

## Asia Argento denies sexual assault tale, blames payoff on Anthony Bourdain

By [Ruth Brown](#)

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Actress [Asia Argento](#) on Tuesday denied allegations that she [sexually assaulted a 17-year-old former co-star](#) — claiming her late boyfriend Anthony Bourdain paid the hush money only to stave off “negative publicity.”

[A bombshell report Sunday alleged](#) that Argento paid actor and musician Jimmy Bennett \$380,000 last year after he accused her of plying him with booze and molesting him years earlier when he was a teen.

In a statement Tuesday, she finally responded to the assault allegations, calling them “absolutely false” and insisting she never had “any sexual relationship” with Bennett — who played her young son in the 2003 movie “The Heart is Deceitful Above All Things.”

But after the 42-year-old Italian actress publicly accused producer Harvey Weinstein of assault in October last year — kicking off a flood of similar allegations from other women and thrusting her into the center of the #MeToo movement — she says a cash-strapped Bennett came to her with an “exorbitant request of money.”

“Bennett knew my boyfriend, Anthony Bourdain, was a man of great perceived wealth and had his own reputation as a beloved public figure to protect,” Argento’s statement reads.

“Anthony insisted the matter be handled privately and this was also what Bennett wanted. Anthony was afraid of the possible negative publicity that such [a] person, whom he considered dangerous, could have brought upon us.”

“We decided to deal compassionately with Bennett’s demand for help and give it to him. Anthony personally undertook to help Bennett economically, upon the condition that we would no longer suffer any further instructions in our life,” she continued.

Weinstein’s lawyer on Tuesday said the settlement showed Argento is a hypocrite.

“This was not simply a matter of a woman who made a false allegation of being outed as a liar,” attorney Ben Brafman told The Post.

“This was a voice who had portrayed herself as a victim being exposed as someone who had been able to fool all the reporters who interviewed her, and all the people who really looked at her as a victim, when in truth she was a brazen fraud if the New York Times story is true.”

Weinstein, who is currently [facing rape and serial sex-assault charges](#) relating to other women, was “relieved” when the story emerged Sunday, according to Brafman.

“One of your principal accusers is being outed as a liar and a fraud, so most people would be relieved when that happens,” the lawyer said.

Weinstein maintains he didn’t force himself on Argento or any one else.

*Additional reporting by Rebecca Rosenberg*