PART III
The letters of 1868 are perhaps the most intense, the most painfully urgent, that Ruskin wrote Mrs. Cowper. True, the familiar pattern reasserts itself, but this time in more somber colors than in the past. Again, the disappointment, confusion, false accusation, desperation—temporarily allayed by transient happiness—are manifest. In this year, too, the relations of Ruskin and Rose are further complicated by Percy La Touche breaking his engagement to Joan Agnew, Ruskin’s cousin; this provides a minor theme for the following letters, as does the death of Rose’s sister, Emily La Touche Ward.

Most disastrous for Ruskin in 1868 is the disagreeable reminder of the 1854 annulment of his marriage to Euphemia (“Effie”) Chalmers Gray Ruskin. Echoes of an “evil report” circulating about his marriage, of his treatment of the frivolous Effie, of “calumnies arising out of my former history,” recur in the March letters. Of course, there had been gossip in the fifties when the marriage was annulled on grounds of Ruskin’s impotency.¹ When he showed an interest in another woman—Rose La Touche—the chatter commenced again. And it seems very likely that Mrs. La Touche, early in 1868, hinted

¹ Legal and medical men—to say nothing of literary critics—have discussed this problem endlessly, and the legality of the annulment still seems open to debate. Diaries, correspondence, and memoirs (e.g., Greville MacDonald’s Reminiscences of a Specialist) suggest that Ruskin was not physically impotent. The fullest account of the subject is found in Leon, pp. 402 ff.
to her daughter of the enigma of Ruskin’s sexual life. For he is fearful in the March letters that Rose has found out something to his disadvantage and that she perhaps possesses sure knowledge of some fatal obstacle to our marriage, such as she could only have obtained by conversation with other women.

So ambivalent is Rose’s attitude toward him—alternating between withdrawal and acceptance, depending upon her religious or physical state—that it is not surprising to find her, apparently in the face of family objection, giving him cause to hope again, which cause he joyously reports to Mrs. Cowper. But the pleasure of this is blighted a fortnight later when he lectures in Dublin on “The Mystery of Life and Its Arts.” Rose’s rejection—this time effected through strong parental influence—cast Ruskin into depths which prompted, in Letter 85, a rare confession—one perhaps more suitable for William, rather than Georgiana, Cowper and distinctly suggestive of earlier auto-erotic practices. Difficulties evidently persisted through the summer and autumn, with Mrs. La Touche, in December, writing Mrs. Cowper the legal facts, as she understood them, of Ruskin’s alleged impotency and vehemently condemning his familiarity about Rose while in Dublin in the preceding spring. Mrs. La Touche also excoriates Ruskin for so much as considering marriage in the light of the “disgusting history of his past.” Further, she uses the diplomacy of Mrs. Cowper to mollify Joan Agnew’s feelings respecting the engagement to Percy La Touche and indicates that Rose’s mental state is so tenuous that even the sight of Ruskin’s handwriting can, according to the physicians, induce cerebral disturbance.

From July to November, 1868, Ruskin does not communicate with Mrs. Cowper. He is abroad for many weeks in France and is pursuing varied interests. His diary at this time suggests a more quiescent mental state, and he records a cessation of serpentine dreams. Neither does he mention his troubles over Rose. One may assume his attention is temporarily diverted. Ironically, in the last half of 1868 it is the

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2 A lecture rife with biographical significance.
3 Diaries, II, 661.
peripheral actors—Mrs. Cowper, Mrs. La Touche, and the MacDonald family (who offended the La Touches by supporting Ruskin)—who come to the fore. Ruskin himself, to judge by available documents, seems almost totally unaware of the storm swirling about his head.

Of considerable interest in the letters of 1868 is the shift in Ruskin’s attitude toward Rose. For the first time, feelings of antagonism appear. Where, in the earlier letters, he abased and humiliated himself as he wrote Mrs. Cowper about his beloved, he now becomes aggressive, even hostile, as he writes of her. He remarks that he cannot pity Rose because he feels she does not love him; neither has she the power, he asserts, of suffering as he suffers; and he even refers to her as a “patient murderess” who has destroyed his life. He attributes a loss of usefulness to her, a valid accusation surely, for Ruskin dissipated his energies and intellectual gifts in fruitless pursuit of the girl at a time when his powers should have been at their zenith. In later years, too, after Rose’s death, he failed to exorcise himself of her uneasy influence, and consequently he never again was able to focus his immense resources and gifts and find for them an intellectual center, as he could, for instance, in the forties. Antipathy toward Rose, then, becomes evident as the correspondence moves sadly forward.
My dear Mrs Cowper

Although I have no difficulty in accounting in many ways for your prolonged silence, I am yet desirous of being assured that it is not owing to anything said of me either in Ireland or elsewhere, which has induced you to think me in any way undeserving of your former friendship. I do not wish to renew our correspondence—but I have an uneasy feeling at its sudden & strange cessation, which I hope it may be in your power to remove.

With my regards to Mr Cowper accept my thanks for your former kindness and believe me respectfully yours.

J Ruskin.
My dear Mrs Cowper,

I could not write yesterday nor can I write much today but you must come to me.

Rose has no need for shame, in anything that she has done or thought,—in even what she has not done—she is not in the deep sense to blame—but her mother only.

She wished me to be Lover & Friend to her always—no more. She spoke fearlessly, as a woman in Shakespeare would have done—as the purest women are always able to do, if left unspoiled.—She thought it was what I wished, as it had been so with my first wife. On my refusal she refused all that she could refuse. She cannot, my Love nor my sorrow.

Of course she charged me not to speak this—but she had no right to lay any charge upon me, nor did I accept it—I can guard her honour as well as my own—better than she; and my honour needs that this should be known to those who deserve my trust.

I repeat—she has no ground for shame—For bitterness of grief—in what she now permits to be enforced upon her of horrible & merciless silence—not to me only—but to my more innocent, and more causelessly and wantonly injured, poor little lamb of a cousin— in this she has cause for grief—And in this that her words of trust in God she has made Blasphemies to me—that her prayers she has made mockeries—that she has destroyed my faith in womanhood—my Love for all creatures—that she has ruined a great Life that was wholly trusted to her—and become the patient murder-

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4 A reference to the broken engagement of Percy La Touche and Joan Agnew.
ess day by day of the creature who loved her more than all creatures living.

You have been very wrong, also—You ought to have felt more responsibility in dealing with me—I am worth more thought than you have given me—Since the letters of refusal came, I have heard nothing—known nothing—worse than nothing—only the mother lies of word—lies of silence—lies of thought—falsehood too intense to recognize itself. Rose promised to write to me on Xmas day—and did not—and has cursed the day for ever to me into darkness with her broken faith—I went roaming about all Xmas day & the day after—so giddy & wild that in looking back to it I can understand the worst things that men ever do. You need not be afraid to come & see me though—I am quite at rest—now—writing the history of flint—I shall never write more gentle words now.

You ought not to have gone on writing to her on these terms—you ought not to have given her that Kiss—only. You ought to have been resolute to deal with her soul to the full truth of it—or to leave her.

Come and see me, when you can—any day—any time—(except next Friday afternoon). You must know more—and you must not write to her—unless on other terms. Of all the [illegible] things throughout this matter nothing has impressed me more than the way Mr Cowper spoke when last he came to me—it might have been wise & right—for most people—but to me it was so wrong, in its coldness and slightness, that it is, among the Spiritual Phenomena of this dark Time—one of the saddest & darkest that I have to think about—that a man of kind & right purpose should be so misled as to what was needed of him by another.

Ever with affectionate regards to Mr Cowper, your grateful St C.

I should have told you before I had not sent the letter—but thought my cousin might change her mind—however, she still prays me earnestly to be quiet.
Denmark Hill, s. [March, 1868]

Dear Mrs Cowper

I will only that I may not weary you in your illness thank you for your kind feeling, and especially for your goodness to my cousin—who can be helped—more than I, and for the interpretation of Mr Cowper’s way—and for promising to come.—What I chiefly need is to know the facts about Rose & what she means—these I have a right to know,—then I can determine what else is right. If she suffers, God forbid I should add one pang—but if she does not, and is comforted by her religion in doing wrong, I know that I shall be able to show you that it is your duty to her to make her know what she has been compelled to do—and that it is not God’s hand that is guiding her. It is the saddest certainty in history that the most earnest Faith has often been the falsest; and the purest—the most cruel.

