

La Machine à Courage

Extracts

Georgette Leblanc

Leblanc, an accomplished singer and writer, met Gurdjieff in 1924, attended his Institute, and during the 1930s was a member of his 'Rope' group with Margaret Anderson, Jane Heap, Kathryn Hulme and others. Her diaries provide a unique portrait of Gurdjieff and this circle.

“Here I am, at the point that we all reach, and that seems to be the negative point of existence. Women produce no more children and men do no more business. We rest, and imagine we are slipping down the hill (as though we had ever mounted it). We declare—with an incomprehensible tone of satisfaction—that we are getting old, that the task is done, that we are no longer what we were, that it is other people’s turn to live . . . and this life that they talk so much about, extends, roughly, from the ages of twenty to fifty—and that is stretching it a bit, as the period of women’s youth is more elastic now than it used to be in Balzac’s time. It is judged to be over, when I consider that it has hardly begun. Life is held to be an arc, when it can and should be looked upon as an ascending straight line. According to me, life begins at fifty, and afterwards rises all the time. Everything worth while begins at that age. It is the time for “something else.”

I have the feeling that I have lived the whole of my life for this particular present. I must admit that I have not yet finished with art and moonlight, with music and spring, and that I shall never be insensitive to all the delights that are the delicious froth of the earth. But in order to learn to live one must be prepared to abdicate, to make way for changes of plan and level. There is a way of looking at things that is eternal and that accords to happiness the place it deserves.

In 19... Colette wrote to me about my first book *Le Choix de la Vie*: “But I shall never dare to speak to you again! You say: ‘We lose nothing when a sad truth takes the place of a beautiful dream.’ Shall I ever think in so noble a way? No, I am quite sure I should regret. Forgive me—I know that amongst many other things, the ‘need for knowledge’ is lacking in me. To half ignore, to fear, despise, desire passionately and passively, to hate and curse, and even come to blows, this is my lot. I was astonished (forgive me)—really astonished—at the inexhaustible strength one divines in you. I could wish you Queen of something or somewhere, and your subjects would be overjoyed.”

But I am not one of those impatient people who throw themselves, from the very beginning, on something they have only caught a glimpse of; I search, and doubt, and wait, and search again, and wait again. This cycle has repeated itself all my life until 1924. Since then my search has been slowing down—until it finally came to rest in 1934.

It was in New York in 1924 that I met someone and something. I began to think: “There is a truth here.”

Since then I have never left this truth. I have studied it, sometimes looked at it askance, trying almost to betray it, but it triumphed over my schemes, and continued—getting stronger and stronger. And now—fifteen years later—it has become for me the Truth.

To say it in a word, in many words—in countless words—would be to annihilate it. A truth that can be contained in a formula is nothing. I shall only tell what I have felt and understood, what it has done for me by transforming my aspirations into one united force. I will not say what I hope for, but what I have learnt to will. I shall proceed by an elimination of systems, beliefs and methods. I will quote a few pages from my notes and my impressions. I will do it without pride or false modesty. I am not unaware of the danger of speaking about ideas unless it is to deny them. Negation is always well received, and thinkers who only put forward hypotheses are always seemingly respectable. Hypothesis is a kind of life belt for the mind, which, by clinging on, can float a little further before sinking. I am not unaware of all that can be said against the word “search”—it’s stupid, useless, incomplete, mistaken, limited, excessive, feverish, hysterical, pretentious and vain. If searching seems vain, it is less so than living comfortably with one’s eyes shut, living a life one no longer believes in.

At first it seemed to me terrible to be approaching the truth when no longer young. I sank into deep despair. But the very fact of working on a new and unawakened part of myself has restored to me by youth. A fresh start is ahead of me and barring all accidents I shall know how to use it. The future seems to me like the mould of a honey-comb, each cell of which is waiting to be filled.

Someone and Something

And so, in New York in 1924, I met someone and something.

I was asked: “Is he the man Katherine Mansfield knew?” I answered, seemingly yes, but in reality no. She understood him “religiously”—I am tempted to say “ordinarily.” He was misunderstood by her, her husband and her friends. The greater a man is, the less likely one is to see the whole of him. If I succeeded in understanding him a little, it is because I have studied him for a long time.

