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Leroy

Steve Katz

Eileen grabs a subway and heads for Van Cortland Park. What a park. Anything you want is there. Cricket. Lacrosse. Ladies' Softball. "So enjoy yourself," mumbles Eileen, as she slides to a seat near the mucky window. The woman in the seat by the door reads *The New York Times*. Eileen hates that newspaper and all its contents. The pup she has hidden under her sweatshirt is wiggling so she slaps a wad of kleenex over its little prick and under its tail and prays it can restrain itself. "Nice pup you got there, lady," says a black kid, edging towards her along the seats. He is wearing a baseball uniform, and *The Marvels* is the name of his team. "I've got no puppy here," Eileen replies, knowing pups are illegal on the subway.

The kid sends some gestures and winks back to his teammates at the other end of the car. "You've sure got something that whines and wiggles like a puppy under there."

Eileen ignores the kid. The IRT rumbles on down the track and busts into daylight, heading for The Bronx. The boy tries to pet the hidden pup with his first baseman's mitt. "I told you there is no puppy under there," Eileen insists, turning aside and looking hard out the window. Flat-topped buildings stick up all over the little hills of The Bronx. "If you don't got no puppy in there," says the kid. "With all that whining and whomping around in there, then you something boss, lady; you got the jivingest jugs in the world." The kid goes back to his teammates and they slap each other's palms when he tells them what he said, and they roll baseballs up their arms.

Eileen sets the puppy free in the park, and it yerps with joy. The sun is good and hot. She slips out of her sweatshirt and strolls up the path towards granite cliffs and bushes. Her tight, bell-bottom jeans make her want to lope and her purple, jersey polo shirt grazes the nipples of her small, braless bosom. She feels giddy and loose. The little pup jumps at her ankles and scampers around her and growls: a lively white and black beagle crossbreed pup with a warm tongue. High above them the sun lights the wings of a hawk that glides in wide circles on the air-currents. Its head flicks from side to side like a switch. Van Cortland Park, in New York City, is most famous for its hawks. They hunt there for pigeons and squirrels and other small stuff running on the rocky slopes. They swoop down on baseballs. They snatch the caps of nurses. A sandwich isn't safe. Eileen steps across the grass, skirts the baseball diamonds,

keeps one eye peeled for the circling hawk. She heads for a point of seclusion and comfort up in the rocks. The sun is strong; the wind, fresh. Jetstreams crosshatch the sky. Hawk lazes in his circles overhead, casual enough to make us foolhardy. Eileen pauses high on a rock to gaze South at Manhattan poking up through the smog. The city is a dumb bunch of things, she thinks, so filthy and crunchy in its thick sauce. Then she hears the puppy squeal as the big hawk yanks it off the ground in its talons. "Good boy," she says, and salutes the hawk who carries the pup to the top of some rocks.

Eileen squats to watch a bunch of half-nude, hairy people turning on below her; they swallow handfuls of pebbles for kicks. She certainly could never be one of them, nor one of any group she ever knew about. That was why she came to New York. She stretches her back out on a flat stone and a lovely depression floats down to settle around her like a heap of leaves. "Whatever my life is," she whispers into her mood. "Nothing I do will ever add up to anything. No accounting. It's all for the moment, for the good moments. I'll never get to a conclusion. I won't reach a climax."

Hawk drops down softly to a fallen limb by her knee. "Thanks a million," it says. Eileen sits up. A bit of puppy gristle clings to the hook of its beak. "It sure is swell of you to keep on bringing me those tender pups. They make me feel so good. A hawk in New York is like a fish out of water these days. No eats here. Everything comes frozen or in cans."

Eileen smiles. "It's probably because I'm Aquarius. My friend, Corinne, at the office is a Virgo and she thinks what I do is hideous. But I don't balk at the law of tooth and fang. I tell my friends to feed the hawks and they think I'm a freak. I mean violence is your predicament. It's in your nature. It would be stupid to oppose hawks just because they survive by violence. That's why I tell my friends to feed the hawks. If you make a hawk into a friend then you can begin to understand him."

"I like you a whole lot, lady," says the hawk. "Otherwise I would let you know how stupid you are, because you are stupid, because you don't even remember a thing I said to you last time. Violence need never be mentioned. It's not even a word. We're up there for the circling. The circles, making the circles, that's where it's at."

