

Chapter 2: Breakfast in Kenton

The next morning, Kash and Édouard were sharing their usual breakfast of pain au chocolat and coffee in the kitchen. They were keeping their voices down, but had been arguing.

‘Look here,’ Kash was saying, ‘Everton’s had a big shock. Can’t you see? I just don’t want you taking advantage of him.’

‘Me, take advantage of him? You were the one all over him last night. I think it is you who should be keeping your hands to yourself.’

‘Well, he is gorgeous, I can’t deny that. But how many more times do I have to tell you? I ain’t trying to get inside his knickers. Believe me. It wouldn’t be fair. Anyways, I know you. What about that guy from Sénégal last Easter? You practically had to be held back, if I recall. That’s what I’m talking about; hands off, right.’

‘Well, as far as I am concerned, he is a Girlfriend. That is my last word. And I think you should treat him like one too, even if you do not take the Girlfriends’ Code seriously.’

“‘Girlfriends’ Code”, “Girlfriends’ Code”...’ Kash grumbled, ‘...we’re both sayin’ the same thing here... just you stick to it... you hearing me?’

‘Of course I am. And I will, if you do. Now shush. Is that him coming down the stairs? Quiet now.’

A moment later, Everton tried the door. ‘Oh, there you are, can I come in?’

‘Yeah, yeah, don’t be so silly, hey man, good morning,’ Kash said, as though nothing had happened.

‘Yes, do join us.’ Édouard scraped back a chair and poured him a cup of coffee. ‘Would you like some breakfast?’

‘Oh yes please.’ Everton helped himself to some pain au chocolat and took a big bite. ‘You know I really am grateful for all this, you have no idea. You guys saved my life last night. I don’t know how to thank you. Mmm, this is nice.’

‘Yeah, the French sure know how to do pastry. And don’t even mention it,’ Kash replied. ‘It’s no big deal, really, stay as long as you like. My folks are loaded,

so it's no imposition. Make yourself to home. I see you found the shower. Your hair looks fantastic my brother.'

Everton's massive afro was hanging down towards his shoulders in wide open curls. 'It's got a mind of its own. It goes like this when it's damp, but it'll bounce back later.'

Kash swept off the multicoloured hat he always wore. 'Well you're making me jealous. I shave mine because of the head-gear. I'm a Muslim, you see.'

'Oh, right. I never knew. It suits you.'

'Why thank you kindly. But what's your programme? What does that solicitor want?'

'Yes, it sounds very mysterious.' Édouard added.

'You're not kidding,' Everton replied. 'I have no idea what he knows about Dad, but I just have to be there tomorrow to find-out.'

'He disappeared when you were small you say?' Kash asked.

'Yeah; all I know is he went back to Africa when I was two and no-one ever saw him again. I think he must be dead.'

'But you do not know that, perhaps he has turned up and wants to get in touch?' Édouard suggested.

'Or they've found his will and he's left you a fortune,' Kash added. 'Look on the bright side. What does your Ma think about it?'

'Oh I can't ask her now, she's dead,' Everton said, now more serious. 'She had a heart attack two months ago. Anyway, he couldn't have left me anything; they had nothing to start with.'

The room fell silent for a moment. 'Oh. I'm sorry. I didn't know. That's awful.' Kash said.

'Thanks, but it's OK, we weren't close. Mum found me in bed with a guy when I was in the sixth form and chucked me out. We never spoke after that.'

'Was she...?'

'English, yes.'

'So how are we going to find that address?'

‘I’ve been thinking about that. Is there an internet café around here? He sent me directions by email, so if I can just get online...’

‘Hay, no problem, you can use ours. There’s a computer in my study.’

‘Oh brilliant, thanks, but... Oh.’

‘What do you mean, “Oh”?’

‘Look, I haven’t got any money, or anything to wear; just what you lent me last night. How am I going to get there?’

‘Don’t be ridiculous. Let US look after you.’

‘No, it’s asking too much. I can’t.’

‘How else are you going to do it? If it makes you feel any better you can give me something once you’re sorted out. And then I’ll refuse to accept it. Now quit whining and get yourself upstairs. We’re about the same size. I think I’d better lend you some more appropriate clothes.’

Kash’s room was, as Everton suspected, impressive. In the middle was a huge bed framed by gilded dogs, just like the one in Tutankhamen’s tomb. Moroccan lanterns hung from the ceiling and there was a tiger-skin rug on the floor. Two doors led off the room and Kash opened one of them. Behind it was a walk-in dressing-room lined with wardrobes.

‘Let’s see,’ he said, casting an appraising glance at Everton. ‘They say it’s gonna be “hot” today. I guess you’d be “hot” in linen.’ He laughed and pulled out a pair of white slacks. ‘Come on, get those off an’ let’s see if they fit.’

‘You do know I’m not wearing any knickers...’