I am convinced that Katherine Mansfield was seeking a spiritual life. She was not pious, but she needed some prop. She, who was already “pure,” was preoccupied with the idea of a system of purity. She was pure and did not know it. Knowing is everything. That is what was wrong with her seeking, for naturally she found what she was looking for. She was seeking a spiritual life—but a spiritual life without religion. That is nothing much. It is the first stage after that of religion. It is not worth it.

Her greatness was to wish for truth; She did not see that Gurdjieff offered her more—that is to say knowledge. Of course knowledge is spiritual life, but it is not that only. Spiritual life is still ourselves. Knowledge is beyond ourselves. The Truth, of which she had such a splendid need, was still too much tied to life—human life. In life, the true and the false have no great importance as they are both, after all, more or less nonsense. It is beyond, where there is no boundary between physical, mental and emotional life, that everything begins. These lives were meant to function together—that is why they were created. We have divided them by our inability to use them properly. When we feel, we live badly; when we think, we no longer feel; when we live, we neither feel nor think.

I believe that Katherine’s subconscious, aware of her approaching death, impelled her towards an idea that was both consoling and without the religious trappings that would have put her off; but, in fact, what she absorbed from Gurdjieff was a religious force that enabled her to say: “All is well” and gave her resignation. Now, Gurdjieff is not consoling. He is something better. What he brings us is as tough as Jesus is, if one goes back to the source. There is no question of soothing truth. I think the primary condition for approaching Gurdjieff is to be in good health. One must be in a state to withstand the first shocks. Above all there is the unbelievable torture of feeling something beginning to work in one. Suddenly all one’s strength is engaged on a work that is unknown—impossible. The more one sees of it the more one thinks: “I shall never be able to.” But is it really our own strength that is being called on? No—we have never used it, we know nothing about it. It is an energy awakened by a new need and directed towards a new end.

The Priory, Fontainebleau

It was in June 1924 that I settled for the first time at Fontainebleau-Avon in order to get to know Gurdjieff. I had the impression of a giant who had chosen the smallest doorway to the world and had to bend double to pass through. The earth seemed like a coat too tight for him, bursting at the seams. Where was he, himself? A great deal in his writings, a great deal in his words, but not at all in social life—a huge joke that he treated roughly and with impatience.

I was not surprised that he should be little known or recognized. Neither money nor “friends” could open the door of the fortress he had built around him. At the Priory I have seen sweet smiles and outstretched hands brushed aside and Gurdjieff himself turn away, mumbling “Dirty money” between his teeth. He created all sorts of difficulties to discourage at once the lazy-minded.

I have never been able to accept ordinary polite behaviour. I don’t believe in it and I always turned away. But the atmosphere at Gurdjieff’s, on the contrary, held me—a difficult atmosphere, almost despairing. To remain there one had to have an invincible need of “something else.”

The conditions were hard; however, my greatest concern was not having known sooner about this work, which would have taught me how I might have lived. I felt a growing despair, as every moment I became more aware of the soul I had not yet acquired. There are two histories for every individual, his own history and that of his shadow (that is to say, his soul). The visible self comes and goes with a force, a name and a position. The shadow—a reality that only exists through light—awaits its hour, and makes its appearance only at the end. I saw myself as we all are, a repeating machine; I, who had always aspired to some different state ... on to finish with this life, so sweet but so empty—human life that leads to nothing unless it leads to all. I had rested too long in the illusory “me” that perpetually approves of us. It says “yes” to all our stupidities, like a nodding china mandarin—that is its only gesture.

Now I was working at changing my direction and I felt great upheavals. How was it that I could go on clinging to what I did not want and had never wanted? I did not realize the strength of the ties that bound me to nothing—all the ties of my heredity. I thought myself different from my parents because I spent my time differently, but what of that? It was only the bill of fare for the day like the bill of fare for a meal.

I had to reduce every question even farther in order to find the answer—reduce it to a point, the worst, perhaps ... The question is the stone thrown into the water. One sees only the rings on the surface; one responds to the rings, not to the question. One ignores the stone that has fallen to the bottom.

