**One Step Behind You**

Part One

By Randall Austin

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In the last quarter of my senior year at St. James  
Private School for Boys, I received notice that I had  
been awarded a scholarship to Gilman College in  
Pennsylvania.  My friends seemed to be as happy for me  
as I was for myself, since Gilman College was  
recognized as having one of the finest history  
departments in the country.  History was my obsession,   
and it was my goal in life to specialize in one of the  
relatively smallest seriously researched areas in  
American history, that of the American West prior to  
the 19th century.     
  
The summer after graduation Brother Michael, a faculty  
member at St. James Private School, had a party for me  
and my circle of friends.  While it was not really a  
party just for me, I was the main focus of the  
gathering, because everyone was especially happy that  
a match that seemed so right, Gilman College and me,   
had been made.  Indeed, my goal for college had even  
been the subject of the local community newspaper.   
While everyone who attended St. James Private School  
was gifted, and all of my class mates and friends had  
bright careers ahead of them, Brother Michael wanted,   
he said, to reward me for four years of extraordinary hard  
work.  
  
We had a great time that evening.  All of my closest  
friends were there.  Tony Porto, Jill MacDonald, Perry  
Thompson, Ben Cordesman, and Eric Valiotis, and  
Brother Michael himself, my sophomore biology teacher,   
had become one of my best friends.  We had a wondrous  
platonic relationship.  He would spend hours with me  
after class, listening to me express my frustrations  
with life and school, and always he was patient.  At  
the end of every session his words of wisdom were a  
genuine help to me as I struggled through life as a  
teenager.  Brother Michael was slender and handsome,   
and somewhere through the years I developed a crush on  
him.  He seemed to me to be what a perfect lover  
should be; wise, patient, understanding, handsome, and  
sexy (though he was, I believed, too spiritual to be  
aware of such earthly matters as sexuality).    
  
Two months after my graduation party, in August, just  
three weeks before I was to enter Gilman College, I  
was driving my friends Perry and Ben home from a  
birthday party of a mutual friend.  We all had had a  
little bit to drink.  I was driving down Koerner Lane,   
a road that twisted as it winded downhill from Canyon  
Heights, where the party was held.  Just as I had  
negotiated the steepest curve on the road I noticed a  
large fallen branch in the road.  Deciding and acting  
in haste I swerved sharply to avoid the branch,   
causing my car to roll over.  In the crash Ben  
Cordesman was seriously injured.  He was paralyzed in  
both legs and his left arm.    
  
In the hearing that followed I was found guilty of the  
crime of driving while under the influence of intoxicating beverages,  
of the crime of reckless driving, both misdemeanors,  
and of the crime of reckless endangerment, which is a  
felony.  In addition Ben's family sued me and won the  
personal suit against me, and was awarded damages of  
$2,000,000.  The judge pronounced, "William Garneau,   
since you have forever and irrevocably changed the  
course of Ben Cordesman's future, it is justice that  
by sentencing you to a term of life enslavement, the  
course of your life, thus, shall also be forever and  
irrevocably changed."  He went on to answer my  
attorney's consideration of the fact that my promising  
gifts as a historian would be lost to the world by  
addressing me; "Your love of history will serve you  
well as a slave.  Whether you are owned in the course  
of your life by a corporation or a private individual,   
seek to know the history of the organization or person  
you serve.  Learn of them by looking at their past to  
see how you can best offer them service as a slave."    
  
The judge's pronouncements and choice of words were  
met with much criticism, not only locally, but also  
statewide.  But in the end his ruling was law and I  
was sentenced to life enslavement.  I was held in the  
county jail for four days before I was to be shipped  
out to Pittsburgh where I would be spending eight  
weeks in training at the Pennsylvania State Slave  
‘Commitment to Obedience’ Training Center.  While I  
was in prison, all of my friends came to see me, and  
as I sat with each one of them, I was filled with  
utter shame.  Shame at all that was unspoken.  Tony,   
Jill, Perry, and Eric all came to support me, and told  
me how tragic and unfair the events were.  And yet as  
they offered me words of comfort, I could see that my  
neon orange prison jump suit intimidated them.  From  
each of them I got a sense that they were happy to be  
on the other side of the bars.  I could sense that  
they were already looking at me as someone who was no  
longer quite the same person, no longer the same kind  
of friend, no longer at all their equal.  I sensed I  
was no longer a someone to them, rather more of a  
something.  
  
And Perry, during his visit, put into words something  
I knew each one of my other friends had thought about,   
but had too much social skill to actually verbalize to  
my face, "To think you no longer can be who you are,   
or do the things that you love to do, all those things  
that you loved to do and did so well.  To think that  
you, Billy Garneau, now have to do for the rest of  
your life whatever someone who has the money to afford  
you tells you to do!"   
  
