

Letter 355
Nuenen, c. 24 January 1884

Dear Theo,

I was glad to get your letter of today, and the enclosure, and thank you very much for both.

It seems to me that up to now Mother's recovery is very satisfactory in general. And that there is less and less immediate danger, and that it is more and more reduced to a question of time.

Nevertheless – Mother will certainly not be quite the same after the fracture is healed. I believe that the effect on her, and the unavoidable countereffect on Father, will be that it will prove to have pushed them a long way into old age.

Under the circumstances I was glad to be at home, and as the present accident has pushed some questions (in which I differ from Father and Mother) entirely into the background, we get on pretty well; and the result may be that I shall stay more and longer at Nuenen than I thought possible at first. As a matter of course I shall be able to lend a helping hand, especially later on when Mother will have to be moved more often, etc.

Since the panic of the first days has calmed down a little, I can do my work pretty regularly.

Every day I am busy painting studies of the weavers here, which I think are technically better than the painted studies done in Drenthe, which I sent you.

Those subjects of the looms, with their rather complicated machinery with a little figure sitting in the middle, will also lend themselves to pen drawings, I think, and I will make some, according to the hint you gave me in your letter.

Before the accident happened, I had settled with Father that I should have free board and lodging here for some time, so that I might use your money to pay off some bills at the beginning of the year. And the money you sent on New Year's Day and about the middle of January was lying ready for that. But as I gave it to Father when the accident happened, this time it will be those colour bill's turn. The more so because Father has had a windfall, as Uncle Stricker sent him 100 guilders, which I think very kind of Uncle S. So, as far as the money goes, I have not profited from being here.

And I am firmly resolved to carry on the work vigorously.

After about a year Father will feel more keenly the financial difficulties which Mother's accident cannot fail to bring in its train. Therefore, in the meantime let's try to do something with my work. After all, Father and Mother personally will be secure for life, Father's pension being equal to his present salary. But, brother, the poor sisters – without capital at a time in our society when the inclination to marry a penniless girl is not great – for them life might remain dark and dreary – and their normal development frustrated. But let's not anticipate things.

It is difficult to say in advance how the constant lying still in bed will influence Mother's health.

All precautions we can take to prevent bedsores are, of course, of the greatest importance. We have made a kind of stretcher to move Mother if necessary, but at present the less it happens the better. The most important thing is for her to lie quietly.

Taking her difficult situation into consideration, I am glad to say Mother's spirits are very even and bright. And she is amused by trifles. The other day I painted for her a little church [F 1117, JH 446] with the hedge and the trees (like this).

You will easily understand that I love the scenery here. When you come, I shall take you into the cottages of the weavers. The figures of the weavers, and the women who wind the yarn, will certainly strike you. The last study I made is the figure of a man sitting at the loom, the figure apart, the bust and hands [F 026, JH 450].

I am painting a loom of old, greenish, browned oak, in which the date 1730 is cut. Near that loom, in front of a little window which looks out on a green plot, there is a baby chair, and a baby sits in it, looking for hours at the shuttle flying to and fro [F 1119, JH 449].

I have painted that thing exactly as it was in reality, the loom with the little weaver, the little window and the baby chair in the miserable little room with the loam floor.

Please write me some more details about the Manet exhibition; tell me which of his pictures are there. I have always found Manet's work very original. Do you know that article of Zola's on Manet? I am sorry to have seen so very few of his pictures. I should especially like to see his figures of nude women. I do not think it exaggerated that some people, for instance Zola, rave about him, though I, for my part, do not think he can be reckoned among the very first of this century. But his is a talent which certainly has its raison d'être, and that is a great thing in itself. The article which Zola wrote about him is published in the volume

Mes Haines. For my part, I cannot agree with Zola's conclusions, as if Manet were a man who opens a new future to modern ideas of art; I consider Millet, not Manet, to be that essentially modern painter who opened a new horizon to many. Goodbye. With a handshake in thought,
Yours sincerely, Vincent

Love from all. Write to Mother a little more often, letters are such a distraction.