

Katherine Mansfield at the Prieuré

excerpts from

Katherine Mansfield's Letters

to

John Middleton Murry

1913 — 1922

Edited by

John Middleton Murry

Katherine's original plan had been to return to Paris on August 20 to continue the Manoukhin treatment; but shortly before she decided suddenly to go to London. Ostensibly, the purpose was to consult Dr. Sorapure about the condition of her heart, which had been troubling her. In fact, Katherine's heart was relatively sound, though she always believed it was her weak spot. But she must have been visited at this moment by a strong premonition of approaching death, for on August 14 she made her will. She arrived in London on August 17. I went with her.

I say that 'ostensibly' the purpose of her visit was to get Dr. Sorapure's opinion about her heart, because I believe her real purpose, though it was probably not admitted to consciousness, was to get into touch with A. R. Orage who had been instrumental in sending 'Cosmic Anatomy' to us in Switzerland. At any rate, I was surprised by the swiftness with which she joined the circle formed about P. D. Ouspensky, to which Orage and J. D. Beresford belonged. Katherine was staying in Dorothy Brett's house at 6 Pond Street, Hampstead, while I had a room in Boris Anrep's house next door.

We sometimes talked of the matter which most deeply concerned us, but now our love spoke across a vast; and my memory of those days is one of despair and anguish. It was evident to me as it was to Katherine that rebirth was the only remedy. But how to be born again? It was impossible for me to follow her into the Ouspensky circle; or at least it seemed impossible without violating my own integrity. Thus I had no part in what had now come to be Katherine's absorbing interest. I had to acknowledge that I was now utterly useless to her—even worse, a positive hindrance to her effort towards liberation.

Dr. Soropure's verdict on her heart was reassuring, and he also found the disease of her lungs quiescent. Katherine arranged to have the Manoukhin treatment continued by a London radiologist. But by this time that had become a secondary matter. When finally, having declared the London radiologist unsatisfactory, she left London for Paris on October 2, for the avowed purpose of resuming the treatment under Dr. Manoukhin himself, I was pretty certain that her real purpose was to try to enter the Gurdjieff Institute. Probably the reason why she did not openly acknowledge it to me was that she was fully aware of my opposition to such a step.

Meanwhile I had arranged to live at Vivian Locke Ellis's house at Selsfield. On September 1 Katherine and I went there together for a weekend. When she returned to London I stayed on, but visited her at the weekends.

John Middleton Murry 1929

Wednesday, (September 20, 1922)

My dear Bogey,

There seems to me little doubt that the wave of mysticism prophesied by Dunning is upon us. Don't read these words other than calmly! But after yesterday to read that little leader in *The Times* this morning was quite a shock. We had a most interesting after-lunch talk at Beresford's. Orage gave a short exposition of his ideas and we asked him questions and made objections. It seemed strange to be talking of those dark matters (with passionate interest) in a big sunny room with trees waving and London 1922 outside the windows. Ask Sullivan about it when you see him in the country. He liked Orage and he found a very great similarity between his ideas and Dunning's. In fact, the more we talked, the more apparent the resemblance. This pleased me for I felt that you would accept what Dunning believed and like that you and I would find ourselves interested equally in these things.

I came back and found Richard here. He had tea and we had a most *terrific* talk. Nice is not the word for your little brother. Richard does believe it is possible to

'imagine' an artist a much more complete being than he has been up till now—not that exactly—but more *conscious of his purpose*. But if I try to reproduce his youthful conversation I shall antagonise you. For I can't put in all the asides and all the implications. Sullivan came back for supper and he and I talked of all these ideas afterwards. It was, as he said, a 'simply stunning evening'. I do hope you see Sullivan for a longish time and that you see Dunning, too. Is this interference? It's hard not to interfere to the extent of wishing you found life as wonderful as it seems to me. Even the least idea—the fringe of the idea—of 'waking up' discovers a new world. And the mystery is that 'all' of us, in our unlikeness and individual ways, do seem to me to be moving towards the very same goal. Dear, dear Bogey, I hope I don't sound like Mrs. Jellaby.

Accept my love

Yours

Wig

Wednesday, October 4, 1922

Dearest Bogey,

I don't *feel* influenced by Ouspensky or Dunning. I merely feel I've heard ideas like my ideas, but bigger ones, far more definite ones. And that there really is Hope—real Hope, not half-Hope. . . .

Goodby, dearest.

Wig

Wednesday, October 11, 1922

Dearest Bogey,

I have a letter and a card of yours to answer. . . .

It has got very cold here. I feel it. I am adjusting myself to it and it makes me feel rather dull—*distract*, you know. I have had to leave my dear little *grenier au 6ème* for something less lofty, more expensive, but warmer. However, it's a very nice room . . . All the same, you say 'Tell me about yourself.' I'll have to try. Here goes.

A new way of being is not an easy thing to *live*. Thinking about it, preparing to meet the difficulties and so on, is one thing, meeting those difficulties another. I have to die to so much; I have to make such *big* changes. I feel the only thing to do is to get the dying over—to court it, almost. (Fearfully hard, that.) And then all hands to the business of being reborn again. What do I mean exactly? Let me give you an instance. Looking back, my boat is almost swamped sometimes by seas of sentiment. 'Ah, what have I missed! How sweet it was, how dear, how warm, how simple, how precious!' And I think of the garden at the Isola Bella and the furry bees and the house-wall so

warm. But then I remember what we really felt there—the blanks, the silences, the anguish of continual misunderstanding. Were we positive, eager, real, alive? No, we were not. We were a nothingness shot with gleams of what might be. But no more. Well, I have to face everything as far as I can and see where I stand—what *remains*.

For with all my soul I do long for a real life, for truth, and for real strength. It's simply incredible, watching K. M., to see how little causes a panic. She's a perfect corker at toppling over.

Ever your
Wig

Friday, October 13, 1922

My dearest Bogey dear,

Don't mind if I don't talk about health, will you? . . . It's a *useless* subject. . . .

It's a divinely beautiful day—so was yesterday. . . I shall go to the Luxemboug Gardens this afternoon . . . Oh, how I love flowers! I think of them with such longing. I go through them—one after another—remembering them from their very first moments with love—oh, with rapture, as if they were babies! No, it's what other women feel for babies, perhaps. Oh Earth! Lovely, unforgettable Earth! Yesterday I saw the leaves falling, so gently, so softly, raining down from little slender trees golden against the blue. Perhaps Autumn is loveliest. Lo! it is Autumn. What is the magic of that? It is magic to me.

At that very minute in came your letter with the rose, and the aspen tree, the two little birds, the ring from the anvil, and the far away rooster. You never gave me such a perfect birthday present before. A divine one. I love you for it. . . .

