

Dear Theo,

This morning a man came who had repaired a lamp for me three weeks ago, and from whom I bought some crockery at the same time, which he forced upon me.

He came to make a row because I had just paid his neighbor and not him, and accompanied it with the customary cursing, noise, invectives, etc. I told him that I would pay him as soon as I received money but that for the moment I was absolutely without a cent, but that was just pouring oil on the fire. I begged him to leave the house, and at last I pushed him out the door; but he, perhaps having waited for this, seized me by the neck, threw me against the wall, and then flat on the floor.

Now you see, this is the kind of small misery one has to face. Such a fellow is stronger than I, of course – he is not afraid. All the small tradesmen one has to deal with daily are of that same kind. They come of their own accord to ask you to buy from them, and want to have you for a customer, but if by chance the payment has to be put off for more than a week, they come to curse and make a row. Well, they are as they are, what can one expect? – they are sometimes hard up themselves. I am telling you this to show you that it is indeed urgent for me to make some money.

When I went to Scheveningen, I had to leave some people waiting for their money. I am rather harassed, brother, there is so much worry and care. I long for your coming, because I should like to settle the question of moving. To keep things going here, I ought to earn a little more. Life is impossible here, because of the little that's lacking.

As far as my work goes, I am not unlucky, because all these little miseries do not affect my energy and do not prevent my making a few more things. I left two small marines at De Bock's, one with a stormy sea, one with a calm one. I should love to go on with that kind of thing. Yesterday I painted a farm with a red roof under high trees. I think painting figure studies would help me in a great many ways. I started one of a boy in a potato field, and one in the garden near a fence of plaited rushes. I ought to be able to work at it with all my might. This morning's incident indicated clearly that it is my duty to find a way to go and live in a smaller house in the country, since it is impossible for me to earn a little more here. On the other hand the studio here is comfortable enough, and there is no lack of beautiful things to paint. The sea is another thing one does not find everywhere. What I told you about my feeling rather weak is true. It has now settled into a pain between the shoulders and in the lumbar vertebrae, which I've already had at times, but I know from experience that one ought to be careful then, otherwise one becomes too weak and can't get over it so easily.

To a certain extent I let things take their own course. Things have been too much for me lately, and my plan to regain former friends by working sensibly and hard has fallen to pieces.

Theo, there is one thing we must settle – I don't mean that it will happen immediately, but the days might become even gloomier, and in that case I should like to make an arrangement.

My studies and all the work that is in the studio are absolutely your property. I repeat, at present there is no question of it – but it might happen – for instance because of my not paying the taxes – that they sold my things; but in that case I should like to bring my work safely out of the house. It's my studies, which I need for my later work, things which I've taken a lot of trouble to make.

Up to now no one on this street has paid taxes, though they are all down for various sums.

So am I, and twice the assessors have come to the house; but I showed them my four kitchen chairs and rough deal table, and told them that I could not be counted among those who ought to be taxed so high. If they found rugs, pianos, antiques in a painter's house, perhaps they were not wrong in putting such a man down for a high tax; but as for me, I couldn't even pay for my colours and had no articles de luxe but children in the house, so there was nothing to be got from me.

Then they sent me assessments and summonses, but I didn't pay the slightest attention, and once when they came to ask about them, I said it was simply no use, I'd lit my pipe with them. That I didn't have the money, and that my four chairs and table wouldn't bring anything – that even new, they weren't worth what they had assessed me for.

Since then, they have already left me alone for several months, and others here on the street haven't paid anything either.

But now that we mention it, in such a case, I wish I knew where to store my studies. Perhaps I could take them to Van der Weele's. And my painting materials too. I always feel a certain hope that when you come to the studio, you will find things that might appeal to somebody, though they may have no fixed market value. It's not my work that's the cause of the trouble.