While joining in all the activities at the Priory, the exercises, the readings, the rhythmical movements, I also worked in the garden. I used then to try to distinguish the different phases of my development, and I laughed at myself—this poor human creature that dared to write: “I want to be—to devote my whole life to this end.” It was as monstrous as though I had said: “I am working so as to be able to fly like the birds.” The road leads from tadpole to bird, and I could not even imagine the number of stages on the way. I knew only that each step creates the next one and that nothing in the world—no book, saying or prophecy—could give me any inkling of what the next step would be. It depended entirely on my own makeup, only my own “me” could tell me, this “me” that I was getting to know better every day.

What astonished me was not that I should understand—a little—but to see so many not understanding. Sometimes my conscience shook me so violently that I became hot all over. My pulse beat in my temples, my breathing stopped and I was afraid—afraid of what? Of no longer recognizing myself. Between the non-existent picture of myself that had been my constant companion, and the new picture that I sometimes caught a glimpse of, there stretched a mist. Everything disappeared, and I pursued myself, panting and despairing, with the terrible fear of never finding myself again.

I often felt I was falling into an abyss, and a kind of dizziness came over me. I longed to fly, to escape from this science that asked too much of me. Why did that seem to me both criminal and impossible? Because once one has caught even a glimpse of the truth it never leaves one but will make itself felt at whatever cost. And if one really wants to live this truth one is bound to have given oneself to it, and it is impossible that all the events of one’s life should not always have been conspiring towards it. I felt I was like a chick beating on its shell to get out. All that is beyond, is, for us, quite as different as the outside world is for the chick. I believe that any preparation “before” is equally impossible for everyone, as that would be a negation of the new life that comes “after.”

The Other Life

Many people have surely come across some science similar to the one I am describing, but there is nothing in it that can be of any use in a worldly life. Even intelligence takes second place. Why should anyone who is satisfied go in for it?

I lived for two years on end at the Priory. Later on, in Paris, I met Gurdjieff less often but I continued to live according to his principles and incorporated his teaching more and more deeply. “Why do you want knowledge?” I was asked. A strange question! One does not ask: “Why do you want happiness?” Knowledge for me is synonymous with happiness, a sure happiness.

My friends inundated me with questions and advice. “Never look into yourself—it’s fatal.” Or: “What can one do with life when one has lost all illusion?” I answered: “It is as though a peasant said: they have removed all the weeds from my field—what can I do with it now?”

Another time I used to think: “Our natures must be ploughed, like the land. But where is the plough, and who guides it? Alone we can do nothing. The labourer is as necessary as the seed.”

In Gurdjieff’s work the way was indicated, the plough and the labourer were ready. It was up to me to be ready. Desire, need, preparation, realization—this is where the other life begins, with its special efforts, new laws, and essential evolution which even tends to change one’s chemical constitution. It is hard. I have seen people stop half-way, renounce the work or diverge from it, or even turn against it and embark on a different system that promised for certain a paradise at the end of their lives. Sometimes they went back to some religion, declaring themselves suddenly touched by grace—a grace that usually corresponded to their most material needs and in which they settled down comfortably with every convenience, as though for a long journey. They took a single ticket to paradise, which, more often than not, proved to be a return.

I think the place for religion is in a monastery, where self-centered egoism can be unbounded. In real life, religion limps, in society it poisons—and what a mistake to imagine that suffering is sufficient for growth. If that were the case our planet would be full of saints and angels. Suffering kills some, spoils or maddens others; very few are improved or able to progress through grief. That requires a special technique, the hardest of all, perhaps. I was always a believer by instinct, but I could not accept the God offered me by religion—God as a refuge, when He should be the divine goal of a soul that contains him. He is neither a refuge nor a hope. But everyone is the mirror of the God he conceives, and many are pocket mirrors.

My only hope was in the efficacy of effort.

As the Priory I knew hours of happiness such as I had never known before, but, in reality, I lived from one despair to another. What was my anxiety? It was total. I was living the meaning of the word “distraught.” I had the feeling of being driven out of myself.

Fragments of a Journal 1936-1937

Circumstances allowed me to see Gurdjieff continuously until war was declared. I can only convey the steady relationship with him and with the work—the “development” that no other happiness can ever equal for me—by giving extracts from the journal I used to write from time to time, during long, sleepless nights.

I am a little afraid of the absurd interpretations that could be given of the struggles recounted in this journal—faults to be conquered, crimes to be expiated, childish mortifications, false mysticism—when all I was really attempting was to awaken and enlarge what was already within me, as it is within everyone. I shall not speak of the principles of this science. I have no right to. I shall simply try to describe what happened, which was, for me, the culmination of life.