"Maybe that's true, but first listen to me. I want to tell you something. I don't think I've ever said this to you or anybody." Eileen is enthusiastic, suddenly, about talking to someone. "I really need to blow up the New York Times. Everyone would be much better off if it were a bunch of cinders. And then maybe some T-V networks. Get rid of all of them. But it's the Times that's my biggest nemesis. Everybody reads it and stuffs his head full of information. What good is information to the people? All it does is prevent me from becoming an adventuress."

"Okay, okay. Maybe you've got a point. But listen for once to what I say. You've got to understand what I keep on telling you about the circling. It's the perpetual present, the continuous moment. Come to think of it those are half-assed ideas you've got about information and adventure. You just make them up to hear yourself get excited. I tell you if human beings could learn to fly in circles of their own volition life would be calm for them and information would fall away, and

meaning would fall away, and wisdom would follow them like a stream of song. You humans are really out to lunch. There is no such thing as adventure.”

“You yourself told me that the hunting was bad.”

“You’re stupid, lady. Listen to me carefully. You’re a nitwit. Hunting isn’t worth the prey of a mantis in my estimation. It’s not what you get. It’s not the catch. It’s the circling itself, those long eloquent arcs you can make without creaking a wing. I mean I like my food, lady, but that’s not . . .”

“You should call me Eileen.”

“. . . okay, Eileen. But there’s nothing the matter with it if I don’t eat. It’s my least care. Usually one gets something to eat, and if he doesn’t he just keeps circling and circling into the most exquisite dreams. Those are the circles I make, and those circles are my life, which is the moving circle of my horizon as I fly, which makes me harmonious with my world, the sphere. And the earth arcs around the sun, and the universe warps out forever. I know all that. I didn’t have to study mathematics. Eileen, my dearest human friend, you live in a box, and that’s why you always get those headaches.” With that final remark the hawk stretches his wings and a few powerful sweeps bear him aloft.

So she gets headaches, how does a hawk understand that? He gets into the air easily, and that’s admirable, but what he has to say is just so much hawk breath. So she gets headaches. What does a hawk know about aspirin, and the even more potent remedies? Pills are little circles in themselves. So what? Take all your hawk theories along with all your man theories and put them in orbit and what have you got? Solar garbage. What she still wants to do is burn down the New York Times. Hawks make easy assumptions about human life without ever pausing in their circles to examine the complexities. If she were shaped like a wheel things would be different.

Eileen strolls on the paths around the baseball diamonds. This is the first really ‘good’ day of the year and she knows that something extraordinary is about to happen to her. If this were not LEROY, but was instead a cheap movie that featured her, she could expect to make a stop at some store-front fortune teller on Second Avenue, and have the old fraud read from a crystal ball, or from the tarot, or from the stars, or her palm, that she is obliged that day to meet a remarkable and confusing stranger. What a bore on a day so warm and sunny to be constrained to have conversations with someone like that, and a lot of superstitious nonsense anyway. Such hocus-pocus impresses the faint of heart, people who walk into lamp-posts and sit on wet park benches. All she wants to happen is something that keeps her from ever going back to her job again, the persistent nibbling just below the heart she has to call her ‘work’. She loves to lie in the sun. She could be a professional lizard. How does someone like herself, who has no feeling or concern for the problems of the underprivileged, has no philanthropy in her heart though she was born poor herself, get into the welfare case-worker’s racket? The data-processing she was in before was a worse job, doing the driest tasks with other husks of human beings. Work is a stupid idea, a dessicating poison that people in this darkest of dark ages inflict on themselves.

“Hey lady, where’s your pup?” The Marvels are on the playing field she passes, warming up for a game with the incomparable New York Bullets. “A hawk

snatched it," she shouts back. "Right on, lady. We play The Hawks next Saturday." She feels something observing her. The boys toss around last year's baseballs, wrapped in black electrician's tape. They shag flies, do some pepper drill, practice sliding, bunting, learn to chew tobacco. She thinks she sees something moving in the bushes, like a cloud. She starts back up for some flat rocks she knows about where she can lie down with her belly to the sun and one one will see her. There's a rumbling noise somewhere, like a jet plane, but it seems to be on the ground. She rises through some sumacs, some scruffy willows, some sycamores and arrives at her flat place. She stretches out and the sun feels for her face and heats up her belly when she lifts off her shirt. She yawns, and almost dozes. Jets in great profusion rise above her belly from Kennedy, LaGuardia and Newark dropping poisonous smoke. She hears something else, like a large metal wheel cracking the gravel. "Who is it?" She pulls her shirt down. A big sphere rolls her way over the flat rocks. It's as high as she is, and full of a milky iridescence that looks like life. This is the most remarkable thing that has ever happened to her, and then the sphere begins to speak.