I am going to Fontainebleau next week to see Gurdjieff. I will tell you about it. Why am I going? From all I hear he is the only man who understands there is no division between body and spirit, who believes how they are related. You remember how I have always said doctors only treat *half*. And you have replied: 'It's up to you to do the rest.' It is. That's true. But first I must learn how. I believe Gurdjieff can teach me. What other people say doesn't matter—other people matter not at all.

But you matter to me—more and more. I'd like to say I believe as never before in the possibility of real living relationship between us—a true one.

Ever,
Wig

Again, my love, I thank you for the rose.

Saturday, October 14, 1922

My darling Bogey,

Your sweet telegram and letter are here. Thank you, my angel. . . .

About doing operations on yourself. I know just what you mean. It is as though one were the sport of circumstance—one *is*, indeed. Now happy, now unhappy, now fearful, now confident—just as the pendulum swings. You see that one can control nothing if one isn't conscious of a purpose—it's like a journey without a goal. There is nothing that makes you ignore some things, accept others, order others, submit to others. For there is no reason why A. should be more important than B. So there one is—involved beyond words—feeling the next minute I may be bowled over or struck all of a heap. I *know* nothing.

This is to me a very terrible state of affairs. Because it's the cause of all the unhappiness (the secret profound unhappiness) in my life. But I mean to escape and to try to live differently. It isn't easy. But is the other state easy? And I do believe with all my being that if one *can* break through the circle one finds 'my burden is light'.

I have met two awfully nice men here. One is Mr. Pinder—did I tell you about him? The other is a [Doctor Young](#). He came up from Fontainebleau today to meet Orage who arrives tonight. And on his way to the station he spent a couple of hours with me, talking about Gurdjieff and the Institute. If I were to write it all to you, it sounds fabulous and other-worldly. I shall wait until I've *seen* it. I still hope to go on Monday and I'll take a toothbrush and *peigne* and come back on Wednesday morning, only.

My *darling* Bogey,

I am your

Wig

Sunday, October 15, 1922

I have opened my letter, darling, to add something. It's this. Darling Bogey, in your spare time, however little that is, get nearer the growing earth than that wheelbarrow and spade. *Grow things*. Plant. Dig up. Garden. I feel with all the force of my being that 'happiness' is in these things. If it's only cabbages, let it be cabbages rather than chess. Sweep leaves. Make fires. Do anything to work with your hands in contact with the earth.

You see chess only feeds your already over-developed intellectual centre. And that regular spade-and-barrow becomes a habit too soon, and is likely only to feed your moving centre—to exercise your machine. Does that sound awful rot to you?

Why don't you get some animals? I'm not joking. Two hours a day would be enough for them. Birds—rabbits—a goat—anything, and live through it or them! I

know you will say you haven't the time. But you will find your work is 100 times easier if you come to it refreshed, renewed, rich, happy. Does this sound like preaching? Don't let it. I am trying to tell you what I feel deep down is your way of escape. It is to really throw yourself into life—not desperately, but with the love you even don't feel yet. People won't do. We know too well that unless one has a background of reality in oneself, people can't endure in us. When we have a table spread we can afford to open our door to guests, but not before. But enough of this. I am afraid of boring you.

Oh, if you knew how I believe in Life being the only cure for Life.

Ever your own Wig

Monday, October 16, 1922

Dearest Bogey,

Thank you, darling, for the *Times* article. It is extraordinarily interesting. I read it twice. The writing, apart from everything else, is so good, too—clear and not too persuasive. Do you know what I mean? I don't want any more books at present of any kind. I am sick and tired of books, and that's a dreadful fact. They are to me like sandwiches out of the Hatter's bag. I'll get back to them of course.

A queer thing. I have cramp in my thumb and can hardly hold the pen. That accounts for this writing. Ida and I are off to Fontainebleau this morning. I am taking my toothbrush and comb. Young phoned me yesterday that there is a lovely room all ready. I'll see Gurdjieff and come back tomorrow. It's not sunny today. There is a terrible difference *sun* makes! It ought not to. One ought to have a little core of inner warmth that keeps burning and is only added to by sun. One has, I believe, if one looks for it.

Ever, my darling Bogey,

Your

Wig

Le Prieuré

Fontainebleau-Avon

(Seine-et-Marne)

October 18, 1922

My dear darling Bogey,

A have been through a little revolution since my last letter. I suddenly made up my mind (for it was sudden, at the last) to try and learn to live by what I believed in, no less, and not as in all my life up till now to live one way and think another. . . . I don't mean superficially, of course, but in the deepest sense I've always been disunited. And

this, which has been my 'secret sorrow' for years, has become everything to me just now. I really can't go on pretending to be one person and being another any more, Boge. It is a living death. So I have decided to make a clean sweep of all that was 'superficial' in my past life and start again to see if I can get into that real living simple truthful *full* life I dream of. I have been through a horrible deadly time coming to this. You know the kind of time. It doesn't show much, outwardly, but one is simply chaos within!

So my first Leap into the Dark was when I came here and decided to ask Mr. Gurdjieff if he would let me stay for a time. 'Here' is a very beautiful old château in glorious grounds. It was a Carmelite monastery, then one of Madame de Maintenon's 'seats'. Now it is modernised inside—I mean, *chauffage centrale*, electric light and so on. But it's a most wonderful old place in an amazingly beautiful park. About 40 people—chiefly Russians—are here working, at every possible kind of thing. I mean outdoor work, looking after animals, gardening, indoor work, music, dancing—it seems a bit of everything. Here the philosophy of the 'system' takes second place. Practice is first. You simply *have* to wake up instead of talking about it, in fact. You *have* to learn to do all the things you say you want to do.

I don't know whether Mr. Gurdjieff will let me stay. I am 'under observation' for a fortnight first. But if he does, I'll stay here for the time I should have been abroad and get really cured—not half cured, not cured in my body only and all the rest still as ill as ever. I have a most lovely sumptuous room—a kind of glorified Garsington—for the fortnight. As for the food, it is like a Gogol feast. Cream, butter—but what nonsense to talk about the food! Still, it's very important, and I want you to know that one is terribly well looked after, in every way. There are three doctors here—real ones. But these, too, seem details. The chief thing is that this is my Selsfield for the time, the house of *my dreams*. If Mr. Gurdjieff won't let me stay, I shall go to the South, take a little villa and try and learn to live on my own, growing things and looking after rabbits and so on, getting into touch with *Life* again.

No treatment on earth is any good to me, really. It's all pretence. Manoukhine did make me heavier and stronger. But that was all if I really face the facts. The miracle never came near happening. It couldn't, Boge. And as for my spirit—well as a result of that life at the Victoria Palace I stopped being a writer. I have only written long or short scraps since *The Fly*. If I had gone on with my old life I never would have written again, for I was dying of poverty of life.

