



MAMA'S

BOY

BEHIND

BARs

DAVID GOUDREULT

TRANSLATED BY
JC SUTCLIFFE

**MAMA'S
BOY
BEHIND
BARS**

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JUSTICE

When it comes to sodomy, I'm a passive kind of guy; I mostly just wait for it to be over. When I ended up in prison, I soon realized this would be the best attitude to adopt. Trying to argue only turned my attacker on. And if I wasn't getting a kick out of it, I certainly wasn't going to give him one.

Society is so prejudiced about people who take it up the ass. But we're not doing anything wrong. The ones doing the ass-fucking are the ones getting their hands dirty. Or other parts of their anatomy. Especially in the kind of sexual assaults I've been subjected to since my first few hours in prison. But the social prejudice weighs heavily on the back of the person being taken up the ass. I never wanted to be that person, and I've never done anything to make it happen. Being fucked up the ass is bad for a person's self-esteem. But nobody ever criticizes the person doing the fucking. It's a deep injustice. I don't think we'll be seeing groups standing up for buggered people any time soon. Sad.

The giant sodomizing me went by the pseudonym of Butterfly. Don't let his delicate nickname fool you. He got it from his first conviction: he blinded his girlfriend with a butterfly knife.

He caught her looking at photos of an ex. Butterfly didn't appreciate that kind of nostalgia. The broad survived, minus an eye.

So for the last six months, this brute Butterfly has been working hard to increase my sphincter flexibility. It's been tough, but you can get used to anything, especially if it goes on for long enough. The butterfly in question needed to make out with me every day. Over time, it became irritating but tolerable. For the body, anyway. The head never gets used to being raped.

Optimists like to say that things could always be worse. If Butterfly hadn't chosen me for his boo, I wouldn't have benefited from his protection. Every other prisoner in the joint would have had a claim on my ass. And Butterfly was a high-up dude in Big Dick's gang. So even if his libido was suffering from morbid obesity, and even if he used to make me wax my crack and balls, just by being under his command, I too, by extension, was a little bit part of the gang. I aspired, in some nearish future, to establish professional rather than sexual relations.

I should explain that in prison it's not homosexuality. It's simply managing the surplus testosterone in a closed circuit—a very complicated intermittent circuit. Unless you have a history of it before you get here. And even among back-door connoisseurs, there's a whole spectrum of differences. There are gays, queers, fairies, and homosexuals. You shouldn't lump them all together, even though they sometimes overlap. But I'm none of those things. I'm just a virile hetero in an unfortunate position. Even though he's bald, Butterfly is also a very virile hetero, but after four years in the slammer he's gay for the stay.



Under Butterfly's protection I had nothing to fear—except him. Which was plenty. People who say that those who bark don't bite are wrong. Butterfly barked and bit constantly. His six-foot frame

was like the body of a Rottweiler crossed with the personality of a vicious chihuahua. He yelled and screamed and yelled, and if he got a chance to bite a foot, he'd take off with the calf too. I don't think he ever had a mother: he was the offspring of a Viking chief and an Ostrogoth blacksmith. Basically he was a caricature of a monster, the kind that's a dime a dollar in every prison. He'd blown a fuse once, and now he had a screw loose. One time I saw him smash an inmate's head into a mirror for brushing his teeth too slowly. He wasn't even in his way; Butterfly never brushes his teeth.

I got a taste of his medicine the first time I dared reject him. In vain did I scream, argue, and remind him that I'd just killed a defenceless old lady: he was unimpressed. And he showed me just how unimpressed with a quick head-butt to the jaw. I'm still waiting for dentures; the state should be buying me some new teeth soon. That's one of the advantages of being a social pariah: free dental.

You can't tell from the writing on the page, but since it happened, I now whistle more than I speak. I try to articulate and stop the air getting through. It's hard to establish a gangster reputation with a voice full of air. Threats don't have the same edge when they're whistled. *I'm going to slaughter you, you piece of ffff!* See what I mean?



The most spectacular thing about Butterfly's body is his tattoos. His skin is covered with them. Dragons, whores, tribal symbols, skulls. Even on his face. Barbed wire climbs his neck up to his eyebrows and around his eyes. And, like a trinity of cherries on a sundae, three tears mark the corner of his right eye, one for each murder.

I don't have any confidence or any tattoos. When I've

covered my body with enough messages, I'll be less afraid of asserting myself. But I won't need to, then; my skin will speak for me. I'll be able to expand my self-esteem and my ambitions. I know I'm a criminal genius, and maybe even a genius full stop. You can feel these things. I feel strongly. And I'm not just being pretentious—I'm not pretending anything, I'm asserting!