June 1936—Constant suffering. A painful period. Have at last found a flat in the Rue Casimir-Périer, between the church and the trees.

A wonderful end to the month because of my recent meeting with Gurdjieff. He has been living in Paris for some time and I decided to say to him: “Time is passing and I am making no progress. I haven’t much longer to live. Will you let me read the new parts of your manuscript?” He looked at me for a long time and at last he said: “You still have time to live. Yes, come to lunch tomorrow and you shall read.”

He murmured something that I couldn’t understand. At length I grasped it: “Liver out of order. All organs clogged.” Again he looked at me for a long time, and he then said: “Yes, I will do it for you.”

I wanted to cry out my thanks, but I knew that I should keep calm, that he would understand me. With difficulty I got out: “Thank you.”

I lunched with him and his family and a few pupils. After lunch he fetched this manuscript and showed me a cupboard in a small room next to the dining room. He would leave it there for me, and I could come and read whenever I liked.

So I go there nearly every day. I read with concentration, as though my life depends on the difficult thought to be gleaned from those pages.

June 28th and 29th —A bad liver attack. (This was to be the last).

Thursday, July 16th —I tell him I have changed. I haven’t had any pain for the last fortnight. This has never happened before in the last twenty years. He was glad and not surprised. He said that he had wished this, that he had an object. He repeated for the second time: “You are young.” I understood later that he thought it a question of glands. He explained that there was hope for me, but that the work would take five years. One achieves nothing if body and soul are not keeping pace. It is faith that purges the flesh. In Tibet, priests are doctors, and vice versa.

He tells his pupils that my case interests him. “She was a candidate for death. Now she is a candidate for life.” At lunch he looked at me mischievously: “I only said, read the book, madame, read the book.”

July 22nd—Physical and moral delight when every night I can stretch out on my bed. Amazement of the body, when the expected suffering doesn’t come. I often feel a

strong, internal heat, as though I were pleasantly near a fire. I sleep peacefully. I believe a deep and beneficial upheaval has taken place. My mind is overflowing with astonished gratitude. I understand what is happening, but living through it is amazing.

July 27th—Yesterday I dragged myself to his flat, exhausted. I read the book for two hours, and when I left I felt light and strong. I walked for miles without tiring. Physically, I am experiencing spring, in this cold month of July. I feel charged, like a dynamo.

July 30th—Gurdjieff came in while I was reading. I was finishing a chapter on the religions. I told him of my exaltation, with as few words and gestures as possible. He doesn't like too much enthusiasm. He was obviously pleased. He thinks my health is improving all the time. He added: "This is nothing as yet. Soon something else will begin."

August 1936—No more pain. I can't feel my organs. My body knows it is living through a miracle. Morally, I am not yet accustomed to marvel. I am assisting at something immense that is taking place inside me. The brain is not our sole control; some of our organs register what is happening in us more accurately than the brain. At the moment, I have the impression of a perpetually turning wheel within me, embracing my whole body from head to foot, inside and outside. The wheel is moved by the relief from suffering of my organs, and by my conscious will to receive what I am being "sent." It is also the wonder of experiencing something that is not hereditary. I could not have conceived it, but having always been searching unconsciously for it, I was ready. Otherwise there could have been no result.

August 1936—If I succeed a little in grasping this Master as a whole, it is because I have been seeking and studying him for thirteen years. The humility of Jesus was in tune with his bare feet, the desert and the epoch. Gurdjieff's humility looks like a grimace, or a joke. Really, he seems to me almost a messiah—a messiah with no followers, no setting. He "is," but the blindness of the civilized world turns him into a negative prophet. He has, however, a few disciples, enough to ensure that he will be "understood" in one hundred or two hundred years. Humanity is powerless without pregnancy, and becomes aware of its condition through growth. It takes centuries for it to give birth to a messiah.

September 27th, 1936—For several months it has been clear that man's unconscious is producing what he calls destiny, that is, war, while at the same time he declares, in all sincerity, that what he wants is peace.

September 30th, 1936—I go every day to read his manuscript. I consider it the decisive event of my life.

