

Dear Theo,

Coming home from Scheveningen just now, I find your letter, for which many thanks. Many things in it please me. In the first place, I am glad that the darkness of the future cannot change our friendship or interfere with it; further, I am glad that you will come soon, and that you find progress in my work. The division of your income, directly and indirectly, among no less than six persons is certainly remarkable. But the subdivision of my 150 francs among four human beings, with all the expenses for models, drawing and painting material, house rent, is also rather remarkable, isn't it? If those 150 francs could be increased by the work next year – I reckon the year begins with your visit – that would be delightful. We must find ways and means.

It is a pity that my painting is not more advanced, yet I shall have to explain it to you all over again.

When you were here last summer, you gave me the money to get the necessary supplies. I had to pay Stam and Leurs then. I bought new things for which I paid cash, and set to work. Besides, after some time, you wrote that you expected some money to come in, and that then “the colours and the paintbox should not be lacking.” But it was not to be, for since that time you yourself had some bad luck, as you remember. However, in the beginning of the winter, or rather toward the end of autumn, I received some extra money. But there was Leurs to pay off again. I had continued painting through those autumn days even when it was so stormy in Scheveningen. Winter was at the door and I was afraid to incur new expenses, as there was more to pay for coal, etc., and little of the extra money was left.

Well, then I took models again, and certainly since then, at least up to now, it has been a period in which I feel I've made progress in the figure.

But it was absolutely impossible to buy colours or to make watercolours while making those figure studies, for you will remember that several times you expected to be able to send something, for instance in March, but then you yourself were obliged to get an advance.

And you had to provide for the woman, and there was the incident with H. P. v. G.,¹ and later business was rather slack.

Well, sometimes I tried to carry on when there was the least chance of managing it. I've borrowed money from Rappard, I've had an extra remittance from Father. But what was the result? It was like the beetle which is bound to a thread and can fly a little way, but is inevitably stopped by something. I began things, but after paying the bills, I was hard up for weeks at the end of the month, sometimes almost without a penny.

So that I haven't always been able to do what was, and is, in my mind. Well, we must not lose courage, we must try again.

I just came home with a few marine studies which might serve as a basis for watercolours, like that very small one of the last bathers which I once sent you in a letter. We shall do our utmost, but times are hard. What I have just started, what is really more necessary than anything else, is painting figure studies, but I don't see how I can afford it.

I have also had the studio altered.

As a matter of fact, I have been living on hope for a long time.

But you will come soon – that's a good thing; at all events you will see what I still have here then, and you will also see that I have not been idle.

But I must try to get some new strength; if that succeeds, it will be high time to use it.

For my strength is failing, it is abnormal for me to get tired when I've walked a short distance – e.g. from here to the post office – but that is actually the case. Oh, I don't give in of course, but I must try to remedy it. Still, my health is not thoroughly or chronically upset; it has not been caused by excesses, but by too long a period with insufficient and unsubstantial food.

Now, what is most pressing this year is the painting. I remind you once more of what I already wrote last year, which has slipped your mind, I think: here I have to pay the regular retail price for colours.

Wouldn't it be possible for you to get me colours from Paillard or someone, in a certain quantity at the wholesale price from the manufacturer himself? Undoubtedly that would be a step toward the possibility of the colours not being lacking. And I should be very glad if we could arrange it so that you deducted 10 francs from your remittance every time. That would be 30 francs a month, 90 francs in three months, and I shouldn't have to trouble you for a few tubes every now and then, but if I had the net price list I could give a three-month order. Will you think this over? I think it would be a good arrangement. Paillard or Bourgeois or whoever it may be, it doesn't matter. As an art dealer, you might perhaps be entitled to the wholesale price.

I had another plan to try to get somebody else to let me have colours wholesale, but after talking it over with him, I heard he cannot do it.

You must try to come soon, brother, for I do not know how long I shall be able to hold out. Things are getting too much for me. I feel my strength failing. I tell you plainly that under such circumstances, I am afraid I shall

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never hold out. My constitution would be good enough if I hadn't had to fast so long, but it was always a question of fasting or working less, and I chose the former as much as possible, till I have become too weak now. How to bear up against it? It influences my work so obviously and clearly that I don't see the way to get on. You must not speak to others about it, brother, for if certain persons knew it, they would say, "Oh, of course it's what we foresaw and prophesied long ago." And not only would they not help me, they would cut off all possibility for me patiently to regain my strength and to get over it.

Under the present circumstances, my work cannot be other than it is.

If I can get over my physical weakness, I shall try to make progress. Again and again I have put off taking some nourishing food because I had to provide for others and for the work. But now I am at my wits' end; no progress in my work can be expected before I get somewhat stronger. Recently I have seen only too clearly that my physical condition influences my work. I assure you that it is nothing but prostration from overwork and too little nourishment. Some people who have spoken of me as if I had some kind of disease would start it again, and that is slander of the worst kind; so keep it to yourself without speaking about it when you come here. But to a great extent I cannot help the dryness in my work, and it will change when I can get well again. What I most long for is your coming, so that we may look over the work together and see each other again.

Good-by, and meanwhile try to write a little more often, I need it so much. And many thanks for this last letter; have a good time if possible.

It will again be a question of fasting these next days till your letter arrives. Write as soon as possible.

1. Hendrik van Gogh, the bad debtor.