

Letter 419a
Nuenen, 3 August 1885

[The envelope of this letter is addressed to: Furnée, Korte Poten, The Hague, and bears the postmark:
Nuenen, 3 August 1885.]

Dear Mr. Furnée,¹

In reply to your postcard I want to submit a few things to you for your consideration.

I wrote you that after my father's death I had taken a house of my own here, and I requested you to have patience, as I should soon be able to send you the money.

But look here, perhaps you know that until now I have received financial help from my brother, who is an art dealer in Paris. I am making progress with my work, and the chances of selling are better than they used to be; but at the same time this is the very moment when financial assistance from others has been completely discontinued, and I am exclusively dependent on my own work. My father's decease as well as my wish to be quite on my own are two changes that for the time being make me even poorer than I was before.

And look here – suppose you draw a bill of exchange on me, well, I cannot pay cash; if I have it, it will be 10 guilders one time and 5 guilders another, and to earn these I shall have to pay for canvas, colours, brushes again. So if you should demand payment, you would have to resort to extreme measures (if you should insist on ready money), i.e. selling my furniture and my other possessions. These consist of a small number of old chairs and a plain wooden worktable, and the long and short of it is that they are of so little value that the whole lot together, in a village like the one I live in, would not bring 10 guilders.

So what will you gain by doing this? If you really want to, I should not much care, but it would most decidedly not be the way to get your money; but if you will wait, I will pay you in full.

If you should draw your bill and take these tremendous measures – well, it would be to my advantage.

I have only one thing, and that is steadily improving: I mean my pictures and my drawings.

What I hear people say about them is good as well as bad, and they can all think whatever they like of them. But as for the present case – seeing that they represent my only means of paying you, what do you want?

Will you wait until I sell something and settle my account? All right – I am not dishonest, and I shall pay you as soon as I have the money.

Do you want me to send you some of my work, so that you will be able to show it to art lovers?

There is nothing I should like better.

I have inherited – not a single cent.

In the first place my father was not rich, and in the second place not one of the children has claimed his or her portion of the inheritance.

I don't think you will be the loser if you try to achieve some success with my paintings. I am willing to send you a number of them, and perhaps they will not disappoint you. It might mean that I should not only be able to pay you, but also to buy even more colours.

At present I need colours quite as much as money.

As I am very much afraid of being in debt, I do not run up high bills, I buy very little and only cash down, and I use only the colours I get brayed here.

If I am forced to let you wait, it is because I have to wait even worse myself.

As for drawing a bill of exchange, I tell you emphatically that I do not appeal to your clemency, that you would, however, have to take extreme measures, and I add that it would be to my advantage, as I possess literally nothing but my tools. Please answer this letter in any case, for you should know that if you draw a bill, you will not gain your object, and that later on I shall certainly not pay you, seeing that in that case you will have lost your rights. But you will be paid, either if on your part you are willing to try and dispose of some of my work for me, or if you will wait until I sell something of what I have on hand here.

I offer you my apologies for all this, but the circumstances I related are my excuse. However, I am not doing so badly, and above all things you should not despair of getting your money; it will be all right, but I myself have to wait worse and longer than you.

With regards,

Yours obediently, Vincent van Gogh

One last word.

If I were dishonest, certainly no moment could be more opportune than the present to get rid of a few small debts by letting you draw your bill of exchange, and then passively awaiting developments. But I need not

be disturbed by the comparatively small amount I have to pay. I work too hard to believe that I work in vain. If I said to you and Leurs, to whom I owe another 25 guilders, go ahead with your bills, you, and not I, would be the losers.

Please note once and for all that I am not exactly afraid of bills of exchange. I buy nearly everything cash down and I regulate my requirements so much in accordance with my ready money that now and then weeks pass without my spending a single guilder except on bread. Last year I had an ugly setback in the matter of the decoration of a dining room, which I did for somebody who would not pay me. If you take into consideration that notwithstanding all my exertions I have not yet recovered from the deficit thus occasioned – the colours I got from you and Leurs last year were destined for that purpose – you will understand that the year was not lucrative for me. I have no friends – and yet I tell you, do not despair of getting your money!

But could you manage to show some of my work at The Hague? That would be the best thing, and in this way you would serve your own interests as well as mine. I don't ask high prices, and the amount in question is not big. And therefore I suggest you try it. I haven't any money, less than ever before, as this is a period in which I am making myself independent of all subsidies.²

1. Mr. Furnée was the father of the land surveyor to whom letter 352a was addressed; he is also mentioned in letters 307 and 329. He dealt in colours; his son, Dr. A. L. C. Furnée, younger brother of the land surveyor, says Vincent owed his father 40 guilders.
2. This debt of 40 guilders, computed according to that period's rate of exchange, was \$16 or £3/6/6 (£3.32½)