

Val-Mont par Glion sur Territet, Vaud Canton  
February 24, 1926

Once again, my dear Balthus, you will have to put together a little party out of the eleven imperceptible intervals between the chimes of midnight on February 28. There cannot be many people who have such pure, hitherto entirely unseen material to make their birthday out of; yours, being rare, has become a real collector's item. So, from the miniscule elements of its absence, make a lovely personal fabric on which others can rest their eyes and place their best wishes on the morning of March 1. And may your whole new year be productive, I mean usable for your deepest needs, whether or not you know what they are yourself.

I have not forgotten, my good Balthus, the magnificent gift you made and gave me around the end of last year: this copy is a beautiful work and I know that it will speak to me always.<sup>10</sup> But please, I beg you, *don't think of sending it to me* at the moment. For I'm not planning to go back to Muzot right away, and if one day they find me done for here,<sup>11</sup> your painting would be all alone there with no one to enjoy it; that would trouble me. It has to stay with you for the time being, so that you can show it to your friends, and your friends' friends, and also so that you can look at it more and be moved to make other beautiful things, either after the old masters or after the harmony being created between your imagination and everything that happens to you. That said, I have to add

that I am proud of this *Narcissus*, and glad that it will someday come and enrich my immediate environment with its composite tenderness and this quantity of admiration it testifies to.

Since we're on the subject of *Narcissus*, might I ask you to talk to Miss Monnier for me about a favor? She may be able to help with something. Here are the main details: A series of books has recently started coming out in Paris, the *Série de l'Horloge*—twelve volumes, I believe, which are sold only to subscribers and only as a whole series, not individually. The first number, Cocteau's "Mutilated Prayer," has already appeared. I desperately wanted to be one of these subscribers, because the series will contain Valéry's "Notes on 'Narcissus,'" in which he plans to publish the various fragments of his "Narcissus." I don't yet know whether I will translate these poems someday,<sup>12</sup> but it is very important to me to own the introduction, which I am sure will be a very valuable addition to the fragments. I asked Miss Moone (in Zurich) to add me to the list of subscribers for the complete series, irrespective of the cost, since there was no other way to obtain the Valéry pamphlet—it will be extremely rare as soon as it comes out. However, the publishers in Paris have total contempt for orders from abroad, and the person in charge (I forget who the publisher is) stubbornly refused to accept the order, despite the insistence of good Mr. Morisse. He thinks that some booksellers in Paris have been guaranteed a certain number of copies for their clients; if, for instance, Miss Monnier is a client

of one of them, I would be delighted if you could arrange for me to subscribe to the whole series that contains the text I've mentioned. Let her know my predicament one of these days, in passing, could you?, and tell her that I place my last hopes in her, on the off chance that she will be able to help.

Well, my dear, I am very happy to hear that you have now met Jean Cassou and his family; I'm sure you will like him and will meet through him, if you haven't already, some charming gentlemen (for instance, the great and generous poet Supervielle!) and delightful women . . .

As for myself, my dear Balthus, I have a great desire to do and say nothing. If you imagine an evil wizard has changed me into a turtle, you won't be far from the truth: I now carry on my back a strong, hard carapace of indifference to all troubles, and even my head, when I do occasionally stick it out (a bad habit of mine), never receives any impressions that noticeably surpass the capacity of an average turtle's brain. This condition does certainly entail some ancient advantages, but I must admit that I haven't yet figured out how to take advantage of them. While I wait, I send my love, as though I were still the

RENÉ of the old days

(I send all of this to all three of you, by way of your birthday!)

P. S. This Middle Ages exhibition at the Bibliothèque Nationale, it must be astonishing! But did you consider going to see the seventeenth-century drawings of flowers and animals at the Pavillon Marsan? (It must be over by now, I suppose.)