I wish, when one writes about things, one didn't dramatise them so. I feel awfully happy about this, and it's all as simple as can be. It's just the same for us, darling, as though I had stayed on in Paris, *except* that I hope I shall be well when you see me again, instead of knowing it would be a variation on the old theme.

Will you send me letters here for a fortnight? Ida will be at the Select Hotel for that time, so, if you prefer to send them there, she'll post them on. At the end of that

time, I'll either stay on here or, as I say, go off to some warm place where I can turn into a worker. But I hope it will be here.

Mr. Gurdjieff is not in the least like I expected. He's what one wants to find him, really. But I do feel *absolutely confident* he can put me on the right track in every way, bodily and t' other governor.

I haven't talked money to Mr. Gurdjieff yet. But in any case I shan't write any stories for 3 months, and will I'll have a book ready before the Spring. It doesn't matter.

When we have discussed finances I'll tell you. The fact is I've hardly talked with him at all. He's terribly busy just now and he only speaks a few words of English—all is through an interpreter. I can't say how 'good' some of the people seem to me here—it's just like another life.

I start Russian today, and my first jobs: which are, eat, walk in the garden, pick the flowers and rest *much*. That's a nice calm beginning, isn't it? But it's the eat much which is the job when it's Gurdjieff who serves the dish.

I must stop this letter, dearest. . . .

Goodbye for now, darling heart

Ever your own

Wig

October 20, 1922

My darling Bogey,

I'll tell you what this life is more like than anything; it is like *Gulliver's Travels*. One has, all the time, the feeling of having been in a wreck and by the mercy of Providence got ashore . . . somewhere. Simply everything is different. Not only language, but food, ways, people, music, methods, hours—*all*. It's a real new life.

At present this is my day. I get up at 7.30—light the fire, with kindling drying overnight, wash in ice-cold water (I'd quite forgotten how good water is to wash in and to drink) and go down to breakfast—which is coffee, butter, bread, gorgonzola cheese and quince jam and eggs. After breakfast, make my bed, do my room, rest, and then go into the garden till dinner, which is 11 a. m. Which is a very large meal with things like—beans mixed with raw onions, vermicelli with icing sugar and butter, veal wrapped in lettuce leaves and cooked in cream. After dinner, in the garden again till 3 o'clock, tea-time. After tea, any light job is going until dark—when all knock off work, wash, dress and make ready for dinner again at 7. After dinner most of the people gather in the salon round an enormous fire, and there is music—tambourine, drums and piano—dancing and perhaps a display of all kinds of queer dance exercises. At ten we go to bed. Doctor Young, a real friend of mine, comes up and makes me up a good fire. In 'return' I am patching the knee of his trousers today.

But it's all 'stranger' than that. For instance, I was looking for wood the other evening. All the boxes were empty. I found a door at the end of the passage, went through and down some stone steps. Presently steps came up and a woman appeared, very simply dressed, with her head bound in a white handkerchief. [This was the Olga Ivanovna or '[Olgivanna](#)' mentioned below.] She had her arms full of logs. I spoke in French, but she didn't understand. English—no good. But her glance was so lovely—laughing and gentle, absolutely unlike people as I have known people. Then I patted a log and she gave it to me and we went our ways. . . .

At present the entire Institute is devoted to manual work, getting this place in order, out and inside. It's not, of course, work for the sake of work. Every single thing one does has a purpose, its part of a system. Some of the English, 'arty' and theosophical people are very trying, too. But one can learn to use them, I am sure—though I'm not much good at it yet. On the other hand, some of the advanced men and women are truly wonderful. I'm still on my fortnight's probation, simply spending a fortnight here. Mr. Gurdjieff hardly speaks a word to me. He must know me pretty well.

But even if he won't let me stay here, I'm finished for the time being with *old circumstances*. They have just not killed me, and that's all there is to be said for them. All the people I have known don't really matter to me. Only you matter—more and more, if that is possible, for now that I am not so 'identified' with you I can see the real tie which holds us. . . .

Do send *Lit. Sups*. They are so good for lighting fires. I wish you were here. It's such happiness.

Ever, my darling,

Your

Wig Voyageuse

Tuesday, October 24, 1922

My darling Bogey,

I was so glad to get your second letter today. Don't feel we are silently and swiftly moving away from each other! Do you *really*? And what do you mean by us meeting 'on the other side'? Where—Boge? You are much more mysterious than I!

I have managed this badly for this reason. I never let you know how much I have suffered in these five years. But that wasn't my fault. I could not. You would not receive it either. And all I am doing now is trying to put into practice the 'ideas'. I have [heard] for so long of another, and a *far more truthful* existence. I want to learn something that no books can teach me, and I want to try and escape from my terrible illness. That again you can't be expected to understand. You think I am like other

people—I mean: *normal*. I'm not. I don't know which is the ill me and which is the well me. I am simply one pretence after another. Only now I recognise it.

I believe Mr. Gurdjieff is the only person who can help me. It is great happiness to be here. Some people are stranger than ever, but the strangers I am at last feeling near, and they are my own people at last. So I feel. Such beautiful understanding and sympathy I have never known in the outside world.

As for writing stories and being true to one's gift,—I wouldn't write them if I were not here, even. I am at an end of my source for the time. Life has brought me no FLOW. I want to write—but differently—far more steadily. I am writing this on a corner of the table against orders, for the sun shines and I am supposed to be in the garden. I'll write again, my darling precious.

Ever your own

Wig

October 27, 1922

Darling Bogey,

What are you going to do to the fruit trees? Please tell me. We have masses of quinces here. They are no joke when they fall *exprès* on your head.

I do hope you are having this glorious weather. Day after day of perfect sunshine. It's like Switzerland. An *intense* blue sky, a chill in the air, a wonderful clarity so that you see people far away, all sharp-cut and vivid.

I spend all the sunny time in the garden. Visit the carpenters, the trench diggers. (We are digging for a Turkish Bath—not to discover one, but to lay the pipes.) The soil is very nice here, like sand, with small whitey pinky pebbles in it. Then there are the sheep to inspect and the new pigs that have long golden hair—very mystical pigs. A mass of cosmic rabbits and hens—and goats are on the way, likewise horses and mules to ride and drive. The Institute is not really started yet for another fortnight. A dancing hall is being built and the house is still being organised. But it has started really. If all this were to end in smoke tomorrow I should have had the very great wonderful adventure of my life. I've learnt more in a week than in years *là-bas*. As to habits. My wretched sense of order, for instance, which rode me like a witch. It did not take long to cure that. Mr. Gurdjieff likes me to go into the kitchen in the late afternoon and 'watch'. I have a chair in a corner. It's a large kitchen with 6 helpers. Madame Ostrovsky, the head, walks about like a queen exactly. She is extremely beautiful. She wears an old raincoat. Nina, a big girl in a black apron—lovely too—pounds things in mortars. The second cook chops at the table, bangs the saucepans, sings; another runs in and out with plates and pots, a man in the scullery cleans pots—the dog barks and lies on the floor, worrying a hearth-brush. A little girl comes in with a bouquet of leaves for Olga Ivanovna. Mr. Gurdjieff strides in, takes up a handful of shredded

cabbage and eats it . . . there are at least 20 pots on the stove. And it's so full of life and humour and ease that one wouldn't be anywhere else. It's just the same all through—*ease* after *rigidity* expresses it more than anything I know. And yet I realise that as I write this, it's no use. An old personality is trying to get back to the outside and observe, and it's not true to the present facts at all. What I write sounds so petty. In fact, I cannot express myself in writing just now. The old mechanism isn't mine any longer and I can't control the new. I just have to talk this baby talk.