I cannot pity Rose, for I do not think she loves me—or knows the pain of Love. The terrible final letter had words in it which on English lips would have meant much—but the close of it was in its inner signs, so heartless that I tore it asunder in my pain—Still I have the pieces—& you shall read & judge for me—

God knows I am not selfish in my hardness to her—If I knew she had but the hundredth part of my pain—I would bear mine thrice to save her from it—only let her know what she is to me—and what I bear for her.

I have a letter today from an Irish girl—one of my old Winnington ones—very dear & simple—who has seen her

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5 Ruskin’s thanks here “for the interpretation of Mr Cowper’s way” suggests that Mrs. Cowper has responded to Ruskin’s complaint of Mr. Cowper in the letter immediately preceding.

6 Lily Armstrong, daughter of Sergeant Armstrong of Dublin.
often lately—and says she always looks sad—and that her mother never goes out in the carriage with her—she is always alone.

—But I cannot write & should not—to pain you uselessly.

Ever very gratefully Yours,

St C
Dear Mrs. Cowper

How kind you have been to my poor little cousin—you have given her more peace and brightness than I have seen in her—since she was hurt—it is very dear of you.

Do not fear coming, to help me also. —You cannot think I would ask you to do anything you did not feel that it was right to do,—least of all anything that would hurt Rose, in vain. I am deeply thankful for many things you told my cousin. I had been left in depth of darkness—about all things. Do not wonder that I find it so hard to trust—I have never yet trusted, without being deceived—I trusted Rose with my whole spirit & life.

There is a very little thing I want to say to you—but I do want to say it. —My cousin was saying that you thought I did not know you again after twenty years, because you were so changed.

It was because you were not changed. It never entered my mind that the Roman Madonna of mine could still be beautiful—I thought you were another—younger—almost as lovely. I did not indeed think of you together at all for I supposed the vision in Italy to have long vanished—to be no more seen.—My cousin says she cannot think how it could ever have been more beautiful than it is.

Come tomorrow if you can (not Wednesday any day after that). Some strange things have just happened to me, from that other world that you first showed me had being.

Ever gratefully Yours.

J Ruskin

7 The reference in the first paragraph of the letter to Mrs. Cowper’s kindness to Joan presumably is connected with the breaking, by Percy La Touche, of his engagement to Ruskin’s cousin. As Letter 64 indicates, the engagement was over by March 4, 1868. Thus this letter appears to belong roughly to the same time. Also, Ruskin’s reminiscence about “the Roman Madonna of mine” is picked up again in Letter 66 with “those old days in Rome.”
Letter 66

My cousin will thankfully come on Saturday at 4.

Denmark Hill, s.

Wednesday evening

[March, 1868] 8

Dear Mrs Cowper

It is late, but I cannot sleep till I have answered your kind letter—and first—that this may not be said after dark thoughts—believe in the truth of everything I say, to yourself, no less than of her,—and that it gives me some comfort of heart to think that anything I can say to you, or still must feel about those old days in Rome—can give you some pleasure.

Now,—for that letter—of which I did not speak—for though perhaps the root of all the worst of this evil, it is in reality—out of the scope of the true question.

Remember then. I had loved Rosie since she was ten years old—I saw her first in 1858 (autumn)—I have had no thought within me—ever since—but was in some part of it hers. For months of solitude among the hills—I have had no other thought. Well—at last I had my dream changed into hope —Then into certainty. I entirely trusted in her love—and in this joy I had dwelt—binding my whole soul upon it with cords of love—as to an altar—In an instant—wholly without warning came this stern—final—fearful word of death—and only resting on this strange sentence—unexplained. “There is nothing, but this frail cannot to separate our life and love.”

Now—remember—as far as you know them—and you know not the thousandth part of them—the strains of passion I had to bear during these many years—and then this at the end! It drove me quite wild—and I had no power of thought—but was utterly stunned & broken—the wonder to me only is, how I was not struck with some fatal pang of brain. But the one thing that burnt itself into me was that

8 The date ascribed is based on the textual reference to Lady Higginson; for her role in the complex relations between Ruskin and the La Touche family see Leon, pp. 392ff., where, on the basis of other material there cited, it is clear that Lady Higginson was involved in the affair early in March, 1868.
she could not have done this unless there was some fatal bar in herself preventing the possibility of marriage.—I totally misunderstood the last part of her letter—saying that Lady Higginson had helped her through all this—and I thought Lady Higginson was wholly in her confidence. How else could she have helped her—or told her what was right? Well—the one thing I wanted to know was whether this that I feared was the truth. I could not think—nor judge—nor stir out of my trance of pain till I knew this. For the question instantly came to me—"God knows how thankfully I could take her—by whatever law of life we were to be bound—but if a second time an evil report goes forth about my marriage—my power of doing good by any teaching may be lost—and lost for ever. And this was a fearful question to me—above all personal ones. It was all so solemn and dreadful that I had no thought of restrictions of word or "delicacies" of thought—all heaven was at stake on this one question.—And the substance of what I wrote was this—I cannot remember term for term.

"She says 'you love us both.' You could not have allowed her to write me this letter unless there had been some fatal reason—Tell it me. I cannot think—I cannot judge—for her or myself till I know—Is there incapacity of marriage?—If there be—still I will not give up hope—but the question is a fearful one whether I might not thus finally confirm the calumnies before arising out of my former history—and I am not now thinking of myself—no, nor even of Her—in dreading this,—but of the loss of such usefulness as in me—but now I cannot think. Answer me this—one word—Yes—or No,—by telegraph. Then I can think—Nay—do not—it would be like trusting the child's life to the iron & fire—I will wait till you can write—but tell me what she means." 9 This was the substance—of course if she had not given lady H her confidence—it would be dreadful to her. But it is not unforgivable it seems to me—If she thinks it so—I will rend her out

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9 What Ruskin quotes here is the substance of a letter he rashly wrote to Lady Higginson, who, he thought, could elucidate what Rose had written him.
of the poor wreck of life she has left me—and never name her more.

—There were one or two other things in the letter that might hurt her, about religion—and the way she separated herself from me by using religious words when I had told her they were useless, but I do not suppose these were the hurt.

Both my mother and Joanna heard every word of the letter—They did not say “do not send it” once.

Pray answer me one word, as soon as may be—saying if this sin is in your judgment so unpardonable—And if not, surely you will say to her how cruel she has been.

For she can never redeem what she has done—now—even if she is ever mine. The suffering since that day of horror has been to me so ghastly that it can never be forgotten—scorched into the holiest—highest of what I was—with its black, eternal scar. I never so much as see a flower without a sense of treachery—in both worlds. Yes, I will come—if I may—and try to discern with you, the good and evil—as far as either, now exist—for me.

Ever gratefully Yours

J Ruskin

Stay—there was one other thing that might have offended her, if misunderstood—this, I said. “She talks of being my friend—But I should only waste away in the weary longing for her—as I have done in these sad past years—I might live, by tearing myself all awry into some lower mechanical life—But she would miss me—would not she?”

This might hurt her pride—or she might not understand the phrase of “lower” life.

Can you not write one word to her, and say if this was the cause—how cruel she has been?

You may say—why did not you write to her. First, she gave me no means and Lady H might simply have refused to deliver the letter. And at least it would have lost a day, till the Sunday—two days altogether with possible contingency of her not choosing to reply—but—mainly, it was to spare her the pain of reply.—I knew that she had been repeatedly to Dublin to see physicians—and if what I feared
was so—I supposed this friend of her's, whose influence her
mother valued so highly—would know more of the truth
than she did herself. I have not told you yet half of what I
had to bear, that day—I felt the whole letter so hard—selfish—
religiously tyrannous—humanly weak—and false to her very
words of but the day before.——"Trust in God and me" and
Both failed—as it seemed—in one instant—for I had day by
day all the year before prayed to Him through her words.

