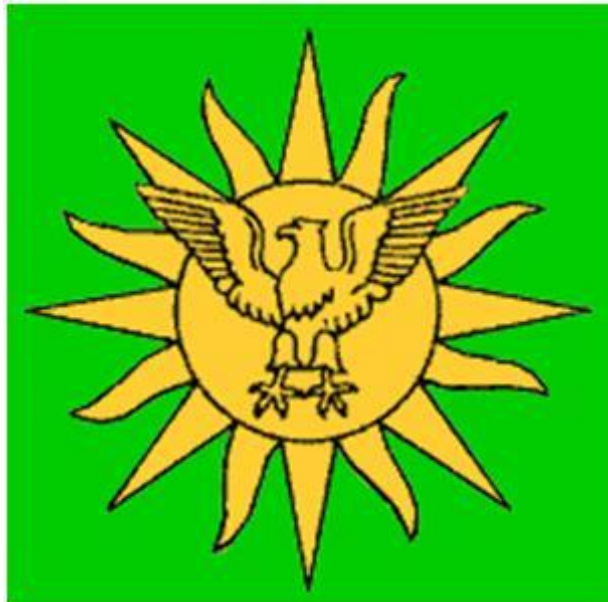


Bokassa's Last Apostle



“Can Everton Jones figure out how his father managed to steal Emperor Bokassa’s diamonds and where he hid them before the world and his brother get there first?”

By Toussaint

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Synopsis

The last six of Emperor Bokassa's surviving cronies, his "APOSTLES" and a street gang from Peckham are staking out JAMES STEVENS' New Cross solicitor's business. Each Apostle has an odd tattoo on his neck—an eagle over a sun—Bokassa's personal emblem. The same design is at the top of a share certificate hidden in a bank box by EVERTON JONES' Central African father, 19 years ago, just before disappearing.

After Everton somehow ends up naked on Hampstead Heath, and is befriended by KASH, a dissolute black American playboy and ÉDOUARD, his moralistic white French lodger, he goes to see James Stevens. James tells this beautiful, naïve, mixed race gay boy from Dudley all he knows about his father, which isn't much. A power of attorney and a bank statement in his father's file lead to that bank box, which holds a fortune in cash, those shares, a beautiful diamond ring and a leather necklace. That turns out to be a "grigri" a charm to ward off demons. But surely that's all nonsense. There are no demons, are there? Everton and his friends start to spend the money and at the same time follow-up the clues to find out all about the father Everton never knew.

He was an "Apostle" too, smuggling diamonds into Geneva for Bokassa but, when he was deposed, Everton's father took advantage of the situation, stealing the diamonds and running for cover in London. Those shares are special. Bokassa tied up all the money he plundered from his poor country in just this one company. Each Apostle had just the one share. When all but just one Apostle, THE LAST APOSTLE, is left, he gains control of the company and all of its assets, which have grown into a £3.5Bn fortune since 1979. Everton's father must in the end be the Last Apostle because, although missing, no-one knows for sure that he's dead either. Alerted to the situation the Central African Government tries to have him declared just that, legally dead. Luckily the Apostles get caught up in a local gang war and start to be killed. If they all die before the Central African Government succeeds, his father will get everything and they can use the power of attorney to transfer the assets into Everton's name.

In the meantime, can he find out where his father hid the diamonds? Can he placate the demon, which is now getting more and more believable and frightening, causing everyone violent nightmares? Will the remaining Apostles be killed in time? Nor are they the only ones to get interested. MI6 and the French secret service are on his case, and EVERYONE wants his body.

Everton eventually falls in love with Kash, despite Édouard's protestations, and during the course of the novel they each betray the other, before finally reconciling themselves and decide to be "girlfriends".

The Beginning

James Stevens waited until the Bank Manager had left the vault before turning the key in the lock and sliding the bank box out of the wall. It felt heavier than most as he thudded it down onto the table in the middle of the familiar, austere room.

He came here at the same time every Monday to manage the assets he and his partner Roger Williams had been entrusted with by various crooks, back in the Seventies. Some of them were even household names, synonyms for violence and greed. But Roger was long gone and most of their clients had met horrible ends. He now scraped a precarious living looking after petty street gangs and, God help him, even doing divorces and wills. But he still kept up the old routine. Someday, maybe a day like today, the past would wake up and make him feel young again.

A letter, a few days ago, had alerted him to one of Roger's files, something about an old account for "Carlene Jones and Barthélémy Faye". Roger hadn't left much in Mr. Faye's file. Just the "usual" power of attorney and bank statement, enough to track down the assets they had hidden for their "special" client, but not so much as to incriminate him, or get him in trouble with the Law Society. Sure, he could have done all this without being a solicitor, but it helped. It had certainly helped convince the manager to take the power of attorney seriously and give him the key to this box.

