

8 October 1888 (unfinished – not sent)

My dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter, but I have had a very thin time of it these days, as my money ran out on Thursday, so it was a damnably long time till Monday noon. These four days I have lived mainly on 23 cups of coffee, with bread which I still have to pay for. It's not your fault, it's mine if it's anyone's. Because I was wild to see my pictures in frames, and I had ordered too many for my budget, seeing that the month's rent and the charwoman also had to be paid. And even today is going to drain me dry, because I must also buy some canvas and prepare it myself, as Tasset's has not yet come. Would you ask him as soon as possible if he has sent it off, 10 meters or at least 5 of ordinary canvas at 2.50 fr.

But I should not mind, my dear boy, if I did not feel that you yourself must suffer from the pressure that this work puts on us now. But I venture to think that if you saw the studies, you would say I was right to work at white heat as long as it was fine. It wasn't so the last few days, there is a merciless mistral furiously sweeping along the dead leaves. But between now and the winter there will be another spell of magnificent weather and magnificent effects, and then the thing will be to make another headlong spurt. I am so much taken up with the work that I cannot come to a dead stop. Don't worry, the bad weather will make me stop only too soon, like today, yesterday and the day before yesterday too.

Do your utmost to persuade Thomas. He is bound to do something. Do you know what I have left today for the week, and that after four days of strict fasting? Just 6 francs. It is Monday, the very day I received your letter. I ate something at noon, but already this evening I shall have to sup on a crust of bread. And the money is spent on nothing but the house, or else the pictures.

This is great news about Bague.

If these good gentlemen can make use of the Mauves as a set-off for Corot, it may come off and it may be a true and even a just thing. Because really, the Mauves, Mesdags or Marises have a heavy effect beside Corot. It is none the less true that they have bought a lot of it, even Mauve's last watercolours. It was they who took them to be framed at that place where we saw them, the man who made the frames for Reid's Monticellis. I am almost sure that Bague will like my big studies, the "Starry Sky," "Furrows," etc., he will like some in the last batch much less. So far Bague is in sympathy with me because he likes painting to be rich and in full impasto. I have heard him on it often enough in the past. I do not count at all on their buying, only it would do no harm to tell Bague that I have some big studies here – new ones – of autumn effects. And keep him going with that. I should say you might show him and Thomas the white orchard, "The Harvest" (size 30 canvas), but not much else. We must not push the studies, which are more trouble to do but are less pleasing to the eye than the pictures, which are the result and fruit of them, and which one paints as in a dream, without so much agony.

I have had walnut frames made for the two pictures of "The Poet's Garden," and they have a very good effect. And now I am looking for a frame in yellowish chestnut. It is as stiff and plain as the rim of a slate, but the tone of the wood does well. Pine also goes well with the "Furrows" and the "Vineyard."

If you were very kind and would send me a louis by return mail, I could get through the week and be spared the "pinching" which accompanied the beginning of this month. Without it I should get too run down, and I should not have all my strength for the fine days which I hope we shall have at the end of the week after the mistral.

Herewith another letter that I wrote about Gauguin's portrait during the last few days. I am sending it to you because I have no time to copy it out, but the chief thing is that I underline this, That I do not like these atrocious hardships of "the craft," except in so far as they show us the way. Our way is neither to endure them ourselves nor to make others endure them, but the opposite.

I do not think I exaggerate about Gauguin's portrait, nor about Gauguin himself.

He must eat and go for walks with me in lovely surroundings, pick up a nice girl now and then, see the house as it is and as we shall make it, and altogether enjoy himself.

He has lived cheaply, yes, but he has got so ill by doing it that he can see no difference between a gay colour and a dismal one.

Well, that gets one nowhere.

It is high time that he came, no fear that he will recover very soon. Meantime forgive me too if I exceed my allowance; I shall work all the more. I promise you. But I have an absolute horror of this melancholy à la Méryon. You will see the two portraits of Gauguin and Bernard someday, and compare them with the "Negresses." And you will see that he absolutely must cheer up.

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Or else . . .

But none of that “or else,” we’ll take it for granted that he is going to cheer up.

But it is indeed high time.

I write in haste, I am working on a portrait.

That is to say, I am doing a portrait of Mother for myself. I cannot stand the colourless photograph, and I am trying to do one in a harmony of colour, as I see her in my memory [F 477, JH 1600].

A good handshake.

Ever yours, Vincent

Do not delay, if it does not leave you too short, do not delay sending me the louis and the canvas.

I have been so hard up since Thursday that from Thursday to Monday I only had two meals; apart from those I had only bread and coffee and even that I had to drink on credit, and had to pay for today. So if you can, do not delay a minute.