

Joan Bauer

THE POTATO PEELER

What *do* you see of me?
Black hair pulled back,
a white apron crisply ironed.
A modest blouse.
I sit deep in my rocking chair,
an earthen bowl rests on my leg,
white curtains billow behind me.
Clouds darken my eyes,
my lips set in a frown. Impatience.
For you have routed my dreams.
I grip the peeler tightly,
like a weapon.

Soon I will not think of you,
but of that gray-eyed German sailor
with hair like distant wheat fields.
He would have had me follow him
hard against the grassy banks.
And afterward, a calm so deep,
it blurred my vision.

But now I will sit in this kitchen forever,
my face, a mask of stiffened dough,
eyes, black as coal, distracted.
Enduring. And if you see me a hundred years from now
know this: You have *not* known me.
I have conjured you.

My face alive in your dream world.
I am your great-aunt, your cousin,
all the forgotten women
in half-lit corners everywhere.
You *see* me? It is just yourself you see.
Always, I elude you.