"I could have been quieter, but I was afraid that would alarm you completely. I've been gathering mushrooms."

"I'll bet you have," says Eileen.

"It's about this time of year that the morels pop up all over, and I know a spot that's just chuck full of them. Nobody gets there before me. The month of May is so good, just because of my favorite mushrooms."

The sphere makes Eileen smile. Though he's just a piece of geometry, he seems pleasant. "You've got no way to pick mushrooms. You haven't any hands," she observes.

Waves of crimson, like a smoky blush, drift through the sphere's interior, and he says, softly, "You would notice something like that. I have my limitations, as we all do, but you must have noticed too that I didn't say I'd picked them. I said I'd gathered them."

Eileen sits there stymied for a moment beside the sphere. City noises rise in her ears. She doesn't understand what is going on. Here she is in an extraordinary situation and she reacts no more than as if she were bored by it. She's numb. A chill flows within her and she looks at the sphere and wishes it had some arms to immediately throw around her and comfort her. "We don't seem to have much to say to each other," she whispers.

The sphere rolls slowly back and forth. "That's nothing to worry about these days," it says. "Conversation has gone the way of the trolley car and the glass milk bottle. Years ago I used to talk a lot. I made predictions then and I liked to tell them, I was sure of what was going to come true, but I guess I've been mostly wrong. For instance, about forty years ago I knew that by nineteen-seventy or so most modern cities would have moving sidewalks, so nobody would need to walk to the store except if he wanted to get there twice as quick. That hasn't happened yet. I also predicted that people would be jumping around on contraptions that resembled jet propelled pogo sticks so that dense populated areas would look like popcorn. Not a chance for that to happen. I predicted that all food by now would come to people in little pills or packages, and that taste

would be obsolete. That has almost happened. Then I predicted that India would become the world's new superpower because of clever politics and oil and natural gas deposits that should have been discovered in the Madras state in the mid-sixties. You can see that never happened. I got so discouraged with predictions. I made huge forecasts at that time: that half of Japan and the Philippines would sink in an horrendous earthquake that would give birth to seven new populous chains of islands and cause California to rise twelve feet higher out of the sea and as a result of this calamity a man named F. Scott Fitzgerald (not the writer) would become massively wealthy and influential due to the treasures he found heaved up on the extended shore by his beach house. The Galapagos were to have popped out at this upheaval like a cork and spun into orbit around the earth, colliding with the moon and causing a dispersal of satellite fragments that would then orbit the earth like one of the rings of Saturn. Half of the Pacific was to have flowed into the hole left by the Galapagos, causing an expansion of South America, the rediscovery of Atlantis, and proving the hollow earth theory, to some people's satisfaction. The water within the earth was to have built up such pressure that geysers would have funneled up all over the globe: Poughkeepsie, Tel-Aviv, Kuznetsk, LaPaz, Oslo, Christchurch. Some of the jets were to have spouted over a thousand feet into the air, spewing out quantities of strange, boiled artifacts, whose use couldn't be known on the surface of the earth, but clearly must have been the product of some form of intelligent life inhabiting the center of the globe."

Eileen lowers one eyelid and stares at the sphere. "I'll bet that's where you're from, from the center of the Earth."

"You're quick and smart," says the sphere. "And right as rain. I admit it. I left to escape the cataclysm I had predicted, and also because I wanted to see for myself if there really was intelligent life on the surface of the earth."

"Did you come on any?"

"A little bit, but nothing to make you sit up and take notice. There was mostly a lot of confusion and wilfulness. You've seen it yourself. I did realize that the disaster I had predicted would wipe out most of the population of the United States, leaving mostly Teamsters and Athletes to pick up the pieces and start again through a tribal system. They would have to invent a substitute for soap and would remember only sixteen letters of their alphabet, so the three books they found hermetically sealed in a box would be less than useless to them. Those three books were to have been: **THE BEST OF BROADWAY: 1954**, **AION** by C. G. Jung, and **BORN TO RAISE HELL**, a study of Richard Speck, the mass murderer."

