

The Child in My Heart

Sir Richard Steele wrote,
“That man never grows old
who keeps a child in his heart.”
What did he know--he died
at fifty-seven! But I liked
what he wrote when I was
young. I framed it with its
lovely illustration; it hung for
many years in our family sunroom.

Only weeks ago, sorting, I threw it
out. Why? For one thing, I'm
now old myself--was, when I
threw it out, almost eighty-six.
And why, I asked, should I want
to “never grow old”? Also,
long ago I'd begun to be bothered
by that thoughtless male framing:
That *man*? *His* heart?

But even setting sexism aside,
just listen, my friends, hear what
that “child in my heart” did
to me; *she* made me *sick*!
My four sons, you see, have
given me *so many reasons* to
know they love me! *I don't need*
(I told myself, wish I'd told them)
a birthday gift, card, flowers; I've
never been (I told myself) *the kind of*
mother to impose guilt trips
when I'm ignored.

But when old Eighty-Six passed
without a word from my two
youngest sons, I woke the next
morning feeling ill. *As if this year*
of isolation wasn't bad enough,
I thought. And telling my thoughts
this is ridiculous didn't help.
It did help that I'd planned to
garden; I ferociously weeded, dug,
planted. Eventually, days later,
it all worked out; they both
came through. But

My greatest eighty-sixth
birthday gift was this: *seeing*
her--that "child in my heart"-- lurking
in the shadows, pouting as she
wondered whether *she* was loved; my
gift was *seeing* her push those buttons,
the ones she knows will bring me
down--have brought me down
so many times.

So. My dear Sir Richard Steele. I'm sorry
you could not grow old. I did, you see,
and that "child in my heart"?
You can have her!

KA ~ 5/03/21 - 5/30/21