Brother Michael was away on retreat with the new  
senior class during my trial and brief jail term, but  
he sent me a note that inspired me, and which I hung  
on my cell wall, "Billy, Whatever anyone may say about  
you cannot alter the fact of who you are!  You were  
great and gifted.  You still are great and gifted.   
And that shall not change, no matter what may befall  
you."  When I read his note I wept.   
  
When my four days in the county jail were up, two  
guards entered my cell and chained my arms to a waist  
chain, and my legs were hobbled together with a short  
chain that allowed me to take only mincing steps.  As  
they led me out of my cell they said, "Okay Billy,   
you're outta here.  You're free at last!", and they  
laughed the way crude people laugh.  As they led me to  
the van that would transport me to the Pennsylvania  
State Slave ‘Commitment to Obedience’ Training Center  
one of them said, "When you're finished with slave  
training, Billy, you won't need any more chains to  
keep you in line.  They do a real good job down in  
Pittsburgh of teaching you slave boys to obey without  
being chained."  
  
Slave training in Pennsylvania, as I had been assured,  
was not like slave training in the South or Mid-West.   
No trainers stood around with whips making us do  
meaningless tasks round the clock.  Rather, training  
consisted of an endless series of classes, chiefly  
civics classes.  The classes were geared to slaves, to  
instill within us; a sense of how important we were in  
the new economy; how all citizens, slave and free,  
have a duty; the definition of slavery in our  
enlightened age; how by giving of ourselves totally to  
our owners, we are giving to all of society; how we  
are part of a new world order where slaves' status is  
respected; etc..  It was also full of psychological  
and sociological classes, some of which taught us how  
slaves can find happiness and fulfillment; some  
explained bonding trends in slave households; and some  
demonstrated our value to our owners in very real  
everyday terms.  All of the classes were designed to  
make us feel good about ourselves, to give us a sense  
of self-respect, and fill us with hope.    
  
But I was no fool.  I knew all about the tactics  
employed by the state; give slaves self-esteem through  
official government pronouncements, and 90% of slaves  
lose their rebellious streak.  Such tactics were in  
the literature.    
  
Given all that, I was quite surprised when the  
‘Commitment to Obedience’ curriculum finally did  
include some very graphic sessions of the grimmer  
aspects of slavery, at least for slaves.  One class  
fully apprised us of owners' rights regarding, and  
authority over, slaves (almost total); one  
demonstrated the latest techniques and tools used in  
slave control (state of the art torture); and another  
attempted to explain to us why the best course of  
action for any slave was always direct obedience  
(castration, after all, is an option).  Such scare  
tactics mixed in with the sweet talk made all of us in  
the class just want to sit attentively and listen and  
not make any waves.  
  
But overall, it actually was a stress reducing eight  
weeks for me.  I was stressed out to my limit on going  
into the training session, but being allowed to bond  
with other human beings, other new slaves, forming  
little groups, breaking off for discussion groups, and  
all monitored by professional trainers who acted as if  
we really were important beings, had a calming effect.  
Of course the fact that my life had changed forever  
was before me every day as well; when we had to eat  
what we were given and only as much as we were given;  
when we all had to take assembly line showers; when we  
had to sleep in rows and rows of cots packed closely  
next to each other; when we could see security cameras  
present everywhere; and when guards were present in  
the corners of every room we entered.   
  
When the ‘Commitment to Obedience’ course was over, I  
was shipped back to my hometown county slave  
authority, and it was in charge of putting me up for  
sale.  The Clarion County Slave Depository had a  
low-key, somewhat laid-back, approach to moving  
inventory.  They used no flashy advertisements in the  
Sunday papers.  No snappy radio spots loudly  
announcing "This just in!", "Freshly tamed, prime,  
workboy", "A slave you don't have to be embarrassed to  
have your guests see."  The Slave Depository simply  
took phone calls from prospective buyers, and the  
highly trained account reps on the phone were quite  
successful in setting up appointments and getting  
callers to come down to the showroom to examine the  
wares.    
  
