

## **The Glamour of Business Travel #2: The Poolside Restaurant**

Outside it's raining like a motherfucker, my sweet. According to the travel book, the wet season is supposed to be over, but it isn't. So much for the travel book. Rain falls in sheets, smacking the patio outside like a thousand hands smacking a thousand asses. The hotel is mostly empty now. The Japanese and Americans, the English and the few pale Germans and Norwegians are gone.

The restaurant is nearly empty too. In a wicker chair in the lounge, a distinguished looking gray-haired gentleman watches TV, his mouth agape, the universal guy-watching-television expression on his face. Seated next to him his younger, once-trophy wife, more plump with age but still a looker, watches the program in disgust, her hoped-for night of romance or passion or whatever thwarted by bad French TV.

The weightlifter, his ebony forearms heavily veined and muscled, drinks Perrier alone at a table waiting for his date. He gets up and circles the dining room anxiously, waiting for her arrival.

A group of Frenchmen entertain two Mexican businessmen, but it's soon apparent that it's the same old Mexican story - big ideas but no financing. The French soon ignore their guests and go about their dinner, conversing loudly amongst themselves, acknowledging their still-smiling but discouraged guests from time to time. Two couples out for the evening occupy another table. One of the women holds a nasty yippy dog. Fucking French and their yippy dogs. Not that I hate the French, really. Its just that I'm stuck here in this tropical steam bath on the tip of nowhere in South America, and I miss you, my love.

The rain stops. Water drips off the veranda as the maitre d'i opens the doors to the patio and the pool outside. A hotel employee fishes an iguana from the greenish water with a long net. The lizard lands on the concrete with a 'splat' then scurries off into the night.

The slim effeminate waiter stops to watch, then brings the bill to the party with the lady with the yippy little dog. And then it hits me. The weightlifter isn't waiting on his girlfriend. No, my dear, the waiter is his lover. See the tender expression on the muscleman's face as he watches the waiter sashay his way to the kitchen with a tray of empty coffee cups. The tenderness! Like I used to smile, watching you do almost anything, when we were newly lovers. I have to remember to look at you that way again. Maybe I have to go away to remember how much you mean to me.

As the waiter slips behind the bar to tally the French-not-deigning-to-entertain-the-Mexicans bill, the bartender and the other waitress playfully tease him. He smiles and cowers at their gentle slaps. The weightlifter sits up in his seat, flexing his muscles, on guard, ready to spring until his lover smiles at him as if to say "It's all right. I'm okay."

The rain begins to fall again, heavier than before, if that's possible. The tropical night smells of rain and decay and musk. The dog yips as the couples split the tab and leave. The old man and the woman watching TV yawn in unison then rise from their wicker thrones and exit through the lobby, holding hands.

And I'm still here, drinking coffee, alone at the edge of the jungle, putting up with yippy dogs and bad manners and Iguanas and the French. Have I told you? I miss you, I miss you. I miss you.