

Jen Rouse

What Would Happen if You Took Anne Sexton to Costco?

Let's just envision for a moment
a Costco. That captivating letter C
shimmering like a scarlet mistress
in the distance, the ultimate promise
of capitalist deliverance. You know you love
that big box store.

Its warehouse ceilings sneering down
and full of fluorescent teeth. Your cart
the size of a slug bug—more! scarlet! You know
the moment by heart, the catch-your-breath-
by-the-big-screens bliss, the way your neck
awe-strains to stare at the monoliths
made of petrified muffins. O yes.

Let's just envision for a moment
one Anne Sexton. One Anne Sexton
walking into the Costco. But she doesn't
just walk. She sashays into the Costco.

She sashays with an old fashioned
and a cigarette and some killer
heels. She definitely calls
it "The Costco." When you're Anne
Sexton, you have to look things
over. There's always a chin up and
down kind of appraisal. Plus
you have to figure out how to push
the cart. When your hands are so
very full. But are we pushing the
cart today? Meh. That's still to be
decided.

Why are we here, again? She looks
me over. She has no idea who I am
or why she'd ever come to such a place.
She takes stock, she passes by a 48-

pack of toilet paper. *I mean, really
darling, who shits this much? This
would last the rest of my lifetime
and, of course, given that short span,*

*probably longer. I'm afraid of disappointing
you, of course, but I can't seem
to remember your name. Or...*

And then, from the corner of her
slightly boozy eyeball, she spots them,
rows and rows, the endless glistening
jewel-hued tones of liquor bottles. *O now,
now, I remember. We must be throwing
a party. Of course. You know I don't
eat when he's gone. You know
I can't host all the friends alone. You
know if the hem of my skirt isn't
straight, I can't sit at the table. You
know, I'm not sure I can do this.
Do you smell that scent? So many
people. Maybe she's here. Nana--*

*this is where she's gone, right? That's
why you've brought me here?
To the big Costco in the sky?*

She laughs uncontrollably,
she slithers into the cart
and her skirt catches on a rough edge,
this will end just as you thought
it might. With a mad grab for a bottle
to appease her, some indiscriminate
sobbing—by which one of us may
remain unclear—and we jump the line,
all the lines, but not before we snag
that giant pack of toilet paper, because,
really, really, you just never know.

Jen Rouse's poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *The Inflectionist Review*, *Midwestern Gothic*, *the CDC Poetry Project*, *Sinister Wisdom*, *Lavender Review*, *Up the Staircase*, and elsewhere. She has work forthcoming in *Parentheses* and *Sliver of Stone*. Rouse's chapbook, *Acid and Tender*, was published in 2016 by Headmistress Press. Find her at jen-rouse.com and on Twitter @jrouse.