‘And... ? I bet you’d look good without ’em. Just tell me when you’re finished.’ He handed the trousers to Everton and turned the other way, ever the gentleman.

‘What do you think?’ Kash asked Édouard as they came back into the kitchen wearing a mischievous grin. ‘I only wish they looked as good on me.’

Édouard whistled, ‘Mon Dieu, that trouser, ouaw! C’est impressionant!’ He rolled his eyes. ‘But you are not wearing any underpants.’ The light fabric was almost semi-transparent, and left little to the imagination.

‘You don’t think it’s a bit too daring?’ Everton blushed. ‘Kash persuaded me.’

‘Well it will certainly get you noticed. Just hope it does not rain and God forbid you get an erection in the street. Do not say you have not been warned.’ Édouard grinned, and drained his coffee. ‘But I cannot stay and chat, I have to go to work.’

‘Oh, I’m sorry; I never asked you what you do. I thought you and Kash were working on Hampstead Heath?’

‘Oh no, Kash is a volunteer.’

‘Yeah, I try to do my bit,’ Kash said, ‘Édouard was there for the ride, weren’t you?’

‘Yes, and it was quite an experience. I work for Eurostar, and I have to be in Waterloo in... an hour! Oh la la, I must hurry or I will be late,’ he said looking at his watch. ‘Thanks to God I have my uniform ready.’ And, grabbing a pain au chocolat, he rushed out.

‘So you’re a Muslim?’ Everton asked when Édouard had left, ‘They’re all Asians in Dudley.’

‘You’ve never heard of Louis Farrakhan then?’

‘Who?’

“‘Louis Farrakhan’”. He’s a black activist in the US – converted to Islam in the sixties – it’s an African religion you see – none of that western Christian crap – come on, let me show you somethin’.’

He led him into the lounge and they sat down together on a stylish white leather sofa. ‘Ha, if only these sofas could talk. They’ve seen a thing or two! Just wait until the next party. I’ve seduced a few guys on here in my time but, don’t worry, I’m not after you... yet. Check this out.’ He reached for the remote. A huge plasma screen came to life and he flicked over to a religious programme on an American satellite channel.

There was a choir of fat black men and women in pastel blue and pink robes singing their hearts out on stage. People in the audience kept standing up and dancing, yelling out “Praise the lord” and “Allaluyia” all the time. Kash indicated a tall old black man by the side in a neat, expensive, suit, his hair peppered with white flecks, swaying and clapping along to the music.

‘See that guy?’ Kash said, ‘that’s my Pa. He owns the whole church, this TV channel, bookstores, funeral homes, you name it. And if you think it looks like I’m loaded, he pays for all this out of small change; religion’s big business in the States.

When I was a kid he used to send me to these Christian summer camps to “convert” me for the Lord. I hated it. In retaliation, when I was 18, I converted myself to Islam and changed my name legally from “Tobias Napier” to “Taurique Mohammed el-Haji Kashta”; “Kash” for short.’

‘I flew out to Saudi and got my pilgrimage to Mecca out of the way, and converted in the prophet’s mosque in Medina. When I came back, the old man was furious. Well you can imagine it; a Christian minister with a Muslim son? He banished me to good old London Town, under the threat of cutting me off without a penny. Now I live the life of a playboy, and all to keep his precious reputation intact, neat, huh!’

‘Yeah, but Muslims aren’t supposed to be gay, are they? And you drink too, don’t you?’

‘Well Farrakhan’s a homophobic jerk, I’ll give you that. An’ the Pope, now I come to think of it. But that don’t stop their priests when a pretty choirboy comes along. Same thing in Saudi; you should have seen the way all those young Arab guys were carryin’ on. They were all over each other, walking hand-in-hand, kissing, all that stuff. They ain’t so innocent, an’ all good Muslims to boot. So I don’t worry much about that, and I eat pork too. To be honest, I did it to piss-off the old man, but there’s a grain of truth in it. I do take it seriously, sorta’.’

‘You’re lucky knowin’ about your Pa Everton. Most black Americans don’t know their origins. Some of us have kinda’ adopted Egypt. An’ why not? It was the first and the most successful culture the world’s ever seen. And it’s Muslim. See? “Kashta” was the first black Pharaoh.’

‘So that’s why you’ve got that amazing bed. And maybe I do know where my father came from, but I don’t know much else. So we’re about level there. When

Mum kicked me out I was housed by social services. I've got a council flat in a tower block in Dudley.'

'And you've finished you degree, right? Well, I congratulate you, my brother. You'll be looking for a job then?'

'Yeah, nothing sorted out just yet though. I've got to go back to Brum Thursday week to sign-on, but apart from that I'm pretty much at a loose end. I'd more or less emptied my bank account, so when my wallet was stolen I lost everything. There's not much point reporting my cards lost. I'm just waiting to go and see this solicitor tomorrow. Will you come with me?'

'Heck yeah, wouldn't miss that for the world.'

Comments are always welcome.

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