

The Sapphire Bond

by Kenneth Lifshitz

Jeffrey tensed slightly and stood up from the hard wooden bench to follow the beckoning finger of the short Swiss Doctor into the Sauna. The door creaked slowly closed and the doctor averting his gaze purposefully inquired. 'Well;--, he intoned with his slight German accent, 'Do you 'have any,--did you bring any marijuana back with you?' 'No,-none at all.' The words seemed hardly adequate to portray the nothingness that gripped his mind as well as his pockets. Somehow- he felt that he deserved to be a suspect. Some vague guilt still stood like an unanswered question between them that the words had no power to dissolve. The two of them emerged crisply into the changing room, Jeffrey sweating as if the sauna had been on full force.

'Well?--' demanded the stocky athletic director of the camp.

'He hasn't got any,' The Doctor said matter-of-factly, facing the row of clothes hooks that stood as bare and expectant as a jury.

The grizzled crew-cut Camp Director turned to Andrew and said, 'It's up to you.'

The athletic director just waved his hand dismissively-

'Well' said Harold, looking at Jeffrey with as much interest as if he had been a weed on an otherwise immaculate tennis court,

'If it's up to me, I have to say we just don't need any extra problems. We could lose our license. Are you aware of that?'

Jeffrey stood stiffly awaiting some formal enunciation of dismissal from the camp director, but none came. 'Pack your things today.' Said Andrew.

He flew down the steps of the sauna as if they were the front steps of the house in Brooklyn and he was late for a baseball game and he didn't stop running for a long while. The next thing he felt was the tingle of his feet as his sneakers slapped against the concrete -near the swimming pool. He had covered the mile between the sauna and the pool without being aware of anything. He drew up shortly and gazed back toward the sauna which was eclipsed now by a stand of beeches. 'Olympic Size Swimming Pool.' he thought to himself and then abruptly wondered exactly what that meant, and if they had indeed had any swimming pools in ancient Greece. His breath came in hard gasps against the roof of his mouth and he longed to lie down in the pitted shade of the sycamores nearby and rest. He suddenly realized how exhausted he was from the morning's events.

But rest was a phantom now that eluded his grasp. A world of his own making had collapsed, but there were no casualties, because it had only been a dead, ghost world because there was no justice in it. But the rubble yielded a weird and twisted smoke whose sinuous windings sometimes seemed to take the shape of some half remembered dream, whose vacuity lent the wind voice,--baleful and low sometimes like hounds baying and at other times high like a cat being strangled. But he could find no rest until the breach that had opened in his mind was healed and the furies which had emerged from it appeased, somehow. He bore the responsibility for the collapse of a world and the guilt of that pursued him in pale relentless forms. His vision blurred and his head drooped from fatigue like some rotten vegetable on a shish-ke-bob.

He could barely trace the ascent of his orange sneaker laces up the broad canvas mountain of his feet. His brain drummed in some-ancient code that ended in a buzzing like insects or telephone wires which carried some communication that would forever be a mystery to him. The sun stood high, aloof, burning out of focus, obscured by wisps of clouds and slowly his senses gathered around him like dew only to be burned off again. The swimming pool. It was here that she had attempted to memorize his body, he remembered the elusive lines of her shoulders as she had sped past him. A chlorineflowgermless seduction as he lay cushioned by his breath a few feet below the surface. Her light frame seemed to hypnotize him like some goddess descending to earth interred in sparkling light, shocking under the water as any piece of ivory. With one loop she swam directly at him, stopping inches from his face to spew her downy tickling bubbles into his immobile and embarrassed features and then she was back at the surface. He remembered thinking 'now I am an apprentice to this apparition' but in a second she had re-submerged. Later, with the dark dress drawn tight across her thighs near the wonderful, wonderful Olympic size swimming pool he felt himself -sink into that darkness until only her lips were left, glistening in the cold night air. He abruptly came back to the ambiguous meanderings of his sneaker laces.

Finally he gained the now impersonal welcome of the cabins under the sycamores whose light soothing hands swept the afternoon from off the roofs like so much spilled sugar. He stood in the doorway and suspiciously eyed the fuzzy comfort of his army cot. 'No,' he thought. He looked up with a start and found the cabin gratefully empty and unreproaching. 'Perhaps, just for a few minutes.' The country air seeped into his limbs which lapped up its comfort like hungry tree roots drinking the cool dark water of the earth.

