

My dear Theo,

Thank you very much for sending me the canvas and paints, which have just arrived. This time there was 9.80 fr. carriage to pay, so I shan't go and get them out till I get your next letter, having no cash at the moment. But we must make sure that Tasset, who generally pays the forwarding charges in advance and does not fail to note this prepayment on his bill, has omitted it this time. In the same way on the last consignment but one I paid 5.60 fr., so if forwarding charges were put down on the last bill but one, it would be an overcharge. If he had made two separate parcels (usually the cost of carriage is about 3 francs) we should only have had to pay 5.60 fr.

Provided that on the 10 meters of canvas I paint only masterpieces half a meter in size and sell them cash down and at exorbitant prices to distinguished connoisseurs of the Rue de la Paix, nothing will be easier than to make a fortune on this package.

I think it is likely that we are going to have great heat now without wind, since the wind has been blowing for six weeks. If so, it is a very good thing that I have a supply of paints and canvas, because I already have my eye on half a dozen subjects, especially that little cottage garden I sent you the drawing of yesterday. I am thinking about Gauguin a lot, and I am sure that in one way or another, whether it is he who comes here or I who go to him, he and I will like practically the same subjects, and I have no doubt that I could work at Pont-Aven, and on the other hand I am convinced that he would fall in love with the country down here. Well, by the end of the year, supposing he gives you one canvas a month, which would make altogether a dozen a year, he will have made a profit on it, not having incurred any debts and working steadily without interruption; certainly he won't have been the loser, as the money which he will have had from us would be largely made good by the economies that will be possible if we set up house in the studio instead of both of us living in cafés. Besides that, provided we keep on good terms and are determined not to quarrel, we shall be in a stronger position as far as reputation goes.

If we each live alone, it means living like madmen or criminals, in appearance at any rate, and also a little in reality. I am happier to feel my old strength returning than I ever thought I could be. I owe this largely to the people at the restaurant where I have my meals at the moment, who really are extraordinary. Certainly I have to pay for it, but it is something you don't find in Paris, really getting something to eat for your money. And I should very much like to see Gauguin here for a good long time.

What Gruby says about doing without women and eating well is true, for if your very brain and marrow are going into your work, it is pretty sensible not to exhaust yourself more than you must in love-making. But it is easier to put into practice in the country than in Paris.

The desire for women that you catch in Paris, isn't it rather the effect of that very enervation which Gruby is the sworn enemy of than a sign of vigour? So you feel this desire disappearing at the very moment you are yourself again. The root of the evil lies in the constitution itself, in the fatal weakening of families from generation to generation, and besides that, in one's unwholesome job and the dreary life in Paris. The root of the evil certainly lies there, and there's no cure for it.

I think that when the day comes for you to free yourself of those futile accounts and the absurdly complicated management at Goupil's, you would gain enormously in influence with the collectors; these complicated systems of management are the very devil, and I think that no brain exists, no temperament, whoever the man on the job is, that does not lose 50 per cent over it. Our uncle was quite right in what he said about it: much business with few employees and not little business with a lot of them. Unluckily for him he was himself caught in the wheels. This job of working among people so as to make sales is a job that requires observation and coolness. But if you are forced to give too much attention to the books, you lose your poise.

I do want to know exactly how you are. Anyway, provided the impressionists produce good stuff and make friends, there is always the chance and the possibility of a more independent position for you later on. It's a pity that it cannot be from now on. No letter from Russell yet, but now that he has got the drawings, he is bound to reply. This restaurant where I am is very queer; it is grey all over; the floor is of grey bitumen like a street pavement, grey paper on the walls, green blinds always drawn, a big green curtain in front of the door which is always open, to stop the dust coming in. So it already has a Velásquez grey—like in the "Spinning Women"—and even the very narrow, very fierce ray of sunlight through a blind, like the one that slants across Velásquez's picture, is not wanting. Little tables of course, with white cloths. And behind this room in Velásquez grey you see the old kitchen, as clean as a Dutch kitchen, with floor of bright red bricks, green vegetables, oak chest, the kitchen range with shining brass things and blue and white tiles, and the big fire a clear orange. And then there are two women waitresses, both in grey, a little like that picture of Prevost's you have in your place – you could compare it point for point.

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In the kitchen, an old woman and a short, fat servant also in grey, black, white. I don't know if I describe it clearly enough for you, but it's here, and it's pure Velásquez.

In front of the restaurant there is a covered court, paved with red brick, and on the walls wild vine, convolvulus and creepers.

It is still the real old Provençal, whereas the other restaurants are so much modeled on Paris that even when they have no kind of concierge whatever, there's his lodge just the same and the notice "Apply to the Concierge!"

It isn't all brilliant here. I saw a stable with four coffee-coloured cows, and a calf of the same colour. The stable bluish-white hung with spiders' webs, the cows very clean and very beautiful, and a great green curtain in the doorway to keep out flies and dust.

Grey again – Velásquez's grey.

There was such quiet in it – the cafe-au-lait and tobacco colours of the cows' hides, with the soft bluish grey-white of the walls, the green hanging and the sparkling sunny golden-green outside to make a startling contrast. So you see there's something still to be done, quite different from anything I have done so far.

I must go to work. I saw another very quiet and lovely thing the other day, a girl with a coffee-tinted skin, if I remember correctly, ash-blond hair, grey eyes, a print bodice of pale pink under which you could see the breasts, shapely, firm and small. This against the emerald leaves of some fig trees. A woman as simple as the herds, every line of her virgin.

It isn't altogether impossible that I shall get her to pose in the open air, and her mother too – a gardener's wife – earth colour, dressed just then in soiled yellow and faded blue.

The girl's coffee-tinted complexion was darker than the pink of her bodice.

The mother was amazing, the figure in dirty yellow and faded blue standing out in strong sunlight against a square of brilliant snow-white and citron-yellow flowers. A perfect Van der Meer of Delft, you see.

It's not a bad place, the South.

Ever yours, Vincent