One thing troubled him. The names were different. The power of attorney and this tangible and heavy box related to a Mr. Barthélémy "Lingoupou", not Mr. "Faye", Roger's client. Not that that mattered; he was used to deception. Quite like old times, in fact. James smiled. For the first time in years he was enjoying himself.

He hesitated for a moment; then lifted the lid. There was just the briefest pause as he satisfied himself his eyes were not deceiving him. The box was crammed with hundred dollar bills!

Anyone else would have been shocked. But money was just money; he knew that, even though there was more in here than he'd seen in a long while. As he scrutinised the contents, he came across something else, tucked in at the back. A note addressed to Roger and a lumpy envelope. His curiosity aroused, he squinted through his half-moon spectacles at the spidery, faded ink. On the front, he could make out just one word: "Everton".

Chapter 1: The View from the Bushes

A full month later, well past midnight on the first day of what would turn out to be the hottest August on record, Everton Jones was regaining consciousness in an alleyway in Golders Green. He raised his hand to the location of the throbbing in his skull and opened his eyes. He felt cold, despite the unseasonal heat and he realised he was... naked!

'FUCK!' he cried although no-one was around to hear.

He shouldn't have done it. He shouldn't have followed that boy out of the bar. Come to think of it, he shouldn't even have got off the bus at Golders Green; the hotel was in Marble Arch, for Christ's sake. He should have stayed on the bus and taken the tube to the hotel where he should now be tucked up between warm sheets anticipating whatever that Solicitor had to tell him about his father. That was far more important than giving some stranger a blow job in a dingy alley, however gorgeous he might have been.

And he was gorgeous! He'd been sure he was gay; sure he was only after sex. The look he'd given him in the toilet left no doubt about that. But maybe that was why he'd done it? To obliterate any lingering doubt about how safe it might have been to follow him here, alone. If that was his game, it had worked like a charm. Whilst Everton had been down on his knees, the blow which knocked him out cold had been completely unexpected.

How long it took him to strip him of his clothes he didn't know. Actually, what was the time? He looked down at his wrist. Even his watch had been stolen. Panicked, he looked around for his stuff. His bag, the new Versace bag, the bag containing all his best designer clothes was gone. Of all the thieves in London, it was his misfortune to have been robbed by a label queen. Perhaps if he'd worn cheaper pants at least he'd have had something left to cover his modesty.

As he rued the loss of his clothes, in one horrible moment it dawned on him. The letter! The letter from that solicitor had been in his jeans. How on earth would he know where to go on Monday? Or yet tonight? The address of the hotel was scribbled at the top. Fuck, he thought.

How was he going to find out about his father now? The solicitor's news was so important it had to be told face-to-face. What could it be? He'd disappeared when he was only two and he'd never really been curious enough to ask Mum about him before she died. He'd convinced himself that he too was dead long ago. He couldn't have turned up now could he, nineteen years later?

But he'd enough regrets this evening to last a lifetime. Worrying about it wasn't going to get him out of his mess. He stood up, brushed the dry dust from his body and took a few steps

towards the road, back to the pub. It wasn't far. If he could make it back unseen perhaps someone could help him?

As he passed a slight bend in the alley a security light flashed into life. He fled back down the alley, both his hands clamped between his legs in a vain attempt to cover himself and headed for safety in the darkness. It wasn't long before he found himself on a stony path. Trees gathered round from every side and the moonless night deepened into pitch darkness. It had taken him into some sort of forest.

He stopped a while, to let his eyes adjust, and rubbed his sides, wondering what to do next and where the hell he was. As he was racking his brains, a sharp crack over to his left brought him back to reality. He tensed and turned around. Was that someone else? The leaves of the trees were rustling in the breeze, but there was also a different, swishing noise, coming from lower down. As it became louder, something moving caught his eye, just lighter than the undergrowth, coming his way.

He slipped into a gap in the trees on his side of the path trying not to make any noise. He had to turn around to make out the way between the branches and, as he did so, a narrow track revealed itself. He followed it and, when he thought he was deep enough in, he turned to see what it was.

A young white boy in his teens stepped from the bushes onto the path and stood there, looking around him. Blond hair, jeans ripped at the knee, white tee shirt, baseball jacket and trainers. He reached into a pocket for his cigarettes and lit one. Christ I need one of those! Everton thought. How long had it been since his last smoke?

A shorter Chinese-looking guy came along the path from farther down. He stopped, not far from the blond boy, and they looked each other up and down. Fucking hell, they're all at it! Everton thought. What on earth are they doing here, this time of the night? But before he could have his answer; they turned towards his hiding-place and began to walk into the bushes. Everton fled.