His breath spun out like a whistling top as he sat down heavily on the edge of the cot. Almost immediately he stood again to hang up the sweater which he had been carrying on the hook above his cot. Though the breeze was cool, the sun had begun to beat on the roof of the cabin making the interior a bit warm. He seemed to keel over as if shot, -but a wayward hand crept forward under the bed-seeking the spider webbed volume of his own poetry. 'Go pack,--' the phrase in its simplicity rang in his head causing his hand to involuntarily jerk back to the foetal warmth of his prostrate form. But soon it crept out again like a cripple, or a blind astronomer groping for some metallic spiral galaxy longing to feel amidst the interstellar vacuities the creamy smoothness of stars between his groping fingers, --one plank, two planks and still the theorem that would reveal his notebook did not appear, but a cobweb's musty kiss caused another involuntary shudder.

"Hera--", the voice seemed to float on the air like the expanding gossamer waves of an atomic bomb, -- yet soothing not destroying in their wake.. A power that spoke to itself while calling another, like an Alzheimer patient, yet strangely strong. The God sought another as Jeffrey stared at the pine plank ceiling, as it seemed to eddy and shift in echo of the cry. She must have passed here quite recently he thought, but as for which way she was going? Where to seek her now or even what she looked like that he couldn't tell you a rat's hairs worth. Like a shooting star on a balance beam she traversed the earth to the teeming brink of eternity, like a whisper followed by a word, the voice did not dissipate on the back of the afternoon but grew, on its' own efflux like the re-mastication of the 'ray cows'.

Was it Phoebus that now sought the wife of Zeus? What could that expansion be that could not catch itself,--like a middle age man going to fat or the sea running after the tide it sought in the pine planks of the ceiling. The fields which bent to the sweet urging of the goddesses' foot lay far away in a more golden sphere, yet somewhere near the swimming pool too.

"I forgot my mitt" the tentative query interrupted his unsuccessful effort to retrieve the notebook. Ronnie, the athletic director's son hauled himself up the bannister of the front steps of the cabin hand over hand like a drunken sailor and promptly collapsed on the floor near Jeff. Beads of sweat decked his forehead beneath the baseball cap and the vagrant black curls which protruded.

'What did you do?' he inquired with that disarming directness that was peculiar to children. Jeff shrugged withholding the recriminations that boiled in him now like hot bile, knowing they would be misplaced and misunderstood by the boy. Four more heads sprouted like a quizzical fungus from the side of the door jamb.

'Where' ya goin', queried Ronnie again now retrieving the baseball glove from under the bunk. Again, Jeff could not reply but he stood up and began to clear the small wood shelf over the washstand of his toilet articles. He reached toward the razor but his hand hovered above it like a bird caught in the headlights of a car, indecisive and suspended in mid-air, he glanced up at the flat-mirror over the washstand and saw how ridiculous he looked standing there, like some defrocked priest giving a benediction to a toothbrush.

'He- wouldn't understand anyway' he thought to himself searching for a reason for his reluctance to reply to the simple query. Ronnie began pounding the pocket of the baseball glove. 'I guess I was horsin' around too much he said finally, glancing sideways to see if Ronnie had bought it and spying the spider thin fingers of Norman the black kid still grasping the door jamb.

'OK' said Ronnie abruptly turning to walk out. Jeff breathed a sigh of relief seeing that his simple explanation had been accepted by the boy and that he hadn't reduced the fact of his dismissal to a non-event by his inarticulateness. He still felt sick in the back of his throat as he continued putting his possessions in the small overnight bag. The four mushroom growths disappeared, following the turned around brim of the baseball cap. Jeff stifled the desire to call after them to wish them good luck at the baseball game which was scheduled for the afternoon. He trudged down the long dirt road to the main highway feeling very alone and very young. He shifted the overnight bag to his free hand and tried to think of a song but all that would come to his mind was how badly he needed a soda. The road stretched out before him like a nasty unanswered question.