



The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield: Volume 5: 1922

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The fifth and final volume of the Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield covers the almost thirteen months during which her attention at first was firmly set on a last chance medical cure, then finally on something very different--if death came to seem inevitable, how should one behave in the time that remained, so one could truly say one lived?

Mansfield's biographers, like her friends, have wondered at the seemingly extraordinary decision to ditch conventional medicine, for the bizarre choice of Gurdjieff's Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man at Fontainebleau. These letters show the clarity of mind and will that led to that decision, the courage and distress in making it, and the gaiety even once it was made. She went against what her education, her husband, and most of her friends would regard as reasonable, as she opted to spend her last months with Russian émigrés and a strange assortment of Gurdjieff disciples (which she was not). But Fontainebleau give her the space and the incentive to shake free from the intellectualism that she thought the malaise of her time, as she worked at kitchen chores, took in the details of farm life, tried to learn Russian, and attempted to reach total honesty with herself. "If I were allowed one simple cry to God," she wrote in one of her last letters, "that cry would be I want to be REAL."



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