I would like you to see the dancing here. There again you see it's not to be described. One person sees one thing; one another. I have never really cared for dancing before, but *this*—seems to be the key to the new world within me. To think that later I shall do it is great happiness. There may be a demonstration in Paris in a month or two. If so, I wish you could see it. But would it just look like dancing? I wonder. It's so hard to tell.

Oh, about money. I don't need any, thank you, Bogey. If ever I do need money I shall ask you first, but at present I don't.

I wish you'd ask Ouspensky out to dinner when you are in London. His address is 28 Warwick Gardens. He is an extraordinarily sympathetic person.

There are masses of work going on in this garden—uprooting and digging and so on. I don't see why there isn't in yours. Or perhaps you are more forward. . . .

Still got cramp in my thumb. Oh, I wish I could write to you from this self, not the other.

Suppose you throw up every single job in England, realise your capital, and come over here to work for Gurdjieff. Burn every single boat for once! Do you like the idea? That's why I thought you might care to see Ouspensky. Do you like that old mechanical life at the mercy of everything? And just living with a little tiny corner of yourself?

You could learn the banjo here and if the worst came to the worst always make enough to keep you with playing it—or anything. But perhaps this sounds very wild talk. We are not really wild here, at all. Very serious, in fact.

My darling precious Bogey,

Yours ever

Wig

Saturday, October 28, 1922

Darling Bogey,

Forgive me if I don't write often just now. I am so glad you are happy. I am happy, too. And our happiness does not depend on letters. I feel certain we shall move towards each other. But we shall do it in our several ways. If I write at present I 'falsify' my position and I don't in any way help yours. It's absurd to give you the news

here. News there is none that can be so expressed. As to the people I have known I know nothing of them and they are out of sight just now. If I am sincere, I can only say we *live* here—every moment of the day seems full of life. And yet I feel I can't enter into it as I shall be able to; I am only on the fringe. But write about it I can't. . . .

There is always this danger of deceiving oneself. I feel it, too. I only begin to get rid of it by trying and trying to relax—to give way. Here one *learns* how to do it. Life never would have taught me.

But I am sure you will understand why it is so hard for me to write. We don't move in our letters. We say the same things over and over.

As I tried to explain, I'm in such a state of transition. I could not if I would get back to the old life, and I can't deal with the new.

But *anxiety* I never feel. Perhaps I shall; I cannot tell. But I am so busy and so many people are here—so much is happening.

Goodbye for now, darling

Wig

Let us speak the new truth. What present relationship have we? None. We feel there is the possibility of one. That is deep-down truth, don't you feel? But no more. It doesn't mean we are moving away, though! It's a thousand times more subtle.

November 2, 1922

My own Bogey,

Ever since my last letter to you I have been so enraged with myself. It's so like me. I am ashamed of it. But you who know me will perhaps understand. I always try to go too fast. I always think all can be changed and renewed in the twinkling of an eye. It is most fearfully hard for me, as it is for you, not to be 'intense'. And whenever I am intense (really, this is so) I am a little but false. Take my last letter and the one before. The tone was all wrong. As to any new truth—oh, darling, I am really ashamed of myself. It's so very wrong. Now I have to go back to the beginning and start again and again tell you that I have been 'over-fanciful', and I seem to have tried to force the strangeness. Do you know what I mean? Let me try now to *face facts*. Of course, it is true that life here is quite different, but violent changes to one's individuality—of course, they do not occur. I have come here for a 'cure'. I know I shall never grow strong anywhere in the world except here. This *is* the place, and here at least one is understood entirely, mentally and physically. I could never have regained my health by any other treatment. And all my friends accepted me as a frail half-creature who migrated towards sofas. Oh, my dearest Bogey, just wait and see how you and I will live one day—so happily, so splendidly. But in the meantime, love, please never take what I say for 'absolute'. I do not take what you say for 'final'. I try to see it as relative.

Essentially, you and I are together. I love you and feel you are my man. It's that I want to build on and realise and live in, one of these days.

So I shall write at least twice a week and tell you any odd things that are happening. Will you tell me, too?

Last night, for instance, in the salon we learnt to make rugs from long pieces of corn. Very nice ones. Very easy to make, too. I have been in the carpenter's shop all the morning. The small forge is alight; Mr. Gurdjieff is planing, a Mr. Salzmänn is making wheels. Later on I shall learn carpentry. We are going to learn as many trades as possible, also all kinds of farm work. The cows are being bought today. Gurdjieff is going to build a high couch in the stable where I can sit and inhale their breath! I know later on I shall be put in charge of those cows. Every one calls them already 'Mrs. Murry's cows'.

This letter must be posted, love. Do please forgive my two silly ones. I learn terribly slowly, my precious Veen, and I must not hurt you.

Ever your own

Wig

November 7, 1922

My darling Bogey,

Here it is part of the 'work' to do a great many things, especially things which one does *not* like. I see the point of that. It's the same principle as facing people whom one shrinks from and so on. It is to develop a greater range in oneself. But what happens in practice is that no sooner do the people begin doing those things they don't like than the dislike changes. One feels it no longer. It's only that first step which is so terribly hard to take.

Are you having really divine weather? It's marvellous here—like late spring today—really *warm*. The leaves are still falling. The park belonging to this château is incredibly beautiful, and with our livestock roaming about, it begins to look like a little piece of virgin creation.

I am fearfully busy. What do I do? Well, I learn Russian—which is a terrific job—have charge of the indoor carnations—no joke—and spend the day paying visits to places where people are working. Then every evening about 50 people meet in the salon and there is music and they are working at present at a tremendous ancient Assyrian group Dance. I have no words with which to describe it. To see it seems to change one's whole being for the time.

Until I came here I did not realise with what a little bit of my mind, even, I lived. I was a little European with a liking for Eastern carpets and music and for something that I vaguely called The East. But now I feel I am turned to that side far more than the other. The West seems so poor, so scattered. I cannot believe knowledge or wisdom are

there. I expect this is a phase. I tell it you because I said I would tell you my reactions. . . . In three weeks here I feel I have spent years in India, Arabia, Afghanistan, Persia. That is very odd, isn't it? And oh, how one wanted to voyage like this—how bound one felt! Only now I know.