He followed the track as it curved around between the trees and widened into a broad path, lounging along what looked like a garden wall. Barely ten metres farther in he stopped short as he fell on a group of men bunched together against it. One had his jeans down around his ankles, another on his knees sucking him off. A third was kissing the first on the mouth, his hand inside his tee shirt. The rest were jerking off, facing them, their heavy breathing synchronised to a mounting beat. Not one word was being spoken, like a concert audience awaiting the final crescendo.

Everton looked around. Now he could make out even more men, standing over to the side in ones and twos. The moment he had stopped, they had begun to advance on him, as if it was pure co-incidence; vultures gathering around a rotting corpse.

He turned and fled in horror, back the way he came. Past the two boys he had tried to get away from and onto the path. Putting some distance between them and him he slowed to a walk and headed off.

Now he realised there were men everywhere. But he avoided their gaze, and they left him alone.

The path sloped downwards and, up ahead, he saw a light, sneaking around the next corner. As he got closer, he could make out two guys, one black one white, standing behind a table lit up by lanterns. They were talking, actually talking to each other! At last, some people who weren't up to no good.

'Thank God, some normal people.' Everton said when he got there.

'Hey, what happened to your clothes?' The black guy asked with a southern US accent, so thick you could cut it with a knife. 'I mean, I know it's hot an' all, but, jees...'

'I've been robbed... the bastard took my clothes.'

'Someone actually stole your clothes? Chrissakes, how did that happen? Where?'

'Well there was this pub... and this guy... I thought he was, you know, gay... but no, he just wanted to rob me... he hit me and I passed out... I came to and all my clothes had gone... then I ended-up here.'

'Jees! How bad are you hurt?'

'Well my head feels a bit funny... apart from that... ' Words flooded into his brain, but they wouldn't make themselves into sentences. There was too much to explain. He gave up and raised his hands in a broad shrug. The guys behind the table stared at him in open disbelief.

'Oops... Sorry... Fuck... ' Everton's hands went back where they should have been. 'I'm completely screwed!' Too late, he'd nailed what he'd been trying to say earlier. 'Where am I...? It's mental... There are these guys... everywhere... doing "stuff" and that... I ran a mile and... ' He looked down at the table and broke off when he saw what lay there. '...Why are there condoms?' he asked, with deliberation.

The guys behind the table looked at the naked man in front of them and then back at each other. The moment was so bizarre it was farcical. 'You mean you don't know? You're on HAMPSTEAD HEATH honey! Just about the most famous cruising ground in the country. We're giving the condoms away to anyone who needs them. Looks like you've had a narrow

escape. Thanks to God you aren't badly hurt. Now what you need are some clothes. You're making quite a spectacle of yourself.'

He was right. There were men all along the path, pretending they hadn't noticed the naked man lit up in the glare of the camping lanterns. 'Look, my gym kit's under the table. You're welcome to it; better put something on before those guys pass out! My CPR's a bit rusty.' He handed over his bag and Everton went into the bushes to change. 'Showtime's over!' He called out and Everton's fan club slunk away into the shadows, disappointed.

'Hey, I don't know how to thank you,' said Everton, as he came back, 'my name's Everton by the way.'

'That's OK, the pleasure's mine. I'm Kash, this is Ed, well "Édouard" though you say it "Edwaar"—the d's silent—it's French. He has a room in my house. Pleased to meet you. Have you got anywhere to stay tonight?'

'Well, yes, and no. I lost the details of the hotel when he took my trousers. It was in the back pocket, and the address of a solicitor I'm supposed to see on Monday. That's why I came in the first place. It's something to do with my father. He disappeared nineteen years ago and I think he knows what's happened to him. God this is turning into a nightmare.'

'OK, OK, look, it's gonna be alright, you hear me? We'll look after you, won't we? First things first; don't worry none about this guy, we'll track him down soon enough. You can stay with us tonight. No arguments,' he added as Everton opened his mouth to protest. 'Look, we're about done here, let's get you home. You look like you could do with a beer.'

'God yes, I could murder a drink. Thank you so much for this, I promise you I won't be any trouble. I am so... grateful... you have no idea. But do you know what? I'm dying for a fag.' He managed a small smile. It lit up his face for a brief instant, and then passed.

'Now that's better. Here, have one of mine.' Kash offered him a Lucky Strike. 'Let's get packed up.'

'OK, where do we start?'

'No, no my brother, we'll do it. Won't we, Ed? Here, hand me that laundry bag from under the table.' He began scooping up the leaflets and packs of condoms. Minutes later the table was folded up under his arm and they were walking along the path. The way out led up a flight of steps cut into the earth about 50 metres farther down. As they turned in, the vegetation closed around them and they were again in utter blackness.

