Warning – When I am an Old Woman

When I am an old woman, I shall wear purple
with a red hat that doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.
And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves
and satin candles, and say we've no money for butter.
I shall sit down on the pavement when I am tired
and gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells
and run my stick along the public railings
and make up for the sobriety of my youth.
I shall go out in my slippers in the rain
and pick the flowers in other people's gardens
and learn to spit.

You can wear terrible shirts and grow more fat
and eat three pounds of sausages at a go
or only bread and pickles for a week
and hoard pens and pencils and beer nuts and things in boxes.

But now we must have clothes that keep us dry
and pay our rent and not swear in the street
and set a good example for the children.
We must have friends to dinner and read the papers.
But maybe I ought to practice a little now?
So people who know me are not too shocked and surprised
When suddenly I am old, and start to wear purple.

~Jenny Joseph
Ode to the Red Hat Society

A poet put it very well. She said when she was older,
She wouldn't be so meek and mild. She threatened to get bolder.
She'd put a red hat on her head, and purple on her shoulder.
She'd make her life a warmer place, her golden years much golder.

We read that poem, all of us, and grasped what she is saying.
We do not need to sit and knit, although we all are graying.
We think about what we can do. Our plans we have been laying.
Instead of working all the time, we'll be out somewhere playing.

We take her colors to our hearts, and then we all go shopping
For purples clothes and hats of red, with giant brims a-flopping.
We're tired of working all the time, and staying home and mopping.
We order pies and chocolate fudge, and rich desserts with topping.

We crown ourselves as duchesses and countesses and queens.
We prove that playing dress-up isn't just for Halloween.
We drape ourselves in jewels, feathers, boas, and sateen.
We see ourselves on television and in magazines.

We laugh, we cry, we hug a lot. We keep each other strong.
When one of us goes out for fun, the rest all go along.
We gad about, we lunch and munch, in one big happy throng.
We've found the place where we fit in, the place we all belong.

~Sue Ellen Cooper