There is another thing here—Friendship. The real thing that you and I have dreamed of. Here it exists between women and women and men and women, and one feels it is unalterable, and living in a way it never can be anywhere else. I can't say I have friends yet. I am simply not fit for them. I don't know myself enough to be really trusted, and I am weak where these people are strong. But even the relationships I have are dear beyond and friendships I have known.

But I am giving the impression that we all live together in brotherly love and blissful happiness. Not at all. One suffers terribly. If you have been ill for 5 years, you can't expect to be well in five weeks. If you have been ill for 20 years (and according to Mr. Gurdjieff we all of us have our 'illness') it takes very severe measures to put one right. But the point is there is hope. One can and does believe that one will escape from living in circles and will live a CONSCIOUS life. One can, through work, escape from falsity and be true to one's own self—not to what anyone else on earth thinks one is.

I wish you could meet some of the men here. You would like them very very much, especially a Mr. Salzmänn, who speaks very little. I must stop this letter. Is it a rigmarole?

Goodbye for now, my darling heart,
Ever your
Wig

November 12, 1922

Darling Bogey,

. . . . I have had a great talk about Shakespeare here with a man called Salzmänn, who is by 'profession' a painter. He knows and understands the plays better than anyone I have met except you. He happens, too (this is by the way) to be a great friend of Olga Knipper's [Tchekhov's wife.] His wife is the chief dancer here—a very beautiful woman with a marvellous intelligence.

Dear Bogey, I'm not 'hypnotized'. But it does seem to me there are certain people here who are far beyond any I have met—of a quite different order. Some—most—of the English here don't even catch a glimpse of it. But I am sure. I remember I used to think—if there was thing I could not bear in a community, it would be the women. But now the women are nearer and far dearer than the men. Of course, I don't speak of Mr. Gurdjieff. I couldn't say he was *near* or *dear* to me! He is the embodiment of the life here, but at a remote distance.

Since last I wrote to you I have changed my room. Now I am in another wing—another kind of existence altogether. Where all was so quiet outside the door, all is noise and bustle. My other room was very rich and sumptuous. This is small and plain and very simple. When Olga Ivanovna and I had arranged it and she had hung her yellow dancing stockings to dry before the fire we sat together on the bed and felt like two quite poor young girls . . . different beings altogether. I like being here very much. I hope Mr. Gurdjieff does not move us again too soon. But it is a favourite habit of his to set the whole house walking. Easy to see why when one saw the emotions it aroused.

I must finish this letter, darling. It is written on the arm of a chair, on a cushion, on my bed, as I try to escape from the heat of my fire. Oh, I have so much to do this afternoon! It's terrible how the days pass. I had a bath this morning—the first time since leaving England! There's a nice confession. But it's wonderful what can be done with a basin and a rough towel.

Goodbye, my dear darling.

Ever your

Wig

Sunday 6.30, November 19, 1922

Darling Bogey

. . . It is intensely cold here—quite as cold as Switzerland. But it does not matter in the same way. One has not the time to think about it. There is always something happening, and people are a support. I spent the winter afternoon yesterday scraping carrots—masses of carrots—and half way through I suddenly thought of my bed in the corner of that room at the Chalet des Sapins. . . . Oh, how is it possible there is such a difference between that loneliness and isolation (just waiting for you to come in and you knowing that I was waiting) and *this*. People were running in and out of the kitchen. Portions of the first pig we have killed were on the table and greatly admired. Coffee was roasting in the oven. Barker clattered through with his milk-pail. I must tell you, darling, my love of cows persists. We now have three. They are real beauties—immense—with short curly hair? fur? wool? between their horns. Geese, too, have been added to the establishment. They seem full of intelligence. I am becoming absorbed in animals, not to watch only, but to know how to care for them and to know *about* them. Why does one live so far away from all these things? Bees we shall have later. I am determined to know about bees.

Your idea of buying some land and building a little house *does* seem to me a bit premature, darling. You know so little. You have never tried your hand at such things. It's not quite easy to change from an intellectual life like yours to a life of hard physical work. But your remark made me wish you did care for my 'ideas'—I mean by my

'ideas' my desire to *learn to work in the right way* and to live as a conscious human being. They are not much more than that. There is certainly no other spot on this whole earth where one can be taught as one is taught here. But life is not easy. We have great 'difficulties'—painful moments—and Mr. Gurdjieff is there to do to us what we wish to do to ourselves and are afraid to do. Well, theoretically, that is very wonderful, but practically it must mean suffering, because one cannot always understand.

Ouspensky came over last week. I had a short talk with him. He is a very fine man. I wish you would just see him—out of—let's call it curiosity.

I must get dressed for dinner. I badly need a good *washing*. Remarkable how clothes fall into their proper place here. We dress in the evening, but during the day . . . the men look like brigands. Nobody cares, nobody dreams of criticising.

Oh, Bogey, how I love this place! It is like a dream—or a miracle. What do the 'silly' people matter? And there are silly people who come from London, see nothing and go away again. There *is* something marvellous here if one can only attain it.

Goodbye for now, my dearest.

Ever your own

Wig

[after November 19, 1922]

By darling Bogey,

. . . . It is intensely cold here—colder and colder. I have just been brought some small fat pine logs to mix with my *boulets*. Boulets are unsatisfactory; they are too passive. I simply live in my fur coat. I gird it on like my heavenly armour and wear it ever night and day. After this winter the Arctic even will have no terrors for me. Happily, the sun *does* shine as well, and we are thoroughly well nourished. But I shall be glad when the year has turned.

Darling, I must sit down to a Russian lesson. I wish you knew Russian. I have also been learning mental arithmetic beginning $2 \times 2 = 1$, $3 \times 3 = 12$, $4 \times 4 = 13$, $5 \times 5 = 28$ and so on, at great speed to the accompaniment of music. It's not as easy as it looks, especially when you start from the wrong end backwards. In fact at 34 I am beginning my education. . . .

Goodbye for now, my dearest Bogey,

Ever your own

Wig

November, 1922

My darling Bogey,

I understand affairs much better from your last letter. . . . Of course, I do not feel that my way is 'the only way'. It is for me. But people have such hidden energy, such hidden strength that, once they discover it in themselves, why should they not do alone what they have to learn to do here? You were only joking, weren't you? when you said you might find Le Prieuré was your way. For one can only come here *via* Ouspensky and *it is a serious step*. However, one can always go again if one finds it intolerable. That is true, too. But the strangeness of all that happens here has a meaning; and by strangeness I don't mean obvious strangeness—there's little of it—I mean spiritual.

