



## The Rubber Vagina Club

by Kevin Burke

The doorway to Le Sex Discount Shoppe on the corner of Hollywood and Western did not look inviting in spite of the crudely hand-painted sign above the entrance that featured a comforting circus clown and the silhouette of a naked female torso.

The crumbling exterior door had been retrofitted with intimidating iron reinforcements that prevented casual access. Old Korean men stood outside of Yoe Roe Run Karaoke Bar #1 next door and smoked cigarettes and watched me as I pressed the Sex Shoppe doorbell. Through the open metal slats of the armored security gate, I could see what had brought me here, drunk at 2:37 a.m. The door buzzed and I pushed it open. I had it in mind to buy a rubber vagina.

Earlier, I had been on a tortuous date with an aspiring actress whose tanned thighs alone put her far out of my reach. She had poked at a plate of green corn tamales like they were made of human flesh as I talked my game and engaged her with witty made-up phrases and absurd non-sequiturs. I spoke earnestly of my father's recent death. I asked her about her childhood, and her acting of course. I listened with careful attention, making sure to appear I was consumed by her countless auditions and her recent performance in a one-act play at the Tamarind Theater. I said everything required to create the illusion that I was a desirable human being, with feelings and ambitions and ideas about the world.

But it was no good. Maybe she sensed that I thought children were intolerable—or that I had been thinking about growing a handlebar moustache—while she prattled away about her career and the art of acting. Outside her apartment building in West Hollywood, we grappled in a brief goodnight embrace like crabs fighting with red, lumbering claws. We exchanged polite words heavy with bad subtext. I watched her ass wiggle as she walked away. I wanted her anyway.

I drove home drunk and hungry. The Pontiac knew where I was going before I did and steered me into a parking lot around the corner from my apartment on Garfield.

I had coveted pornography at a very early age. The adult section of the video store called to me with a siren's song of nude bodies. Thighs, breasts, asses and whole carpets of pubic hair awaited the boy brave enough to enter the damning gates of pussy heaven. Even at an inexperienced 11 years, the shameful titillation of that nudie Shangri-la was instinctual. The hot eyes of the female clerk, or a mother looking through the new releases, were on those lurking men in the adult section. They were stares of pure loathing.

Le Sex Discount Shoppe knew nothing of hateful eyes. Patrons made their sad, furtive rounds through the aisles of instant gratification free of judgment, save their own ignominy. I cruised the aisles pretending to look at the rows of pornographic movies. *Edward Penishands* was on display. The cover was well worn from years of being pawed. A faded starburst sticker said: "Own the Classic!"

And underneath *Edward Penishands* was the shelf entirely devoted to synthetic vaginas.

This was a brave new world. The days of the plastic blow-up doll with the eternal open mouth and cartoon make-up were gone. Modern technology trumped those primitive devices with creations of soft, flesh-like latex made from molds from real genitalia: the labia, the clitoris and the rosy interior all lovingly realized in thick, skin-like rubber. Porn stars had their anatomies re-created for



their most devoted fans and sold in boxes decorated with their pictures. "Watch me then Fuck me!" "My Hot Pussy is Wet For You!"

The variations seemed infinite: Black ones, white ones, Asian ones, Latina ones. Vaginas, assholes, vagina-and-asshole combinations, vibrating models, vaginas with pubic hair and ones that were completely shaved. Fat girls, skinny girls, young girls, old ladies, pregnant women, doggy style, missionary position, even a realistic looking mouth complete with gleaming white choppers set underneath a pair of bee-stung lips.

I was shocked to see they were expensive, until I remembered that the sex trade has men over a barrel. Vibrators and dildos were cheap by comparison. The average price for a rubber vagina was \$99. Some were as high as \$200, a few were as low as \$39.

Women have it easy and less humiliating in the sex-toy department. Owning a vibrator is, for a woman, a declaration of sexual independence. A symbol of individual power and self-reliance. A man with a rubber vagina, by contrast, is not really even a man. He might as well strap the rubber vagina over his real genitals, buy a cheap vibrator and fuck himself. At least then he'd have his independence.