The time of destruction—war—is near. However, we go on arranging our flat, which is getting prettier all the time because of the arches I have made everywhere. We shall lose it. There will be war, external or internal, or both.

I am anguished by the strength that has been “restored” to me. For three years I had accustomed myself to the idea of death. Now I’m full of desires, enthusiasm, plans.

October 28th, 1936—“He” still does me good, but, being now no longer torn by constant pain, a release of tension is taking place in me. And then winter is coming. My body is adjusted to the changes of the earth, beneath the pale colours of the cold. The trees stretch their branches towards the sky with mechanical gestures. One’s body has bad habits; having suffered too long, it wants to suffer still. It is more on edge, more sensitive. And I feel I’m slipping. I have moments of discouragement. I try not to admit it, but it’s true.

October 31st, 1936—I explained to him my condition, my distress. He knew ... the usual reaction. From the beginning he had said to me: —“I can stop the pains and so prepare the way for something else.”

I know that there is some special work to ensure that my psychic life shall keep pace with my physical cure, but shall I have the strength to undertake it?

He went back to his studio, and I began my reading. A minute later I felt enveloped in vibrations. I remained there, reading and resting, from two o’clock until six. The next day I felt renewed.

Monday, November 2nd, 1936—A great day. When I arrived at his flat he opened the door himself. I said at once: “I am in a new body.” The light from the sitting room fell full upon him. Instead of withdrawing, he lent back against the wall. Then, for the first time, he allowed me to see what he really is—as though he had suddenly dropped the mask that he is obliged to wear. His face was stamped with a goodness that embraced the whole world. Transfixed before him, I took him in with all my strength, and experienced so deep and painful a sense of gratitude that he felt the need to soothe me. With an unforgettable look he said: —“God helps me.”

November 15th, 1936—The efforts required are infinite and almost hopeless; but to believe at last that a truth exists, is there, and that one can go towards it, is enough. I understand, now, that happiness was nothing, that the delights of love and art were nothing but pleasurable soul-deceivers evoked by a desire for self-manifestation. I am aware that my subconscious has lived in spite of me, like a deeply buried treasure. It was necessary to have lived first for a long, long time, according to the usual laws.

November 20th, 1936—One of Gurdjieff's greatest virtues is having been able to make accessible to human understanding, truths almost impossible for the human brain to grasp.

End of November, 1936—After dinner he played. A unique sight—Gurdjieff playing on his little organ. One can see the music “pass” through him. He plays it, but it not the player. He is the direct means of expression of an “impersonal thought”—the perfect vehicle of an idea. One is watching a man—a circle—live. One hears a language that borrows its very essence from art, in order to adjust itself exactly to the form to be communicated. And what an extraordinary look!—the richness of his smile—the richness of kindness, the richness of truth.

December 25th, 1936—Extraordinary gathering at Gurdjieff's. In another age, a patriarch distributing bounty. The little flat was full—of relations, friends, the Concierge and his family, and old retainers. The Christmas tree was so tall that it was squashed against the ceiling and its stars fell off.

The distribution began with real ceremony. About fifty numbered cardboard boxes stood in a corner of the room. He stood at a table, with his glasses on and a list in his hand, calling out names that corresponded to a number. The person called came up, and into each box that was put in front of him, Gurdjieff added one or more hundred—or thousand—franc notes. Then he handed over the box with a small gesture that meant “No thanks,” and muttering: —“Off with you” he passed on to the next one. The ceremony went on from 9 o'clock until ten. A Russian publisher received a dressing gown, a doctor received woolen underwear and a thousand-franc note. As Gurdjieff dropped the note into the box S. said: —“He's lucky, that one.” Gurdjieff replied in a flash: —“Not you?”

At ten o'clock we dined. On each plate there was a huge chunk of mutton, with pickled gherkins and pimientos, and a Russian roll—all things I can't bear; but there were splendid desserts spread out. Cake, fruit and sweets of all kinds. At half-past eleven we left, and others took our places. The Russian maid told me: —“After one o'clock until daylight the poor will come ... and the place will stink.”

We know that after this feast there will be, for him, a more or less lengthy fast. Thus he will compensate for his material bounty and fulfil his duty.

December 28th, 1936—A resurrection is beginning in me—the all-powerfulness of the spirit. A passionately interesting and fundamental question for me—the successive deaths and perpetual re-births. Illness devours life: resurrection—the sum of what was, is and is to come—goes beyond.

