

MARIA EDGEWORTH (1767-1849)

FROM *EARLY LESSONS* (1801)

### **“The Purple Jar”**

Rosamond, a little girl about seven years old, was walking with her mother in the streets of London. As she passed along, she looked in at the windows of several shops, and saw a great variety of different sorts of things, of which she did not know the use, or even the names. She wished to stop to look at them, but there was a great number of people in the streets, and a great many carts, carriages, and wheelbarrows, and she was afraid to let go her mother’s hand.

“O, mother; how happy I should be,” she said as she passed a toyshop, “if I had all these pretty things!”

“What, all! Do you wish for them all, Rosamond?”

“Yes, mamma, all.”

As she spoke, they came to a milliner’s shop, the windows of which were decorated with ribands and lace, and festoons of artificial flowers.

“Oh mamma, what beautiful roses! Won’t you buy some of them?”

“No, my dear.”

“Why?”

“Because I don’t want them, my dear.”

They went a little further, and came to another shop, which caught Rosamond’s eye. It was a jeweller’s shop, and in it were a great many pretty baubles, ranged in drawers behind glass.

“Mamma, will you buy some of these?”

“Which of them, Rosamond?”

“Which? I don’t know which; any of them will do, for they are all pretty.”

“Yes, they are all pretty; but of what use would they be to me?”

“Use! Oh, I’m sure you could find some use or other for them if you would only buy them first.”

“But I would rather find out the use first.”

“Well, then, mamma, there are buckles; you know that buckles are useful things, very useful things.”

“I have a pair of buckles, I don’t want another pair,” said her mother, and walked on. Rosamond was very sorry that her mother wanted nothing. Presently, however, they came to a shop which appeared to her far more beautiful than the rest. It was a chemist’s shop, but she did not know that.

“Oh, mother, oh!” cried she, pulling her mother’s hand, “look, look! blue, green, red, yellow, and purple! Oh, mamma, what beautiful things! Won’t you buy some of these?”

Still her mother answered as before, “Of what use would they be to me, Rosamond?”

“You might put flowers in them, mamma, and they would look so pretty on the chimney-piece. I wish I had one of them.”

“You have a flower-pot,” said her mother, “and that is not a flower-pot.”

“But I could use it for a flower-pot, mamma, you know.”

“Perhaps, if you were to see it nearer, if you were to examine it, you might be disappointed.”

“No, indeed, I’m sure I should not; I should like it exceedingly.”

Rosamond kept her head turned to look at the purple vase, till she could see it no longer.

“Then, mother,” said she, after a pause, “perhaps you have no money.”

“Yes, I have.”

“Dear me, if I had money I would buy roses, and boxes, and buckles, and purple flower-pots, and everything.” Rosamond was obliged to pause in the midst of her speech.

“O mamma, would you stop a minute for me? I have got a stone in my shoe, it hurts me very much.”

“How comes there to be a stone in your shoe?”

“Because of this great hole, mamma—it comes in there: my shoes are quite worn out. I wish you would be so very good as to give me another pair.”

“Nay, Rosamond, but I have not money enough to buy shoes, and flower-pots, and buckles, and boxes, and everything.”

Rosamond thought that was a great pity. But now her foot, which had been hurt by the stone, began to give her so much pain that she was obliged to hop every other step, and she could think of nothing else. They came to a shoemaker’s shop soon afterwards.

“There, there! mamma, there are shoes; there are little shoes that would just fit me, and you know shoes would really be of use to me.”

“Yes, so they would, Rosamond. Come in.” She followed her mother into the shop.

Mr. Sole, the shoemaker, had a great many customers, and his shop was full, so they were obliged to wait.

“Well, Rosamond,” said her mother, “you don’t think this shop so pretty as the rest?”

“No, not nearly; it is black and dark, and there are nothing but shoes all round; and, besides, there’s a very disagreeable smell.”

“That smell is the smell of new leather.”

“Is it? Oh!” said Rosamond, looking round, “there is a pair of little shoes; they’ll just fit me, I’m sure.”

“Perhaps they might; but you cannot be sure till you have tried them on, any more than you can be quite sure that you should like the purple vase *exceedingly*, till you have examined it more attentively.”

“Why, I don’t know about the shoes, certainly, till I have tried; but, mamma, I am quite sure that I should like the flower-pot.”

“Well, which would you rather have, that jar, or a pair of shoes? I will buy either for you.”

“Dear mamma, thank you—but if you could buy both?”

“No, not both.”

“Then the jar, if you please.”

“But I should tell you, that in that case I shall not give you another pair of shoes this month.”

“This month! that’s a very long time indeed! You can’t think how these hurt me; I believe I’d better have the new shoes. Yet, that purple flower-pot. Oh, indeed, mamma, these shoes are not so very, very bad! I think I might wear them a little longer, and the month will soon be over. I can make them last till the end of the month, can’t I? Don’t you think so, mamma?”

