

Letter 303
The Hague, 23 July 1883

Dear brother,

Since I wrote you yesterday, I could not shake off an anxious, restless feeling, and it kept me awake last night.

It is, Shall I be able to go on or not? – that, in short, is why I'm worrying.

You have the photographs now, and you will be able to imagine my state of mind better with those in front of you than before you saw them. The drawings I make now are only a shadow of my intentions – but the shadow which already has a definite shape, and which I seek, which I aim at, is not vague, but consists of things taken from full reality, which can only be mastered by patient and regular work. The idea of working in fits and starts is a nightmare to me. Nobody can work without money; I think it's right to work with as little as possible, but the thought of being left absolutely without what's strictly necessary would make anybody depressed and melancholy.

Oh, Theo, the work brings its troubles and cares, but what is it in comparison to the misery of a life of inactivity?

So let's not lose courage, but comfort each other, instead of distressing or disheartening each other.

Now I have spoken to Blommers about my painting – he wants me to keep it up; personally I also feel that having finished those last ten or twelve large drawings, I have reached a point where I must change my course instead of making more in the same way.

What I wrote you about (which you wrote about, too, our thoughts having met again), the meagerness or what is called dryness, is the first thing to be conquered, lest it become a chronic disease. I really think it remarkable that you and I seem to have thought the same thing again, for though you wrote only a single word about it, it is immediately noticeable in the two lithographs and in the photographs, too. Except for that defect, they don't seem so bad to me.

I've been thinking of ways and means to conquer it, but see no other help than to renew my energy and also my physical strength, for I am afraid it is going the wrong way. I absolutely need some money, and must restore both my health and my paintbox; otherwise I am afraid things will crop up later which would be more difficult to redress. It is now just the beginning – and all the same, here and there the last drawings are less dry than before.

If in some way, Theo, I might find some help or sympathy, I think it would redress itself soon enough.

In many lives I could show you similar periods of dryness which have become completely overcome. I shan't cite examples, for you will find many of your own accord, if you think it over. Almost all the fellows who have gone through the *École de Rome* and who had been drudging assiduously on the figure for some time showed at the end of the course rather clever, rather correct drawings which are unpleasant to look at, however, because there is something of "une âme en peine" [a soul in pain] in them, which they later lost as soon as they could move and breathe a little more freely. Now I don't consider myself as clever as those people, but without being under the constraint of a definite course, just to perfect my drawing, I have forced myself to study the figure assiduously, and through that very strain, by constantly exerting myself, I have drifted into this dryness.

I wish you could come soon.

I repeat, it would be good if my circumstances were a little easier, not for my pleasure or comfort, but for the order and progress of the work. If you read this letter in relation to the photographs I sent you, I hope you will see that I myself am perfectly aware of the weak points in the drawings, and that I see how to remedy those weak points, and that I certainly do not refuse to work hard to conquer them; but at the same time, that I am confronted with the difficulty of how to get the necessary means for it. It's not your fault that I don't have them, but it isn't mine, either, and "que faire, que faire?"

Taking a rest is out of the question, but I think it would be a good thing to find distraction in a change of subjects and style. After these figure studies, I feel the need of looking at the sea, the bronzed potato foliage, the fields of stubble, or plowed earth. In order to save time I have not spared myself, pinched on everything just to work on, but now I am absolutely drained. I can draw no more bills on my personal needs, on that side not a drop can be squeezed out, there is sickness and dryness.

I submit for your consideration whether it is incomprehensible that I feel pretty hopeless when I think of the income getting even smaller, seeing that there is already the beginning of want.

I wish you would come soon.

I had hoped that some of the ten or twelve drawings might have been sold, but this too has come to nothing.

Well, I hope to keep courage after all, whatever may happen, and I hope that perhaps a certain frenzy and rage for work may carry me through, like a ship is sometimes thrown over a cliff or sandbank by a wave, and can make use of a storm to save herself from wrecking. But such maneuvers do not always succeed, and it would be desirable to avoid the spot by tacking a little. After all, if I fail, what does my loss mean? I don't care so much after all. But one generally tries to make one's life bear fruit, instead of letting it wither, and at times one feels that after all one also has a life of one's own, which is not indifferent to the way it is treated.

But it is beyond my power. If I don't have anything extra now and then, as soon as I receive the usual amount, I have to pay out so much that little is left for the ten days ahead, on the last of which one walks around with a very weak, faint feeling in one's stomach, and then such a path through the dunes gets the aspect of a desert.

And one feels oneself sinking, and one cannot get or pay for the necessary things. And then the inner struggle – shall I be able to go on and continue going along this road? What can I do about it?

At all events write soon whether you have found something in the photographs. You don't see anything absurd in them, such as one might infer from Tersteeg's remark that he "would rather have nothing to do with it," do you? After all, I am too calm and collected for that.

Adieu, a firm handshake in thought,

Yours, Vincent