† This whole letter, I mean—a mere cry of stupefied pain.—
I enclose the answer. You may think how I took that. That
she should think it could all end thus! I did not believe she
had ever known of its being written.
Dear Mrs Cowper,

I was not pleased last night—but that is of no consequence. We must go on—and see & feel—but this, it seems to me is of prime consequence, that each of us should determine, by our own most earnest judgment, the right way to employ the remainder of our life, and set to work steadily—desiring no knowledge more than may fit us to accomplish it. I am thinking of so many things as I write—I can do nothing but misplace and scratch out words. I must add one word of explanation to my wicked letter last night—(I wonder if it brought wicked spirits into the room—!) You must feel a continual kind of contradiction between my saying that I cannot bear what seems to me Rose's not suffering: and yet my fierce scorn of her saying that I wished to make her suffer with me. Look here. If she had a perhaps mortal wound—which was mortifying in her flesh—and I was tying it and found it senseless—if at last—as I came to the lips of it—she shrank—I should say—Thank God—it hurts, then.—So, when you show me that she is suffering, I say now—Thank God, she does.† And yet I am as far from desiring to give her pain, as if I was sitting by her bedside in her mortal peril—and pressing my hand on a torn wound in her breast.

Ever your affecte St C.

†You know, in that letter I unbound to show you—she said, "she was only then beginning to understand what that pain was."

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10 The question of Rose's suffering which is the principal subject of this letter was introduced in Letter 64, thus connecting Letter 67 to others of this time. In the sequence it is placed after Letter 66, written late at night, because of Ruskin's reference to "my wicked letter last night."
Dear Mrs Cowper

Your letter comforts me, in interpreting—but does not comfort in transferring the cause of silence to this error of mine however great, or painful to her it may have been: For it was an inevitable one. I cannot ask pardon for it.

I have done Rose no wrong from the hour when she entered the room a child of ten years old, to this instant. I have loved, honoured—cherished—trusted—forgiven—and all these limitlessly. For her I have borne every form of insult. For her, I have been silent in pain—for her I have laboured, & wept; for her, I have died, for my heart is dead within me. And if, now, she cannot pardon—nay, if she even counts as a sin needing pardon, my belief that she dared not have cast away this so great love, unless in sure knowledge of some fatal obstacle to our marriage, such as she could only have obtained by conversation with other women, (—how else could she have known how I lived with my former wife?)—if—I say, she holds this for a sin in me—it is I whose forgiveness would be withdrawn. The very greatness of my love would make such sin against it, infinite.

If she chooses, because I thought of her as a woman, not a child;—because I thought her so pure and holy that no knowledge could stain, nor dishonour touch her—because I believed her word of pledge to me inviolable, unless by mortal compelling of Fate—because I did not believe that in breaking

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11 There is good evidence for placing the letter here in the sequence. The “friend” mentioned in paragraph three of this letter is almost certainly a reference to Lady Higginson; thus the letter’s opening—“Your letter comforts me, in interpreting”—suggests that Mrs. Cowper has responded to Ruskin’s request in Letter 66 for an interpretation of the effect on Rose of his confiding letter to Lady Higginson.
that pledge, she could have been comforted by any friend who did not know the reason of her doing so,—but was advising her to baseness of falsehood in the name of Religion.—If for these sins against her, she rejects my love—Be it so. But I do not believe it; nor will you, when you are able to measure this thing with your now perfect knowledge of it. I have never rejected her. She, without mercy—without appeal—without a moment of pause, rejected me. And now—I will take her—for Wife—for Child,—for Queen—for any Shape of fellow-spirit that her soul can wear, if she will be loyal to me with her love.

But if not—let her go her way, and stain every stone of it with my blood upon her feet, for ever. Mine will be shorter—The Night is Far Spent.

Ever faithfully Yours,

J Ruskin.
Letter 69

Denmark Hill, s.

14th March [1868]

Morning—(I've been sketching the dawn on the back of your letter—)

—It was not I who went to a "Stranger"—It was she—who in my worst agony—left me only a Stranger to speak to—and refused to receive my words herself.—Who chose that time—of all times to tell me that a Stranger said "she belonged to her."

—No—dear lady—I have not sinned against Rose. And it ought—if she is noble—to be the greatest joy she can now feel to know that the Sin was her's—not mine. Both of us innocent in purpose—but the actual fact of wrong—her's—the actual falsehood—hers—the resolved infliction of sorrow—her's—the dishonouring thought of her lover—her's—I not believing it, till now, possible she could have known of that letter's being written—believing all were guilty—except she.

—No—φιλη—I have not sinned against Rose.

St C.

12 The reference in the second paragraph to a "Stranger," i.e., Lady Higginson, places the time of writing in the year ascribed.
**Letter 70**

Denmark Hill, s.  
15th March. 1868  
(Emily's birthday)

My dear Mrs Cowper

I have heard thankfully from Joanna, the substance of your conversation yesterday, and I wholly feel the truth—or probability of all that you thought. And surely therefore, it would be now right for you to say to Rose that she had been mistaken and cruel,—and knew not what she was still doing,—that she owed it to me in strictest duty to put an end to this torture of doubt—one way or another: and that she could only do so by determining in calm and patient thought—with full understanding of all things, what was right for us both,—she at present knowing hardly anything certainly of herself—and nothing of me, except through mists of broken words & thoughts. I would write to the mother—in all gentleness, if it would be of the least avail, but be assured it would not.

And, so far from being unwilling to receive Rose in the way she wished—I should rejoice in it wholly, for my part. But every human creature has hissed and shrieked at me, for—as they said—not knowing the nature of girls, and making my former wife miserable, by this very thing—But I will face the world for her—if she will so trust me.—If she will not—she has destroyed my life.—There is no need for her decision yet —let her forget her past anger like a dream—let her be faithful to the pledge she gave me—and let her write to me, as she used to do—that we may know each others' hearts again.

The law which only gives her liberty of action in a year—is a merely human one. She is as much bound to obey her parents, in all lawful things not injuring others, after she is twenty one, as before—And she is as much bound to disobey her parents—if they command her to commit injury to others, now, as she would be then. It seems to me that a firm expres-
sion on your part to her and to the parents, of the wrong you now know to have been done to me, would enable her to write to me—or to you about me;—Things cannot go on as they are,—and they have already gone on, thus, too long.

For the appointment which Mr Cowper was so kind as to make for me I will hold myself at your command any evening, this following week. Tell me the hour, and evening; and I will be at the door in Marlborough St, waiting for you.

Every gratefully Yours,

J Ruskin.
My dear φίλη,

I was much comforted by your letter to Joanna last night. Nor was I disappointed—(far from this) the night before. My chief surprise was at myself, in not being more impressed by a sensible miracle; I am impressed however in a deep and helpful way, though not as I should have imagined of myself. On the other hand, there is much to surprise me sadly;—as you feel without my saying.—To any degree of humbleness of mankind I could stoop to be taught—(nay, beneath mankind) —I could gladly be taught by the most illiterate peasant—if simple and noble of heart—gladly by an animal—if God gave it voice—by the Ass-colt—by a bird—a worm—by the crying out of stones—But I can’t be taught submissively—by Mr C. nor even by Spirits who don’t know the make of a pigeons beak—and draw it halfway between a Parrot’s and Vulture’s.— The Saints forbid that Professor Owen should meet with such.

We must go again—please—& see and hear more—I was very happy in my dear little lambie’s messages—though I do think that the Spirits need’nt spoil her, like every body else. For the few words from that other Spirit that came in your last night’s letter—I am thankful—but I want you yourself to feel more distinctly the Law of Justice and of plain sense—by which she—as all others—is bound to test herself. As soon as you feel it strongly—you will be able to impress her with it also,—it is only by holding to it that you can even test these miracles whether they are indeed of God or of His enemies.— For instance—Rosie going out one day in the rain, comes home in a cab through Grosvenor Sq. and under her own stately two-pillared portico—gives the Cabman sixpence. The Cabman swears at her—or at least within himself—(I hope not
even under such provocation would any English cabman blaspheme at her)—and goes away in by no means an improved state of mind. Now Rosie has not the slightest business—hereupon, to comfort herself with the idea that God, through that Affliction, may be dealing beneficially with the Cabman's mind, and giving it six-penny-worth of holy discipline. Her business is wholly and solely, with her own mistake and stupidity. Similarly when she breaks her word to me on Christmas day—and after ten years of my waiting and weary love—dismisses me by the word of a Stranger, she has no business to write to you—nor ought you to allow her to do so—about the possibly beneficial effects on my mind.

