

Barbara Daniels

The No. 8 Omelet

At the counter a boy explains anomie, situational ethics, liberation theology. I'm eating the usual—a Swiss, bacon, onion, and mushroom omelet,

rye toast, coffee. I talk to a waitress about the heat wave. The boy moves on to the Great Awakening. Everyone was in it, he tells us,

evangelical hymns at tent meetings, families in wagons, the miles they traveled for good preaching and people to talk to after the harvest.

I keep touching the spot where my biopsy was. Scraped skin on my chest still stings. And what about fires in Florence, Italy?

Savonarola, the boy tells us, burned every temptation to sin: mirrors, artwork, clothes. At Sunday school a small girl asked Mom,

“How did you get so old?” In the country she came from people die young. My waitress tells me I have a cute pocketbook and I say

I like her new darker hair. The boy gathers his papers and books as if for a bonfire. I could walk into that fire pulling out books

and then those dresses with trains that bell out behind you over cobbles, your breasts on display because you still had breasts.

So what if it was vanity, your dress, shoes, pocketbook, no reason to feel shamed. The boy has the look of someone who hears

things, but isn't coffee more important? Rye toast, the No. 8 omelet? The thumping in the motel room last year—Mom said it had been so long since she'd had sex she didn't think of it. She thought of hunters cutting up game. “Did you think it was easy,” she asked me, “growing so old?”

Barbara Daniels's *Talk to the Lioness* was published by Casa de Cinco Hermanas Press in 2020. Her poetry has appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Mid-American Review*, and elsewhere. Daniels received a 2020 fellowship from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.