"All those were predictions you made?"

"Yes they were. I made most of them in the late twenties, but I was pretty far off."

"None of them have come true?"

"Damned few. Of course I predicted that man would reach the moon, because it looked pretty close to me. I also have predicted that both Mao-Tse-Tung and Chang-Kai-Shek will be dead by 1985. I predicted 3-d television, other trivial

forecasts, but they're easy. I've stopped forecasting. I don't really have the talent for it I thought I had."

"Haven't you ever had a hankering to return to the center of the earth, to be with your own kind again?"

"I don't really think of it that way. I don't feel as if what's in there is my own kind. I prefer the isolation I have out here. I find amusements here. The mushrooms are like friends, for instance. They give me endless pleasure. The little fellows grow inside the earth too, and I used to just love them there. I guess all mushrooms grow in pairs, one on the outside and one on the inside of the Earth's crust. Knowing them here makes me feel at home."

Such a gentle presence is the sphere. Eileen imagines subtle variations of color in its interior as it speaks, but she thinks her eyes are doing it. She strokes the sphere's surface affectionately and it quivers like a membrane. "You're such a strange sweet sphere. I must admit I've never heard one speak before."

"Well, don't feel bad. I've always seemed strange, wherever I've been. I've never fit in."

"Did you have parents?"

"Sure I had parents. They were just like parents. Authoritarian. Rigid. Dense. My father was a Pyramid and my mother was Ellipsoid. The last thing they expected was to have a sphere. They had no idea of how to cope with me. As soon as my surface was hard enough and I could roll on my own I put distance between them and myself. That's an old story. Tell me about yourself because you're so very pretty. What were your parents like?"

"They were poor midwestern people, but my mother was pretty and my father handsome and I inherited their looks, for whatever it's worth. I just lead a stupid life. I'm nobody."

"What a strange expression, 'nobody'. What a funny way to speak about yourself to me."

"I really mean it."

"But what a thing to say to me, 'nobody'. Look at me. I'm nothing but geometry in your world. A sphere. Really no body."

"That was a dippy thing to say," Eileen blushes. "Forgive me. I'm really sorry. I like you a lot as whatever you are."

"I don't take offense. That would be silly." The sphere rolls slowly back and forth like a man in the throes of indecision, pacing with his arms folded behind his back, a cigar twixt his jaws. It suddenly stops. "Just amazing," it says. "That makes me so happy. It's really remarkable."

"What is?" Eileen looks around.

"Don't you see it? Your city. Look at the way that Manhattan has disappeared down there. It has disappeared. That's miraculous. You know one of my predictions was that Manhattan would disappear in the late sixties or early seventies. I predicted that it would dissolve in its own air and wash away, and now look. It's true. It's gone. My prediction has come true and I'm so happy. You are my good luck charm."

The sphere is right. Manhattan does seem to have disappeared, though she knows it isn't gone for good. A storm has swaddled it in clouds, rushing in off

the Atlantic, sending a thick tongue up the Harlem River towards the Bronx. "That's just the rain that has moved on the city. You can hear thunder."

"Oh thunder. Right. Rain. There's always some explanation. I'm still not used to it here. Well the rain can have Manhattan, damn it. I'm wrong again."

"I would have been quite upset," says Eileen. "had Manhattan actually disappeared. I would have been left without anything. Not even a friend."

"Well then I'm glad my prediction didn't come true. To hell with it. I won't make any more. But I still think something is going to happen, and I'd like to know what it is."

"We'll get soaked if we stay here," says Eileen, getting back into her sweat-shirt.

"I don't get wet," says the sphere. "I can be impermeable."

"Maybe I sound fussy, but I'll get soaked and chilled, and I just got over a cold. I'm going to get to the subway before it rains."

"I even like the fresh water on my surface," the sphere says.

Eileen feels reluctant to leave the sphere. She knows the encounter will seem another of her daydreams once several hours have passed. She wants to touch it some more, as if to seal its texture on her skin. "Please . . . umh . . ." she finds the words difficult to release. "Please come home with me to my apartment if you want."

The sphere bounces around in place as if it has been bobbed. "I was hoping you would ask me to come. I haven't seen many interiors."

