

Dear Auntie,

You were a gift to me because you weren't like most grownups. You were full of wonder, and you never tried to hide it.

You found me wonderful, too. You treasured me. You asked me questions, and you never seemed in a hurry to give me answers. You wanted to hear mine, and not many people did. You took the time to show me your favorite flowers, and you made them mine. Just today, I saw Queen Anne's lace, and I loved it the way we used to love it together when I was little.

I wonder now what your sorrows were. You always seemed so content with your rose bushes and your poetry and your view of the big pond. You never seemed to miss the things you'd missed. But I wonder what it was like when you were alone. I wonder whether you ever dreamed about what life would have been like if Pop Flynn hadn't said no when your boyfriend asked to marry you.

Maybe not. You thought less about yourself than anyone else in my world. I'm sorry that you grew old when I was still so firmly fixed at the center of my world that I had no time for you. I wish you hadn't sat alone in that old people's home where they propped you up in your chair and put silly barrettes in your hair. I wish it with all my heart, and the wishing hurts more every year.

It's you I want to be like when I grow up, you know. You were, to borrow your favorite expression, 'fine as silk.' You knew the landscape of your heart far better than most people do. And what a heart it was. Sometimes I wonder why your memory isn't threadbare from all the times I've taken it out and loved it.

I wish I'd said thank you. I will one day -- first "I'm sorry," and then "thank you," and then all between us will be fine as silk.

*Chief of our aunts -- not only I,
But all your dozen of nurslings cry --
What did the other children do?
And what were childhood, wanting you?*

Robert Louis Stevenson