

wrong with me
that I was a freak

and it felt neither good nor
bad,
I accepted the situation and
waited.

ON BEING 20 ...

my mother knocked on my roominghouse door
and came in
looked in the dresser drawer:
"Henry, you don't have any clean
stockings...
do you change your underwear?"

"Mom, I don't want you poking around
here...."

"I hear that there is a woman of the
streets who comes to your room late at
night and she drinks with you, she lives
right down the hall...."

"she's all right...."

"Henry, you can get a terrible
disease...."

"yeah...."

"I talked with your landlady, she's a
nice lady, she says you must read a lot
of books in bed because as you sleep at
night the books fall to the floor all
night, they can hear it all over the
house, heavy books, one at midnight,
another at one a.m., another at 2 a.m.,
another at four...."

after she left I took the library books
back

returned to the roominghouse and
put the dirty stockings and the dirty
underwear and the dirty shirts into
the paper suitcase
got public transportation downtown
boarded the Trailways bus to
New Orleans
figuring to land with ten dollars
and let them do with me
what they would.