Buying a rubber vagina is a struggle between analysis and speed. Everyone in a sex shop automatically enters into a social contract not to acknowledge the mutual goal of whacking off. But even the sexually depraved have a class system. A videotape or magazine is acceptable old-timey masturbation—the kind of thing that grandpa used to do. But even in this taboo-free zone, the rubber vagina shelf is strictly for those who have lost the will to live. I scanned the parade of faux genitals in front of me; \$99 was too expensive, but a \$39 vagina simply couldn't be a quality product; it would probably chafe, or worse yet, carry some kind of latex-borne disease.

My bourgeois roots showed through as I eyed a \$69.00 vagina named after porn star Christy Canyon. Christy had a used look about her—her eyes hardened from the knowledge that thousands of men took her rubber vagina to bed with them every night.

I made up my mind to buy Christy Canyon's vagina. It was washable and not too pricey. It had no pubic hair on it. (The ones that did looked like they had been through chemotherapy treatments.) I waited until Le Sex Discount Shoppe was temporarily clear of other patrons to take my intended purchase from the shelf. A window of opportunity opened when the only other customer took some tokens into the peep show booth hallway.

"Part of my training as a writer..." I told the clerk at Le Sex Discount Shoppe as I handed him Christy Canyon's vagina, "is *experience*." He put my product and receipt in a large paper bag, carefully stapled it shut and handed it to me without a hint of ceremony. He went back to reading a copy of *Vogue*.

I put the rubber vagina, still sealed in its paper bag, on my bedroom closet's highest shelf. I shoved it towards the back, behind a jar of coins that I had been putting aside to lose the next time I went to Vegas. I stared at the bag, which went in and out of focus as I swayed back and forth, still drunk.

A rubber vagina is a hell of a thing. If I opened the bag, was there any going back? Was it a test from God? Worse yet, what if, as I had always believed, there was *no* God and the thing worked? What then? What sort of beast would I become? Would I ever *stop* fucking it? Would I slip it into my pants so that I would be fucking all day long everywhere I went? Would it remove my need for women altogether?



I shut off the light and closed the closet. Garfield Place was quiet. I listened carefully in the darkness of my room and could hear the bubbling fountain in the courtyard, and further away, the white noise of swift traffic on The 101.

I thought of calling ex-girlfriends and making them save me from the life of the undead. Perhaps a little phone sex, or better yet they could come over for a late night re-kindling of an old flame.

It was a sleepless night. My bedroom felt suffocating and hot. The air around me was slow; I could see it moving through my closed eyelids. Sleeping on my side toward the window, I avoided eye contact with the closet door, which taunted me with its contents. What had I done?

Finally, mercifully, I passed out.

The next morning was cool and steeped in fog. I could smell the damp air as it mixed with old eucalyptus leaves that littered the grounds of 1835 Garfield. It did much to soothe the lingering sense of dread and death left by my hangover and the previous night's purchase. I wandered into the front room of my apartment where the comforts of television awaited.

I spent a listless Saturday driving the Hollywood Hills looking at houses I would never afford. I dreamed of being a socialite. A giver of large parties. Smoking the finest cigarettes and drinking perfect martinis made by a live-in bartender. Eventually I would marry some lovely woman named June or Marianna and we would have two children whom I would love and whose concerns would outweigh the petty ones that once were mine.

My children would grow into fascinating human beings that would gently get me to stop smoking and drink slightly less as I got older. When June or Marianna would die, I would, in my sadness, travel across France and Spain and even China on foot. Then I would become a lonely painter, strolling the beaches of the South Pacific in breezy, white linen pants while impossible, complex and introspective thoughts came to me like God was sending them on the incoming tides.

I caught myself talking to my phantom wife in the car. A woman wearing a tee shirt, khaki shorts and a backpack watched me intently through the passenger window. She looked healthy and relaxed and peaceful. I hated her. I sped away. I tried in vain to return to my fantasy, but it was unbearable now. I could never be that man. Men like that didn't have rubber vaginas in their closet. Or maybe, just maybe, *only* men like that had rubber vaginas in their closet. The bold and adventurous. The Ubermenches. The Masters of the Universe. The Rubber Vagina Club.

I drove by the apartment several times. My place was on the second floor at the rear of the courtyard and I could see the windows through the trees. It wasn't time to go home yet.

I had one last chance, I thought, to make an appeal to real women before I was sentenced to a lifetime alone with a rubber twat. An old friend was having a goodbye party at a bar on Wilshire—Lila, a lovely half-Egyptian woman with large, expressive brown eyes and lively breasts placed perfectly on a slight frame. She was leaving for New Jersey to be with her mother, who was suffering from cancer. Her mother had taken a turn for the worse, and Lila decided to forsake her stalled career as a movie producer and return home to watch her die.