Are you having really perfect weather (except for the cold)? It is absolutely brilliantly sunny—a deep blue sky, dry air. Really, it's better than Switzerland. But I must get some wool-lined over-boots. My footgear is ridiculous when I am where I was yesterday—round about the pigsty. It is noteworthy that the pigs have of themselves divided their sty into two: one, the clean part, they keep clean and sleep in. This makes me look at pigs with a different eye. One must be impartial even about them, it seems. We have 2 more cows about to calve in 3 weeks' time. Very thrilling. Also our white goat is about to have a little kid. I want to see it very much. They are so charming.

You know I told you a Turkish Bath was being built. It is finished and working. It was made from a *cave* used for vegetables and of course all labour, including the plumbing, the lighting and so on was done by our people. Now one can have seven different kinds of baths in it, and there is a little rest room hung with carpets which looks more like Bokhara than Avon. If you have seen this evolved, it really is a miracle of ingenuity. Everything is designed by Mr. Gurdjieff. Now all hands are busy building the theatre which is to be ready in 2 weeks. I have to start making costumes next week. All the things I have avoided in life seem to find me out here. I shall have to sew for hours on end just as I have to puzzle over these problems in mathematics that we get sometimes in the evening.

But I wish I could tell you of the people I live with. There is not only my friend, Olga Ivanovna. There are the Hartmanns, husband and wife. He was—is—a musician. They live in one smallish room, awfully cramped, I suppose. But to go and sit there with them in the evening before dinner is one of my greatest pleasures. Dear precious people! She is very quick, beautiful, warm-hearted. No, it's no good. I can't describe her. He is small and quite bald, with a little pointed beard, and he generally wears a loose blouse spotted with whitewash, very full trousers, wooden boots. He is a 'common workman' all day. But it is the life between them; the feeling one has in their nearness. But so many people come forward as I write. They are all very different; but

they are the people I have wanted to find—*real* people, not people I make up or invent. .

..

Goodbye for now, my darling Bogey. I do feel we are nearer than we were. But there is so much—so very much one cannot write. One can only feel.

Ever your own

Wig

Friday (Piatnitse), December 1, 1922

My darling Bogey,

. . . . About Christmas. I want to be quite frank. For many reasons I would rather we did not meet till the Spring. Hear my reasons before judging me for that, will you? For one thing the hotels at Fontainebleau are closed—the decent ones. You could not come to the Institute as a guest at present. It's not running smoothly enough. You would simply *hate* it. No, let me be very careful. I have not asked Mr. Gurdjieff if you could come. He might say 'Yes'. But I can't think what on earth an outsider could do here just now. It's winter. One can't be out of doors. One can't just stay in one's room. Meals are at all hours. Sometimes lunch is at 4 p.m. and dinner at 10 p.m. And so on.

But the chief *reason that matters* is this. Physically there is very little outward change in my condition so far. I am still breathless, I still cough, still walk upstairs slowly, still have to stop and so on. The difference is that here I make 'efforts' of a certain kind all day and live an entirely different life. But I have no life to *share* at present. You can't sit in the cowhouse with me at present or in the kitchen with seven or eight people. We are not ready for that yet. It would simply be a false position. Then, when I first came here, I had a most sumptuous luxurious room and so on. Now I rough it in a little, simple, but very warm room. But it's tiny. We couldn't sit in it.

Deeper still is the most sincere feeling I am capable of that I do not want to see you until I am better physically. I cannot see you until the old Wig has disappeared. Associations, recollections would be too much for me just now. I must get better alone. This will mean that we do not meet until the Spring. If this sounds selfish, it must sound selfish. I know it is not and I know it is necessary. If you do not understand it, please tell me, darling.

I don't feel the cold as much as I have in other winters. It's often sunny, too, and I have just bought for 23 francs very good *boots*, lined with felt with felt uppers.

But I'll say no more just now. I hope you will understand and not be hurt by my letter, dearest heart.

Ever your

Wig

Wednesday, December 6, 1922

My darling Bogey,

Your Sunday letter arrived today. Until I have your answer to mine suggesting that we do not meet until the spring, I will not refer to the subject again. . . . I think that's best.

Your little house and way of life sounds so nice. I am very, very glad that you feel Dunning is your friend . . . And Mrs. Dunning—you like her? And do you play with the little boys? There are nine children here. They live in the children's house and have a different mother every week to look after them. But I remember now I have told you all that before. I'll tell you instead about that couch Mr. Gurdjieff has had built in the cowhouse. It's simply too lovely. There is a small steep staircase to a little railed-off gallery above the cows. On the little gallery are divans covered with Persian carpets (only two divans). But the white-washed walls and ceiling have been decorated most exquisitely in what looks like a Persian pattern of yellow, red and blue by Mr. Salzmann. Flowers, little birds, butterflies and a spreading tree with animals on the branches, even a hippopotamus. But, Bogey, all done with the most *real art*—a little masterpiece. And all so gay, so simple, reminding one of summer grasses and the kind of flowers that smell like milk. There I go every day to lie and later I am going to sleep there. It's very warm. One has the most happy feelings listening to the beasts and looking. I know that one day I shall write a long long story about it.

At about 5.30 the door opens and Mr. Ivanov comes in, lights the lantern and begins milking. I had quite forgotten the singing wiry silvery sound of milk falling into an empty pail and then heavier—plonk—plonk! 'Mr.' Ivanov is a very young man. He looks as though he had just finished his studies, rather shy, with a childlike beaming smile.

I don't know how you feel. But I still find it fearfully hard to cope with people I do not like or who are not sympathetic. With the others all goes well. But living here with all kinds I am simply appalled at my helplessness when I want to get rid of someone or to extricate myself from a conversation, even. But I *have* learnt how to do it here. I have learnt that the only way is to court it, not to avoid it, to face it. Terribly difficult for me in practice. But until I really do master this I cannot get anywhere. There always comes the moment when I am uncovered, *so zu sagen*, and the other man gets in his knock-out blow.

Oh, darling—I am always meaning to ask you this. I came away this time without a single photograph of you. This is *intolerable*. I really must have one, Bogey. Not only because I want it fearfully for myself, but people keep on asking me. And I

am proud of you. I want to show them what you look like. Do please send me one for Xmas. This is very important.

Goodbye for now, my own Bogey. I am
Ever your loving
Wig

Don't forget the photograph.
Saturday, [December 9, 1922]

My darling Bogey,

I have never had a letter from you that I so 'understood' as your last about your house and how you are living and the wages you give to John and Nicholas. I can't say what a joy it is to know that you are there. It seems to me very mysterious how so many of us nowadays refuse to be cave-dwellers any longer but in our several ways are trying to learn to escape. The old London life, whatever it was, but even the life we have led recently wherever we have been, is no longer even *possible* to me. It is so far from me that it seems to exist in another world. This, of course, is a wrong feeling. For, after all there are the seeds of what we long after in everybody and if one remembers that any surroundings are possible . . . at least.

