



Jocelyn Uma

Assisi & Brannan: Excerpts

#1: The Night Before

If there's one thing I learned last night it's that I shouldn't moonlight anymore. Sam takes one look at my face and tells me I need more sleep. It's that obvious. A new mother and a senior citizen are not that different—they both need more sleep. Me? I'm neither. I just need more hours to shut down.

There's also another very practical reason: I don't have the energy to do my day job. More on that later.

Last night I drove Andrea and her girlfriends to the city. By the time they sat down for dinner they had hit three bars. I get it. Andrea, a really spectacular woman, was in Balenciaga. She dressed around her bag which she had told me cost \$5000. WTF? I mean really, Why TF would you spend so much on a bag? Even on sale? The rest of the gear was straight off a Paris runway. Feathered collar on a cropped jacket, skin-tight pants of a sheer gossamer material and six-inch heels. I was envious. She looked great. I didn't in my uniform. I get it when you are middle-aged you need to book from the family.

She had four friends with her who had more brand names on their persons than I could count on my

hands and feet. Andrea had done well choosing her company. Not one could I label as spectacular.

I took the Hummer into San Francisco because that was what Andrea ordered. She usually books the limo but sometimes goes for the ATV look.

“It’s okay, Garnet,” Sam says watching me panic.

So I’m here waiting with the Hummer parked on California while the women are chowing down \$30 plates of succulent scallops and sole inside Boulevard. I’m almost done texting Sam about where I am when a man as tall as he is wide comes at me cursing.

“Get the fucking Hummer off my spot!”

I’m 5’ 4” in my socks in a Halloween uniform that Sam got from a store in the Mission. My nails are cracked and my hair feels dry, but I’m not taking crap from an extra-wide, has-been receiver.

“I don’t see your name on the pavement,” I retort, immediately regretting what I’ve said. Fear prickles down my spine.

“What did you say, you little bitch?” he snarls. Hot, stale breath wafts to me.

I hate bullies and my head now hurts.

“I was here first,” I say. What are you going to do? I ask wordlessly.

“You don’t park here. You park there!” I didn’t look where he pointed. It was night and dark and a part of the city I didn’t know.

“Sam told me to park here,” I said.

He paused mid-sentence through his profanity.

“Sam. Sam Grier? You know him?”

That constriction in my chest eased. My stomach fluttered. My hands were damp.

“Sam’s my partner.” I swallow.

“Why didn’t you tell me? We are buddies.”

I spent the next hour talking to Square Man, aka Joe “Fusilli” Marino, about his job, his boss, and his family. My headache deepened to shards of agony.

I took Andrea and her friends home at midnight. They were drunk and happy.

I’m a wreck.

“I quit” I texted Sam.

#2: The Day Job

When I parked my Vespa this morning outside the *Bay Area Weekly*, it was cold and misty in San Mateo. I’ve been getting to work late for the past week. My strategy is to keep my helmet on and walk past Bruce. Bruce Connelly, editor-in-chief at the *Bay Area Weekly*, is my boss and he misses nothing. He would have had to have been blind to miss seeing me come in through the door because the *BAW* office is one large room in a strip mall in old downtown San Mateo.

“Another late night?” His cold voice rasped drily like a nail sliding down a dusty chalkboard.

“Sorry, I’m late, Bruce. I forgot to set my alarm,” I replied from beneath the cover of my helmet.

“All right. I need to see you when you are settled.” He was not convinced.

This is bad. I quit Sam’s and now I’m going to be fired from the job I really want. Life couldn’t be worse.

My desk is a 10-square-foot surface filled with proofs and loose paper. I throw my bag under the desk. The helmet and jacket follow.

“I’m going to get a juice and donut from Donuts. You want one?” Stalling may work.

“No juice, yes on the donut.”

“Glazed.” I finish.

If there was a contest for the most unimaginative name, Donuts would have won. It’s all generic linoleum décor, white walls and stainless steel hardware. The coffee is worse than sludge, but the donuts rock. Light, slightly sweet and airy. It’s the only place where after eating I don’t breathe out lard fumes the rest of the day.

“Hey, Ming.”

Ming’s unibrow drifts up his forehead in greeting. Never a smile graces his face but I’ve yet to meet a nicer man with a bigger heart.

Kindergarten question: What do you want to be when you grow up? Ming’s answer must have been, Mr. Donut.

Each donut that he produces is a work of art. He has a secret recipe for the “do” and the glazes and fillings are unearthly good. There’s usually a steady stream of people who come to his store. There’re senior citizens, high-tech folk, kids, moms and us. I once saw some customers try to pay with food stamps. Ming refused the checks and sent them away with their donuts.

“Juice and cream-filled?”

Even the names are brand-free. This place rules.

“And a glazed for Bruce.”

Bruce eats his glazed in a mouthful and rattles off my assignment.

“I want you to cover this story. A woman was alone at this party and left with a man. Her husband is convinced she has been kidnapped. She’s been missing for 36 hours.”

#3: The Missing Woman

“Did the husband file a missing person’s report?” I ask.

“It’s too soon for us to get the public record. Find out when you talk to the police,” he said.

“Where do they live?”

“They are in San Mateo up on the hill.”

“I’ll go talk to Peter,” I made a mental note to check in with the neighbors too. It was early but it couldn’t hurt.

“I want the story by 8 tonight.”

I choke over my cream-filled donut.

“But I don’t know what I will find out! Who knows, she might show up.”

The man is a lunatic. BAW is all he knows. He bought the paper 10 years ago after selling his start-up. The Bay Area Weekly was never profitable and now it bleeds money because all he cares about is the story. He’s fired the sales person again and there are barely any advertisements in the paper.

“Put the paper on the web and cut your losses,” Robert, the last salesman told him.

Bruce cut him instead.

I get on the Vespa and head to the Hills.

The house was in the Baywood area of San Mateo. Houses here are large and spaced comfortably away from the neighbors. The Dinhs' house is a handsome Spanish-styled building with nice little touches like a fountain and a beautiful shady grotto. Someone hung the wind chime on a low branch on the tree in front of the house.

I knocked on the door and waited. After a while a middle-aged Asian woman came to the door.

“Yes?”

“I'm Garnet Chan from the Bay Area Weekly. I'm looking for Gene Dinh. I had called little earlier.”

A man came to the door. “It's OK, mom.”

It was awkward because Sarah was still not declared missing. Gene was nice enough to see me and agree to answer my questions. We sat down while his mother went to watch the children.

His eyes were rimmed red with fatigue. Despite his exhaustion he showed me Sarah's office where she worked when she was home. She had flexible hours and often stayed home. There was a picture of her on the refrigerator. Pretty with haunting dark eyes, she had done her hair in long waves, both feminine and alluring. Two children posed in a different picture. The boy looked no more than two and his sister about five.

There was a picture of Sarah and the boys standing in front of a bowl with a fish.

“That's when they got the Siamese fighting fish,” he said.

There wasn't much but I had questions for Peter Hunter, the officer on the San Mateo Hills beat.

"Assisi & Brannan" is a work of serial fiction.

Description: "As a young journalist, Garnet Chan knows that San Francisco's Bay Area can be heaven or hell depending on how you look at it – a wealth of human stories or adventures gone bad. Moonlighting as a limo driver to make ends meet, Garnet looks for truth and finds it tangled with life."

Jocelyn Uma lives and works in the Bay Area. For more installments of "Assisi and Brannan," visit the [Serialteller website](#).