She has nothing whatever to do with God's dealings with my mind. She ought to know—or to be told—and convinced that she has done (through false teaching and her own constant dwelling on her own sensations instead of other people's,) —an ineffably false and cruel deed—and that she has to repent of it—and undo it—as soon as may be. What the effect on my mind actually has been—if she cares to know it—is this—that my ideal of womanhood is destroyed—and irrecoverably—that my love and tenderness to all men is greatly deadened—my own personal happiness in any love—destroyed —my faculties gravely injured—so that I cannot now command my thoughts except in a broken way—and such a bitterness mixed with my love for her, that though it is greater than ever—and possesses me more fatally than ever—it is partly poisoned love, mixed with distrust and scorn—and even if she comes to me now—whatever she may be to me hereafter —though she were Portia & Virgilia in one—I should and shall —always say "She has cost me too dear." That is the effect on the Cabman's mind.
Letter 72

Denmark Hill, s.
Sunday. 29th March. 1868.

My dear φιλη

I will bring you back the letter, which indeed it was well that I should see—on Tuesday Evening. I will not say anything respecting it, except that the actual words to which she refers—(taking their sense on report from an evening—!) were these “Her sin is tenfold greater than Percy’s,¹³ because she has betrayed a greater Love.” I did not say tenfold greater, for fear of paining Joanna too much.

I am still—nay—I am more than ever of the mind I first held, that you ought to write to the father refusing to correspond farther with her under your present pledge, while her lover and your friend is misrepresented to her: but in this I wholly defer to your judgment your wish—and your care for her in her sorrow. I myself shall simply persevere in the course I had adopted of absolute silence to all my friends, and withdrawal from all my usually helpful labour—until she writes to me in kindness.

And let time and the Lord of—more than Time—judge for us both.

Ever your affect.⁶ S⁶ C.

¹³ Who, it should be remembered, had broken his engagement to Joan Agnew.
My dear φίλη,

I will bring you back the letter tomorrow evening,—yes, it was well that I should see it, but I wish you had a little more capacity of Indignation. Cannot you say one word against this insolent habit of her’s, of constituting herself judge of all things and all men?—Can you not at least point out to her the fearful wrong of listening to reports of my words, when she is not allowed to hear the words themselves;—or ask her how she dared to break her promise of writing on Christmas day—and break it in anger!

If you care to know what my words were—(and are—and will be)—these “Her sin is tenfold greater than Percy’s, because she has betrayed a tenfold greater love.”—(a “greater” I said—only, to Joanna, for fear of paining her.)—Of course I know she meant to do right. But theft—and murder—and betrayal of true love—are Sins positive, at whose-soever command committed—and under whatsoever conviction. And the baseness of her thought of me that I wished to give her pain, because I was in pain myself—is—You know you never take any notice of what I say in my letters, but—does the child really suppose—is she mad enough to suppose—that I would have been silent all this time, as I have been, unless to avoid hurting her in her phase of grief?

However, I trust you wholly with her—do what is helpful to her—and I will abide my hour—steadily following out this law that I have set to myself—and remaining silent to all other creatures, until she writes to me to be forgiven. And let Time and the Lord of more than time, do, and judge for me.

14 The closeness in phrasing and subject matter of this letter to Letter 72 determines the year ascribed.
It is strange that I never seem to be able to make you feel that I laid my life in her hands, and she threw it to the dogs by the hand of a Stranger,—and it is not by her mercy that I live, this day, but by what poor strength I had, left wholly helpless and desolate. And then her quite horrible cruelty to Joanna!—Of course I know her worth and power, and the difference between the faults of her noble ignorance of what she ought to do—and those of Percy’s ignoble carelessness as to whether he does it or not. But alas, the words of all her family have been always fair, and their deeds always cruel, (unless when they were excited by the presence of some minor object of pity). She says she will always love me, with her child-love. Let her see me then as a child, & speak to me, & be with me, and I will live for such love as she can give me. But she need not think to reverse God’s law & make it good for man to be alone.

Ever your affecte. St C.
Letter 74

Denmark Hill, s.
[Late March–early April, 1868]¹⁵

There is of course—a good in all this, with which she has nothing to do—I am stronger—(as a glacier is stronger than a stream—) wiser—and keener; nerved for necessary Refusal of kindesses—where I used to be weakly kind—and far better able to write the history of Flint. That my hair is grey, & foot infirm, I think we must set down as dead loss.

I wrote yesterday to those of my friends who knew—or might be permitted to know anything of this matter, to say that I would henceforward write no word to any creature, (my mother, Joanna, & you, being excepted of course—though not nominally)—until my mistress wrote to me again,—nor then—unless she wrote as mine, one way or another. That words of absolute business to strangers—must of course be sometimes written—and what I can helpfully say with my lips—I will in due time. I shall at present, at least—get the good of Rest.

Ever, dear φίλη—your affectionate S* C.

¹⁵In light of the “I would henceforward write no word to any creature” that appears in the second paragraph of this fragment, echoing as it does the words “absolute silence to all my friends” of Letter 72 and “remaining silent to all other creatures” in Letter 73, this conjectural date seems reasonable.
Letter 75

Denmark Hill, s.

30th April. [1868]

Oh, φίλη—φίλη—I have a letter from her—saying—"Say what you will to me"—

Be thankful for me—and pray that God may make me worthy of her always—and able to be her peace.

Ever your affecte S't C.

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16 This pathetic note is coincident with an entry of May 4, 1868 (Diaries, II, 647) which consists of the one word "Peace." It is the time when the relations between Ruskin and Rose were temporarily restored, as both diary entries and letters to Mrs. Cowper indicate.
Letter 76

Denmark Hill, s.

4th May [1868]17

My dearest φίλη,

She is mine, and nothing can come between us any more, unless, in some future day, she is surprised by the love she yet knows not of, for another, and if that should be, I will surrender her—in peace of heart—as I shall know that God bids me.

But now, He has given her to me, and except by His word of Love, or Death, we cannot be separated more.

Ever your loving S't C.

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17 See the note to Letter 75 for the year attributed to this letter.
Denmark Hill, s.
6th May. 1868

My dear φιλί,

I had another lovely letter yesterday, but terribly difficult to answer—for she keeps blaming me for not having trusted her—and I can’t tell her what the mother was writing of her—nor show her in the least, even the direction of all the real wrong—nor can I ever do so, as you know. But without speaking of me, when you write to her, try to make her more humble, in the real vital sense—try to make her believe in the possibility of her having been wrong, even when she most desired to be right—and please also suggest to her that what people say of the guidance of men by the wisdom of maidens, does not in every word apply to maidens who are never allowed to speak to their lovers,—and who have the misfortune to have lovers of fifty when they are just out of their teens.

—The agony they have made the poor little dear thing suffer, too!—and she keeps telling me how much they love her!

I have written a perhaps somewhat too grave and cold answer†—saying that I can never discuss the conduct of her

† I have made her despise me a little in her heart, by my former utter humility of love—so that the position now is one of extreme difficulty when there is a real need of her trust in me, and distrust of herself.

Here are two letters which Joanna has given me out of my Cumberland ones—She had so much to say to you last night—at bed time. I sent her to bed authoritatively, instead, and said you should forgive her.

—in looking at these letters again, I am partly happy again—but it is all so impenetrable—(—except out of those low cottage windows!)

