

to resist "service" in Vietnam. But how could he serve? To what purpose? "You were one of those kids who constantly wanted to know why this, why that," said the voice on the tape recorder, "and I always tried to answer you. Now I wish I'd just said: Because I Said So, Son, That's Why. It would have done you more good. You're too selfish, Randy. I have to pity you for that."

Randy wasn't feeling terrifically selfish. They were asking him to walk the plank as part of a media event to demonstrate American "will" power; that's how it felt. Wasn't it imposition enough to have his old man opening mail before forwarding it -- and then propping a tape recorder over the sink and holding forth on the social dangers facing a C-O? Through the pandemonium of clanking dishes his father exhorts, jeers and wheedles, unconscious of the fact that his tape recorder batteries are running down and his voice is rising. Like a rocket it gathers speed as it ascends. In the end there are no distinct words, only a sound like compressed air shrieking through a penny whistle. Randy supposed that's funny and appropriately surreal and he summons his dormmates, who also deem it funny and appropriately surreal. Yet none of the young men laughs very much.

THE SPIRIT OF SEVENTY-SIX

I dream I'm in the post office with a letter of great importance, for which the rate is very high, in fact the maximum. The clerk weighs it, mentions a figure, I pay for the stamps, affix them, turn to leave ... "Wait," says the clerk. He's weighing the letter again. With the weight of the stamps added, it requires another stamp. I shell out, lick the stamp, he puts the letter on the scale once more. "Wait," he demands as I turn to leave. He won't grin, he's performed this too many times to be able to locate the humor. The letter is on the scale. I reach in my pocket for more change, discover a revolver ...

THE DRIVER'S SEAT

He was used to doing the driving and he didn't mind doing the driving because he was sure he was a better driver although she was the one who'd never had an accident yet what did that show as far as he was

concerned except how little she ever drove. But then if it was a long trip, and on their vacation it got to be very long, then she'd ask to take the wheel and he never wanted to let her, then she'd pout, then he'd grumble, then he might miss a stop sign, then she'd take over, then he'd feel like a failure, then they'd talk about it, then he'd admit he'd been swearing under his breath for hundreds of miles, then she'd admit it made her nervous, then he'd want to know what it was she expected from him. In the end they'd agree that the next time out she would help with the driving. Into the back seat he'd climb, with a pillow, to lean back and take it easy, but coming at an intersection his feet strained at the floorboard, to slow down, slower, now stop, did you hear me, good, the light's changed, get going, that other car, I'm sorry, hold it, look behind, oh god, accelerate, go, just go, please go, or else, and he'd lose his erection.

GET BACK

He started taking short cuts. Why should every buck stop here? Why should he be the one who always bore the brunt? Nobody had the right to expect that of him, nobody except her. But look at the woman, she was no better than she ought to be. In her he found this most compelling. What forbade him paying her back in kind? She might like it.

He went with the flow, ceasing to exert himself. What are you, you're nothing, he was told. I thought I knew you. I thought you stood for something. He had to figure she'd be back. Why should he snap to it and perform for her, when there were people out there more than willing to take him for what he was? Let the woman lift the finger.

Nothing to it. Wasn't that the point? The stranger came out of his bathroom, strapping on her watch. "Morning," he giggled, reaching from the bed. "Forget it, I have to be at work. Who's that in the john?" "What?" "The picture." "Oh, her. I thought she took that with her." "She's gorgeous. How on earth did you snag one like that?" "You kidding? It was easy." "It was?"

Mirror, Mirror on the bathroom wall. Her picture next to it. He couldn't look. What would he do with himself? He squeezed into a pair of old running shorts, but they were so tight he couldn't move. Then her key turned in his lock. Sinking to his knees, he encircled the familiar waist. The woman stepped backwards, fast. "You have a picture of mine," was all she had to say.