What do you read? Has Dunning any familiar books? You have rather a horror of anything at all . . . Eastern, haven't you? I read Ouspensky's *Tertium Organum* the other day. For some reason it didn't carry me away. I think it is extremely interesting but—perhaps I was not in the mood for books. I am not at the present, though I know that in the future I shall want to write them more than anything else in the world. But different books. There is Mr. Hartmann here with whom I have great talks nearly every evening about *how* and *why* and *when*. I confess present-day literature simply nauseates me, excepting always Hardy and the other few whose names I can't remember. . . . But the general trend of it seems to me quite without value whatsoever.

Yesterday when I was in the stable Mr. Salzmann came up. He had just returned from his work—sawing logs in the far wood. And we began to talk about poverty. He was talking of the absolute need for us today to be *poor again*, but poor in the real sense. To be poor in ideas, in imagination, in impulses, in wishes—to be simple, in fact. To get rid of the immense collection with which our minds are crammed and to get back to our real needs. But I shall not try to transcribe what he said. It sounds banal; it was not. I hope you will meet this man one day. He looks a very surly, angry and even fierce workman. He is haggard, drawn, old-looking, with grey hair cut in a fringe on his forehead. He dresses like a very shabby forester and carries a large knife in his belt. I like him almost as much as I like his wife. Together they seem to me as near an ideal couple as I could imagine.

Bogey, are you having fine weather? Today is perfectly glorious. There was a heavy frost last night, but it's marvellously clear and fine. No, I don't want any money just now, thank you, darling heart. What nonsense to say those W. S. certificates are mine! Why? They are yours! And don't go building a 7-roomed house. 7 rooms for 2 people! I will write again in a day or two. Goodbye for now, dearest darling Bogey,

Ever your own
Wig

December 17, 1922

My darling Bogey,

. . . . My fortunes have changed again. I have been moved back from my little bare servant's bedroom on the general corridor to my beautiful sumptuous first room overlooking the lovely park. It seems almost incredible grandeur. I suppose—I feel I have learnt the lesson that other room had to teach me. I have learnt that I can rough it in a way you and I have never done, that I can stand any amount of noise, that I can put up with untidiness, disorder, queer smells, even, without losing my head or *really* suffering more than superficially. But how did Mr. Gurdjieff know how much I needed that experience? And another mystery is that last week when it was intensely cold I felt that I had come to an end of all that room had to teach me. I was very depressed and longing beyond words for some real change and for beauty again. I almost decided to ask him to send me away until the weather got warmer. Then on Saturday afternoon when I was in the stable he came up to rest, too, and talked to me a little. First about cows and then about the monkey he has bought which is to be trained to clean the cows. Then he suddenly asked me how I was and said I looked better. 'Now', he said, 'you have two doctors you must obey. Doctor Stable and Doctor New Milk. Not to think, not to write. . . . Rest. Rest. Live in your body again.' I think he meant Get back into your body. He speaks very little English, but when one is with him one seems to understand all he suggests. The next thing I heard was that I was to come into here for the rest of the winter. Sometimes I wonder if we 'make up' Mr. Gurdjieff's wonderful understanding. But one is always getting a fresh example of it. And he always acts at precisely the moment one needs it. That is what is so strange. . . .

Dear Bogey darling, I shall not have any Xmas present for you. But you know that £5 I sent you. How much did you spend? I hope there will be something left over for you, darling. Buy it with my love. I'll tell you what I want for a present. Your photograph. The proof of the drawing, of course, I would simply treasure, but why should you send me that? Keep it. Of course, if you could have it copied. . . .

We had a fire here the other night. A real one. Two beautiful rooms burnt out, and a real fear the whole place would go. Cries of 'Vode! Vode! (Water!), people

rushing past all black and snatching at jugs and basins. Mr. Gurdjieff with a hammer, knocking down the wall. The real thing, in fact.

What is the weather like with you? It's so soft and spring-like here that actually primroses are out. So are the Christmas roses under the espalier pear-trees. I *love* Christmas; I shall always feel it is a holy time. . . .

God bless you, my darling precious!

Ever your

Wig

Saturday, December 23, 1922

Darling Bogey,

Just a note to wish you a Happy Xmas. I am afraid it will not arrive in time for today is Saturday *not* Friday as I imagined. But there! Put the blame on the poor Xmas postman. No, even to think of such a thing won't do at all. . . . A Happy Xmas, my dearest Bogey. I wonder very much how you who always say you hate Xmas will spend it this year. . . .

Here we are to have great doings. The Russian Christmas is not due for another fortnight. So Mr. Gurdjieff has decided the English shall have a real old-fashioned English Xmas on their own. There are so few of them, but that makes no difference to his ideas of hospitality. We are to invite all the Russians as our guests. And he has given us a sheep, a pig, two turkeys, a goose, two barrels of wine, whiskey, gin, cognac etc., dessert of all kinds, an immense tree and carte blanche with which to decorate it. Tomorrow night we have our tree followed by the feast. We shall sit down to it about 60. Whoever gets the coin in the pudding is to be presented with our new-born calf—a perfect angel. Would that it were mine! . . .

Darling precious Bogey, this is not a letter this time—only this note written on a table piled with paper chains, flowers, little bon-bon cases, gold wire, gilded fir cones—you know the kind of thing.

I attended the obsequies of the pig this morning. I thought I had better go through with it for once and see for myself. One felt horribly sad. . . . And yesterday I watched Madame Ouspensky pluck, singe and draw our birds. In fact, these have been our gory days, balanced by the fairy-like tree. There is so much life here that one feels no more than one little cell in a beefsteak, say. It is a good feeling.

God bless you darling.

Ever your

Wig

Boxing Day: Tuesday, [December 26, 1922]

My darling Bogey,

I think the drawing of you is quite extraordinarily good—and in a very subtle way. I had no idea Rothenstein was that kind of artist. People will say it makes you look old. That is true. But you have that look. I am sure *c'est juste*. I am more than glad to have it and I shall keep it v. carefully. Thank you, my dearest. The photograph I don't like so well for some reason. But photographs always pale before good drawings. It's not fair on them.

How is the old Adam revived in you, I wonder? What aspects has he? There is nothing to be done when he rages except to remember that it's bound to be—it's the swing of the pendulum—and the only hope is when the bout is exhausted to get back to what you think you really care for, aim for, wish to live by, as soon as possible. It's the intervals of exhaustion that seem to waste so much energy. You see, my love, the question is always: *'Who am I?'* and until that is answered I don't see how one can really direct anything in oneself. *'Is there a Me?'* one must be certain of that before one has a real unshakeable leg to stand on. And I don't believe for one moment these questions can be settled by the head alone.

It is this life of the *head*, this formative intellectual life at the expense of all the rest of us which has got us into this state. How can it get us out of it? I see no hope of escape except by learning to live in our emotional and instinctive being as well and to balance all three.

