

My dear Balthus, since the law says you still live closer to heaven, where no terrestrial commitments can reach you, I must bear on my own the enormous weight of this legal contract!¹

Here it is. As you can see, it unfolds like a perfect sonata, from first note to last, culminating in two very serious signatures. So let us take it with all due seriousness, and do our best to erect a public monument to Mitsou, who disappeared asking for no such thing.

Rodin told me one day that when he was reading *The Imitation of Christ* he used to mentally replace the name of God wherever it appeared with the word “Sculpture”—that is precisely what you must do in looking through this worthy document: replace my name everywhere in it with yours. For my contribution to your book will be much too minor to deserve the preponderant role assigned to me purely by the conventions of the contract. Your contribution was all the work and all the sorrow; mine will be paltry and nothing but pleasure.

Please read this document carefully and send it back to me; as soon as I have your agreement, I will sign the duplicate I have here and send it to Mr. Rentsch. I will also have our publisher send you the manuscript, so that at your leisure you can add the one missing drawing and the cover. I would like the manuscript back in its final state so that I can have it to look at while I work on the

preface. You'll see that they've let us take our time, but I imagine we will both be done with our work well before April 1, 1921.

My stouthearted castle keeps me shut up tight, let me assure you. I can't even leave the park, since the foot-and-mouth disease decimating the poor animals in the region has shut down the main roads. Otherwise I would have gone to Winterthur tomorrow, to say hello to your father at his lecture. I gather that he will have already left by next Monday; I received a letter from him yesterday, which I answered, telling him how sorry I am not to be able to see him again.

I am sometimes overcome with a true nostalgia for Geneva, which, by the way, as Mr. de Salis writes me, is suffering from a bad and quite unflattering case of "multicolor curtainitis." Good Lord, I wouldn't care about that—I'm sure the disease hasn't spread as far as the pleasant neighborhood around rue du Pré-Jérôme.

In any case, my conscience is quite clear about finding myself alone here with the demands of work, which I have been kept from for far too long by aggravating circumstances. Down there, with you, I am inclined to pour my heart out in that delightful freedom which friendship and affection permit me; here, my nature grows miserly and austere. Let us hope that it will emerge from its voluntary prison with something to show for it.

You will, of course, my dear boy, give your mother² my most affectionate greetings, with which I conclude this letter. I received her letter yesterday, and as always it was

delightful and diverting to read. Please likewise assure Pierre³ of the warm and faithful friendship I feel for him. As for you, my dear Balthus, you surely know full well the love that binds us.

Yours with all my heart,

RILKE