

Letter 398
Nuenen, c. 5 April 1885

Dear Theo,

I am still greatly under the impression of what has just happened – so I have worked on quietly these two Sundays.

Enclosed you will find a scratch of a man's head and of a still life with honesty, in the same style as the one you took with you; in the foreground are Father's tobacco pouch and his pipe. If you care to have it, you may of course, and welcome.

Mother is looking well, and for the present the many letters she has to write distract her somewhat. But of course she feels her loss heavily.

I do not know whether you remember how in January, when the fields were covered with snow, and the sun rose fiery red out of the mist, I wrote you that I had hardly ever begun a new year in a more despondent mood.

The fact is that there will be much trouble in store for us all. Of course you will understand that it isn't for my own pleasure that I shall go and live in the studio. It makes things more complicated for me again, but I am quite sure that it is better for the others if I leave. Especially in view of Mother's intention to take in as a boarder somebody who wants to stay in the country for his or her health, if it can be done – or, if this should not prove so easy, they will at all events be freer in the matter of receiving guests, etc. However, I still very much deplore the incident with Anna which decided me on this. What she told you does not alter anything of what she reproached me with, however absurd these reproaches were, as well as her unfounded suspicions with regard to certain things of the future. She has not told me she took them back. Well, you understand that I simply shrug my shoulders at such things, and for that matter, more and more I let everybody think of me what they like, and say of me, and do, under certain circumstances, too.

But consequently I have no choice. After such a beginning one is forced to take measures in order to avoid such occurrences in the future. So I am firmly resolved.

Probably Mother will go to Leyden next year. Then I shall be the only one of us left in Brabant.

And it doesn't seem at all improbable that I shall stay there for the rest of my days. In fact, I have no other wish than to live deep, deep in the heart of the country, and to paint rural life. I feel that my work lies there, so I shall keep my hand to the plough, and cut my furrow steadily.

I believe that you think differently about it, and that perhaps you prefer my taking another course, and settling elsewhere. But I sometimes think that you have more feeling for what can be done in the city, whereas I, on the contrary, feel more at home in the country.

But I shall still have a hard time of it before I can make people accept my pictures.

Meanwhile, I am not going to let myself be discouraged.

I remember what I once read of how seventeen pictures of Delacroix's were refused, "dix-sept refusés," as he told his friends straight out.

I was thinking today what damned brave fellows they were, those pioneers. But the battle must be carried on even at present, and I will carry on my own fight for all the little I may be worth.

And so, Theo, I hope we shall continue on both sides what we started anew; while waiting for, or rather, toiling on more important compositions, I shall send you the studies fresh from the cottages.

Of course, people will speak of unfinished, or ugly, etc., etc., but – my idea is to show them by all means. I personally have the firm conviction that there are a few people who, having been drawn into the city and kept bound there, yet retaining unfaded impressions of the country, and remain all their lives homesick for the fields and the peasants. Such art lovers are sometimes struck by the sincerity in a picture, and what repulses others does not trouble them.

I myself remember how I used to walk for hours in the city, looking at the show windows, to get a glimpse of some bit of the country, never mind what.

We are now in the very beginning of showing the work; I feel sure that by and by we shall find some friends for it. Circumstances impel us and gradually we shall be able to show better things. For the moment I am strongly preoccupied with settling my colour bill; besides, I need canvas, paint and brushes.

As Father's death has caused you many extra expenses, I have thought of the following arrangement; in case you should not be able to give me the extra allowance which I used to receive every spring and summer and which I cannot possibly do without, don't you think it would be fair if I reserved for myself a sum of, for instance, 200 guilders as my share of the inheritance, which for the rest I gladly leave to the younger ones, and shall be able to do if you continue to help me?

In fact, I do not consider it as if I left them my share, but that it is you who make it possible for them to get my portion.

If I go to live in the studio, it is absolutely necessary to have the closet made, for instance, for now I haven't the smallest place to put my things away, and some improvements must be made as to the light. To have to move now would be as bad for me as if the house were burned down; I think with patience and perseverance we can stay on our feet.

As soon as I am settled in the studio I think I shall take up doing watercolours regularly every evening, it is not possible at home in the living room.

As to Anna, you must not think that I shall go on resenting a thing like this or bearing a grudge – but it is a pity that they think they are doing Mother a service by such a thing – this is to be regretted – it is foolish and unwise. As long as Mother and Wil are here, nothing of an odious nature will happen between them and me, this I firmly believe. Only it is an established fact that Mother is unable to grasp the fact that painting is a faith, and that it imposes the duty to disregard public opinion – and that in painting one conquers by perseverance and not by making concessions – and that “I cannot give thee the faith” – this is exactly what is the matter between her and me – as it was to Father, and remained so. Oh dear.

Till then, I shall continue to work from the model in the evening also.

This week I intend to start that composition of those peasants around a dish of potatoes in the evening, or – perhaps I shall make daylight of it, or both, or “neither of the two” you will say. But whether it may succeed or not, I am going to begin the studies for the various figures. Goodbye, with a handshake,
Ever yours, Vincent