You see, Bogey, if I were allowed one single cry to God, that cry would be: *I want to be REAL*. Until I am that I don't see why I shouldn't be at the mercy of old Eve in her various manifestations for ever.

But this place has taught me so far how unreal I am. It has taken from me one thing after another (the things never were mine) until at this present moment all I know really, really is that I am not annihilated and that I hope—more than hope—believe. It is hard to explain and I am always a bit afraid of boring you in letters. . . .

Our cowshed has become enriched with 2 goats and two love-birds. The goats are very lovely as they lie in the straw or so delicately dance towards each other, butting gently with their heads. When I was there yesterday, Mr. Gurdjieff came in and showed Lola and Nina who were milking the cows the way to milk a goat. He sat down on a stool, seized the goat and swung its hind legs across his knees. So there the goat was on its two front legs, helpless. This is the way Arabs milk. He looked very like one. I had been talking before to a man here whose passion is astrology and he had

just written the signs of the Zodiac on the white-washed stable door. Then we went up to the little gallery and drank koumiss.

Goodbye for now, my darling. I feel this letter is flat and dull. Forgive it.

I am ever your own loving

Wig

Sunday, [December 31, 1922]

My darling Bogey,

My fountain pen is mislaid, so as I am in a hurry to write please forgive this pencil.

Would you care to come here on January 8 or 9 to stay until 14-15? Mr. Gurdjieff approves of my plan and says will you come as his guest? On the 13th our new theatre is to be opened. It will be a wonderful experience. But I won't say too much about it. Only on the chance that you do come I'll tell you what clothes to bring.

One sports suit with heavy shoes and stockings and a mackintosh and a hat that doesn't matter. One 'neat' suit with your soft collar or whatever collar you wear and tie (you see you are my husband and I can't help wanting you to look—what shall I say?) slippers and so on. That's all. If you have a cardigan of course bring it and a pair of flannel trousers in case you get soaking wet and want a change. . . .

Will you wire me your reply—just 'yes' or 'no' and the date, if 'yes', of your arrival.

There is a London train that reaches Paris at 4 something. You could then come on to Fontainebleau the same day. Otherwise it's far better to stay the night in Paris as no cabs meet the late train.

You get out of the train at *Avon* and take a cab here which costs 8 francs *with* tip. Ring the bell at the porter's lodge and I'll open the gate.

I hope you will decide to come, my dearest. Let me know as soon as you can, won't you? . . . I have gone back to my big lovely room, too, so we should have plenty of space to ourselves. We can also sit and drink *kiftir* in the cowshed.

I can't write of other things in this letter. I hope to hear from you soon.

Your ever loving

Wig

~ * ~

I arrived at the Gurdjieff Institute early on the afternoon of January 9, 1923. Katherine was very pale, but radiant. We talked for a while in her room overlooking the garden. She told me that she had wanted me to come very much indeed, because the moment had come for which she had been waiting. She had had to disentangle herself from our love, because it had become an agony of concern for each other which threatened to strangle us. At the Institute, she had worked herself free of it, and from the fear of death, with which it was so deeply entwined. Now she could come to me as a free being, in a love that was purified of all fear.

The greatest obstacle she had to overcome in taking the plunge and making the final decision to enter the Institute had been her fear of losing me. But that fear had been the source of the falsity that had steadily grown upon her since her illness began. Only at rare and terrible moments had she dared—or been driven—to reveal to me the deadly fear that was taking possession of her soul, the blackness that engulfed her; and then I had been dismayed. When she had cried to me to help her out of the gulf, I could do nothing: I almost seemed to turn away as from something intolerable. And so our love had become a dream of happiness to be in some unattainable future. And she had had to pretend, and to go on pretending, to herself and to me that she was not the sick and frightened Katherine that she was, until her own identity was lost and she did not know which was her true self.

Suddenly, she had known that, if she was to escape this living death, she must make a clean sweep of all her fears. The Institute had offered her the opportunity. Even to enter it had been the cause of fear: she had been fascinated by, but afraid of its doctrines. She had been afraid of ignoring her illness. She had been afraid of finally alienating me. By acting in spite of her fears, she had overcome them. By risking losing me, she had found her love for me: it was entire and perfect.

And truly as I looked at her, while I listened, she seemed a being transfigured by love, absolutely secure in love. She had no desire to defend the Institute; as indeed I had none to criticise it. She spoke quite quietly of her feeling that she had perhaps now gained all that it had to give her, and that she might be leaving very soon. When she did, she would like to live with me in extreme simplicity in a small cottage in England, and she would like me to cultivate the land.

It was a great happiness to me to be with her again. She led me out first to her gallery in the cowshed, then to where the company was putting the finishing touches to the dancing hall which had been erected in the garden. Though it was built with trusses, hangar fashion, it immediately impressed me by its likeness to a huge nomad tent, though I have never seen one. She introduced me to some of her friends—to Hartmann and Salzmann and Dr. Young, to Olga Ivanovna and Adela, a young Lithuanian girl who was devoted to her. Under instruction I took hand in painting coloured designs upon the windows of the hall. I met Orage again, for the first time for many years; and he seemed to me a changed man, much gentler and sweeter than I remembered him. Indeed there was a blend of simplicity and seriousness in most of the people I met there, and in the company as a whole, which impressed me deeply.

Many of them were very tired. They had been working against time, and often all night long, to finish the hall in time to open it on January 13. The work appears, in memory, to have gone on uninterruptedly all through that afternoon and evening. I cannot remember that there was any formal meal. But later in the evening Katherine and I went to sit in the salon. At about 10 o'clock she said she was tired, and began to go to her room. As she slowly climbed the big staircase to the first floor where her room was, she was seized by a fit of coughing. I took her arm and helped her into her room. No sooner were we inside, than the cough became a paroxysm. Suddenly a great gush of blood poured from her mouth. It seemed to be suffocating her. She gasped out 'I believe . . . I'm going to die'. I put her on the couch and rushed out of the room calling for a doctor. Two came almost immediately. Wisely, I suppose, they thrust me out of the room though her eyes were imploring me. In a few minutes she was dead.

She died at the age of 34 and was buried in the communal cemetery of Avon near Fontainebleau. On the stone was carved a sentence from Shakespeare which she particularly loved.

*But I tell you, my lord fool,
Out of this nettle, danger
We pluck this flower, safety.*

It is not for me to pass judgement on the Gurdjieff Institute. I cannot tell whether Katherine's life was shortened by her entry into it. But I am persuaded of this: that Katherine made of it an instrument for that process of self-annihilation which is necessary to the spiritual rebirth, whereby we enter the Kingdom of Love. I am certain that she achieved her purpose, and that the Institute lent itself to it. More I dare not, and less I must not, say.

John Middleton Murry
1929