After all, I don't feel discouraged at heart. On the contrary, I agree with what I recently read in Zola: "Si à présent je vaux quelque chose c'est que je suis seul et que je hais les niais, les impuissants, les cyniques, les railleurs idiots et bêtes." [If at present I am worth something, it is because I am alone, and I hate the fatuous-minded, the impotent, the cynics, the idiotic and stupid scoffers.] But for all that, perhaps I should not be able to

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withstand the siege if I stayed here. I write about it because it's only the beginning, and the device of going and living more cheaply may bring relief – it is already decidedly urgent just to lower the rent.

Van der Weele has got the silver medal for his picture, which he richly deserves. I am glad he has it.

I have thought a great deal about that picture of Van der Weele's because I have seen it in various stages, and I have talked it over with him, and I liked it at once. I think, Theo, that if I can work on regularly and calmly, I, too, shall be able to make something of the kind in the future.

But at all events first I should have to go through a period of assiduous painting, and I must have the means for that which as yet I can't figure out how to get. Van der Weele has got the means by sacrificing half his time to things which he does not do for pleasure, but they keep his paintbox filled, and his larder, etc. Perhaps, perhaps, if something might come into my work which people would care to buy, I could manage too. I shouldn't care so much about the selling itself – if it weren't for being able to go on; I tell you frankly that out of all the ideas about art which I picked up during that period at Goupil's – though my taste hasn't changed – very few have stood the test when put into practice. Things are not made the way the art dealer thinks they are, and a painter's life is different, the study is different.

I can't explain it exactly, but Daubigny's saying, "Ce ne sont pas mes tableaux que j'estime davantage, qui me rapportent le plus" [Those of my pictures that I appreciate the most do not bring the most], is something which I believe now; but if I had heard it when at Goupil and Co., I would have thought that he only said it "par manière de dire."

Adieu, boy, I am in rather a tough spot. You can see from what I told you about this morning's skirmish that people are very inconsiderate of me. They would probably stay more at a distance if one wore a top hat and the like. After all, one has self-respect, and such things are not pleasant. Well, I wish my work could bring some profit. Adieu, write soon, I long so much for your letters.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

The future would seem brighter if I were less awkward in my dealings with people. Without you, finding buyers for my work would be almost impossible; with you, it will eventually be possible. And if we do our utmost, it will stand firm and not perish. But we must stick together.

For my part, I have a great longing to see you and to talk the work over. Occasionally I talk with De Bock and other painters, but I don't take them into my confidence, and they needn't know everything.

Of course I don't mind things like this morning's little incident, but so many disagreeable things coming from the outside make one feel the need of just forgetting everything by talking with somebody who fully understands and sympathizes. Usually I keep things to myself, and try to fight it out alone. But that's not sufficient for a man of feeling, and one tries to find true friendship and confidence. Just because at times I feel my health failing and the strength to bear things dwindling, I tell you frankly that I'm sorely in need of having a quiet talk with you, and of seeing you again.

Keeping the studio going this year has been quite a struggle. Sometimes it has been awfully hard to go on with the work. And I must try to renew my strength.

And in the time which must elapse before we see each other again – do write a little oftener if you can, that must be possible. I must go on with my work, but a feeling of prostration overwhelms me again and again – a general faintness, a reaction after exertion, which keeps returning, and which I must try to overcome, otherwise it will get worse.

I wouldn't say this to De Bock or anyone – but I trust you enough to tell you, it isn't a question of losing courage or giving up, but of having spent more strength than could be spared, and of being more or less exhausted. All in all, the main thing is that a good understanding remains between us and that we keep our friendship warm. If bad luck comes, we'll brave it, but, brother, let's stick faithfully together. I am the gainer in all respects, for without you I shouldn't have been able to get as far as I have now. You don't gain anything by it, except the feeling of helping somebody to a career who would otherwise be without one.

And who knows what we may achieve together for the future?

Getting on with painting will continue to cause a lot of worry for a while, but when you see the studies, I hope you will see that it is no humbug.

I've written you so often recently about my lack of money because the need is great. One must not become too weak physically, and one's self-respect must not be too damaged. When things get too bad and one gets pressed too hard, it's one's duty to look around and try to improve one's circumstances.