“Nay, my dear, I want you to think for yourself; you will have time enough to consider the matter, whilst I speak to Mr. Sole about my clogs.”

Mr. Sole was by this time at leisure, and whilst her mother was speaking to him, Rosamond stood in profound meditation, with one shoe on, and the other in her hand.

“Well, my dear, have you decided?”

“Mamma!—yes,—I believe I have, If you please, I should like to have the flower-pot; that is, if you won’t think me very silly, mamma.”

“Why, as to that, I can’t promise you, Rosamond; but, when you have to judge for yourself, you should choose what will make you happy, and then it would not signify who thought you silly.”

“Then, mamma, if that’s all, I’m sure the flower-pot would make me happy,” said she, putting on her old shoe again; “so I choose the flower-pot.”

“Very well, you shall have it; clasp your shoe and come home.”

Rosamond clasped her shoe, and ran after her mother. It was not long before the shoe came down at the heel, and many times she was obliged to stop to take the stones out of it, and she often limped with pain; but still the thoughts of the purple flower-pot prevailed, and she persisted in her choice.

When they came to the shop with the large window, Rosamond felt much pleasure upon hearing her mother desire the servant, who was with them, to buy the purple jar, and bring it home. He had other commissions, so he did not return with them. Rosamond, as soon as she got it, ran to gather all her own flowers, which she kept in a corner of her mother’s garden.

“I am afraid they’ll be dead before the flower-pot comes, Rosamond,” said her mother to her, as she came in with the flowers in her lap.

“No, indeed, mamma, it will come home very soon, I dare say. I shall be very happy putting them into the purple flower-pot.”

“I hope so, my dear.”

The servant was much longer returning home than Rosamond had expected; but at length he came, and brought with him the long-wished for jar. The moment it was set down upon the table, Rosamond ran up to it with an exclamation of joy: “I may have it now, mamma?” “Yes, my dear, it is yours.” Rosamond poured the flowers from her lap upon the carpet, and seized the purple flower-pot.

“Oh, dear mother!” cried she, as soon as she had taken off the top, “But there’s something dark in it which smells very disagreeably. What is it? I didn’t want this black stuff.”

“Nor I, my dear.”

“But what shall I do with it, mamma?”

“That I cannot tell.”

“It will be of no use to me, mamma.”

“That I cannot help.”

“But I must pour it out, and fill the flower-pot with water.”

“As you please, my dear.”

“Will you lend me a bowl to pour it into, mamma?”

“That was more than I promised you, my dear; but I will lend you a bowl.”

The bowl was produced, and Rosamond proceeded to empty the purple vase. But she experienced much surprise and disappointment on finding, when it was entirely empty, that it was no longer a *purple* vase. It was a plain white glass jar, which had appeared to have that beautiful colour merely from the liquor with which it had been filled.

Little Rosamond burst into tears.

“Why should you cry, my dear?” said her mother; “it will be of as much use to you now as ever, for a flower-pot.”

“But it won’t look so pretty on the chimney-piece. I am sure, if I had known that it was not really purple, I should not have wished to have it so much.”

“But didn’t I tell you that you had not examined it; and that perhaps you would be disappointed?”

“And so I am disappointed, indeed. I wish I had believed you at once. Now I had much rather have the shoes for I shall not be able to walk all this month; even walking home that little way hurt me exceedingly. Mamma, I will give you the flower-pot back again, and that purple stuff and all, if you’ll only give me the shoes.”

“No, Rosamond, you must abide by your own choice, and now the best thing you can possibly do is to bear your disappointment with good humour.”

“I will bear it as well as I can,” said Rosamond, wiping her eyes, and she began slowly and sorrowfully to fill the vase with flowers.

But Rosamond’s disappointment did not end here. Many were the difficulties and distresses into which her imprudent choice brought her, before the end of the month. Every day her shoes grew worse and worse, till at last she could neither run, dance, jump, or walk in them. Whenever Rosamond was called to see anything, she was detained pulling her shoes up at the heels, and was sure to be too late. Whenever her mother was going out to walk, she could not take Rosamond with her, for Rosamond had no soles to her shoes, and at length, on the very last day of the month, it happened that her father proposed to take her with her brother to a glasshouse, which she had long wished to see. She was very happy; but, when she was quite ready, had her hat and gloves on, and was making haste down stairs to her brother and father, who were waiting for her at the hall door, the shoe dropped off. She put it on again in a great hurry, but as she was going across the hall, her father turned round. “Why are you walking slipshod? no one must walk slipshod with me. Why, Rosamond,” said he, looking at her shoes with disgust, “I thought that you were always neat; go, I cannot take you with me.”

Rosamond coloured and retired. “O mamma,” said she, as she took off her hat, “how I wish that I had chosen the shoes! They would have been of so much more use to me than that jar: however, I am sure—no not quite sure, but I hope I shall be wiser another time.”