I had always wanted Lila, but she seemed beyond my reach. She would catch me staring at the soft slope of her neck as it joined her shoulder and then look away pretending that she had not seen anything. Her collarbone accented the base of her neck, and I found her irresistible. Men that are afraid to go home for fear of a rubber vagina in the closet have no chance with such women.

Some famous actor owned The Connecticut on Wilshire, and since his purchase it became a spot for the fools and those who love the fools to gather in safe numbers and drink the latest popular version of a martini. It was not a bar I frequented, but its transient popularity appealed to Lila. It was still early when I arrived.



"I didn't think you'd come," Lila said smiling. Even the narrow gap between her front teeth did nothing to trouble those lips as they spread in their joyful reach.

"Oh, you know, I wouldn't miss saying goodbye to you..."

"Aw, Charlie. I'll miss you."

"Me too. How's your mother doing? Better?"

"A little. She says she feels stronger. She'll be going through more chemotherapy in a week. Pretty aggressive treatment. It wipes her out. But I don't know. It doesn't look good." A nervous laugh broke her silence. Lila always laughed when she said something that troubled her.

I looked at Lila. Why did I bring up her mother? I had bungled for something to say. Anything. I wanted Lila. Talking about her dying mother wasn't the answer. She left me to attend to another of her friends, and I made my way to the bar to order a drink. The bartender was busy with several other customers, so I took a moment to survey the room: People I don't know. A group of men at a booth. An elderly couple taking delicate sips of their white wines. A woman by herself downing the last of her drink...

I looked her over. She was a blond—pretty, but in a dull, pedestrian sort of way. She wore a black semiformal top and tight skirt, dark pantyhose, her face caked in too much powder. A good-looking girl to men who wore their t-shirts tucked into their comfortably belted jeans, but not my type. Still, I was a man with a rubber vagina in his closet.

"It takes forever to get a drink around here, doesn't it?" she said to me, sliding onto the stool next to mine. She was right.

"It's taking forever right now," I agreed.

"I read something interesting today," she said.

"Oh yeah?" I said.

"Yeah. They figured out why women are attracted to men. And it's not because of the way they look either."

Her flirtatious glance made me forget all about the contents of my closet.

"Oh no?" I ordered a drink and gulped it down like my grandfather used to do with cans of Busch Beer in the cement backyard of his one bedroom home in Alhambra.

"No," she said. "No." It's because of the way you smell. And if you don't smell right? Zippo. No nooky."

"So. Some scientists proved that you can't smell like shit and expect to get a lady?" I asked.

"No. That wasn't it at all. You gotta smell a little bit like the girl's father. Too much like her father and you're out. Not enough like her father and you haven't got a chance. No matter what you say. Or look like. Or how big your thing is!" she laughed. "You?" she said. "You smell just a little bit like mine, I think. I'm Jennifer by the way."

Jennifer was my angel. Jennifer was my savior. I could feel the confidence well up inside me as she touched my knee lightly with her fingers even though I knew there was something wrong inside of her head.

Jennifer got drunk, or more so than she already was. She was like a pull-string talking doll spewing out nonsensical phrases. She turned to me and said she wanted to dance. When I declined, she danced by herself, whirling-dervish style, knocking into tables where stunned and horrified customers sat frozen, forks to mouth. I wondered what was wrong with her.



A hooker, I thought to myself. She must be. Several times she whispered in my ear that she wanted me to take her somewhere else. She came back to me after her dancing episode, and I saw it in her eyes. A lunatic's eyes that vibrated and twitched in their sockets.

"Never let the money get to your head, Charlie," she said breathless as she grabbed my arm. "I let the money get to my head. Don't let that happen to you."

I didn't know what to make of that. She went on to say that she was recently separated from her billionaire husband from San Francisco and that she, and her two-year-old child, were temporarily living in the South Bay.

The child, the billionaire, her manic antics all combined to make me uneasy. I needed to get away. When she was dancing again, I sneaked outside for a smoke, thinking I would give her the slip.

She found me. She giggled and whispered in my ear so quietly that I had to feel the words to hear them:

"If you drive me home, I'll suck your dick," she said.

