Estrangement

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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