

GONE BAMBOO

Anthony Bourdain



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To Nancy

We don't need clothes and we don't need money . . .
from "Totally Nude,"
Talking Heads

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

I wrote *Gone Bamboo*, unsurprisingly, in Saint Martin – on a balcony at the Oyster Pond Hotel. As a chef, and New Yorker, I am used to a somewhat more stressful, cranked up pace than exists in the Windward Islands and I wanted to write a book that would reflect the remarkable transformation one experiences after a few weeks without shoes – the sort of boozy romanticism that comes over one when sunburned and half-drunk after a day spent paddling around in body-temperature water and eating barbecue under a palm tree.

I wanted to write a sociopath beach book – something that jaded, hyperactive chefs, bent lawyers, paroled arsonists and protected witnesses might find entertaining and escapist. I wanted a hero and heroine as lazy, mercenary, lustful and free of redeeming qualities as I sometimes see myself. Whether I succeeded or not – I don't know.

I can tell you that the people who get paid to read these things out in Hollywood were appalled by my loathsome couple. Studio coverage uniformly suggested – in the strongest terms – that my heroes should “learn from their experiences,” and “grow as people.” I felt they'd missed the point. Needless to say, you won't be seeing a naked Mel Gibson, running in slo-mo down a Saint Martin beach anytime soon. And as much as I would have liked to see Sigourney Weaver or Linda Fiorentino with an all-over tan, I don't think that'll happen.

Readers of my first novel, *Bone in the Throat*, will recognize a few of the supporting players – and forgive me, I hope, if small inconsistencies of time-line occur in the less than seamless segue from book to book. I can only suggest you pop open a Red Stripe,

grease up with SPF 15 and read on. Treat the little inconsistencies like sand-fleas or the guys hawking time shares and seashell jewelry – ignore them and they’ll go away. Put down the book, have another beer, take a dip . . . have sex . . . read another chapter. And please. Get sand between the pages.

Anthony Bourdain
2000

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Jimmy “Pazz” Calabrese wanted room service.
“Just a san’wich or somethin’ for chrissakes,” he said.
“I would prefer you didn’t,” said the other man at the table.
“Then I’d have to change motels. I don’t know how you feel about it, but I’m not crazy about being seen together.”
“Awright . . . awright . . .,” said Jimmy, his stomach growling, “I’ll get somethin’ later. Shit.”

The other man at the table was tall, around six foot four, thin, and deeply tanned. He looked in his mid- to late forties, with long, dark brown hair, sun-bleached in spots and going to gray, tied back in a ponytail. He was dressed in faded blue jeans with holes in the knees and a loose-fitting long-sleeve T-shirt. He was wearing no socks or shoes, and even his feet were tan. In the dimly lit motel room, the darkness of his skin made his eyes and teeth and the gold hoop earring in his left ear flash unnaturally bright.

There were three other men in the room at the Teterboro Motor Lodge. Richie “Tic” Gianelli, a small, ferretlike man with a jail-house pallor, stood by the door, appearing nervous in a flannel-lined

Burberry trench coat. The coat didn't look right on him, somehow; he looked like he'd borrowed it from an older brother. Paul "Paulie Brown" Caifano, a large man with no neck and a crew cut, sat silently on the edge of the bed in a camel hair coat, playing with the remote control for the bolted-down television, clicking from channel to channel.

"There's a reason this is comin' from me personally," said Jimmy Pazz, solemnly. "Nobody gimme permission for this piece a' work. I'm tellin' you that up front, right from the get go. It's two guys gotta go – a double. And they gotta be done this weekend 'cause you ain't gonna get another crack at 'em."

Jimmy Pazz weighed somewhere in the neighborhood of 320 pounds before lunch. He had a low, simian brow, beady, wet eyes set too close together, and a big, sloping honker of a nose. He had a dark, heavily bearded complexion, despite a recent shave and the heavy application of face powder, and he was wearing, as was often his habit among friends and business associates, a dress; on this occasion it was a blue and green tartan jumper the size of a pup tent, white kneesocks, and saddle shoes. Because he had come to discuss a matter of some gravity, he had chosen to dispense with his customary wig; it lay neglected on the dresser like a strangled chinchilla.

"What is it?" asked Jimmy, narrowing his eyes so that they almost disappeared into his face. "What?"

