

My dear Theo,

What you write about your visits to Gruby has distressed me, but all the same I am relieved that you went. Has it occurred to you that the dazedness – the feeling of extreme lassitude – may have been caused by this weakness of the heart, and in this case the iodide of potassium would have nothing to do with the feeling of collapse? Remember how last winter I was stupefied to the point of being absolutely incapable of doing anything at all, except a little painting, although I was not taking any iodide of potassium. So if I were you, I should have it out with Rivet if Gruby tells you not to take any. I am sure that in any case you mean to keep on being friends with both.

I often think of Gruby here and now, and I am completely well, but it is having pure air and warmth that makes it possible. In all that racket and bad air of Paris, Rivet takes things as they are, without trying to create a paradise, and without in any way trying to make us perfect. But he forges a cuirass, or rather he hardens one against illness, and keeps up one's morale. I do believe, by making light of the disease one has got. If only you could have one year of life in the country and with nature just now, it would make Gruby's cure much easier. I expect he will make you promise to have nothing to do with women except in case of necessity, but anyhow as little as possible.

Now as for me, I am doing very well down here, but it is because I have my work here, and nature, and if I didn't have that, I should grow melancholy. If work had any attraction for you where you are, and if the impressionists were getting on, it would be a very good thing. For loneliness, worries, difficulties, the unsatisfied need for kindness and sympathy – that is what is hard to bear, the mental suffering of sadness or disappointment undermines us more than dissipation – us, I say, who find ourselves the happy possessors of disordered hearts.

I believe iodide of potassium purifies the blood and the whole system, doesn't it? And can you do without it? Anyway you must have it out frankly with Rivet; he oughtn't to be jealous.

I wish you had company more roughly, warmly alive than the Dutch. All the same, Koning with his caprices is an exception, better than most. And it is always a good thing to have someone. But I should like you to have had some friends among the French as well.

Will you do something which will give me great pleasure? My Danish friend who is leaving for Paris on Tuesday will give you two little pictures, nothing much, which I should like to give to Mme. la Comtesse de la Boissière at Asnières. She lives in the Boulevard Voltaire, on the first floor of the first house, at the end of the Pont de Clichy. Old Perruchot's restaurant is on the ground floor.

Would you care to take them there for me in person, and say that I had hoped to see her again this spring, and that I have not forgotten her; I gave them two little ones last year, her and her daughter.

I hope that you will not regret making these ladies' acquaintance, for it is really a family. The countess is far from young, but she is countess first and then a lady, the daughter the same.

And it would be wiser for you to go, since I cannot be sure that the family will stay at the same place this year (though they have been coming there for several years, and Perruchot should know their address in town). Perhaps it is an illusion of mine, but I cannot help thinking of it, and perhaps it would give pleasure both to them and to you if you met them.

Look here, I will do my best to send you some new drawings for Dordrecht.

I have done two still lifes this week.

A blue enamel coffeepot, a cup (on the left), royal blue and gold, a milk jug in squares of pale blue and white, a cup – on the right – of white with a blue and orange pattern, on an earthen tray of grayish yellow, a jug in earthenware or Majolica, blue with a pattern in reds, greens and browns, and lastly 2 oranges and 3 lemons; the table is covered with a blue cloth, the background is greenish-yellow, so that there are six different blues and four or five yellows and oranges [F 410, JH 1426].

The other still life is the majolica pot with wild flowers [F 600, JH 1424].

Thank you very much for your letter and the 50-Fr. note. I hope the case will arrive soon. Next time I think I shall take the canvases off the stretchers, so as to send them rolled up by passenger train.

I think you will soon be friends with this Dane; he doesn't do anything much, but he has intelligence and feeling, and he probably didn't start painting such a long time ago. Take a Sunday sometime to get to know him.

As for me, I am feeling infinitely better, blood circulation good and my stomach digesting. I have found a place where the food is very, very good, and the result is immediately apparent.

Did you notice Gruby's face when he shuts his mouth tight and says – “No women!”? It would make a fine Degas, that. But there is no answering back, for when you have to work all day with your brain, calculating, considering, planning, you've had as much as your nerves can stand.

So go out now and meet women socially; you'll find that you'll get on swimmingly – artists and all that. That's how it will turn out, you'll see. And you won't miss much by doing it, you know.

I have not yet been able to do business with the furniture dealer. I have seen a bed, but it was dearer than I expected. I feel that I must polish off some more work before spending more on furnishing. I have my room for 1 Fr. per night. I have bought some more linen, and some paints too. I took very strong linen.

Bit by bit as my blood quickens, the thought of success quickens too. I should not be greatly surprised if your illness were also a reaction from that terrible winter, which has lasted an eternity. And then it will be the same story as mine, get as much of the spring air as possible, go to bed very early, because you must have sleep, and as for food, plenty of fresh vegetables, and no bad wine or bad alcohol. And very little of women, and lots of patience.

It doesn't matter if you don't shake it off at once. Gruby will give you a strengthening diet of meat now, you being where you are. Here I could not take much, and it is not necessary here. It is precisely that sense of stupefaction that I'm getting rid of. I do not feel so much need of distraction, I am less harassed by my passions, and I can work more calmly, I could be alone without getting bored. I have come through rather older in the way I look at things, but no sadder.

I shall not believe you if in your next letter you tell me there's nothing wrong with you. It is perhaps a more serious change, and I should not be surprised if you were a trifle low during the time it will take you to recover. In the fullness of artistic life there is, and remains, and will always come back at times, that homesick longing for the truly ideal life that can never come true.

And sometimes you lack all desire to throw yourself heart and soul into art, and to get well for that. You know you are a cab horse and that it's the same old cab you'll be hitched up to again: that you'd rather live in a meadow with the sun, a river and other horses for company, likewise free, and the act of procreation.

And perhaps, to get to the bottom of it, the disease of the heart is caused by this; it would not surprise me. One does not rebel against things, nor is one resigned to them; one's ill because of them, and one does not get better, and it's hard to be precise about the cure.

I do not know who it was who called this condition – being struck by death and immortality. The cab you drag along must be of some use to people you do not know. And so, if we believe in the new art and in the artists of the future, our faith does not cheat us. When good old Corot said a few days before his death – “Last night in a dream I saw landscapes with skies all pink,” well, haven't they come, those skies all pink, and yellow and green into the bargain, in the impressionist landscapes? All of which means that there are things one feels coming, and they are coming in very truth.

And as for us who are not, I am inclined to believe, nearly so close to death, we nevertheless feel that this thing is greater than we are, and that its life is of longer duration than ours.

We do not feel we are dying, but we do feel the truth that we are of small account, and that we are paying a hard price to be a link in the chain of artists, in health, in youth, in liberty, none of which we enjoy, any more than the cab horse that hauls a coachful of people out to enjoy the spring.

So what I wish for you, as for myself, is to succeed in getting back your health, because you must have that. That “Espérance” by Puvis de Chavannes is so true. There is an art of the future, and it is going to be so lovely and so young that even if we give up our youth for it, we must gain in serenity by it. Perhaps it is very silly to write all this, but I feel it so strongly; it seems to me that, like me, you have been suffering to see your youth pass away like a puff of smoke; but if it grows again, and comes to life in what you make, nothing has been lost, and the power to work is another youth. Take some pains then to get well, for we shall need your health.

A handshake for you and the same for Koning.

Ever yours, Vincent