

Berg-am-Irchel Castle, Zurich Canton
[*late February, 1921*]

Balthus, my dear friend,

Many years ago, I met an English writer in Cairo, one Mr. Blackwood, who had put forth a very nice hypothesis in one of his novels: he imagined that every night, at midnight, a tiny gap opened up between the day that was ending and the one about to begin, and that a very nimble and clever person who managed to slip into that gap would escape from time and find himself in a realm free of all the changes we are subject to. All the things we have lost are gathered there—Mitsou, for example . . . broken dolls from childhood, etc., etc.

My dear Balthus, that is where you must slip during the night of February 28 to claim your birthday party—it is hidden there and returns to the light of day only every four years!⁵ (I imagine that in an exhibition of birthdays other people's would look old and used up next to yours, which is well cared for, taken out of storage only at long intervals, looking quite resplendent.)

Mr. Blackwood, if I am not mistaken, called this secret nocturnal gap “the Crack”—and I advise you, for Pierre's sake as well as your dear mother's, not to disappear into it but only peer into it in your sleep. Your birthday, I'm sure, is waiting very close to the opening, you will see it right away, and perhaps you'll be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of other magnificent sights as well. When you wake up on March 1, you will find yourself full of these

sublime and mysterious memories, and instead of a party to celebrate you, the occasion will be one in which you generously delight others by telling them your stirring impressions and describing your rare birthday's splendid condition, absent but still intact and top quality!

This discreet birthday, living most of the time in a space beyond ours, must give you the right to many things that are unknown here. (It certainly seems to me more exotic and significant than a “Brazilian uncle.”) I hope, my dear Balthus, that you will be able to acclimate some of these things to our world, so that they can grow here in spite of the problems caused by our uncertain seasons . . . a bit like what de Jussieu has done with the cedar of Lebanon that now adorns the Jardin des Plantes!

As for “our book,” I am about to finish my final draft, taking advantage of a few edits that Vildrac suggested. I hope to send him the final text on March 1—in honor of your birthday. Let it be a good omen for our joint and brotherly success.

The other day, in Zurich, I had a little (very little!) parcel sent to you, for the day which is forced to stand in for your invisible birthday. I hope they'll be punctual. I myself will send, without fail, my sincerest best wishes, with all the friendship I have to offer you.

RENÉ