Eileen strokes the sphere with both her hands. "Well," she says. "One doesn't often find a sphere in the park she feels she can invite to her home."

"I must seem strange to you."

"Not at all," says Eileen. "You are very nice."

Eileen loves the people of her adopted city. Had she turned up with a sphere in her home town of Swisher, Iowa the whole population would have turned out to call her a Communist Hippy Beatnik and they never would have had a minute's privacy, but here she gets only a few glances over the shoulder from New Yorkers who shrug. Eileen is actually the only one who pays attention to her unusual escort. She gets a sense of vertigo from walking with it, because it moves by rolling and she imagines it continually turning its head over and getting dizzy. That clearly isn't the case. The mental parts, where the senses are, from which it communicates, is probably at the very center where she guesses it is soft, but the surface is tough, though she notices it can vary its texture for her touch, changing from soft to slick to plush to rigid. What a companion it is for her hands. She still feels dizzy with it, like a little girl doing cartwheel after cartwheel on the lawn. The sphere pops up and settles on the seat opposite her and remains there despite the jolting of the IRT.

"How do you stay up there?" she asks.

"Stay up where?"

"On the seat, when the subway jerks? You look like you should just roll off."

"I never think about it," says the sphere. "I have no reason to roll off, so I don't roll off, but I can understand why you wonder about it. When I first started living on the surface it used to startle me to see people keeping their balance

on those two flexible posts. You seemed to move by falling forward and then catching your balance. It seemed inefficient, if not impossible. I made calculations, but I still couldn't figure that it was possible. The only time your motion made any sense to me was when you got into those containers with wheels. Then I could agree that you were doing it, but what you called 'walking' seemed impossible to me. Now I just assume you can do it and let the matter lie."

Special conversations with a sphere make Eileen feel good, as if she is getting the select treatment she deserves. Her life feels spicy, and if the sphere once they get home makes a pass at her, well that is what she has come to New York for, to get away from the humdrum routines of monotonous midwestern life. It is a male sphere. She is sure of it. They get off at 79th Street and Broadway and walk the few blocks North to her apartment, under a sky that is clearing as fast it has clouded up, the smell of ozone, the washed air, the sunlight flying down on glowing buildings. Her little apartment house is wet and luminous.

"You taking such a thing with you to your apartment," asks the lady with a little yellow dog, that Eileen frequently greets on the street. "To your apartment? You must have a big apartment."

"It's coming home with me like a friend."

"What should it be?" The old woman slips on her glasses. "What kind of a thing do you call that?"

"This is my friend, the sphere. Mrs. . . ."

"Lubell. Mrs. Lubell, mother of Harry Lubell the T-V producer. So what is this, anyway? Is this what you kids start to see from squirting the mayonnaise into your veins?"

"I'm hardly a kid, Mrs. Lubell."

"I didn't mean you, darling. But those kids, they get these hypodermics and then they jab themselves with cranberry juice and chloroform. Who knows what else? There's one of them in my house and what he sees is a special thing."

"Well you see this sphere, don't you?"

"I don't see nothing. Don't ask me what I see. You're better off if you don't see nothing these days."

Though it's too wide for them the sphere fits through every door as if the doorframe doesn't exist. It pauses by the sill of her own apartment as she switches on some lights. "I've never spent any time in one of these interiors before," the sphere says. Eileen is suddenly embarrassed. The place isn't herself. She has never done the decoration she always promised. The dead walls are covered with a dog-eared poster of Lenny Bruce, a dull batik hanging, a picture of the Rolling Stones. Nothing herself. The sphere moves around, humming and glowing like a detective's device, then it pauses before a little fishbowl full of brightly colored transparent marbles. "This is just amazing," it says. "If you had these where I come from you'd be locked up." The sphere stops moving and talking. Silence rushes in on them, separating them with the random noise of the building at dinner time. Eileen chews up some bread and cheese she has brought from the kitchen. The sphere seems to be watching her, but she doesn't know. It rolls onto the coffee table and amuses itself by balancing on the edge. It must be taking some account of how she has fitted out her life, and she doesn't know

how to explain that this place isn't what she really is, but just a way-station, a watering hole she is stopping at on her journey to wherever. She begins in the silence to feel the panic of losing contact. Nothing is right. Her own apartment is unreal, like the lair of a hibernating beast. She shuts her eyes for a moment and feels herself rolling over and over, as if the sphere has got into her. "Don't you ever feel peculiar," she says, when she opens her eyes. "I mean you're here on the surface of the Earth, where you don't belong, without friends, or hope of anyone to understand you."

