A Ten Page Letter from Sarah Orne Jewett to Annie Fields
(in sleeves marked K-5)

(And James T. Fields died in April of 1881 – and Annie went through bouts of depression and despair over her loss)

[Someone has written “A selfish grief” at the top of the letter in pencil]

Wednesday evening

My own dear darling

I don’t believe you were half so sad when you wrote this little letter as I was when I read it. Dear Annie I know that life is very hard for you and that the love and help that used to make it so much easier seem to have gone out of it. But it is not all wrong, and it does not hold you back and crush you down unless you make it so, for we both believe that God sent this loneliness and pain into your life only to bless you and bring you closer to Him and to the dear one whom you love best.

I can’t bear to think of your sorrow. I can’t bear to think that everything seems so blank and dreadful to you. I can’t bear not to have you happy among the things that were so lovingly planned and brought together for your comfort and happiness. It ought not to be so dear love, and I do long to have you outgrow this kind of pain and misery that will not let you forget that you are hurt and lonely.

It seems to me that the only thing to do is to say I am hurt and my heart aches, but God keeps me here in the midst of the empty things that used to belong to my happiness, and I must live the old life alone and put all my love and thoughtfulness and helpfulness into it, for the sake of whoever comes now; instead of for the sake of one only and for the sake of one only. I think nothing would please him more than to have you making other people happy just exactly as you have been doing since you came to Manchester. It is not only Jesus Christ but your dear love beside who will think ‘Ye have done it unto me.’ His ‘poor humanity’ whom he told you he was trying to help are is not only the people who cannot buy bread and shoes, but the people who cannot buy content and happiness because their everyday lives are half worthless. And whether you work by your fingers that do pretty things for people to see, or whether you work by your beautiful gift of poetry – or by your own most lovely presence that keeps most people up to the best level that is in them – or by letting them come into the influence of the hospitality which delights everybody who knows it – you are going about doing good. Don’t think about next summer dear darling, don’t think about tomorrow even, but make the days grow lovelier one by one because you do the tasks God sets you, as best you can. Don’t say my heart aches and I am wretched, but say I am going to be happy by and by and have my own again, and God is teaching me as I wait. Don’t say that the time is long and bitterly hard but only that this is a short night between two blessed days, and I will not be always awake to the thought of my own sorrow and
get frightened in the dark of uncertainty. Other people have sorrows that are full of shame and misery, and mine is a sorrow that is like a night full of stars and I see a great light in my darkness to lead me and show me the way. Yes, dear love I know you were certain of all this before – but I can't help saying it again. One kind of happiness is gone, but it is to make place for a better one – “not as the world gives give I unto you” – and so my dear darling I pray God that you may find the peace wherever you are, and may not wish either for the old dear days or for the Heaven that is to come because you have both and they belong to you always in this world as they will always in the next. And I love you and hold you close and cannot do without you. I will stay with you always when I can for it seems more and more lovely, and more strange, however dear other places and people may be, to be away from you. I think it is meant we should help each other and love each other more and more. Oh my dear dear darling, don’t shut yourself out of the sunshine of life – it was only the shut windows of the city which the morning light could not go in – xxxxxxx [illegible word]

I could not help saying all this, but after it is said I only stop to think – ‘Oh if I could go to her and put my arms around her!’ But it is something more than that which you want; something that no human love can give, but only God’s love and goodness and your own faith and bravery. When I see that you do not feel so lonely if I am there, and then it is worse than ever and lonelier, when I am away I know that my love is not enough for you after all, though I would do anything for you and I love you with all the love that I can give. It is my great sorrow too because it is yours – but we will try to say: ‘Yes I am not happy, but I can still make others happy and I must do my work lovingly whatever it is, and so I shall know what Heaven is better and better as the days go on.’

Good night dear and God bless you and comfort you – Yours always and always

S.O.J.