"I was thinking that's a good color for you," said the man with the earring. "Goes well with your eyes."

Jimmy scrutinized the other man's face for a sign of mockery. After a long, tense moment during which nothing was said by anyone in the room, he turned, satisfied, to Richie and smiled, his amethyst drop earrings wiggling.

"See?" said Richie from his place by the door. "You din't believe me. I told you green was good. Din't I say that?"

“I don’t get a chance much to wear what I want around the office, the club. They takin’ pitchers there. The fuckin’ FBI. They’d love to get a pitcher a’ me in a dress. Prolly send it to my mother. That’s how they are, you know . . . they’re—”

“Vindictive,” interjected Richie. “They’re vindictive and repressed.”

On the bed, Paulie Brown rolled his eyes to the ceiling. He’d heard this before.

“You got it,” said Jimmy. “Vindictive. That’s what they are. They should fuckin’ talk too . . . Hoover did this, you know. Friend a’ mine saw him one time at Rockefeller Center, ice skatin’ in a fuckin’ tutu like nobody’s business . . .”

The other man at the table cleared his throat.

Jimmy leaned forward in his chair, suddenly all business, his brawny, fur-covered arms coming together on the table. “Lissen, Henry,” he said, “as far as anybody outside a’ this room goes, this meetin’ never happened—”

“Jimmy. You should get a job with the government, talking like that,” said the man called Henry.

Jimmy smiled indulgently. “I get connected with this, I’m gonna have myself some serious fuckin’ problems.”

Henry looked around at the other men. “Hey. If you end up reading about this in the papers, it’s sure as hell not coming from me,” he said testily. “From what I’ve seen, it’s you guys been opening up your books for the feds. Seems like every other member of your little fraternity’s been picking up two paychecks these days. I mean, Jimmy, your admission standards are really going to hell. The old days, as I recall, membership in the FBI used to stand in the way of qualifying.”

“I ain’t inferrin’ nothin’ about you,” said Jimmy.

“Implyin’,” corrected Richie. “You ain’t implyin’ nothin’. You imply, he infers.”

“Whatever,” snapped Jimmy.

“So. You going to tell me what it is, Jimmy?” asked Henry.

“The thing of it is,” said Jimmy, “to do this right, I gotta be there when it happens.”

“Where is this taking place?” asked Henry.

“Show him that thing,” said Jimmy.

Richie came over to the table with a color brochure and laid it out in front of Henry. It depicted the grounds and facilities of the Devil’s Run Ski Resort in the Adirondacks. There was a map of the ski trails and surrounding slopes and some photos of the lodges, restaurants, and rooms.

“See there?” said Jimmy, placing a stubby finger at a point on the map. “This is where everybody’s gonna be at. All the bosses gonna be there – Jerry Dogs, Philly, Sonny, me and Richie . . . everybody – and some other guys they gonna bring—”

“A convention,” observed Henry, shaking his head.

Jimmy reached into his jumper pocket and unfolded two newspaper photos. One showed an old man in bathrobe, knee socks and bedroom slippers standing in front of a Manhattan social club. The other showed a younger man, broad shouldered, in an expensive double-breasted jacket, shaking his fist at the camera from a loading dock somewhere.

“Charlie Wagons and Danny Testa,” said Henry after the briefest of looks. He gave Jimmy back the pictures. “I know what they look like.”

Jimmy raised half of the eyebrow that ran uninterrupted across the upper part of his face. “You know these guys?” he asked, troubled. “You done some work for these pricks?”

Henry said nothing. His expression didn’t change. After a few seconds of awkward silence, Richie piped in, “Professional ethics, right? He ain’t gonna tell you. It’s like a doctor or a priest; you get the confidentiality. It’s sacred.”

Henry allowed himself a smile.

“This won’t be a problem, right?” asked Jimmy, looking unsure. “I mean . . . that won’t stand in the way if you know these guys . . .”

The word *problem* seemed to rouse Paulie on the bed, where he had apparently settled in on *Wheel of Fortune*. He stirred, the bedsprings squeaking as he sat up, but Henry’s calm answer sent him back to his show.

“I can do it,” said Henry. “It’s going to cost you a whole pile of money, but I’ll do it. Sure.”

