

# Karmen Ghia Presents

## Six Smutty Stories

Edited by Karmen Ghia

Karmen Ghia Presents Six Smutty Stories

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# Chiaroscuro

By Ginger Mayerson

It was the package delivery guy at the door again.

"We're seeing a lot of you this week, Mr. Arkin." He always said that after he took off his envirosuit hood. He handed over the envirosealed grocery order and a small package. He held up the optical scanner up for ID verification and delivery confirmation.

"Yeah, I guess," Arkin mumbled, leaning forward for the scan. The luminous green grid before his eye expanded, contracted, and then went dark.

"Ah, still you," the delivery guy said with a smile. He said this every time and it suited Arkin fine; it meant he didn't have to hold up his end of the conversation.

Arkin opened the package. It was the new game his employer wanted him to test and review. "Chiaroscuro" was emblazoned on the CD case. Arkin had to look it up to know it meant either the arrangement of light and dark parts in a work of art, such as a drawing or painting, whether in monochrome or in color, or the art or practice of so arranging the light and dark parts as to produce a harmonious effect.

He tossed it on his wreck of a computer desk, which was not at all arranged to produce a harmonious effect, and took the groceries into the kitchen. There was a can of tofu stew in the latest grocery delivery; it was something he was slightly less than indifferent to.

The groceries were a neat service: for a few weeks he'd entered what he wanted into their online request form and after that, the database had, based on his previous purchases, sent him a ration of whatever was consistent with those requests. Arkin didn't use the word desires because, beyond food and shelter, he didn't have any.

His job as a software tester provided for both, and made it possible for him to never have to leave his apartment. That was all right. Since the war, the global pollution levels made going out in protective gear essential.

He sat at his desk and put the CD in his computer. Usually his boss sent him a download link for such things, but he'd been told that this was a special project. Based on his previous stellar work, Arkin had received a small promotion, a raise in pay, and better products to review. This was the

# The Accompanist

By Amy Throck\*-Smythe

Early in the third year of his more-or-less voluntary celibacy, Vron Kaeli found himself being courted by a much younger man. As flattering as that was, Vron found himself somewhat at a loss as to how to respond.

Two years before, he'd finally broken off with his on-again/off-again married lover and decided a period of celibacy, housekeeping, and clean living was in order. After a year of such virtue, he'd looked around for someone new to devote himself to and been appalled by the available men near his age. They were either players or losers or both; it was most disheartening to a respectable middle-aged queer like Vron, so he retreated back into his workshop to reconsider his celibate state, which was looking better and better to him.

Vron's workshop was a delightful place full of strange micro-tonal instruments in various stages of commission, the odd keyboard or percussion instrument for repair. A pair of concert grand pianos, long ago abandoned by their cash-strapped owners mid-restoration, still needed their cases refinished, but were otherwise flawlessly tuned and maintained, and acted as a screen for his meager parlor and kitchen. He'd begun a career as a simple piano tuner and repair man, but early on, his musical saw-playing boyfriend had asked him if he could microtune a set of eight saws and mount them in ascending order on a wooden frame. This was easily done and the ensuing, and rather bizarre, concert was a huge and outrageous success. Based on this success, his boyfriend accepted an offer to work in another town and Vron never saw him again. Not that Vron really noticed because he was flooded with orders for saws, percussion instruments, and strangely tuned lute-like instruments. Occasionally, he got orders from Star Trek fans to replicate a Vulcan lyre. And, of course, there were piano tuning and repair jobs, so even though Vron lost his boyfriend, he gained a career he loved.

Never lucky in love, Vron meandered from romance to romance until he discovered the lover to whom he'd finally surrendered his heart was committed to someone else. In addition to feeling devastated, he felt stupid. In a fit of pique one night, Vron wrote in the margin of Fugue No. 19: A

# The Lawn Fags

By Turk Albany

Professor Southern looked up from his desk at his lover. "I'll only be gone a month," he said. "I can't impose on Dr. Vromsky's good will for longer than that, but the fact he's letting me look at his work and his study groups is a minor miracle."

"But, Lee, why can't I go with you?" Ed asked for the nth time.

"Because you're not a linguist, Edward, and someone has to look after the lawn while I'm gone."

Lawns and the palatalization of the letter "T" were Lee Southern's twin obsessions. Somewhere in between he made room in his life for Edward Aurillac, who was getting a PhD in history.

Their lawn - because Ed could either hate Lee's lawn or love *their* lawn in the happy yard of *their* happy home - was magnificent. Verdant, lush, manicured: it was the envy of the block, with the exception of another gay couple three doors down across the street who were even more obsessed than Lee. It was a pleasant competition for best lawn between them, but this was West Los Angeles: gay couples with domestic partnerships and high-maintenance lawns were de rigueur.

Of course Ed took an interest in the lawn, but the lack of domestic partnership commitment held him back from giving himself entirely to Lee and the lawn. He didn't doubt Lee loved him, and were gay marriage legal in California, they'd be married. Ed blamed the Byzantine legalities of acquiring a domestic partnership and Lee's lawyer-phobia for his un-notarized ménage.

So it was more difficult for Ed to care deeply about the yard, which was lovely. Spice bush and plumbago banked the walls and fences on all sides; there were islands of jasmine, sages, lilies and roses, and anything else colorful and fragrant that Lee could find scattered in the lush lawn, but it was just another distraction from his dissertation whenever he happened to notice how lovely it was. He'd even moved his desk so his back was to the window, thus limiting his view to his computer monitor and whatever the solitude-seeking Irish monks were doing in his head.

There were no gardens in his dissertation. There was speculation on Irish monks going from mainland Ireland to the Irish islands, in search of

## Bandmates

By Amy Throck\*-Smythe

"Are you busy, Ian?"