My intelligence—no, I don't believe in it, but I have an element of lucidity that, through all the disasters of life, has never failed me. Before my present experience, I saw the

time approaching when this element would be all that remained to me, like a flag on an empty house.

My notes from January to December, 1937 describe only the long months of effort, of discouragement and exaltation, of fall and ascents well known to all who follow the difficult path of Consciousness.

But what does that mean? —“the path of consciousness?” One has heard this phrase all one’s life without attaching any precise meaning to it.

It is the same with everything that touches on the secret history of humanity, of which Gurdjieff and a few others believe themselves to be the trustees. But on what basis, precisely, does this science of the soul rest? Philosophers are satisfied in saying that: “this interpretation of the Universe, this anthropocosmogeny is the highest, the greatest, the most admirable, the most invulnerable that has ever been conceived; it overflows man’s thought and imagination in all directions.” (Maeterlinck.) “But,” they add, “what influence will a revelation such as this have on our life? What will it transmit to us, what will it add to our morals, to our happiness? No doubt very little. It will pass over our heads. It will not descend to our level. It will not touch us, we shall lose ourselves in its immensity and, in the end, knowing everything we shall be neither happier nor wiser than when we knew nothing.” At the same time they admit that our moral evolution lags several centuries behind our scientific evolution—and that it is solely on the former that man’s happiness and future depend. They maintain that all one seeks can be found between four walls, in books. What could one gain from such an armchair search? Anyone can read Hermes, Pythagoras or Buddha and remain blind to these secret codes, without undergoing any change in himself. These are special teachings that do not reveal their content. Man has something more to do than to read, admire and speculate. The study of “Know Thyself” demands special work and a dedicated life. To those who think that by work they will obtain results beyond their comprehension, one is tempted to say: —“First begin to work.”

All work imposes the same laws. The road that looks vertical flattens out as one mounts it. This hesitation to dedicate one’s life is due mainly, I think, to fear. Every initiation involves a time of panic. The first gulf is between “knowing and incorporating.”

I will include from my journal some extracts from this painful period of incorporating. Resurrection and Fall followed each other for a long time. Then there was a long, slow period of stabilizing without which there could have been no construction. It was like flood water finding its level, and bringing its fruitful desolation. Neither despair, nor hope. I lived in a tunnel.

October 10th, 1937—I know that I am approaching serious moments, morally and psychically. I know about the equilibrium that has to be maintained during these trials. I understand about the balance that is required between the three centres, and that a whole lifetime is too short to attain it. A few lines from Goethe constantly haunt me: — “There is no path. Nothing but the untraced in that which nothing can tread ... You will see nothing firm to catch hold of in the eternally empty distance.”

I know and I detest my anguish. Great as it is, I count it little.

But I am afraid. Afraid of what? I have a hundred fears that haven't all a name. It is my parents, my ancestors, who are afraid in me. Then why do I listen to them? I had less fear of death. Was that, then, more natural? Yes, surely.

Others before me have done what I want to do; but that doesn't help, because, for the first time, everyone is himself, each experience is new, as it adjusts itself to an immutable truth. I envy the impatient ones who plunge in with no hesitation. I am not, however, afraid of being mistaken. My confidence has been strong enough to enable me to withdraw from the outer world. I have already refused the easy way of life many times, but now, faced by what is still to do, I see that that was little enough—perhaps, even, it was laziness, the boredom of beginning over again. Has anything changed? It is impossible to know.

No sacrifice is demanded, but time cannot be stretched. One has to choose. A small life for a great truth. It is little enough. One must pay. The price rises with the quality of the experience. I am ashamed of my hesitation. It seems that I am haggling with myself while this self is still mine. You will go on, into the darkness, without knowing anything. You will see no progress. That which seems is abolished for the sake of that which is. The hardest moment is yet to come. You will only know it by living through it, by feeling yourself lost beyond help. The Master will look on at your painful stumbling and say nothing. He has said: —“I cannot develop you. I can only create the conditions in which you can develop yourself.”

October 12, 1937—The important moment has come. I cannot ignore it. I even think it would be idiotic not to notice it. But my decision is still the same: I would rather risk “all” than watch myself slipping, slowing-down, diminishing psychically, understanding less, taking in less ... No, not at any price. Let it be enough to suffer, to struggle, to look death in the face from nearer all the time. *No*, I will go on risking.