"That makes little sense to me." The voice of the sphere projects a calm that slows her uneasiness. "Everything I do is interesting to me. I have everything I need. I have myself. I don't stay still."

"I am . . . I have nothing," Eileen says slowly, wholeheartedly, as if she is blowing a great weight off her tongue. "You're so lucky not to be made of this flesh. All I feel in myself is an endless dissolution, like I'm run through with nematodes and being carried away from myself in little nibbles, off into a void. I know despair is fatuous, but every face you look at is destroyed by troubles, and behind those troubles lies an abyss. You're lucky just to be a visitor. Nothing is strong enough to hold me together. I don't even know what I'm talking about, and why I say it to a sphere. What are you, or what am I for that matter? If there were another world I'd like to go there and try it for myself, because I don't sit very easy in this one. I want to know some whole people, but there just don't seem to be any. Just nerve bunches, like transmitters running with shapes inflicting pain. Everyone is suffering, and it's like that suffering is a skyscraper built around us in our sleep and only a certain dream we can never have in this life will remove it. I'm so unsettled. I need to blow up the New York Times. I need to go away. My friends talk revolution. The only revolution can be a breakthrough to what's real. I care about that. Something durable has to come clear. What's to become of us? I feel something supreme and horrible is happening on the earth, and we will be excluded. Flesh. How did you ever get into my house, you roly-poly? This must sound so stupid to you. It's like carhorns. People talk like honking taxis. Honk. Out of my way. Blast. This is ridiculous to a sphere. I don't know what I talk about. I just want to find any other world, someplace calmer. I want space to unload, anywhere. You find me tiresome."

The sphere rolls toward her till it is touching her and it moves around her softly grazing her clothes. "You get so serious," it says. "Just relax. Flesh is flesh. You reside in it for a while and it's just a life. It's like the air. Some day you'll get along without it but for now there is no way to step outside, because it's inside of you. You have it and it has you, like a lover, or a talent. Relax. There's nothing to resist." The sphere keeps rubbing her while he makes gentle philosophy. She begins to feel sexy. Perhaps the sphere is just handing her a line, she thinks, and wants only to get her into bed. She feels a pleasant tingling all over her skin. It can't be just a sphere of philosophy that makes her feel this way. The doubts and troubles she has fetched from deep within are slowly displaced by a round, rising dreamlike motion in herself. "You . . . you touch me like . . . like this," she says.

"You need to be touched. I know that," says the sphere. "Those feelings reach

me quicker than words. Perhaps through the language understanding may grow, but knowledge descends through touch alone.”

“I know what you are,” Eileen says lightly. “You’re a spherical make-out artist, paying out a line for me.”

“A line?”

“It makes no difference. Forget about it. Did you ever make love to a human woman before?”

“In the park once I made love, if that’s what you call it, but that was long ago and I think it was a young human male.”

“You think it was a ‘young human male’. What are you, a female?”

“Of course not. I’m a sphere, as you see me.”

“A queer sphere,” Eileen claps her hand over her mouth. “You would do it with men or women.”

“Of course I’d ‘do it’ with men or women, or with dogs.”

“With dogs?”

“They seem to be everybody’s favorite. In the park you see men with men, women with women. You see everybody with dogs.”

“Golly,” Eileen blushes. “Sometimes I forget I’m just a hayseed girl from Swisher, Iowa, but it’s true. My friend, Lester Stueval, used to talk about doing it with young sows. He was far out.” Eileen begins to circle the sphere. The sexiness she feels is uncontrollable, but nothing sticks out on the sphere, nothing to grab. Its surface slowly changes texture in the most pleasing way, and as she strokes it she feels mild electricity flowing just under her skin. She starts it rolling towards her bedroom, her excitement whetted by questions that stroke her mind: How can this sphere ever penetrate her? Would she call it sex with a sphere? If her experience were ever jotted down by a writer, could it be called pornography by the millions?

Once in the bedroom she quickly undresses, a strange activity before a sphere, who seems to get naked from within, its most intimate substances seeping to the surface. The skin is so inadequate, she thinks, in order to be genuinely naked she would have to remove it. The sphere rolls toward her and she spreads her arms as it touches her. “Do something,” she says.