“Good, good,” said Jimmy, relaxing visibly. “You know, we’re fuckin’ lucky to get a shot at the old guy. Never leaves that fuckin’ club down there for nothin’. Lives at his sister’s upstairs, an’ if you think I got it bad with the FBI an’ the cops watchin’ me . . . Him, forget about. You gotta push ’em outta the fuckin’ way to get in down there. Charlie’s been in more movies than . . . than . . . Richie! Who’s that guy?”

“Which one?” asked Richie.

“The cowboy . . .”

“John Wayne?”

“Not him. No, the other guy. Forget it. You get the point. The guy’s been in a shitload a’ fuckin’ movies an’ he never even hadda leave home. They got that place wired up like my fuckin’ front yard on Christmas, so you can’t do nothin’ there,” said Jimmy.

“But he’s going to this ski thing,” said Henry. “I have a hard time picturing Charlie on a snowboard. You sure he’s going to be there?”

“He’s gotta be there,” said Jimmy. “This is a big thing. Everybody’s gotta be there.”

“It’s compulsory,” said Richie.

“Okay,” said Henry. “So everybody’s going to be there. So what happens, I’m supposed to pick the two of them out of the crowd? I have that right?”

“Yeah,” said Jimmy. “That’s pretty much it.”

“This is really going to cost,” said Henry.

“Just don’t fuckin’ shoot me by accident,” said Jimmy. “Okay? I don’t wanna catch no fuckin’ bullet I paid for somebody else to get.”

“I’ll tell you what. I’ll make you a special deal. I shoot you by mistake and you get your money back.”

“Hey, that’s not fuckin’ funny,” said Jimmy.

“Don’t even joke,” said Richie.

“So, where exactly is everybody going to be and when?” asked Henry.

“You see them five little squares there, halfway up the mountain? Them’s the places they got rented for this thing. Each boss gonna get one—”

“Chalets,” said Richie.

“Each boss gonna get one a’ these chalets. Charlie and Danny, they gonna get the biggest one. Right here.” Jimmy pointed to one of the squares.

“It’s got a Jacuzzi,” said Richie, turning over the brochure to show Henry an interior shot. His breath smelled of Tic-tacs. “Nice, huh?”

“So, the meeting. Where’s that going to be?” asked Henry.

“Charlie’s of course,” said Jimmy. “We all gonna show up Saturday night late. Meeting’s supposedta be aroun’ lunchtime Sunday.”

“You guys can’t just step out for a piss, commune with nature for a few minutes? I could blow the whole place. That would be easier,” suggested Henry.

“You don’t get it. I gotta be there. It’s gotta look like it coulda been anybody,” said Jimmy.

“You could go for broke, I mean. Blow them all up.”

Jimmy gave this idea a few moments of serious consideration.

“Nahhh . . . some a’ them guys, I wouldn’t miss. I don’t give a rat’s ass . . . But Jerry Dogs, Sonny and them. We got business together. Nah . . . That would be wrong.”

“I can’t nail them on the way up?”

“I wanted that, I’d just have somebody wire up their car or somethin’ an’ BABOOM! I wouldn’t have to pay you all the fuckin’ money come up here. I can get a couple a’ Irishmen do that for a case a’ fuckin’ beer. You the man that’s so good with a rifle, right? That’s what I called you for.”

“Okay, okay.”

“It’s gotta look like it coulda been any a’ us they was shootin’ at. Like it was just one a’ those things it’s Charlie an’ Danny that gets shot.”

“Awfully convenient,” said Henry.

“Well, nobody’s gonna know for sure ’cause I’m right there. Only thing anybody’s gonna know for sure is that somebody had some fuckin’ balls on ’em.”

Jimmy took a pack of True 100s out of his jumper. Richie came over and lit one for him. “An’ by the time I make my move,” said Jimmy, “nobody’s gonna be in a position to do nothin’ about it anyways.”

“When it’s time for the meeting,” said Richie, “they all gonna go over to Charlie’s place. He’s gonna come out . . . him and Danny. Protocol. They gotta do all that huggin’ an’ kissin’ out there.”

“We’ll do what we can get ’em away from the door. Outside, so’s you can get a good shot at ’em,” said Jimmy.

“We can get ’em in a snowball fight.” Richie giggled.