One day I'll flaunt both my successes and my tattoos in people's faces. I'll be covered in barbed wire, but I'll throw some eagles and knights in the mix too. On my back, there'll be bullet holes around a big samurai armed with a Japanese katana. That's to scare off any bastards who want to attack me from behind.

And between my thumb and my index finger, the prisoner's star will twinkle. This symbol is only for the true, the unrepentant. People who've done hard time in a real max-security institution, not a nice little vacation in some local jail. Sentences of less than two years are for limp dicks. If you're going to do time, you might as well do it properly.

You can't judge by the ceremonial jewels; bling is pretty enough, but with a tattoo you're inked for life. You can take the ring off the guy, but you can't take the guy off his dragon. A tattooed guy is always more dangerous. It's like a constant reminder: be worthy of your balls, be a man.

Anyway, I'd planned to get several tattoos before my next murder. I was lucky, blocks with a needle artist on hand are rare. Especially in the "Wing for Protecting Inmates with Mental Health Problems." Man, civil servants really know how to choose a good name.

And that wasn't fair either, locking me up with the crazies instead of letting me network in the normal sections. My lawyer screwed up: they wouldn't recognize me as crazy in court, but then they shoved me in the ding wing! Our justice system is more contradictory than the emotions of a histrionic teenager menstruating at full moon. Why was I in prison instead of see-

ing a psychiatrist? Why was so-and-so in psychiatry while his accomplice was in prison? Why was Pedo in jail instead of in therapy? And if they're so eager to separate out the mentally ill from the criminals, why is there a special loony section in every prison in the country? They're trying to mess with our heads: those fuckers are more dangerous than we are.

Justice is an exact science that gets it wrong every time.

And who gets to define mentally ill, anyway? Who exactly is this normal person who can claim to be sound of mind? Our entire society's infected. On a small scale, I'm mentally ill, but if you take a wider perspective, I become a social symptom. I'm the forbidden fruit of your tree that's rotten to its roots.

But enough with the ethics. I've got to see out a sixteen-year sentence with people who aren't right in the head. But I'm pretty sure I'll only do two-thirds, maybe less. I've been doing all the therapeutic activities, and I'm always licking my correctional officer's boots. I'll get my sentence reduced. And anyway, I've got a plan for the future: when I get out, I'm going to give conferences and personal-growth workshops. My correctional officer doesn't think there'll be that much demand for someone like me. But she can't dampen my enthusiasm. People eat up stories of resilience with all the twists and turns, and journalists adore them. People love role models, especially the beaten-up models who've been chewed up and spat out by the system. It makes the taxpayers feel safe. I can give them their money's worth.



Prisons look depressing, both outside and inside. The architecture is almost as ugly and austere as a high school building. It's all beige-painted cement, or even just raw concrete. And everywhere you look, there are armoured doors with tiny grilled windows to let a trickle of light in.

Our section starts at the observation box next to the office where guards meet prisoners to discuss their cases. The box is a central control post from where the guard can see two sections at a time. He's responsible for unlocking the cell-block doors and also monitors the guards on the ground. You never know who's inside because the guard on duty is hidden behind a two-way mirror. Naturally we feel obliged to pick our teeth or noses in front of this mirror.

Adjacent to this famous observation box is the prison guards' office. *Office* is maybe not the right word. It's the place where the guards meet inmates one-on-one, so they haven't missed a trick, security-wise. It's a cramped room, with a big table with only a phone, some files, and a panic button. Two plastic chairs. And the rehabilitation of the worst criminals in Quebec takes place in this minimalist decor. What a charming mausoleum.

The office and the guard room are opposite the common area where the only furniture is four cement tables, each surrounded by four benches, just like at McDonalds. There's the television too, of course, which is absolutely essential. This living space is surrounded by our cells, three on each side. Two inmates to a cell, in the vast majority of cases.

The way we were paired up in cells wasn't just chance. These things have a way of working out, as people who actually work out say. I was in a cell with Philippe the Filipino, although Butterfly also spent way too much time there. Officially, the bodyguard who was throwing himself at my body shared his cell with Big Dick, the top boss of the whole place. Denis lived with Giuseppe. Colossus with Louis-Honoré. Timoune with Gilbert. And Pedo lived alone, for his own safety.

You shouldn't get attached to these characters; several of them will disappear during the course of our journey. Murders happen so quickly.



I shared a cell with the tattooer, which would end up having major consequences. For an immigrant from a poor country, he was pretty talented. He hadn't even studied art on his poverty-stricken island. He was Filipino, even though he'd lost all his exoticness and spoke with a Laval accent. He was Filipino so we called him Philippe. It wasn't the name his mother gave him, but it was more practical that way. His real name was unpronounceable, and Philippe the Filipino has a nice ring.

