

DOORS, DOORS, DOORS

1. Old Man.

Old man, it's four flights up and for what?
Your room is hardly any bigger than your bed.
Puffing as you climb, you are a brown woodcut
stooped over the thin rail and the worn-out tread.

The room will do. All that's left of the old life
is jampacked on shelves from floor to ceiling
like a supermarket: your books, your dead wife
generously fat in her polished frame, the congealing

bowl of cornflakes sagging in their instant milk,
your hot plate and your one luxury, a telephone.
You leave your door open, lounging in maroon silk
and smiling at the other roomers who live alone.
Well, almost alone. Through the old-fashioned wall
the fellow next door has a girl who comes to call.

Twice a week at noon during their lunch hour
they pause by your door to peer into your world.
They speak sadly as if the wine they carry would sour
or as if the mattress would not keep them curled

together, extravagantly young in their tight lock.
Old man, you are their father holding court
in the dingy hall until their alarm clock
rings and unwinds them. You unstopper the quart

of brandy you've saved, examining the small print
in the telephone book. The phone in your lap is all
that's left of your family name. Like a Romanoff prince
you stay the same in your small alcove off the hall.
Castaway, your time is a flat sea that doesn't stop,
with no new land to make for and new stories to swap.

Anne Sexton (1928—1974)