“Alright,” said Henry, still looking at the map. “I think I know what you want. We’re talking about two targets at about five hundred yards—”

“Jesus,” said Jimmy. “You gotta be that far? That’s pretty fuckin’ far. You can’t get any closer than that?”

“Not if I want to get away. I *had* planned on getting away.”

“I want you to get away, I want you to get away,” said Jimmy. “That would be fuckin’ great, you get grabbed right onna fuckin’ mountain there.”

“I can do it,” said Henry. “Wind’s right I can do it up to a thousand yards. After that, you take your chances.” He smiled.

“So, how much?” asked Jimmy.

“It’ll be a hundred twenty-five for the old man, and a hundred for the other. In advance.”

Richie whistled through his teeth.

“Okay,” said Jimmy without hesitation. “Paulie. Give the man the money he wants.” There was the sound of money being counted on the bed behind Henry.

Henry held up his hand and shook his head. He looked back at Paulie and Richie on the bed, both now arranging used bills into stacks.

“That’s very nice,” he said, turning back to Jimmy. “That’s very nice. And I appreciate it – you bringing the money with you and all. But that’s not how I get paid.” He handed Jimmy a slip of paper with some numbers on it and a list of banks in the Netherlands Antilles and Cayman Islands. “I would prefer that you send the funds, by wire transfer, in increments not to exceed ten thousand each, to these accounts. A different bank as point of origin each time, please. Can you do that for me? It’s really the only way I do business these days.”

“Richie,” said Jimmy. “You getting this?”

“Yeah, yeah. I got it,” said Richie.

“We can do that?”

“Yeah. Pain in the ass, but we can do that.”

“You don’t want cash?” said Jimmy, disappointed.

Henry shook his head. “I’m not going through customs with that. No way.”

Richie and Paulie began to put the money back in a gym bag.

“And of course, I’ll be calling the banks Friday . . . just to see everything arrived okay,” said Henry. “No offense.”

“That’s a lot of fuckin’ money,” said Jimmy.

“It’s enough.”

“So, you sure you got no problem doin’ this without permission?” said Jimmy, trying to reassure himself. “I ain’t gonna hear about you goin’ cryin’ to some other boss, sayin’ what a terrible thing I axed you to do? I mean, I know you worked for other people . . .”

“Jimmy,” said Henry. “I don’t give a flying fuck about permission. Understand that about me. I’m not a member of your fraternal order. I don’t know the secret handshakes, I don’t want to know. I’m not looking for promotion. You get the money in those accounts there by Friday end of business and you’ll get an honest day’s work out of me. No money – I get on the next plane and go home. That simple. I mean, if some of your lodge brothers want to get pissed off about any bylaws getting violated, hey, that’s tough shit as far as I’m concerned. You guys can work that out amongst yourselves. None of my business. Couldn’t care less.”

“I was thinking,” said Jimmy. “When you do it. Maybe you better put a couple a’ extra shots over the other fellas’ heads or somethin’ . . . Make it look good.”

“I wanna see Jerry’s face, he’s lyin’ inna snow, thinkin’ it’s him’s gonna get clipped,” said Richie, laughing.

“Yeah! Me too.” Jimmy guffawed. “I wanna see that.”

“No, no, no,” said Henry. “You gentlemen want to play practical jokes on each other, buy a fuckin’ whoopee cushion. I don’t do that. I don’t play around when I work, alright? You ever hear about me chopping anybody’s hands off, jamming money up their ass, yankin’ out tongues or any of that shit? No. You know why? ’Cause I don’t do that. No jokes. No messages.”

“Awwww,” said Jimmy. “Just a couple a’ extra shots to make it look good . . .”

“Nope. That’s not the way it gets done. There’s going to be a lot of noise. There’s probably going to be a lot of people around, a weekend at a ski resort. First shot, all hell is gonna break loose. I’m not going to find myself sitting around in an orange jumpsuit because somebody thought a few extra rounds would be good for a laugh. I don’t think I’d like prison. I’d lose my tan.”

“Suit yourself,” grumbled Jimmy. “You know your business. Least I hope you do.” He stood up and walked into the bathroom to change clothes, Richie hurrying after him with a wine-colored double-breasted man’s suit. Just outside the bathroom door, Jimmy caught sight of himself in the mirror over the dresser. “You sure you like this color? I think it makes me look fat. I look fat to you?”

“You look radiant,” said Henry.