They could say: —“You are losing your reason.” What reason would they mean?

October 13th, 1937—I had a dream. I had been walking for years in search of a planet. At last I arrived on it, through space. I thought at first that the towns, the people and the things on it were the same as our own. I soon found that there was little in common. The people loved one another and didn't speak. The animals spoke.

I had a long conversation with a white horse as big as a Cathedral. He explained to me his two-dimensional view, and his dreads. He realized that I was burning hot, so he let his mane fall like rain round by body, to relieve me. It was he who told me about the celebration of a feast that is unknown to us. Three of the seasons had beaten the fourth. I was seeing the triumphal return of the troops—the regiments of all the summers of the world were advancing, their banner streaming, flanked by high spring-times and barely turned autumns. They had killed the winters.

They bore neither good nor ill with them. Their songs were bells, their laugh was the laughter of the sea in sunlight. To amuse themselves on the way, they had chastened plagues and banished pain and calumny—those scourges of humanity. My companion said: —“With winter they have killed the inevitable. Death will be only a result, the consequence of not having understood.”

Suddenly, one of the men fell from a great height on to the ground at my feet. He split in two. He was empty.

October 18th, 1937—Tomorrow we will ask him, Margaret and I, if the time has not come to attempt the personal experiences.

When I “really” begin the trials nothing will have altered outwardly. I shall have my same name that I don’t like, I shall wear the same clothes. No sign will be made, nor promise. I shall go, tomorrow, and simply say:—“I will do.” It will not be “I want to” or “I shall.” It will just be those three words. But for me, for me alone, for myself, it will be the biggest event of my life. When I say that, I shall see before me, in spirit, a succession of mysteries without end, that I shall pass through, come what may.

For those who haven’t been wishing and seeking all their lives it is almost easy. But for me it is the perilous end of what I have always been seeking, and seeking without hope. I thought, like everyone else, that my end would be my death. But this end is in order to gain life.

I cannot write the words: —“I will do” without trembling.

October 19th, 1937—Five o’clock in the morning, in my room in the Rue Casimir-Péier. The sky is a deep blue behind the still spring-like trees. It is cheerful and calm. My God! Why have I known that one can live on another plane than the easy, human plane, which seems to me more and more like a bed of roses. I loved that life. I had at last reached a life turned entirely towards the spirit, and softened by a perfect tenderness, with never a shadow of misunderstanding. How far will it be modified by a new sacrifice? I don’t know. At eleven o’clock Margaret and I will ask the Master to “begin.”

October 19th, Evening—He consented, and gave us an appointment for one o'clock tomorrow at his flat.

October 20th, 1937—As soon as we arrived, he explained again all that we already knew: the need to be certain; to realise that the work would become more and more difficult; that it was not too late to say NO. He didn't mention the rewards. The first one for me is this, that he wants us to help each other.

October 21st, 1937—A heavenly day in the Luxembourg Gardens, with dead leaves swirling about. I have begun the new work, explained by Gurdjieff in such a clear and complete way that I understood without exactly knowing the words. For me it is a long-awaited revelation, this fact, this real, tangible happening, that has infinite repercussions in my being.

Long ago, perhaps forty years ago, I wrote to Maeterlinck: "I don't know if you are aware of it, but I am like a soap bubble that floats in the air and is not attached to anything real; even in my depths I feel that I am nothing. Only one worry exists, perhaps, in this void, that is, my dissatisfaction at being the way I am. It is as though; in order to change, I had to accomplish something I ignore. This comes from far away in me, like a lost thought, a commandment I can give no form, and I search and search ..."

Today, a lifetime later, when I know what I have to do, I see these words again: "As though, in order to change, I had to accomplish something I ignore."

Eleven o'clock at night—To sum up, this 21st of October I have lived real moments.

End of December, 1937—I live too hard. I am tired. If I saw death coming now, I should not accept it as easily as I accepted it in the hospital beds where I have spent so many years. That is because now my time is heavy with a real substance, that I had no conception of before.

I said to Gurdjieff: "I am almost afraid, life is rising in me like the sea." He repeated: "This is only a very small beginning."

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