

Letter T39
Paris, 30 June or 1 July 1890

My dearest brother,

We have gone through a period of the greatest anxiety; our dear little boy has been very ill, but fortunately the doctor, who was uneasy himself, told Jo, You are not going to lose the child because of this ¹. Here in Paris the best milk you can buy is downright poison. We are now giving him ass's milk, and this is doing him good, but you never heard anything so grievously distressing as this almost continuous plaintive crying all through many days and many nights, when you don't know what to do, and all you do seems to aggravate his sufferings. It's not that the milk isn't fresh, but what is wrong is the fodder and the treatment of the cows. It's abominable. You can well imagine how happy we are that it is going better. Jo was admirable, which you can imagine too. A true mother, but for all that she wore herself out a good deal too much; may she recover her strength and not be subjected to new trials. Fortunately she is asleep at the moment, but she is moaning in her sleep, and there is nothing I can do for her. If only the baby, who is sleeping too, will let her sleep for some hours, both them will wake up with a smile, at least I hope so. In general she is having a hard time of it at the moment.

At present we do not know what we ought to do; there are problems. Ought we to take another apartment – you know, on the first floor of the same house? Ought we to go to Auvers, to Holland, or not? Ought I to live without a thought for the morrow, and when I work all day long not earn enough to protect that good Jo from worries over money matters, as those rats Boussod and Valadon are treating me as though I just entered their business, and are keeping me on a short allowance? Oughtn't I to be calculating, if I spend nothing on extras and am short of money – oughtn't I to tell them how matters stand, and if they should dare refuse me, oughtn't I to tell them at last, Gentlemen, I am going to take the plunge, and establish myself as a private dealer in my own house?

While writing I think I came to the conclusion that this is my duty, and that if Mother, or Jo, or you or I myself should resign ourselves to starvation, it won't be of the slightest service to us – on the contrary. What would be the good of you and me going through the world like a pair of down-and-out beggars with nothing to eat? On the contrary, by keeping up our courage, and by living, all of us, sustained by our mutual love and mutual esteem, we shall make better headway, and we shall be able to fulfill our duty and our task with much greater security than if we were to weigh every mouthful of bread. What do you have to say to this, old fellow?

Don't bother your head about me or about us, old fellow, but remember that what gives me the greatest pleasure is the knowledge that you are in good health and that you are busy with your work, which is admirable. You have too much ardor as it is, and we shall be ready for battle for a long time to come yet, for we shall have to battle all through life without eating the oats of charity they give to old horses in the mansions of the great. We shall draw the plow until our strength forsakes us, and we shall still look with admiration at the sun or the moon, according to the hour.

We like this better than being put into an armchair and rubbing our legs like the old merchant at Auvers. Look here, old boy, watch your health as much as you can, and I shall do the same, for we have too much in our noodles to forget the daisies and the lumps of earth freshly cast up by the plough, neither do we forget the branches of the shrubs which put forth buds in spring, or the bare branches of the trees shivering in winter, nor the limpid blue of the serene skies, nor the big clouds of autumn, nor the uniformly grey sky in winter, nor the sun rising over our aunts' garden, nor the red sun going down into the sea at Scheveningen, nor the moon and stars of a fine night in summer or winter – no, come what may, this is our profession.

Is this enough? No – I have, and I hope from the bottom of my heart that you too will someday have, – a wife to whom you will be able to say these things; and as for me – whose mouth is so often closed, and whose head is so often empty – it is from her that I receive the germs, which in all probability come from afar, but which were found by our beloved father and mother – perhaps they will grow so that at least I may become a man, and who knows whether my son, if he can stay alive and if I can help him – who knows whether he will not grow up to be Somebody. As for you, you have found your way, old fellow, your carriage is steady on its wheels and strong, and I am seeing my way, thanks to my dear wife. Take it easy, you, and hold your horses a little, so that there may be no accident, and as for me, an occasional lash of the whip would do me no harm.

Your portrait of Miss Gachet must be admirable [F 772, JH 2048], and I shall be happy to see it with those spots of orange in the background. The sketch of the landscape makes me think of something exquisite. I am anxious to see it. That letter from father Peyron was good. After all, these people are of sterling quality. Now listen, as soon as Jo is a little stronger and the little one entirely recovered, you must come and stay with us for a day or two, at least on a Sunday and some days after. The Salons are closed, but it will not be much of a loss to you, for we shall go see the Quost together, and it is decidedly a fine picture. We are going to ask him if I can display it in the show window on

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the Boulevard, at least if it's not too large. But it must be possible, and there will also be one of your things, old fellow. It is only fair that the two of you should be together, for it was you who drew my attention to that beautiful picture of Quost's. Do you know that I sold that fine picture by Corot, and that those duffers Boussod and Valadon said it could not be sold? Well, Tersteeg sold it to Mesdag at a profit of 5000 and Mesdag is so pleased with it that he wants to buy other ones like it, and he has written to Arnold & Trip asking them to look out for similar pieces. Good-by, dear old brother, the paints are going off. I shake your hand most cordially, and I am glad that the little one and his mummy are sleeping soundly.
Yours, Theo

1. See Vincent's letter 646.