“I want to,” says the sphere. “You’re so sweet and gorgeous.”

Her body feels shot through with refreshing, vital warmth, and she swoons backward onto the floor, but something soft breaks her fall. The sphere rolls up and down her body in a perfect, gentle massage, slowly intensifying its action and making her feel covered head to toe with a warm, satiny fabric, and all her bones feel as if they have been turned loose in her muscles and rolled down a hill. Suddenly the sphere seems to be not only on top of her but under her also, rolling in two directions at once. She feels a minute massaging just under her skin, and begins to let out little shudders of sighs and screams, and she suddenly feels safe inside the sphere rolling over and over down a long hill picking up speed like a juggernaut in ecstasy. She opens her eyes on the marvellous incandescence of the room generated by the sphere who is setting itself off in pale vermilion bubbles towards the ceiling. In a moment her eyes close again and she falls asleep and continues to talk with the sphere in a dream. “Have you ever

been in love?" she asks. "What is love?" it responds. "Have you ever been hungry?" "What is hungry?" "Have you ever been tired?" "What is tired?" "Have you ever been angry?" "What is angry?" "Have you ever thought of marriage?" "What is marriage?" "Have you ever had the religious experience?" "What is experience?" In the dream Eileen and the Sphere circulate in empty space, and they never touch, though they resemble each other, and Eileen feels closer to the sphere than she has ever felt to father or lover.

By morning the sphere has fled but Eileen isn't disappointed. She feels permanently changed, lifted like a wing off the planet onto another realm. She is curious to go outside and see what it is all about again. A fringed buckskin mini-skirt, a yellow silk tasseled blouse, thin-strapped high-heeled Italian sandals, a lime-green silk scarf around her neck, in the mirror she looks too sexy to hit the street. She feels divine. Out she goes. A rare crisp morning after a night of rain has clarified the air. The people take long strides or short quick steps with dogs bounding at their sides. No one looks lazy. Up and down Broadway troops of colorful people walk their dogs and whistle. Eileen heads North thinking of something to buy. She has left her purse at home with no money in it. Old people walk their Pomeranians and Schnauzers. Pretty girls heel their German Shepherds. Hookers walk their Doberman Pinschers. Drag Queens strut with Great Danes. Elegant ladies with Afghan and Borzoi. Chummy animals all of them and full of teeth which they bare at Eileen because they hate her. Eileen has already taken her step off the Earth and she drifts up Broadway, sexy and vulnerable. They look her over, the stoned young couples, the old women in loose cotton dresses, the young men from behind their shades. They're like snipers. They're wallflowers taking tithes from her skin. How glad she is to have left behind this life of sinister presences, this uptown Broadway hanging out, this looking through sunglasses, this weather. She is being followed. Seven blocks and the same male behind her. What could she want now with a male? A confusing pursuit. She walks more quickly and he continues to get closer. He is just behind her. She can hear his clothes. She turns around.

"I am The Astronaut," he says. He is a small, handsome man.

"What's your reason for following me. I have nothing for you."

"Now that I am here you no longer can be the main character of LEROY."

Eileen is startled by such a twist, though not upset. She has no ambitions to be the main character of anything. Now that the sphere has changed her life she would prefer more time to herself. Her sphere is gone forever, she realizes, and she feels ready to weep. "What do you mean by that?" she asks.

"Don't let it trouble you. I am here now and must replace you as the protagonist of LEROY."

Since she has come to New York City, Eileen muses, each thing that happens to her has been stranger than the last. "If this is true, what do I do now?"

"You do what you please. You may leave, or remain in LEROY as a secondary personage. I should like to see you from time to time."

"How do you know this is what happens?" Eileen asks.

"I have the ability to read ahead."

"Why do you claim that you are The Astronaut?"

“That’s who I am. There hasn’t been space yet to explain how it happens that I am, but I am always The Astronaut.”

“I guess it’s quite simple and clear cut, except that before you take over I’d like to ask you to help me with one thing.”

“Certainly,” says The Astronaut, “As long as we can take care of it on this page.”

“I still need to blow up the New York Times.”

“That will be no problem,” says The Astronaut. Eileen is jubilant. She shoves her arm through his and they head for the downtown IRT. Forty-three minutes later The New York Times is a heap of rubble.
