

Dear Theo,

I received your letter just now, coming home from the dunes behind Loosduinen, wet through, for I had been sitting in the rain for about three hours on a spot where everything was reminiscent of Ruysdael, Daubigny or Jules Dupré. I came back with a study of twisted, gnarled little trees [F 010, JH 384], and another one of a farm after the rain [F 016, JH 391]. Everything is already bronze coloured. Everything is what one can see in nature only during this time of the year, or when one looks at some pictures by Dupré, for instance; and it is so beautiful that one's imagination always falls short of it.

You write about your walk that Sunday in Ville d'Avray; at the same moment on the same day, I too was walking alone, and I too want to tell you something about that walk, when our thoughts probably met again. As I wrote you, I had spoken to the woman – we felt that in the future it would be impossible for us to stay together, nay, that we should make each other unhappy, yet we both felt how strongly we are attached to each other and then I went far out into the country to have a talk with nature. Well, I walked to Voorburg and from there to Leidendam. You know the scenery there, splendid trees, majestic and serene, right next to horrible green toy summerhouses and all the absurdities the heavy fancy of retired Dutchmen can invent in the form of flower plots, arbors and porches. Most of the houses very ugly; some, however, old and stately. Now at that very moment, high over the meadows, boundless as the desert, one mass of clouds after the other came sailing on, and the wind first struck the row of country houses with their clumps of trees on the other side of the canal, bordered by the black cinder path. Those trees were superb; there was drama in each figure I was going to say, but I mean in each tree. But the scene as a whole was even more beautiful than those scourged trees viewed apart, because at that moment even those absurd little summerhouses assumed a curious character, dripping with rain and disheveled.

It seemed to me an image of how even a man of absurd deportment and conventions, or another one full of eccentricities and caprice, may become a dramatic figure of a peculiar type, if only real sorrow strikes him – a calamity befalls him. And the thought crossed my mind, how at moments when today's deteriorating society is society seen against the light of a renewal, it stands out as a large, gloomy silhouette.

Yes, for me, the drama of storm in nature, the drama of sorrow in life, is the most impressive.

A "Paradou" is beautiful, but Gethsemane is even more beautiful.

Oh, there must be a little bit of light, a little bit of happiness, just enough to indicate the shape, to make the lines of the silhouette stand out, but let the whole be gloomy.

I must say that the woman is bearing up well. She is unhappy about it, as I am, but she is not disheartened and keeps busy. I had just bought a piece of material to make canvases for my studies, and have now given it to her to make underwear for the kids, and some of my things can be altered for them too, so that she will not leave me empty-handed. So she is very busy sewing these things.

When I say we part as friends, it is true – but the parting is final, and after all I am more resigned than I thought I'd be, because her faults were such that it would have been a fatal thing to be bound together, for me as well as for herself, because one is, so to speak, responsible for one another's faults.

But I ask myself anxiously – how will she be in a year?

I shall certainly never take her into my house again, but I do not want to lose sight of her, for I am too fond of her and the children.

And for the very reason that it was and is a feeling other than passion, this is possible too.

I hope the Drenthe project will be carried out.

You ask me what I should need.

I need not tell you that I intend to work hard. I must do that in order to renew myself. And no painting materials whatever are available down there, so as to stocking up on them, the more one has of the really useful things, the better. Good materials are never thrown away, and though they are expensive, one makes up for it later, and a lot of painting must be done in order to make progress. I hope to waste very little of the time I shall spend there, and hope to have models often, which probably will be much cheaper there.

And life is cheaper and I shall be able to do more with the 150 francs there than here.

But I can arrange all this according to the circumstances. I wish I could have a large amount to spend, because I need so many things that others have, and which one can hardly do without.

My intention is to make so much progress in painting in Drenthe that when I come back I might be admitted as a member of the Society of Draughtsmen. This is again in reference to a second plan to go to England.

I don't think it wrong to speculate, if only one doesn't do it in thin air, or on too unsolid a basis. This in regard to England.

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I certainly expect it will be easier for me to sell there than here, that's true, so I sometimes think of England; but I do not know to what extent my work will please the English art lovers, and as I do not know this, I will first make a small positive start in selling before I shall think it advisable to try it there. Once I have sold a few things here, then I shall hesitate no longer, but start sending things or go there myself.

But as long as I sell absolutely nothing here, I could easily be mistaken in the right moment if I were not wise enough to wait till I see an opening here. I hope you will approve of this idea; that would comfort me, for in England they are very serious once they start something: whoever catches the public's fancy in England finds faithful friends there. Take, for instance, Ed. Frère and Henrietta Browne, who remain as interesting now as they were when their work was little known there.

But to have success, one must give good work, and be sure of keeping up the standard of what one has set.

I was glad to see from your letter that you approve of the Drenthe plan; that's enough for me, the advantages it will bring will be apparent later. For me, it is directly connected with my trying to become a member of the Society of Draughtsmen, and then going to England – because I know for sure that if I succeed in putting some sentiment into the subjects out there, they will find sympathy in England.

Well, I must carry out the Drenthe plan, be it with more or less money. As soon as I can pay the fare, I shall go, even if I have only a small supply of painting materials.

Because the moment of the autumn effects is already there, and I must catch some of them.

But I hope I shall be able to leave something behind for the woman, to help her through the first weeks. But as soon as I can go, I will.

I tell you that I intend to help the woman a little at first; I may not do much, nor can I, but I mention this only to you. And you may depend on it that whatever may happen to her, I neither can nor ever will live with her again, for she is incapable of doing what she ought to do.

I also dropped Father a line to tell him that I had parted company with her, but that for all that, my letter to Father about my continuing to be true to her and being willing to marry her remained a fact. And another fact is that Father avoided the issue at the time, and did not reply to the fundamental question. And I do not know how it will appear to me in later years – for instance, whether this might not have been better than leaving her; now we are too close to the facts to get the right view of the basic interrelation and consequences of all the things.

I do hope everything will come out right, but her future as well as my own looks gloomy. I am inclined to believe there is some latent good in her still, but the trouble is, it ought to have been roused already. Now, as she has nobody to rely on, it will be more difficult for her to follow her good impulses.

Now she never cared to listen; then she will long to speak with me, and I shall no longer be there. As long as she was with me, she had no other standard of comparison, and in other surroundings she will remember things which she does not care for and which she did not pay attention to. Now by contrast she will be reminded of them.

Sometimes it is an anguishing thought, that we both feel it is impossible for us to struggle along together in the future, and yet are so much attached to each other. Of late she has been more trustful with me than usual, and she has refused to play some ugly tricks which her mother had instigated. Things of the kind you mentioned when you were here, of starting a row and the like.

You see there is a seed of more seriousness in her, if that might only stay. I wish she could marry, and when I tell you I am keeping an eye on her, it is because I advised her to do that.

If she could only find a man who was not altogether bad, that would do; the foundation that was laid here would then develop, namely that of a more domestic, simpler disposition; and if she sticks to that, in the future I need not leave her quite to her fate, for then I at least remain her friend, and a true one.

Write soon again and believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent