embankment, prepping the boys for the moment he’d snag the largest salmon of their entire lives. But when they were on the bank of the river, studying its whirlpools and back eddies, Antoine pointed out the fact they had left the fishing rod in the back of the station wagon.

They had arrived emptied handed. Madison laid the blame on his boys and told Junior to go fetch the fly rod pronto. Madison and Antoine were left loitering by the river, waiting and watching as the traffic passed through the crisscross beams of the bridge a short distance upstream.

Madison lit up an Export A and exhaled, studying the ripples and wavelets on the river for signs indicating the migration of Chinooks and Coho. Antoine studied the surface in his own way, wondering how anything could survive in a medium with such deadly undercurrents. It would get worse as the salmon fought their way upstream in to shallower waters.

Junior returned out of breath with the fly rod and handed it to his father with deference. Okay, after that little set back their mission could proceed. Madison paced back and forth with the fly rod in his hand. The most appropriate spot to make the first cast was a short distance from the I-beam shadow of the bridge.

“But why here, Dad?” asked Antoine. The water seemed less disturbed near the mouth of the river. Madison pointed the tip of his rod across to a boulder in mid channel.

“You see that there rock, young fella?” he said with a Brad Pitt inflection. “These silver darlings have been cavorting around in the darkest part of that their ocean.” The rod tip acknowledged first the salt brine of the open Pacific and then tipped upstream towards the narrow bridge. “And that their rock affords them a refuge where they can catch their breath before shooting up the river in single file,” Madison said, scowling with an expression that suggested his patience was running short. Grandpa Lee’s old tilley hat had an assortment of fishing flies attached to the head band. Madison dusted off the best of the collection. A fly of iridescent feathers was attached by a leader to the end of his fish line. On the opposite shore, the black dorsal of tyees were breaking the surface of the tidal pools. A few lunged at insects before moving upstream under the rusty hulk of the bridge.

The river had its own voice and presence. Occasionally cars and trucks raced across the bridge, displacing the silence of the wilderness with the sound of transmissions and tires. With the traffic passed, the river whispered innuendos back to the intruder and his two young boys.

“Okay – men – this is it!” Madison said as he stood with his legs apart. The rod was balancing on his wrist action. Then the line was airborne from the tip of the fly rod. Flight that was imperceptible sent the feathers fluttering over the ripples towards the back eddies surrounding the half-submerged boulder. “You did it, Dad!” Junior was delighted. With the cigarette clamped between his lips, Madison smiled with cool assurance. Antoine let out a whoop of enthusiasm.

The lure was floating towards the boulder on its intended trajectory. Madison teased the fly with gentle tugs. Traffic noises distracted Antoine for a few seconds. First a couple passed on a motorcycle at high speed, followed by a white Pontiac. In another second, with his eyes turned back towards the river, he heard the familiar sound of another motorcycle but it was gone by the time he looked back. His eyes made contact with Madison’s expression. Grinning like a fox, he flicked the cigarette in to the river. Nothing struck at the fly on the water however. Madison reeled it in and was preparing to make a longer and more serious cast. He tossed his line back and forth, back and forth – just as Brad Pitt had done in the film – and followed this all with a powerful stroke but (unfortunately) in the *wrong* direction.

The line made a graceful arc on the wind away from the river towards the bridge. Suddenly the reel was screaming as the line was pulled away at 60 kilometers an hour. The fly had wrapped itself around the antennae of a passing vehicle. Madison was standing on the shoreline while every inch of his fishing line was peeled off the spool and taken down the road. In the final second, the line parted on the empty spool and left the three of them standing in shock and awe.

This was no laughing matter. Their fishing expedition had ended even before it had snagged a deadhead. Antoine was about to offer commiseration (such as: *You can't win them all*) but his father beat him to the punch and was threatening him lest he *dare* make one smart ass remark. So ended the great escapade. When they got back to the car, Madison was in such a fury he broke his father's fishing rod to pieces and left it at the side of the highway. In silence, they swung back on to the six lanes of the Second Narrows and headed home again, slipping in to the traffic stream like the salmon that had eluded their attempts at plundering the species. The tension in the car was uncomfortable. Junior petitioned his father to stop at a Mc Donalds but the request was ignored.

"You'd better stay away from the old man," Antoine cautioned his younger brother as they left the garage behind their house. In front of them was the hunched shape of their father ambling along like some ornery bear just out of hibernation. They stopped and stood outside the house. Soon they could hear Madison ranting to their mother, recounting all of the injustices he had suffered in a world that was not the least bit impartial.

"Looks like the fishing pro is really pissed off," Antoine whispered to his brother with a grin.

The following evening, as the boys prepared for bedtime and school the next morning, a pair of detectives showed up on their doorstep.

Their mother answered the door in her apron and stared at two strangers. They said they were from the homicide branch of the city police department. Junior had come behind his mother in his pajamas and was trying to peer over her shoulder. His mother called for their father, nervous and hesitant to believe the men. Madison came to the door and after checking the identification of the plain clothes detectives, allowed them to step inside the hallway of the house. He didn't want the neighbors to notice anything suspicious. Antoine turned off *Bonanza* on the TV and joined his family. The officers were questioning his father.

"Are you Lee John Madison?" asked the younger of the officers.

“Yeah, why?”

“Were you anywhere near Seymour River recently?” asked the other officer who had the jowls of a pit bull.

Madison looked from his wife to his sons and volunteered, “Is there something wrong?”

“We were fishing” said Junior proudly.

“We gathered that from name on the fishing rod we found in the grass near the bridge.” The officer directed his question to the boy. “When was that, kid?”

“Yesterday afternoon,” their father interjected.

“We asked the kid – not you,” insisted the pit bull.

The atmosphere was stifled by suspicion and distrust.

“Is there something wrong?” asked their mother.

“So you were at the river and fishing. Why was the rod broken and left behind?”

“I had some bad luck and lost all my line,” Madison explained. “We went to the river, fished for 35 minutes, and came directly home. Is there a problem?”

The detectives were capable of telepathy. They could share coded gigabytes between themselves with the exchange of a glance.

“Did you see anything strange while you were on the river?”

Madison acted confused by the question. It made no sense whatsoever and he shook his head.

“Did you see anyone else on the river at the same time?” the younger detective interjected, staring at Junior who was intimidated and sought shelter from behind his mother. She too shook her head in silence.

“How about you, kid?” the officer said, addressing Antoine. “Did you see anything *strange* around the river when you were there?”

Again, their mother asked, “Is there something wrong?”

The detective exchanged glances.

“You go to that river often?” one of them asked Junior.

Junior opened up. Responding to the attention he was receiving, he blurted out the story of his father practicing just like the man they saw in the movie about the river. One detective listened closely to Junior while the pit bull watched Madison with distrust and contempt.

“So this was your first time on the river ever?”

“Yes, of course,” Madison conceded. “Look, my kids have to get to bed. What’s this all about?”

“We’ll ask the questions here, not you,” the pit bull snarled back.

“Why did you choose that river over any other?” asked the detective.

“Its nearby,” responded Madison.

There was another long silence and standoff. Their mother insisted the detectives to tell them the reason for their intrusion.

A glance was exchanged and the younger detective volunteered, “A murder was committed on the river the same time you were in the area.”

“A murder!” their mother repeated. “But surely you don’t believe my husband or boys were involved in something like that! I mean....”

The detectives stood their ground. They looked over the family carefully. Junior pulled back like a terrified rabbit whereas Antoine stood staring at them with a noncommittal expression.

“Just who was killed?” asked the father.

“A young woman. Less than a mile upstream from where we found your fishing rod. She was assaulted by several men before they beat her unconscious with a boulder.”

Mrs. Madison wailed, “Oh my God!”

“How old was she?” interjected Madison, showing the composure, his wife lacked.

“Now what difference would that make?” asked the pit bull.

“I have kids of my own,” Madison replied.

“We can see that,” replied the second detective. “What about you, Antoine? That’s your name isn’t it? Did you see anything suspicious?”

“You keep my kids out of this, okay,” Madison insisted, intent on protecting his family.

But the detectives had done their homework. Following their only lead, they had run checks on all the members of the Madison clan. Lee Madison was involved in small time racketeering in his workplace. The principal of the school the boys attended had encouraged the detectives to get in touch with the counselor, Mr. Socrates. He in turn suggested they talk privately with Antoine, the eldest of the Madison boys.

“Who was killed?” asked Antoine.

“Now we’re getting somewhere,” said the pit bull to his cohort. The second officer read the name on a piece of paper he had taken from his pocket – *Kathleen Jane Anderson*.

“Oh no,” cried their mother “not the Anderson girl! Who would do such a thing?”

“You know this girl?” the pit bull asked Antoine.

Antoine shrugged. “She’s a senior in our school. Her brother is in my class with me. Bruce Anderson.”

Four pairs of eyes were fixed on Antoine. His father was making subtle gestures with his face, suggesting the boy should get lost if he knew what was good for him. Instead Antoine volunteered more information:

“Our school just had a talent contest and she did a break dance routine for the parents and us kids. She’s really a good dancer.”

“Apparently too good,” snorted the pit bull.

“So you knew this girl and still you’re telling us it was a co-incidence you were on the same river where she was murdered. You want us to believe that?”

“Yeah,” said Antoine defensively. “Yeah.”

“Antoine, shut up!” Madison said in no uncertain terms.

“No, you shut up,” said the pit bull.

“I’m going to be sick,” their mother announced in a panic and left to gag in the bathroom.

The younger detective was less obtrusive. He had a faint hunch that led him to further questions with Antoine.

“How long were you on the river for?” he asked if only as a way to continue their dialogue.

“Dad already told you – thirty minutes,” replied Antoine and he repeated the story of his father’s ill fated cast that lost all of his fishing line to a passing vehicle. The humor of the incident relieved some of the tension but the interrogation continued:

“And you saw nothing unusual (or suspicious) at all?”

“Maybe just some passing traffic.”

Madison stepped in front of his son, shouting, “Get to your room! Do you hear me! *Get-to-your-room!*”

The pit bull grabbed Madison by one arm and spun him against a wall in the hallway, warning him he’d break every bone in his body if he interfered one more time. Madison was yelling over the detective’s shoulder:

“That boy *lies* all the time. Makes up stories...”

His outburst subsided when the bull dog clenched his fist in front of Madison’s face, threatening to quash him. The younger detective continued:

“What’s important about the traffic you saw? You said you saw some traffic. Didn’t you say that?”

Antoine stared at the face of the man who was questioning him. He wondered if the young detective was imitating someone else (like Dick Tracey) just like the rest of the adults in his life. But he couldn’t stop the images from rolling back through his memory. As if in slow motion, he saw in exact detail two people pass on the bridge on a motorcycle. He saw too that look in his father’s eyes on the river, a look that would haunt him for the rest of his life.

Antoine took a deep breath. There were too many undercurrents. An enormous effort was required to connect the images on the bridge to the words in his mouth.

“I saw a man and a woman pass by on a motorcycle,” he ventured hesitantly. “I don’t know why but it seemed rather important I take notice.”

“Don’t do this,” Madison pleaded such that the pit bull grabbed him by the front of his pullover and pushed him against the wall.

“Well, lets see. That would last all of two or three seconds,” the other detective said, persisting. “Why is that important?”

Antoine looked down at tiles on the floor. He shook his head and said, “I don’t know...”

“You don’t know,” the detective repeated. This was getting nowhere. He needed more details.

“What was the color of the woman’s hair? Perhaps you remember that?”

Antoine stared back at the detective. At the same instant, he was standing back on the river bank, watching two people race by in slow motion on the bridge above the river.

“She has dyed red hair,” he said.

The detectives exchanged glances. Their lead had just gone stone cold.

The younger detective had a hunch and asked, “Why dyed, Antoine?”

“I guess because it was a rather strange color of red.”

Madison pulled himself away from the pit bull and was sitting in the kitchen, complaining to himself, saying that his son *lied* all of the time, one *lie* after another, always telling things that weren’t true and *lying* all the time. The detective stood in the hallway, blocking the possibility of any return passage. Mrs. Madison joined her husband with Junior standing at her side. She was pale, equally concerned, and shaken. The pit bull tossed a package from his pocket to the other detective and continued to stand guard in the hallway.

The younger detective opened up the package, unfurling a neck scarf. “Is this the color you saw,” he asked, showing Antoine the red fabric.

Antoine was stunned. “Yes, yes,” he said. “What is that? That was the color of her hair!”

“You know the Anderson girl had blonde hair, don’t you?”

“Sure,” said Antoine. “All of us guys were in love with her.” He looked again at the fabric in front of him, the piece of a collage that wasn’t coherent.

“The woman you glimpsed on the motorcycle was wearing this scarf.” The detective said. “It was knotted around her throat when hikers found her warm body and called the police.”

There was a pause and then the younger detective looked up at his cohort and said, “This kid is a winner.”

The pit bull said, “I wouldn’t have believed it if I hadn’t seen it for myself.”

“So, my friend, we’ve established the fact that the woman you saw on the motorcycle was in fact Kathleen Anderson. What comes next?”

Antoine knew what they were looking for but was terrified of the consequences to his family and neighbors. The school system encouraged him to *think* for himself but the cost was phenomenally high. As if standing at a gallows, he was confronted with the choice to be himself and not someone else. Antoine bit his lip.

“A white Pontiac was behind the motorcycle.” His voice was trembling.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. Positive.”

Mrs. Madison came in to the hallway through the living room entrance. She was pleading, “Please, my husband’s didn’t do anything wrong. It was those other men. We’re good people...”

“Motorcycle, red hair, white Pontiac. What happened next, Antoine?” asked the detective.

Antoine was listening to his mother. He shook his head. "I didn't see anything else." The detective looked down at him and said, "Antoine, you're lying. Don't lie."

His parents were in the hallway, supporting each other. They looked crushed, on their way to a gulag. This was it. This was the end of their family life and the end of his innocence. But he couldn't find a valid reason to lie like the rest of the people in his life. Antoine volunteered:

"Another motorcycle passed by but I didn't see it."

"How did you know it was a motorcycle then?"

"I heard it," the boy confessed.

"Okay," said the younger detective. "You are losing me here. How do you know it was a motorcycle if you didn't see it?"

"It has a distinctive sound," he replied. "I wouldn't miss it anywhere."

The detectives stood staring at one another. One asked tentatively:

"What type of a motorcycle?"

"Its a Jawa. I hear it every night when Danny Miller returns from working the late shift and comes down our street at midnight."

"You know this Danny Miller? He a friend of yours?"

"Of course not," Antoine complained. "Kathleen was engaged to Danny but broke it off. My Dad plays penny poker with his dad every second Wednesday of the month. Four or five of them play together at the Walker's place."

The last piece of the nightmare locked tightly in place. Antoine couldn't look his parents in the face. Once people found out he was the one who fingered the culprits and put their husbands, sons, and brothers behind bars, Antoine would be the pariah of the neighborhood.

The pit bull said, "The *second* Wednesday. That was this week. Three days before those bastards murdered her."

“That must have been some poker game you guys played,” the younger detective said to Madison.

“That little bitch had it coming,” Madison said in rebuttal.

“I’ll bet this Walker creep drives a white Pontiac?” the pit bull said. Antoine confirmed his guess with a slight nod.

“Look,” protested Madison, “I wasn’t involved. I listened to what they were planning to do to her, nothing else. I’ll testify if you give me immunity from prosecution.”

They didn’t bother to respond. The case was closed. Madison was coming down to the precinct locked in the back cage of a police car. The charges were an accessory to murder and the obstruction of justice. Several cruisers arrived with their Led bubbles tracing out the circumference of red circles. Neighbors gathered in their front yards to watch Madison escorted out of his home in handcuffs.

For the Madison family, the change was indefensible. The house of cards that had sheltered Antoine and his brother for a dozen years was about to collapse not with a loud bang but with a series of bank statements. Antoine lost his resolve and ran after the detectives, pleading with them to release his father. The younger detective tried to assuage his fears:

“I’ll make sure you and your brother are taken care of properly, okay?”

The gesture held no substance. The boys would find themselves estranged, residing in different foster homes. Without Madison, their mother couldn’t make it on her own.

“Can you give me back my family?” Antoine begged.

“No,” said the detective from the passenger side of an unmarked car. “We can’t raise the dead either for that matter. Think of what the Andersons are going through now”.

Madison looked back at his son for one last time from the back seat of a police cruiser. In the final analysis, Philip Socrates could have been more forthcoming with his advice to his impressionable student. *The truth will set you free*. Omitted was the part that the truth can leave a lasting bitter taste or lead up to a crucifixion. Perhaps that’s why so many of us prefer to be two-faced.

END