—Ever your grateful S't C.
parents with her, and that for the present she has no business to think of any serious matters—but merely to rest in my quiet & constant love—and to get well as fast as she can. But what the mother is capable of doing when she comes home—I don’t know—under the shame of knowing that Joanna & I now know what she has done. If you see her, as she will most likely have heard how things are—soothe her as much as you can—and as unconsciously as possible—saying that I will never take her daughters affection from her—if she will only give up plaguing us—and I don’t mean to press for marriage in the least.—If they had but the common sense to let us alone!—Perhaps Rosie and I might quarrel to their perfect satisfaction—on a point of divinity—before a month was out!
My dear φίλη

I have been thinking—often & often, with a little low laugh, of what the critics would call my contradiction of myself, in my two last letters,—one, saying of Rosie that nothing can ever come between us more, and the other, that we might quarrel perfectly before a month was out, over a point of Divinity. But you know, there's no contradiction. The one means that we shall never more doubt each other—shall always love,—the other—that she might resolve in the most resolute manner never to be my wife—if I did'nt believe on her authority that six & two were seven. I am more and more amused—more and more saddened, as I read and re-read her last letter; It is in one light, so exquisitely presumptuous and foolish—in another, so royally calm and divine. The utter freedom from the consciousness of any wilful sin, all her life, and of her continual faith in her present God, makes her the most glorious little angel, and the most impertinent little monkey, that ever tormented true lover’s or foolish old friend’s heart. I can no more talk to her than I could to a faun or a peewit;—but the white Doe of Rylstone or the Dove of the ark could'nt be more divine [a] messenger, or more to be revered in their narrow natures. What shall I do with her? I can't reason with her—or she would have a headache—I can't tell her she's a little goose—because she does'nt know the difference between that and anything else. I can't let her go on lecturing me as if she were the Archangel Michael and the Blessed Virgin in one—because flesh & blood won't stand it, and I

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18 Although this letter is written from Winnington and Letter 77 of the same date is written from London, there is no reason to doubt the correctness of the date for both letters since Ruskin went from London to Winnington on May 6 (see Diaries, II, 647).
can’t show her that I don’t need to be lectured—because—I should then have to show her that Papa and Mama do. —What am I to do with her? —Send me a little line here, tomorrow please. It’s the ethics of the dust school,¹⁹—and—believe me or not as you will—it’s in this wholly ideal state at this moment, that the two prettiest girls in it are the ablest, & the best!—Now—is anything in Utopia impossible after that?

Love to William—Have you told him about the cottage, yet?

Ever your affecte. S’t C.

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¹⁹ Winnington Hall in Cheshire was the setting for *The Ethics of the Dust*, a series of dialogues between Ruskin and some of the pupils there. Ruskin himself gives the best account of the significance of this work in the Preface to the first edition (*Works*, XVIII, 201-2).
Letter 79

4. Merrion Sq. S.\textsuperscript{20}
Dublin

[May 13, 1868] \textsuperscript{21}

Dear Mrs Cowper

This morning, I receive these few words.

"I am forbidden by my father and mother to write to you, or receive a letter.

Rose."

(Two rose-leaves enclosed.) One larger than the other.

Now, I hope at last you will have some capacity of indignation? and power of expressing it to the right person.

In the meantime I shall be quite still, and do no mischief, till I have your counsel and help. Write here, quickly. The letter of mine to which this of hers ought to have been an answer has, (I hope) put the child at rest as far as regards her thoughts of me—being simply what you wished me to have answered to her first letter of all, do you remember?—So that—if she has read it—all must be at rest between us,—but it is a question whether the mother has not got first hold of it, and merely given the child my address here out of it—but I cannot fancy Rose would allow this, (even with all her filial "piety,") after the injunction again given to me to keep all that she said sacred.

Now, will you not write firmly to the mother—warning her in some way against tormenting her child more—and saying what you begin to feel about it? Or what will you do?

My own purpose is to go on doing all the good I can, resuming my vow of writing to no one except words of necessity. I shall be stronger in patience now, knowing that she is not angry with me any more.

Ever your faithful S*. C.

\textsuperscript{20} The residence of one of Ruskin’s Irish hosts, the Rt. Hon. Sir Joseph Napier, Bt.

\textsuperscript{21} See Letter 80 and the entry of May 12, 1868, in the Diaries, II, 648, for corroboration of the date ascribed to this letter.
My dear φίλη,

I had nearly thrown up lecture\(^{22}\) and everything yesterday when that note came. However, I tried to fancy the difference between getting a note with two roseleaves in it, & getting none, and so I did my lecture as well as I could; but my voice failed me a little from heaviness of heart.

At the end of it, while I was talking to the people behind me a man came up with a rather large white paper parcel, which he said he was to give into my own hand. I took it, ungraciously, thinking it some troublesome person,—and carried it carelessly home—when at last I opened it, I found a large cluster of the Erba della Madonna, in bloom, which was always considered as my plant, at Harristown,—enclosed in two vineleaves and in the midst of it, two bouquets, one a rose half open, with lilies of the valley, and a sweet scented geranium leaf,—the other a pink, with lilies of the valley, and a green and white geranium leaf. This second bouquet puzzles me and confuses the message—do you think it could be meant for Joanna, or, what does the pink mean in flower-language.

I trust, by this, that she has received my letter written on Sunday safely,—though she is forbidden to answer. I hope she also would have firmness enough to let no one else read it—for unless they understood all as well as you do, they might justly blame me for it—being simply the confirmed promise to be just what she chose I should be, to her, for ever —But it is strange that if she did not show it them, the mother has so instantly succeeded in altering the father’s determination again to evil.

Ever your affecte. S\(\text{t}\) C.

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\(^{22}\) "The Mystery of Life and Its Arts" (Works, XVII, 145-87).
my next address over page

Care of Serjeant Armstrong, M. P.
32. Stephen’s Green
Dublin.

(Miss Armstrong is my Lily of the Ethics of the dust—and hardly changed—only taller.)
**Letter 81**

[Dublin] 15\(^{th}\) May [1868]\(^{23}\)

Dearest \(\phiλνη\)

I am to be carried away somewhere, today, before the English letters arrive—There can be nothing in yours,† (alas) but some slow plan or far off hope—with cheering word for the time: but it is sure to be one that I should have liked to answer at once—this is only to say why I do not. I could not have believed the difference it makes to me, even now when all is—in the deep of it so much more happy for me—to be cut off from the letters again—Is it a punishment for not liking to be unjustly scolded, even by her? I don't think so—it is not that I would not bear all for her, or from her—joyfully but that I do not like her to be unjust.

Ever your affect\(^e\). St C.

†How prettily I am chastised—for this despair—by what was in it—besides—! Please, a little line on Monday,—care of Dr Kennedy.\(^{24}\)

I. Upper Merrion St.

I have your letters—and her's. I made a pensive little petition to the young mistress of this house—Grace Napier—an "old" Winningtonian—and she thought of a later train and managed things for me—and so I have this blessed little sheet of "sunshine."

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\(^{23}\) The connection between this letter and Letter 80 is so close as to insure the accuracy of the year ascribed.

\(^{24}\) Evory Kennedy (1806-86), M.D., J.P., one of Ireland's most distinguished medical men. Kennedy, once Master of the Rotunda Lying-in Hospital and a Deputy Lieutenant for the County of Dublin, was host to various literary men.
But—φιλή—you are too naughty in talking of its being "wrong" to send me this letter—and not saying a word of the great wrong. What—are these people first to let their son throw off that innocent and true girl, Joanna, as if she was a moth to be brushed out of their way—and then is the mother after winning her entire trust to go on writing lie after lie to her about Rose, and at last—to throw her away as her son did—in a single ghastly letter—and you think the authority of this woman is a sacred thing! and that the Father—who has never commanded his son to do so much truth or justice as to write to Joan to ask her pardon—who is utterly impotent to command any good whatever to his only Son, is his authority sacred to make his other child cruel to the man who loves her so that he will bear anything for her? and to hurt hundreds through him—for there is not a day of my life which is not deadened in all usefulness—because Rose can't write to me. I am going to do my book on botany—and every word of it will be dead and lifeless—for ever—compared to what it would have been—because this wicked woman's commands are obeyed by her husband—for whom I saved her—and by her child—whom she prayed me not to love—because if I did, "I should take her mother away from her." What respect of this sort do you find rendered to parents. They who were lovely in their lives—and in their death not divided—would you have had the one of them sit still in his place when the javelin flew past him?

