

1986

Class

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Estrangement · Jane Cooper

You dream someone is leaving you, though he says kindly,
It's not that you're cold
or *After all you're an affectionate person.*

You can't explain how hard it is to explain or even to write this poem
so you blurt, *I was ashamed, they put me in the class for remedial speech.*

The doctor leans forward: *Do you feel you have failed me recently?*
The dream answers through you: *I am locked in a struggle with the truth.*

(I was ashamed, I couldn't speak, they voted me out of the shelter.
Like Rousseau's Sleeping Gypsy I lay exposed to the nuclear night
till a dog found my throat.)

You watch your own back growing smaller up the beach.

Class

Jacksonville 1934

How the shrimp fisherman's daughter did a handstand
against the schoolyard fence
proving she owned no drawers
just as my grandmother's old black Packard drove up like a hearse

How we dug in the woods for pirate gold
and found only the bootleggers' empties