She stood up and fell backwards on the sidewalk. Spilling from her wallet next to her was a two-inch thick stack of \$100 bills. I scooped up the money and stuck it back in her wallet and helped her up. I didn't let the money get to my head.

"I'm going to call you a cab," I said.

"I don't need a cab," she declared, "I have a *Mercedes*."

In the garage I found her next to a sky blue Mercedes sedan, frantically ripping through her purse.

"I can't find my keys. I've lost my keys. If they find out, they're going to take my baby." I took her purse and found her keys at the bottom. The garage attendant looked at her with a crooked smile, half-scared and half-amused. He zipped up his red jacket and turned away.

"I'll take you home. I'll drive. Get in."

We took off on to Wilshire Blvd. I didn't know if I was doing it to be kind or if I was just doing it for the pussy. I thought of Lila. I thought of stroking her cheek with my fingers, lying side by side in bed.

"When we get home, I'll give you five hundred dollars and I'll suck your dick." She smiled at me.

"Where is home exactly?"

"Palos Verdes." Jennifer pulled me across the seat and said, "Kiss me."

Her mouth was on mine quickly, a brief but warm exchange of lips and booze-soaked breath. The light turned green and we sped south on La Ciennega.

On The 405 heading south to Hawthorne Blvd., Jennifer would lean out the window, let loose jubilant screams and then sink back in her seat going silent. She awoke again when a pretty song came on over the radio. It was Bonnie Raitt singing with her sweet and powerful voice. Overcome by a mood of compassion, I squeezed her right shoulder as though I were someone who knew how to nurture another human being.

I felt the guilty, uncompromising sensation of an erection.

When the song ended, Jennifer went right back to being crazy. Her cell phone, which had been ringing all night, bleated another urgent chime. I think it was the theme to Darth Vader.

"Don't you want to get your phone?"



"It's just my fucking husband. Fuck him. I don't want it." Jennifer turned to me, "You have no idea who he is, do you? You're in so deep. If you knew who he was, you'd know how deep you were in."

I thought about asking who he was, and then realized I didn't want to know. We exited The 405 and drove the long stretch of Hawthorne Blvd. to Palos Verdes as Jennifer exposed her breasts to men in the car next to us.

She directed me to her house by waving her index finger at an entire block of homes. After a process of elimination, her clicker guided me into the garage of a two-story house with picture perfect views of the bright southern end of Los Angeles. We went inside and I hid Jennifer's keys in a box on the kitchen table. She turned on a big screen TV in the living room and walked down a hallway.

"I have to check on my baby" she said.

Had the baby been sleeping here the entire time? By itself? Would it still be alive? There was a re-run of *The Jeffersons* on TV. George Jefferson danced wildly on the back of his eccentric British neighbor. Jennifer came back out, pointed at the TV and yelled "Who the fuck is that?"

I looked. It was Weezy Jefferson, George's wife.

She put her arms around me and tried to kiss me. I let her. I could faintly smell vomit on her breath and resisted the urge to pull away and run to the sink.

Jennifer looked down at her legs.

"Oh shit," she mused, "there's a run in my stocking."

She flopped down on the thick white shag and stripped off her stockings. Her skirt hiked up and I saw that she wasn't wearing underwear. Was it real or rubber? Who could tell?

She became very serious and said, "I haven't had a man in three months. I'm so... horny. Will you fuck me? I want you to fuck me."

I wanted to fall upon her, take her because she was mine for the asking, even as I was repulsed by her. Then a sound rattled through the house. Someone was beating on the front door.

I was in deep. Maybe I should have asked who her husband was after all. Some rich Silicon Valley billionaire? She's 26; he's 34. He buys her cars and jewels and worries about her tendency to drink until she blacks out. Who the hell was afraid of a computer tycoon? I went to camp for basic programming when I was 13. There was nothing to fear from these people.

I sucked in my gut and boldly walked around the corner, balls first. The sight was shocking. I had expected a confrontation of a different nature than the bewildered elderly couple that was staring at the disturbing, bloodshot stranger in their foyer next to their daughter—who's skirt was pulled up around her bare hips.

I shook the mother's hand and introduced myself. I took her to the kitchen and, with the wink of a conspirator, showed her where I had hidden the car keys.

The mother was silent. The father still stood at the threshold, frozen in confusion. After a few minutes of explanation met with uncomfortable, quiet stares, I suddenly announced, "It's late. I should be going."