Our wing also houses an Italian. A real live Italian, with greasy black hair and everything, but he had nothing to do with the Mafia. How fucked up is that? An Italian without connections is worth even less than a Filipino. If I'd been lucky enough to be Italian, I'd have proved myself long ago: killed for the family, bled on a photo of the Virgin, taken the oath, and I'd be all in. I'd have *Cossa Notra* tattooed over my heart and a beautiful plump little mamma mia in the kitchen. Murder and spaghetti on tap. And to top it all off, this Italian with no contacts was called Giuseppe even though he was only twenty-seven. You're only allowed to call yourself Giuseppe if you're over seventy.

Giuseppe and Philippe were in the same boat. Or the same raft, to be more accurate. They were vulnerable mercenaries caught between two gangs. A pair of innocents in survival mode, waiting to be recruited, transferred, or assassinated. The law of the streets is hard inside. The summer looked like it was shaping up to be a hot one, especially for we who have to sail in troubled waters.



On one side there was Big Dick the all-powerful, with Butterfly

and Denis under him. He'd got the nickname Big Dick when he used to work with Mom. Not Mom Boucher, Mom Paquette. Criminals are usually creative types, but there's a definite preference for certain pseudonyms: Kid, Baby, Fingers, Little, Scars, Tiny, Tony, and Mom, for example. Big Dick is less common. His full name was Great Big Dick. He was a major figure in the biker wars, in the pay of the Italians. His detractors liked to call him Big Fat Dick to diss him.

Big Dick had a head where his heart should be. Using this awesome calculator, each one of his actions had a specific aim. He was a boss, it goes without saying. And, like me, he wasn't supposed to be in a section with brain-damaged people.

The hierarchy goes like this: Big Dick at the top, Denis on his right, Butterfly on the executive committee, and then me, unofficially, underneath Butterfly. Rather too often for my liking. Our gang of Aryan Brotherhood wannabes was in charge of all trafficking in drugs and cellphones. Big Dick, our chief, derived some of his power from my lover's physical strength, as well as from his amazing contacts both inside and outside the prison walls. While he was doing time, he'd left his business affairs in the east of the city in the hands of some real genuine Mafia Italians. He also had a corrupt correctional officer in his pocket, Tony, who kept him up-to-date with everything going on inside. Under his command, the white guys called the shots.

Facing off against us were the black guys, all innocent-looking. Big Dick tolerated Colossus and his henchmen, Louis-Honoré and Timoune, who were Haitians. Colossus liked to be precise, so he claimed to be from Réunion, which is a major city in the Haitian archipelago. These guys were skilled at procurement. Incidentally, Butterfly had negotiated exclusive access to my ass through Colossus. The black guys also specialized in contracts: beatings and murders. Demand was low at the time. In a wing with only eleven inmates, you soon reach equilibrium.

The black guys also had a stranglehold on the tattooing profits. They provided the ink, made up of oil and cigarette ash when pens were in short supply, as well as the motor and the guitar strings to pound the skin. You had to go through them if you wanted to get inked by Philippe. Butterfly had negotiated a good price for the swastika on his shoulder blade.



I'm into black guys who like hip hop. I'd have loved to be in the black guys' gang, but I was told in no uncertain terms that I had to stick with my own race. No chance of appeal.

It sucks big-time, since I've always dreamed of rapping with black guys. I've always felt close to them, I have rhythm in my blood. My entire existence becomes meaningful when I listen to rap. I write it too, I'm still working on my first album. You won't have heard anything like it; it's more unique than a Wayne Gretzky rookie card signed by Mario Lemieux with his own blood. With my major ex-con cred, I'll totally storm the charts.

Like Timoune and Louis-Honoré, I shaved my head. It made me look less ginger and it was more practical in fights. Colossus had no need for any such capillary prevention: he let his long dreads grow down to the middle of his back. Nobody would have dared start anything with him; his father had taken charge of his education by making him referee dogfights. That's where he got all his scars—and his annoying habit of biting people in the face.

Even if I couldn't make friends with the black guys, I stayed hip hop in my soul. Anyway, hip hop isn't even that black anymore. It was taken away from black people, like blues, jazz, soul, bebop, rock and roll, funk, disco, reggae, and so on and so on. White people have always stolen black music. But don't forget, the best rappers in the world are Eminem, the Beastie

Boys and Vanilla Ice, all little white guys. I didn't need a black band to become a good rap group or make a solo career. All I needed was that hip hop in my soul.

From Wu-Tang to Ku Klux, it's always the same thing—people's need for a clan. Same same but different, the Chinese would say. But although the gangs worked with each other on occasion, the tension in our section was palpable. It might explode at any moment. Underneath the debts, the swindles, the aggressions, and the psychiatric symptoms simmered a soup of troubles. If you lock eleven psychopaths up in five square metres, you can hardly expect them to start a knitting club.