"No, come in, babe," Mike Nesmith continued to re-string his guitar.

"Where're Fabrice and Eddy?"

"They picked up some birds in the pub downstairs," Cyril smirked.

"They'll either be back right away or tomorrow sometime." He settled on the twin bed opposite Ian's and watched him nimbly re-string his favorite guitar.

"And nobody tried to pick you up?" Ian asked, glancing up at him, mischievously.

"Oh, some bird, yeah," Cyril admitted. "She saw the show, thinks I've got nothing better to do than get laid."

"Have you got something better to do?" Ian asked, not looking up.

Cyril waited until Ian looked up at him before answering. "No, not really. But I'm tired and she looked like work."

"Know what you mean. This tour is wearing me out, too."

"Is that why you've been haven't been bird-watching?" Cyril asked.

"Yeah," Ian said slowly as he tuned his guitar. "There's always chicks, I just want to focus on the music right now." He glanced up at Cyril, who nodded and smiled, and then played a few chords to cover his nervousness.

Ian had been wanting to get Cyril alone since an interrupted drunken fumble in the back of a limo. It wasn't as if Cyril was avoiding him, but there never seemed to be time for them to get together or for Ian to make a second attempt on his bandmate.

And then the tour had started and it was all a blur to Ian. They'd been playing one-night stands for weeks. These four days in St. Louis were the first breather for the band. This was their second night in town and the exhaustion was just starting to wear off Ian. He wondered how Eddy and Fabrice had the energy to go on a vixen hunt every night (on tour or off).

Of course, sex was never in short supply for the Mondragons (on tour or off), just rest, thought, privacy, peace and quiet were in short supply. When all Ian really wanted to do was curl up somewhere quiet with Cyril in his arms, there were gigs, sound checks, interviews, photo shoots, and other annoying interruptions. At least in St. Louis they each had their own room and that gave them some space.

# The Tagger

By Ginger Mayerson

The thump on the sidewalk outside his studio sounded larger than a cat jumping or a rat falling out of a tree. There were, in fact, no trees outside Paul's studio. There was, however, a billboard, which was a magnet for taggers. Another case for it being a human thump were the police sirens and the running feet. Against his better judgment, he looked outside.

"Not you again," he said to the kid, who was struggling to stand. Well, at this distance, Paul realized he was more of a late teenager or in his early twenties than a kid.

"Who me?" he said, wincing in pain and favoring his left leg.

"Yes, you. You who fell off this same billboard last weekend, you."

The sirens were getting closer. The kid limped behind Paul's van parked next to the studio. There was a plea for help in his eyes as he melted into the shadows.

A patrol car slowed to a halt in front of Paul. The cop stuck his head out and asked if he'd seen anyone tagging the billboard. Paul said he hadn't seen anyone on the billboard, which was true. This satisfied the cop and, after wishing Paul a pleasant evening, he drove off.

After years of living in an industrial area much beloved by taggers and junkies, Paul knew that taggers, at least, were not dangerous unless they were cornered. He'd never had occasion or desire to corner one, so there'd never been any conflicts with them. Paul minded his own business, only nodding when the spray can-toting outlaws made eye-contact, which was seldom. Now, the kid tonight he'd seen before: he'd been trying to tag the new billboards above his studio for several weeks. That particular billboard changed frequently enough that it was a challenge to keep it tagged. It seemed to be the personal quest of this one particular kid to keep it tagged and he was willing to brave cold, rain, police, and falls. Paul had seen him fall more than once, but the kid usually bounced right up again and darted away before the police got there. But not that night.

"Hey, thanks, man," the kid said, hobbling out of the shadows.

"You're not going to get far on that leg," Paul said. "And the cops are probably just going around the block, looking for someone who has spray paint on his pants. Like you do."

"I—" the kid slipped back in the shadows as a car went by. "I'll be okay," he said, trying to look tough balanced on one leg.

"I can give you a ride somewhere," Paul said.

The kid thought about it and then agreed. He directed Paul into a shabby neighborhood not far from the train station. He said, "Thanks," and hobbled away

# You Know You Should be a Better Person (But You're Not)

By Karmen Ghia

*With apologies to Jay McInerney (or maybe he should thank me).*

You know you're unlucky when you and Thad G get to the post office after it's closed. You knock politely on the glass door and are ignored. Thad G slams your body against the glass door until a postal employee threatens to call the police. You know it could be worse, but you're not sure how.

"I swear, Thad, the money is there," you whine like the sniveling little creep you are. "They open at 8:30 tomorrow, I'll meet you--"

"I'm not meeting you anywhere," Thad says in a way that makes your flesh crawl, as you marvel yet again that he can drag you down the street twisting your arm, while lighting a cigarette and talk at the same time. You hope he isn't going to kill you now, but it's hard to know what Thad G might do depending on his mood. He has a reputation for being a very moody guy.

You know cocaine is bad for you, you know running up a bill with Thad's employer is also bad for you. You know lying to your big sister—the only person in your whole family who will still speak to you—is bad. You know she sent you that money order to pay the people who let you sleep on their floor with their pit bull, and won't give you your stuff until you pay them. You also know they will never see any of that money because you're going to cash your sister's money order and give it to Thad G and hope he doesn't beat you up too much to cover the interest your coke dealer wants and knows he's not going to get.

You know you should be a better person, but you're not. As Thad G drags you down the street to his beat-up Chevy Impala, you wish you'd thought of this before. You also wish you'd left town last week when you knew something challenging was going to happen to you this week. You wish you could predict the future and act appropriately on it. You wish Thad G's car had a passenger door handle on the inside of the car. You know this doesn't matter because you'd never have the guts to jump out of a moving vehicle. You also know you wouldn't get very far if you did because Thad G has handcuffed your right hand to your left ankle. You wish you