**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.