Well—I am happy—enough and a thousandfold more than enough—in what she now is to be—and if I could compare my present feelings with those of a month back—I ought to be in heaven—but I was in such a seventh heaven four days ago, that falling back to the third is like falling to the earth. And you know her half Irish—half childish thoughtlessness of me, is very grievous—Her sending nothing but those few words and not saying even if she had my last letter, had very nearly made me throw up my lecture at once—not wilfully—

25 Ruskin refers to Proserpina (Works, XXV, 187-569), which gestated in his mind for many years before appearing, in parts, between 1875 and 1886.
but for fear I should break down—I very nearly did, my voice failing at first terribly)—and that last letter of mine also contained such a solemn submission to her in all things that I ought to have been assured it did reach her hands. But I know now that all this is childishness only—and ignorance—not want of feeling—but I am quite sure that without any speaking of me—you might with perfect honour, say to her that she was wrong in not thinking enough of her duties to God directly—in her own responsibilities for the treatment of those who ought to be cared for by her. And you may certainly tell her not to overwalk or ride herself.

Ever your affect\* S\* C.
The flowers are drying beautifully—only one can't press massive rosebud and pink—so they will be withered at last into dark clusters of frankincense.

Stephens Green. [Dublin]
19th May. 1868.

Dearest φίλη

Yes, that letter was "enough" indeed. I can't say what I think of it—I will be very good. But I want to be wise as well as good for her, and I do not know how to be so,—or how to keep her from being unhappy just now—Why should anything make her unhappy, when her hope of love is for ever—not doubtfully and at moments—like mine—but assured and stedfast?

Yes, I am capable of all forgiveness,—but,—in your sense of this—& deep religious hope—are you enough clear in your conviction of absolute wrong?—have you clearly enough yet expressed it to both the parents—? For is there any one who knows the facts—who thinks them right? John Simon, for instance said of them, after what they had done to Joanna. "They are people ignorant of all human relations."—and what I wrote to you did not refer to Percy's conduct—but to his mother's instantly ceasing to write to Joanna as soon as she had got them separated.

Then—how far do you mean her obedience to her parents to extend? I hold a child as much bound to right obedience at 22 as at 20—and as much bound to disobey in clear light of other duties, at 20 as at 22. She is disobedient in not casting me off altogether, and being resolved in that, she ought not to allow herself to be made miserable: I never in all my life allowed my father or mother's word to interfere in the smallest particular in which I was positive of my duty to some other person and they wished me to violate it—But, if she can be happy now, so can I be, under any law she chooses to obey.
I went sixty-five miles in an Irish car yesterday (30 and more each way—) into county Wicklow to look at a house which I wanted to get there—But it was variously unfit,—the drive was wonderful,—through wildernesses of hawthorn in bloom—and over mountain ground blazing with gorse. Mr Napier drove us, (Sir Joseph Napier’s son) singing Irish songs all the way (nearly)—and Miss Napier (another bright and good girl—one of my first Winningtonians—) and Joan—and Lily—joined as they could—You have not often seen, I fancy, such a little car-constellation as the three made, seen together as we walked behind them up the hills.—The air was as soft as softest summer could be. To day is bright again and Lily is going to take me to see a house which she thinks will do better, north of Dublin, and we are to have a wild ramble over the rocks. I am challenged to cross an Irish bridge—on which no one can pause!—I can cross anything that quiet certainty of hand and foot can—but this Irish impetuosity of traverse will be new to me.

It need not teaze you now to have these long letters—for you need not read—nor reply—only I like you to know—so far as you wish—what I am feeling & doing.

Ever your grateful S't C.
32. Stephen’s Green [Dublin]  
25th May. [1868]  
12. night

My dear φίλη

I have just finished reading my psalms: Your letter reached me—and gladdened, & grieved,—so bitterly—today. I have debated often with myself whether or not to take the train to Sallins and walk round and round H.town—on the chance of meeting her on a walk. But I felt that if I succeeded, I might only give her pain, and that the coming away again would be too terrible for me. So I have been wistfully staying, within twenty miles of her, climbing spurs of the Wicklow hills, and looking across the plain—to where she was. Tomorrow, the sea will be between us again—and I shall be very dead-hearted. But I am soon coming back to Ireland, to stay with Froude in Kerry, and indeed I hope to be often there (The people are so nice.)—and—if she wishes it to live there. I mean to keep as near her now always as I can.

I hear very grave things of Mrs La Touche: which throw light—(fire-light of the city of Dis)—on all her ways. It may be right for you to keep silence, but never to send her your love. The main thing however is to be of what help may be possible, to the child—in that of course I can only thank and revere you.

I was up early and have been talking all day at a lovely place of Dr Kennedy’s, with his very dear and good family—I planted a Deodara on their lawn this afternoon—his grandson, the little Sir Henry Lawrence 3 years old, helping me with tiny spade—the widowed—and but lately motherless—

26 Along with the references to people and places in Dublin, the planting mentioned in the third paragraph of this letter, which coincides with an entry for May 25, 1868, in Diaries, II, 649, establishes the year the letter was written.

27 His country seat, Belgard Castle, Clondalkin, County Dublin.
lady Lawrence\textsuperscript{28} standing (with Joan beside her)—holding
the tree—her little sister—almost too thoughtfully featured
for a child of eleven—but beautiful, watching her tiny nephew
at his work with sparkling eyes; and two elder sisters—and
Grace Napier—Sir Joseph's daughter, an old Winningtonian—and
her brother, completing the group—with sea and Wick-
low hills behind, in fairest sunshine. I'm tired now (if it were
not for my letter from Curzon S't—) and must sleep—and
dream—This is my last letter written from Ireland—this time—
(no right paper or envelopes any where.). Ever your grate-
ful S't C.

Winnington Hall Northwich—finds me till Saturday.

\textsuperscript{28}Lady Lawrence, one of Dr. Kennedy's daughters, married her
cousin, Sir Alexander Lawrence. She was widowed very early in her
marriage when a bridge over a ravine gave way as she and her husband
rode across. (See \textit{Irish Times}, March 15, 1928.)
Letter 84

Denmark Hill, s.
Monday morning [early June, 1868]

My dear Mrs Cowper

You know, without doubt by this time that all is over:— and perhaps you will not even read this note.

It is only to say that now, the only thing possible to me is to persevere in all that I have been endeavouring to do. I cannot measure what I may have to endure, nor what those who have loved me (—they are many—) may suffer for me. But I know now that this thing, whatever it is, has been openly against me from the year 1854 till now; and as I had partly lived it down—I believe in the end—that through all this evil—what I know there is of good in me will yet have some office upon the earth.

Of all things hateful, expressions of repentance, on discovered sin—are to me the most so.

What I was, and what I am—can in no wise be altered— now,—if repentance is in me—it has been long ago past—so far as it can ever cease—but in death.

There is so much dependent upon me that I believe strength will be given me to bear, and to do, what I must. If you believe enough in me to desire to understand me—in the darkness as in the light—first consider whether if the worst things that men ever had done in their lives were all laid utterly bare—how all would be likely to stand. I know there are multitudes wholly sinless and pure. But I know also, that such as I am, I stand next to these, and above the mass. It is no time to say this however, but whatever you are to know of me—you shall.

29 The tone of this letter and its allusion to Ruskin's marital problems of 1854 and to the rumors of his sexual "abnormalities" suggest a connection with Letter 85, in which the same theme recurs with equal intensity.
You will not mistake the tone of this letter for sullenness or defiance of the world,—or for insensitiveness.

But, from moment to moment I must simply try to live on, and not to think.

I believe you will never, in the end of life—look back to any part of your own dealings with human creatures more joyfully than on your having been merciful to me just now.

Ever gratefully Yours,

J Ruskin.
Denmark Hill, s. 2nd June. 1868.

Dear Mrs Cowper

Her words are fearful—I can only imagine one meaning to them—which I will meet at once—come of it what may. Have I not often told you that I was another Rousseau?—except in this—that the end of my life will be the best—has been—already—not best only—but redeemed from the evil that was its death. But, long before I knew her, I was, what she and you always have believed me to be: & I am—and shall be—worthy of her. No man, living, could more purely love—more intensely honour. She will find me—if she comes to me—all that she has thought. She will save me only from sorrow—from Sin I am saved already—though every day that I love her, I deserve her more, in all that she conceives of me—or has conceived. But it was not so always. There was that in my early life which is indeed past as the night.—I care not what she has seen—the worst of me she shall utterly know—but—let her also hear and know the best—There is more depending on her knowing me—than her fate—or mine.

