

Letter 208
The Hague, 22 June 1882

Dear Theo,

I received your letter of June 12 with enclosed 50 fr., and thank you most kindly. I did not answer you before because I did not know what turn my illness would take, as I did not recover as quickly as the doctor had expected. I have already been here more than two weeks, and I have had to pay for the next two weeks in advance, though perhaps, if everything goes well, I can leave in eight or ten days; but in that case I shall get part of my money back. Now this morning I spoke to the doctor and asked him if there has been some complication that would make things worse. He said, No – but rest and a prolonged stay in the hospital were necessary. But I can assure you that I am longing dreadfully for the sight of something green and for some fresh air; an experience like this makes one feel very weak and faint. I have to lie still almost all the time. I cannot draw, though I tried several times – it makes me too feverish. I can read, but I haven't any more books. Well, there will come an end to this sooner or later, so I must have patience.

Sien is at Leyden, but I cannot hear from her until she is confined. What are the sufferings of us men compared to that terrible pain which women have to bear during childbirth. They are better than we are at patient suffering, but on the other hand we are superior in some other things. She came to visit me regularly until the last day, and brought me some smoked beef and sugar or bread, which I have to do without now, and it makes me feel very faint. But now I am so sorry that I in turn cannot go to Leyden to bring her some extras that she might need, for the food one gets there is not particularly good. It gives me such a strange feeling not to be able to do anything, and see the days pass by so idly. Sometimes I think I shall be able to do this or that, but then weakness gets the better of me.

I am very glad you were interested in the drawings I sent you. I worked so hard on them, and on the ones for C. M. also, those last days when I suffered much more pain and was much more depressed than since I have been here. For I felt worse before I went to the hospital, long before.

Now I want to tell you that I've had a letter from Rappard. Of course I had sent him back the 2.50 guilders at once, and then he answered me and repeated what he had already said about my drawings in the studio, namely that he liked them and felt sympathy for them because of their style and sentiment and character.

He suggested that if I had some more like them, I should send them to him, as he thought he might be able to find a buyer. You can imagine that this is what I like best; it does me so much good when people find some sympathy for my work. For it is so discouraging and dispiriting, and acts like a damper, when one never hears, This or that is right, and full of sentiment and character. It is so cheering to realize that others feel something of what one has tried to express. Van Rappard also liked a few of the nude studies.

For the first time in several days I am sitting up again, and I feel something revive in me while I write. If I were only well again! If I could only work here, how I should love to make some studies of the wards. I am now lying in another ward, without curtains around the beds or cots, and there are peculiar light effects, especially in the evening or in the night. The doctor is exactly as I should wish: he looks like some heads by Rembrandt, a splendid forehead and a very sympathetic expression. I hope to have learned this much from him, that in the future I shall try to handle my models the way he does his patients, namely by getting a firm hold on them and putting them straightway into the required position. It is astonishing how much patience he has, massaging the patients himself, rubbing them with ointment, and handling them in different ways, infinitely better than a male nurse does, and how well he knows how to banish their scruples and to make them do exactly as he wishes. There is one old man who would have been a superb St. Jerome – a thin, long sinewy, brown wrinkled body with such very distinct and expressive joints that it makes one melancholy not to be able to have him for a model.

I can imagine that Heyerdahl is pleased with such a reward.

I still have to tell you that Father came to visit me during my first days here, though it was only a short and very hurried visit, and I was not able to speak about anything that mattered. I would have preferred his visiting me another time, when on both sides we could have enjoyed it more. This way it was very strange to me, and seemed more or less like a dream, as does this whole business of lying here ill.

Except for Sien, her mother, and for Father, I have not seen anybody, which is indeed for the best, though the days are rather lonesome and melancholy. Involuntarily I often think how much more gloomy and lonesome things are now than, for instance, when I went to Mauve for the first time this winter. It stabs me to the heart and depresses me whenever I think of it, though I try to throw the whole thought overboard like useless ballast.

I heard from one of the attendants that Breitner left the hospital recently.

I believe that the doctor in this ward is a little more abrupt than in the more expensive wards; so much the better. Perhaps they are less afraid to hurt the patients a little here than in the more expensive wards, and, for instance, they often put a catheter into the bladder quickly, without “ceremony” or fuss. Well, so much the better, I think, and I repeat, I find it just as interesting here as in a third-class waiting room. If only I could work! But I must submit. I have a book by Dickens and my books on perspective with me.

I hope you will write again, you know the address is City Hospital, Brouwersgracht – 4 Class – 6 Ward – No 9.

Adieu, with a handshake in thought and once again many thanks for your faithful letter and what was enclosed. Have a good time and believe me, sincerely

Yours, Vincent

I think that I was too nervous when Sien had to leave, and that it caused a relapse; but there are moments when one cannot always keep calm. She is so alone there, and I should like so much to go and see her, for the days must be frightful for her.