Slaves on sale were held in very small cells, more  
like pens, during their stay at the Clarion County  
Slave Depository.  They were brought out for display  
if it was felt that a particular slave would interest  
a prospective buyer.  At the depository, for business  
hours, we were bathed, shaved of our pubic and pit  
hair.  The hair on our heads was kept as long as we  
had it, so anyone who purchased us had the option of  
any hairstyle for us which they wanted.  Our hair was  
washed and slicked back for display purposes.  We were  
kept naked except for a cloth of cotton material,  
about the size of a small bath towel, which was cinched  
about our waist and was held in place with a clip.  If  
a prospective buyer was interested enough in us after  
seeing our mug shot and reading our statistics,  
history, psychological profile, and market evaluation  
reports, we were then brought out for a physical  
inspection.  If the prospect was still interested,  
then we were escorted to a private room where the  
buyer could have our waist cloth removed, examine all  
of our other parts, and have us do anything they  
wanted to see us do; run in place, do jumping jacks,  
push ups, etc…  
  
The first time I was taken into a backroom at the  
request of a prospect was frightening.  The prospect  
was a middle aged, loud mouthed, self-important, small  
business man, who had a younger woman with him who he  
was doubtless trying to impress with his having the  
means to purchase a slave.  We were escorted into an  
examination room with a Clarion County Slave Control  
guard, and the man told me to remove my cloth.  I did  
so, and he ran his hands across my chest, abdomen, and  
down one of my legs.  He told his girl friend to do  
the same, "You can get to know a slave by their feel."  
She did so and giggled.  He asked me if I could haul  
bricks.  I told him I was a scholar, that I had never  
labored before.  He said to the guard, who had no  
interest in his comment, in an angry voice, "Then what  
in the hell are you selling him for?  He's worthless!"  
He walked out of the room in a huff, his girlfriend  
following.  The guard told me to put my waistcloth  
back on and he took me back to my pen.    
  
That single episode most dramatically illustrated to  
me how my life had changed.  I was no longer, ever  
again, going to be treated like a young man worthy of  
respect, a young man on the verge of a most promising  
career.  Even though I came from a middle class  
background, my academic record made me accustomed to  
being treated as a special person.  I came to feel  
entitled to certain courtesies, certain privileges.   
From now on I could expect to be treated like trash  
that had to do exactly whatever I was told to do.  
  
The stay at the depository was boring.  All one could  
do was lie or sit on your cot (which almost filled the  
entire space of each pen), chat with the slaves in the  
pens nearest you, and read whatever books and  
magazines you gathered for yourself from the  
Depository's little collection.    
  
The Depository Slave Control guards let us out of our  
pens every couple of hours for a little exercise and  
potty break.  If we were called out for display they  
would check to make certain we weren't stinking and  
needed another bath, recombed our hair, made certain  
our waist cloth was straight, and we were walking  
bright and alert as we were taught at our ‘Commitment  
to Obedience’ training.   
  
During the five days I was up for sale at the  
depository I was called out for display about six  
times a day.  I remember, after my third day, while I  
was being examined by a Mr. Enar Falkenberg and his  
son, Lang, that I had hoped they would buy me because  
they seemed to be as good as it gets.  While there was  
nothing really special about Mr. Falkenberg, except  
that his son was cute, there was nothing about the two  
of them that repulsed me.  So I was somewhat pleased a  
few days later when I heard that not only was I being  
called out for another examination by them, but that  
my family had been summoned to the depository.  
  
In Pennsylvania it was preferred custom to have the  
slave's family, or at least one representative of the  
family, present at the point of sale.  Dad was aware  
of the custom, and the Depository had informed him  
they would be calling him when a sale looked imminent.  
  
  
In the chief sales display room there would typically  
be about eight groups of people scattered about  
examining slaves at a given time.  Occasionally one  
entire group of prospective buyers would exit with the  
slave and a guard to a private examination room,  
return, haggle over the price, and either they would  
exit to finalize the sale, or have another slave  
fetched for display.   
  
When the guard brought me into the sales room, I  
immediately spotted the Falkenberg’s (they were tall).   
Lang's blond hair stood out, and he carried a large  
rectangular case in his hand that looked like it held  
tennis rackets.  And standing with them was my dad, my  
sister Ellen, 14, and my brothers Timothy, 16, and  
Chad, 22.  And for reasons completely unknown to me at  
first, there were my friends Tony, Jill, Perry, and  
Eric, as well.  And most amazing of all, Brother  
Michael was also present.  And along with all of them  
was a sales clerk from the Clarion County Slave  
Depository.   
  
I walked over and hugged all of them.  When I hugged  
Brother Michael I shuddered, and felt as though I had  
been rescued.  Everyone smiled as if they were happy  
to see me.  My father explained, "Billy, we wanted to  
make this a special occasion, so I phoned your friends  
when I found out yesterday that Mr. Falkenberg was  
close to making a decision to purchase you, and they  
all wanted to be here for you at this special time."   
I was filled with conflicting emotions because I  
needed friends and was lonely, but even more I would  
have preferred that my family and friends not be with  
me at such a moment.  But for some strange reason I  
blurted out, "Gosh, that's great Dad!"  As though  
everything was just super fabulous and totally cool.  
  