Therefore, now, insist upon knowing what has been shown her. Or perhaps at once—even from what I have said—you will tell her to forget me.

I could say much against this: but a bad man could say it also, and I will not—but of all thoughts, think but this for me—Could a bad man have loved her—as I have loved? You saw the “Resurrection face”—Was that false think you—? Could it be?

Is it possible that she also could have loved me, as she loves, if this had been the end meant by all its sanctity.—It cannot be. Tell her—will you not—to make one effort more—to trust—not me—but her own heart. And there yet may be light.
It is a fearful day, this; I have just heard of an intense evil which has befallen—a very—very dear friend.\textsuperscript{30}

Whatever you do—or judge—I shall never dishonour the love she has given me—even by despair—Whatever comes—I will bear it—as I may have strength.—I cannot write more.

J Ruskin.

\textsuperscript{30} Although the phrasing seems a trifle odd, it is possible that Ruskin refers here to the death—en route from Mauritius to England—of Rose's sister Emily (known as Wisie). She was, as noted in Letter 48, note 33, the wife of Bernard Ward. Her death occurred on June 1, 1868, and, in the entry of that date in Diaries, II, 649, Ruskin so records it. Most unfortunately, it is annotated there as the death of Ruskin's dog, for he once owned a pet of that name.
Dear Mrs Cowper

I have no right to speak of feelings, now: but Joanna will write to you, & say what she feels. And you shall not—for this your great kindness to me, be encumbered with the wreck of me—I will fight my way alone,—only—if anything occurs farther to make you think worse of me—if the cry against me becomes unendurable—think that the last words that dead Emily said to Joanna—were—"my dearest love to S't C"—and write to me yet once more & let me answer.

I have been thinking that it would be well to seal Emily's and R's letters now, together, & leave all in your charge, so that R may see they are all safe before destroying them.

Ever gratefully yours. S't C.
Letter 87

Denmark Hill, s.

16th June. [1868]

Dear Mrs Cowper,

It is rather difficult work to keep living just now, and I must not be beaten, for many people's sakes,—if I can help it. Therefore, I must keep Joanna cheerful as long as I can. You may think it cowardly of me. I believe it is not,—what it is—or what I am, time will assuredly show. For the present—leave Joanna, when you see her tomorrow—what poor hope she has. She will tell you that I have none,—and what I shall try to do.

—Decline to show her R's letters: you can—(truly, without doubt)—say that they are harsh, & would only for the present give pain to her. I have told her nothing but that the influence of the M.s has been brought upon R. You can say that it all hurts you too much to be long spoken of,—comfort poor little Joanna in any general tender way—such as you know so well, and then let her talk to you of Emily & what else is in her heart.

I cannot believe that the powers of giving happiness, and of insight into natural and beautiful things, which are in me—have been given me to be quenched thus. You may wonder at me—but I can sleep—well—and long. The difficulty is in the looking.

I shall have things to say, perhaps—some day—not now.

Ever gratefully Yours. S't C.

31 The textual reference to Joan's sorrow over Emily La Touche Ward, who, as already noted, died June 1, 1868, suggests the year ascribed.

32 Probably a reference to John and Effie Millais. For a discussion of the role played in the Ruskin-Rose tragedy by Ruskin's former wife and her husband, the celebrated painter, see the introduction to Part IV of this correspondence.
Dear Mrs Cowper.

I have only not sent to ask for you, in order not to give you trouble—fearing you would think it in your kindness, necessary to write.

I believe you will like to know sometimes what I am doing,—so I will tell you—not expecting you ever to answer—because it will always be painful to you to think of me, for some time.

I am working chiefly at my botany for I have much material which it would be wrong to waste—(—only it is so very strange to work at it now—when one always shudders if one comes across a particular family of flowers—that one had meant to trace all down from—).

Did you ever read Hood’s poems?—do you recollect poor Peggy and her nosegays? Then I’ve gone back to my Egyptian and other out of the way work—and it won’t be done worse, in some ways, for being done with no distraction except pain. Could you fancy my conceiving such a thing as that in some ways—even This—should be—for the Best? —And you know—I only mean—Best For “To-day.” Not for Tomorrow.

Ever gratefully yours,

S* C.

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33 From “Miss Kilmansegg and Her Precious Leg,” lines 116-18 (“Poor Peggy hawks nosegays from street to street / Till—think of that, who find life so sweet!— / She hates the smell of roses!”).
Letter 89

Denmark Hill, s.

11th July. 1868

My dear Mrs Cowper

Joanna came home so happy—with a bright sense of having been useful—and a deep one of having been petted and cherished to her very hearts best content. I am very grateful to you.—For other & deeper kindness to myself, much more than grateful.—I am getting on strangely well. Just after I had got into some calm & patience, and had resolved to take—and do—what was sent me—there came various calls back to my political work, which have given me much to think of—and, what I most needed, some returning sense of power—and everything seems at present to move well under my hand, (of my own work:) and by steadily hindering myself from thinking of anything else, I seem to get stronger daily.

I knew the meaning of the fable of the Sirens before, but I did not know what shapes they could take, nor that their song could seem so sacred.—But of the best—as of all beneath it—the deadly—or deadliest thing is not the Loss—but the Coveting. The dim sight is misery—blind, one can be at rest. However—I cannot reason of it—one thing I know—that I must neither fail others—nor—in the uttermost sense—fail to her—it will take many a day—but she will know at last that her love was not given wrongly—nor those flowers carried by friends.

—Don’t think slightly of me for being so well.—If you had not stood by me, I believe I should have gone down—it just gave me breath & life enough, to hold on till the wave past. I don’t think you’ll be sorry, as time seals all.

Ever your grateful St C.
Letter 90

Denmark Hill, s. 19th July. 1868.

Dear Mrs Cowper

I cannot understand in the least—though I have perfect faith in—that lovely humility of yours. Few women in this world can ever have had more influence for good—or can have used it more constantly. Perhaps it could not have been so helpful—but for the unconsciousness—but the unconsciousness is not the less mysterious for its beauty. You never can know—nor can I—what you have done for me—for we cannot say what would have happened, most probably, if you had not strengthened me. I should have dashed away to the hills—Greek or Calabrian—or strange—and there fallen sick and passed away—and, as it is—I am in a kind of rest—with clearer sight & purpose than I ever had before.

I have been writing to William—he sent me such a kind letter, too. Whenever you wish me to come, I will come to you now—& will give you no more trouble of any kind—only I must be quite sure that you don’t let me in when you are tired merely in kindness to me. I think to put me at ease—you must not be at home to me—twice—at least—to begin with.

My mother is very happy in your message to her—Joanna—at her happiest. I am tired to day—and there is so much I want to say, only I want to say it prettily too—and I can’t.

—Did I show you that lovely 15th century engraving of “Astrologia”—when you were last here? I was casting my horoscope the other day!—and the first sentence of the stars—was—“innumerable troubles.” The second—“Noble and faithful female friends.”—And truly I have—and have had—such—but none of them yet—to whom I have been so burdensome, or by whom I have been aided—as by you. But the one that
died at Neuchatel—and her sister—(who wrote for me to R—and conquered her for the time)—and poor little Joan—are all very dear,—and then there is the sense yet of having been cared for so long and truly: and that I have the faith to keep to that past.

—I don't think I shall be changed into flint—yet.

Every your grateful

"Coz"

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34 Lady Trevelyan. See Letter 35.
My dear φίλη,

As soon as I came back from France I saw what new grief had fallen on you—and I would have written if any word of comfort had been in me—but you know I never have any comfort. I can help, sometimes when help is still possible—but not console. I only receive help and comfort always from you and can give none. What you tell me of lady Adine is now very lovely, and, there are those who would die glad for two such years,—but the fields and woods of Panshanger must be strangely desolate.

Not so desolate as all fields—& woods, in the autumn that has no hope of spring, look sometimes. But you need never fear disturbing or harming me when you can tell anything to Joan that will make her happy: First—because I am never for an instant free from one presence—and am obliged to be what I can be, and do what I can do—in a tranquillity of eternal pain—and yet more—because the bitterest part of all that pain—not the heaviest or greatest of course—but the piece of it I am least able to bear, is the seeing poor little Joanna suffer so much—all through me—there—at least, is sorrow which has not been deserved—and it is so pure!—she evidently now suffers only—and always, for the loss of R.—and the other love was nothing in comparison.