'Careful, it's a bit dark in here, hold onto my hand,' Kash said.

'You can say that again, it's as black as pitch. Why don't we use the lanterns?'

‘They’re all packed up. Don’t worry, we’ll protect you.’ Kash wrapped his free arm around his shoulder and gave him a little squeeze. Édouard glared at him, but it went unnoticed in the darkness.

When they got to the top, the canopy opened out and it got a bit brighter. Light was filtering in from the streetlights along the road.

‘Kash,’ a white guy with a duffle bag called-out from a clearing up ahead, ‘going home already?’

‘Kevin, hi, how’s tricks?’

‘Well it was busy earlier, but they’re all down at the bottom now.’ He turned to get a good look at Everton. ‘Not been mixing business and pleasure, have we?’

‘Hey, hey, whoa there, let me introduce you to Everton. We found this guy wandering around in a bit of a...’

‘No, you’re kidding, no way. So you’re the guy everyone’s talking about.’ He glanced down to Everton’s crotch. ‘Christ almighty.’

‘Yeah, well the poor guy’s a bit shook up, have you got any beer left?’

‘No, no, we couldn’t.’ Everton protested. ‘Where’s he going to get any more this late, Kash?’

Kevin broke into a grin. ‘Well I might not be Sainsbury’s, but there’s plenty left in the boot of the car, and I expect you to pay for it, mind. Now gentlemen,’ he opened his duffle bag and rummaged around, ‘let me see. I’ve got Strongbow, Fosters and some Budweiser, one bottle of poppers, a few “e”s left, a bit of blow and some Bensons. What can I do you for?’

‘I don’t have any money,’ Everton admitted, looking in Kash’s direction.

‘Don’t even go there,’ Kash cut him short, ‘this is on me. I suppose you want a Fosters, Ed? What about you Everton?’

‘Fosters is fine by me,’ Everton replied, ‘er... thanks, I fucking well need this.’

‘Don’t mention it.’ Kash turned to give Kevin two pounds. ‘Here you go, see you next week.’ He handed Kash the beer and waved as they left for the car park.

They found Kash’s BMW and he and Édouard fussed around filling the boot. ‘Cheers, Kash.’ Everton took a swig of his drink.

‘That should help cheer you up, big boy.’

‘Oh thank you. And I’m sorry. I’m so embarrassed about earlier. You do know I didn’t mean to wave it around, don’t you.’

‘Yes, of course we do, but we are not complaining.’ Édouard said, smirking, ‘it was kind of you to share that with us;’ his French accent coming out stilted and formal.

‘Careful about him,’ Kash warned, ‘he’s a big dinge and a size queen. Give him half a chance and he’ll be all over you.’

‘Sorry,’ Everton asked, “‘dinge”, “size queen”?”

‘He means I fancy black guys with big dicks,’ Édouard replied. ‘Anyway, he fancies you too.’

‘Hey, I’m here to give out condoms, not to pick up trade,’ Kash argued. ‘We have rules you know. Just like you and your “Girlfriends”.’

““Girlfriends?”” Everton frowned and thought for a moment. ‘Oh, you’re bisexual? I didn’t realise.’

‘Non, non, non... of course I am gay.’ Now Édouard was exasperated. ‘Kash means my French friends. We are all bottoms—well except Stéphanie—he’s just a bit girly. So we call ourselves “Girlfriends”.’

““Bottoms”?”’ Everton was still lost.

‘Passive gay men, guys who like to get fucked, like me and Kash. Honestly, where have you been all your life Everton?’

‘Dudley.’

‘Oh.’ Édouard sniggered. ‘That explains it. You must be getting quite an education tonight.’

‘You could say that. And I’ve never – you know – so far it’s always been me – well – I suppose I’m a “bottom” too.’

‘What? Oh my God what a waste. Are you serious? Quel Gaspillage.’

‘Well, at least we all like the same thing.’ Everton grinned.

‘And, if he’s a Girlfriend, then according to the “Girlfriends’ Code” it’s strictly “hands off” for us,’ Kash interrupted.

‘There you go, you’ve lost me again; what “Girlfriends’ Code”?’

‘Oh, Ed’s Girlfriends have this funny rule...’

“... You do not fuck with a Girlfriend, the boyfriend of a Girlfriend or the friend of a Girlfriend”,’ Édouard recited.

‘So,’ Kash said, ‘you’re in the spare room “Girlfriend”.’ He slammed the boot shut. ‘There. All done. Hop in and let’s get home. We’ll work out what to do about that Solicitor in the morning.’

Comments are always welcome. Please email to:
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