The sales clerk asked Mr. Falkenberg one more time if  
he did indeed wish to purchase me.  When Mr.   
Falkenberg said he did, the clerk asked him what kind  
of hairstyle he would like me to have.  Mr. Falkenberg  
said he wanted my hair slightly shorter on the sides,  
and combed in a typical college prep style.  The clerk  
took out a catalogue and asked Mr. Falkenberg to  
select a collar style.  Mr. Falkenberg and Lang looked  
over the selections, exchanged comments, and quickly  
came to a decision. They pointed out their selection  
in the catalogue for the clerk.  The clerk took the  
catalogue, and said, "Good choice. And are you still  
going with the 40-D GPS band?"  Mr. Falkenberg nodded  
‘yes'.  As the clerk started to lead me away he told  
Mr. Falkenberg that the bursar would be in shortly  
with the sales papers and agreements that needed to be  
signed, and by the time everything was signed I would  
be ready to get collared.  As the clerk and I walked  
out I heard my family and friends resume chatting  
quietly among themselves, as people do at funerals.  
  
The sales clerk, in his late twenties, struck me as  
the first person I had so far met who dealt with  
slaves on a regular basis who was not into any kind of  
power trip over slaves, who gave off no sense of  
enjoying lording it over slaves. His black hair, with  
its gelled curls, seemed to be his pride, joy, and  
chief obsession.  He led me to the bathing area and  
had me sit up on a tall stool.  Shortly afterwards a  
stylist with the Depository came and cut my hair as  
Mr. Falkenberg ordered.  When he was finished he  
instructed the clerk on how to comb my hair, and told  
him to call him back if he needed help.  The clerk  
said, "I think I should be able to handle that."  The  
clerk then ordered me to go to the sink and reshave my  
face, pits, and private area.  While I shaved he  
chatted with another clerk.  When I was finished  
shaving he shouted at me to hop into the shower and  
wash up all over.  
  
When I got out of the shower he handed me a towel and  
I dried myself off.  He had me raise my arms, applied  
antiperspirant to my pits, and then had me sit back  
down on the stool.  He then applied way too much gel  
to my hair, and proceeded to comb it as instructed.   
He gave me a clean white waistcloth, which I wrapped  
around my waist and fastened with a clip.  He  
straightened it out, and told me to follow him.  As he  
led me away I saw myself in the mirror, and I looked  
like a way too scrubbed up nerdy schoolboy.  I was  
embarrassed.  He led me back to the corner of the  
sales room where my family and friends and new owner  
were standing.  
  
They all looked at me with beaming smiles, as my dad  
said, "Ah, here he is, our man of the hour!"  Tony  
said, "Look at you! You look fabulous, Billy!"  Jill  
said, "You haven't lost one ounce of your charm,  
Billy!"   Why they all felt they had to compliment me  
I couldn't understand.  Perry said, "Man, you're going  
to do great!", and Eric slapped me on the back and  
said, "Killer dude!  You're a Killer!"  Their forced  
praise only served to bring my shame to the fore.  
  
An official from the Clarion County Slave Depository  
had joined the group and asked who would be escorting  
the Falkenberg’s into the anteroom for the collaring.   
Everyone raised their hands and the official looked  
quite surprised, and then he smiled, "Really? Well,  
that's fine.  Is everyone Okay with that?  Mr.  
Falkenberg?"   
Mr. Falkenberg nodded his approval. Chad asked dad  
why there would be any need to question that.  The  
official, overhearing Chad's question, answered; "The  
collaring has, by tradition, turned into a  
semi-official ceremony where the slave and the owner  
share commitments.  It is recorded, and is recognized  
legal documentation of both party's commitments.  It  
often takes on rather intensely personal turns, but if  
Mr. Falkenberg has no problem with all of you being  
present, then that is perfectly ok."   
  
The official looked at everyone present (except me) to  
see if anyone wanted to change their minds.  Still, he  
felt a need to ask my dad, "Mr. Garneau, are you Okay  
with your daughter being present?"  Dad answered,  
"Absolutely!"  Clearly the official knew something  
about things that go on in the collaring room that my  
dad did not.  I was getting nervous. Finally  
satisfied, the official asked everyone to follow him  
into the anteroom.  The clerk walked up beside me and  
nodded to me.  We followed everyone else in.  The  
clerk and I were the last to enter the collaring room.