

My dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter. You are absolutely right when you say that M. Salles has been splendid in all of this, I am under the greatest obligation to him.

I want to tell you that I think I have done well to come here, because, by seeing the reality of the assorted madmen and lunatics in this menagerie, I am losing my vague dread, my fear of the thing. And bit by bit I am getting to consider that madness is just a disease like any other. Thus the change in surroundings will do me good, I think.

As far as I can tell, the doctor here is of the opinion that what I have had is some sort of epileptic attack. But I haven't asked him more about it.

Have you received the case of paintings, I am curious to know if they have suffered, yes or no?

I have two more on the go – violet irises and a lilac bush, two subjects taken from the garden. [F 608, JH 1691; F 579, JH 1692]

The idea of my duty to get back to work occurs to me a lot and I believe that all my faculties for work will soon come back to me. It's just that the work often absorbs me so much that I think that for the rest of my life I will always be a bit absent-minded and awkward when shifting for myself.

I won't write you a long letter – I want to try to reply to my new sister's letter, which moved me very much, but I don't know if I'll be able to do it.

A handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

My dear sister,

Many thanks for your letter in which I especially looked for news of my brother. And I find it excellent. I see you have already noticed that he likes Paris, and this more or less surprises you, since you do not like it at all, or rather like mostly the flowers there, such as the wisterias, I suppose, which are probably coming into bloom. Might it not be a fact that when you are fond of something, you see it better and more truly than when you are not fond of it? For him and me Paris is certainly already something like a graveyard where many artists have perished whom we once knew directly or indirectly.

Certainly Millet, whom you will learn to like very much, and many others with him, tried to get out of Paris. But as for Eugene Delacroix, for instance, it is difficult to imagine him, as a man, otherwise than as a Parisian.

All this is to urge you – with all caution it is true – to believe in the possibility that there are homes in Paris and not just apartments.

Anyway – fortunately you are yourself his home.

It is rather queer perhaps that the result of this terrible attack is that there is hardly any very definite desire or hope left in my mind, and I wonder if this is the way one thinks when, with the passions lessened, one descends the hill instead of climbing it. And anyhow, my sister, if you can believe, or almost believe, that everything is always for the best in the best of worlds, then perhaps you will also be able to believe that Paris is the best of the cities in it.

Have you noticed that the old cab horses there have large beautiful eyes, as heartbroken as Christians sometimes have? However it may be, we are neither savages nor peasants, and it is perhaps even a duty to like civilization (so called). After all it would probably be hypocrisy to say or think that Paris is bad when one is living there.

Besides, the first time one sees Paris, it may be that everything in it seems unnatural, foul and sad.

Anyway, if you do not like Paris, above all do not like painting nor those who are directly or indirectly concerned in it, for it is only too doubtful whether it is beautiful or useful.

But what is to be done? – there are people who love nature even though they are cracked or ill, those are the painters; then there are those who like what is made by men's hands, and these even go so far as to like pictures. Though here there are some patients very seriously ill, the fear and horror of madness that I used to have has already lessened a great deal. And though here you continually hear terrible cries and howls like beasts in a menagerie, in spite of that people get to know each other very well and help each other when their attacks come on. When I am working in the garden, they all come to look, and assure you they have the discretion and manners to leave me alone – more than the good people of the town of Arles, for instance.

It may well be that I shall stay here long enough – I have never been so peaceful as here and in the hospital in Arles – to be able to paint a little at last. Quite near here there are some little mountains, grey and blue, and at their foot some very, very green cornfields and pines.

I shall count myself very happy if I can manage to work enough to earn my living, for it worries me a lot when I think that I have done so many pictures and drawings without ever selling one. Do not be in too much of a hurry to think that this is an injustice. I myself don't know in the least.

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Thanking you again for having written to me. I am so very glad to think that now my brother is not going home to an empty apartment when he goes back in the evening.

I shake your hand in thought, and believe me,

Your brother, Vincent