As I passed her father, I paused and smelled him. Underneath a thick fog of Aqua Velva, I detected the faint smell of limes and old milk. I turned around to see Jennifer waving at me and smiling as though she would see me tomorrow. I bent my head downward and sniffed at my shoulder. I didn't know what I smelled like. It would be a long walk.

Two hours later I was home. I had called Lila at the bar, so she offered to pick me up, if for no other reason than to hear my story.

Lila and I sat in her maroon Plymouth Laser outside my building. I told her I needed to pick up my car at the bar the next day, and Lila offered to come get me. We talked about when she might return to Los Angeles. She would stay East until her mother recovered. Or until she died.

My thoughts shifted to the fake vagina in my closet; Lila's dying mother came a distant second.

"Would you like to come up?"

Lila looked at me, surprised by the invitation. She opened her lovely lips in a circle of astonishment, then recovered with an anxious smile.

She took my hand and spoke, "I have to get up early tomorrow and finish packing. But thank you."

I wasn't even looking to save myself. I *wanted* to be with Lila. I wanted her to *want* to be with me. Or, at least, I had convinced myself that I did. We kissed with light and friendly lips and I rubbed her soft, tanned skin with the bottom of my callused thumb. Divine, divine, divine, divine. Her taillights disappeared at the end of the street, two red-hot coals cooling, and then she was gone.

I ripped apart the stapled top of the paper bag and pulled out the four-color press-art box. Inside was a plastic bag that contained the vagina. No instructions.

I dumped the contents of the bag out onto my bedspread, and it lay there lifeless—bathed in the red and green light of the colored bedroom lamps.

It was a triangle-shaped piece of fleshy-looking material with the injection-molded lips of a pussy in the center leading down to a permanently clenched anus. From the back of the vagina, a foot long rubber tube flopped lengthwise on the bed. I kneeled next to the mattress and poked at it. It was soft but resilient. I put my finger in between the lips; the thing had a pretty severe grip. I smelled my finger. It reminded me of the time, as a kid, I played inside a new toy Indian tee-pee made from vinyl. Inside the tent, the odor of vinyl was overwhelming and intoxicating.

I played with the lips for a moment and, then, out of curiosity, I licked it. I shrugged at the futility of foreplay. I thought for a second, "Should I do this?" Then I realized I had gone too far to turn back, and I undressed. I used a moisturizing cream to lubricate and put a porno tape in the VCR.

Seconds later, I put myself in my fake vagina. It was stiff and barely yielded to the pressure. It almost hurt and was certainly going to rub me raw in spite of the lotion. After a while of stroking, I decided it was time to do something more conventional and I moved to a missionary position. I let all of my weight fall on the device so that it wouldn't move while I went in and out of it.

It felt...real. Not quite as warm, not quite as soft, but very, very close. I suddenly was overcome with energy and I fucked it mercilessly. Five minutes passed. Ten minutes. A half-hour. Finally after 45 minutes, different positions, and fantasizing about old girlfriends I began to realize that I wasn't going to finish. This bothered me. I didn't want to have to develop a relationship with my rubber vagina just to get off. Sweaty and defeated, I rolled off. I lay there in the blue glow of the television for hours. Or maybe minutes.

The phone rang. I got under the covers and answered it afraid that it might be the rubber vagina police.

It was Lila. She was crying.

Her mother had died.

"Charlie. About earlier?" Lila asked quiet and vulnerable.



"Yes?" I said, in tentative anticipation.

Was Lila going to tell me that she was in love with me? Maybe she needed me now that she was sad and desperate. I eyed the rubber vagina and sneered at it.

"I know I said that I would take you back to your car in the morning but is there any way you could take a cab? I have to get on an airplane first thing."

Oh.

"Sure," I said. "I'm sorry about your mom," I said.

Awake now and sober, I put on some clothes. Might as well pick up the car.

Outside I waited for a taxi as a fresh misting rain came down from a moonless sky. Two Armenian men sat on the grass frontage of my building playing a late night game of backgammon on a portable table. They argued violently and then one paid the other off with a wad of 20-dollar bills.

After the transaction, they stared at me like they could see everything I had just done. One of them stuck his palm out and felt the drops. Without a word they packed up their table and vanished into the entry of the building. Rain ran through my hair and streaked down my cheeks like tears. It was the first rain in as many months as I could remember.