I know if you will answer—if you can answer at all that question, in true understanding of me—I have been able to live through this, and it is in a sense—well with me—because it is all I can now do for her to make her not ashamed of having been loved by me—yes—and for the sake of others—many others—I must be all I can, while I yet live.

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36 The death of William Cowper's niece, Lady Adine Fane, who, in 1866, had married Julian Fane, fourth son of Lord Westmoreland.
I worked hard during my two months at Abbeville\textsuperscript{37}—staying there, not going on to Verona, because I found the church there was to be destroyed this coming winter. I drew—for the first time in my life—as well as I could—and people like what I have done, & it will be of some value.\textdagger I had my dear American friend, Charles Norton with me, some days, & went to Paris with him and met Longfellow there—and Longfellow came and spent the evening with us at Meurices\textsuperscript{38}—just under the room where I got the letter in 1862 saying I was not to have the house at H.town—and I was thinking of Elsie's prayer all the time—but Longfellow liked me. I will show you a letter I had from him since.—Now—here I have been forced into this committee for employment of destitute poor—and I've been useful there already,—I find—in trying for the first time to be of use in public business that the upper and outmost feelings of people are often quite base & mean, & if one fights them, arise into a mere fringe of fiery little dragons, impassable,—but if one never heeds them—and appeals to the inner feeling—there is no end of generosity and sure goodness down beneath—more than the people have the least notion of themselves. I had a fight the other day against some private interests—and after saying what I could gently, went away & left it to the men themselves & they did what I wanted as soon as I was gone! Ever your affectionate & grateful, S* C.

\textdagger Your island shall be done next spring, at Venier—if I am well.

\textsuperscript{37} From which he returned on October 21, 1868.

\textsuperscript{38} The Hôtel Meurice, where Ruskin customarily stayed when in Paris. Ruskin and Longfellow seem to have got along well together, both in 1868 (see Works, XXXVI, 556) and in 1869 (see Letter 109).
My dear φίλη

I find I can certainly come on Saturday—heaven permitting,—or its contrary not hindering—which is the practical way of the world’s transactions—mostly.

Those verses are very beautiful,—(and they have taken a weight of bitterness out of my heart beyond all words—)”—but if—from your own feeling & judgment, you could tell her to think no more of anything that no more—I mean—of herself or of any one whom she cannot help—but instantly to set her mind on ascertaining what direct and material good she can do, by influence or act—round about the Shelburne Hotel—(it is in the centre of as much misery—redeemable at once by only a little human justice & love as ever cried out from the dust to God)—she would recover health—& show mercy—not to them only.

Ever your grateful S' C

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39 On Saturday, December 5, 1868, Ruskin went to Broadlands (Diaries, II, 662); this brief letter very likely refers to that visit.
My dear φιλη

It will be a great pleasure to me to bring my cousin with me. Her simple & constant power of enjoying everything—and her true & deep gratitude for the kindness you have shown her, will I hope give you also some pleasure. We shall come by the afternoon train on Saturday—arriving at Romsey (I believe) at 5.30.

Every gratefully Yours,

JR.
My dear φίλη

We got home so comfortably and both of us happy—Joanna limitlessly; and I, strangely and with return of some feelings of rest which I thought were never to return.—I always felt that William and you were kind to me—but I never felt till this time—sure that you liked me, and that I could sometimes be—kind to you!—It is very wonderful and peacegiving to me to feel this. I do not wish now that I had been wrecked on Boulogne sands—but will live—on my own sand-island—and watch the sun go down and you shall be my “Madonna dell’ Acqua.”

—I have your book—so safe (I never quitted my square casket of treasure all the way)—and will bring it to Curzon St—it will be the first time I shall have been at the door since —Times and Times. And I have put the little geranium leaf —(The Flower knew it was not for me & fell) with some other geranium leaves you know of.

My mother is very grateful to you. She likes so much to hear of you, & of lady Palmerston—it was so very very sweet of lady Palmerston to be so kind to Joanna.

With both our loves to her, & to you & William.

Ever your faithful S’t C.

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40 In view of Letters 92 and 93, the year here ascribed would appear to be the correct one.
My dearest φιλή

Poor little Joan came to me in great sorrow just now, which I hope I have put far from her—first by making her tell it me all—secondly by asking her to think of it as a trial sent absolutely without fault of hers, of yours, or of Rose’s: and therefore—if any trials are for good—to be met as coming from the Grace of god—not at all to be thought of as anything fatal or final—so far as regards any of you three,—and as it regards me—(the chief pain I have being that I must cause all this to all of you)—you are not to think of me but so far as I can help or give you pleasure—so only that you do not—I am sure you never will—think of me as having loved—or loving—less, because I am able to forget love for love’s own sake—no—of all things not that— but to seal the stone of its sepulchre—and look for no light of morning—and yet be at peace—so long as I have some still to love me and to be lived for,—and many whom I can help.

And don’t be vexed for Joan—I will soon make her happy again—and we will come to dine on Monday—and I’ll bring some pretty things and William shall cut them into little pieces—and you and Joan shall heal them again—and then William won’t be so cruel any more.—And for you—& Rose—you have better writing to each other in your hearts than any that anger can make cease—so I will not be sorry for you. And the Time is not Yet.

—And so be happy & know how deeply I am to William & you

Your faithful St C.
Letter 96

Denmark Hill, S.E.
Monday [December 14, 1868]41

My dear φίλη

I have a heavy cold upon me; but will come nevertheless if I can at all stir or speak. I will bring Joan with me, she would be too much tantalized if I did not—and my mother will kindly spare us both for the evening. I shall be greatly interested by hearing of Mr. Oliphant's society in the west.42 If we can get a border land of life, we may hope to fight out to it from our dark centre and capital city of Sorrow.

Ever affectionately Yours

J. Ruskin.

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41 The date ascribed seems correct in view of the reference to a dinner engagement in Letter 95.

42 A reference to the community of Thomas Lake Harris that Oliphant had joined in 1867; see Letter 59, note 48.
Denmark Hill, s.

Thanks—always, but I shall never pass through Curzon Street more—I remember too well the night last year, when I should have waited at your door—with the night beggars—to see her pass, if I had not feared to hurt her.

All that you can do for me is to tell me what you think it all means—and whether she will marry any one else. I know nothing—but that she is mad, and the mother a horror of iniquity—like a Lamia—only with a strange Irish ghastliness of grotesque mistake mixed with the wickedness. Fancy Jael sending polite messages to the mother of Sisera, asking how she got on with her embroidery! Her treatment of my cousin has been worse than of me—as treacherous—& more brutal, more—as being cruelty to a woman—and a child-woman—and not a strong one.—More—otherwise—had been impossible.

I am glad to hear of your being in London again. I hope your sister is better.

Yours faithfully, JR.

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43 The year ascribed is based on an allusion in the letter to Rose's London visit "last year" (in February, 1867). Letters 97 and 98 are placed at the end of 1868 because there is not sufficient evidence to indicate exactly where in the sequence they should go.
Dear Mrs. Cowper,

You must write those verses for me—I should like them so—and I cannot write them, for I cannot feel them—I am night and day in one thirsty fever of passionate longing for the sight of her which no words or thoughts can give peace to—I was nearly coming that night she dined with you, to stand on the pavement to see her pass—and I would—only I thought it would have hurt & startled her—but I can't get over the horror of their doing such a thing to me—and then, my mothers sickbed—which is, in fact a slow—slow—deathbed—is in itself infinitely saddening to my daily life. She has so much power of enjoyment yet—and it is all vain—bound down as she is—and the mind so far weakened that all my intercourse with her is indulgent—not in any true reverent relation as it should be to one's mother and I fail fearfully in my duty to her because of my own distress. Why should I make you sad—Only—no religious words are of use to me. Rosie's thought of me is—but I believe it will all be vain—as it has been—through these weary six years.

But as soon as this evil time is past in the heaven & the four winds of it, I will ask you to come.

Ever gratefully Yours,

J Ruskin

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44 The reference to "these weary six years" and a connection with the theme of Letter 97 account for the year ascribed.