

Letter 388a
Nuenen, 31 January 1885

Dear Theo,

I am anxiously awaiting the money; I had hoped you would have seen your way to sending it a few days earlier.

I have explained to you at great length that the painting of the 50 studies of heads which I intend to do leads to my incurring more expense than usual. And as, by your writing that you are suspicious of me, you yourself are the cause of this, I feel vexed when I think that my being embarrassed every now and then is to be attributed more to this than to anything else. My not selling anything would not worry me so much if only my work could be pushed forward with all possible vigour.

Well, I am doing all I can, and I am making progress after all. You will also have to take back what you said about your suspiciousness. When this will be, you will have to decide for yourself – but I only want to say by way of caution that the ugliest misunderstandings are caused by suspicion.

As for me, at times I feel wretched because it seems that your character has congealed in this mould, which I believe will cause you trouble later on. But what's the use of talking? What I mean is a family failing, as far as I can see.

I always have the impression that at Zundert, and a few years earlier than that, there was a generally better atmosphere in the house. Since then, I feel it has not changed for the better. At present...

But what I don't know is whether the former – the feeling that things were better in Zundert – is only my imagination; this may easily be the case.

But at any rate, now it is not it.

So much for that. Goodbye.

Ever yours, Vincent

Since last summer I cannot help seeing you in my mind's eye wearing a pince-nez with black glasses.

This does not change a man so much, you will say.

Maybe not – but my impression is that, in a sense other than the literal one, in your actions and thoughts, you have procured such black eyeglasses. Suspiciousness for instance.

But on the other hand I think it a good thing to know one's Paris well – if, once there, you become a Parisian through and through – analytical, steely, “knowing,” as they call it – I am not narrow-minded enough to condemn it. That's not my way. Be and remain a Parisian if you like, it's all right with me.

There are various things in the world that are great – the sea with the fishermen – the furrows and the peasants – the mines and the miners.

And in the same way I also think great the sidewalks of Paris and the people that know their Paris.

Now, however, you commit an error if on your part you are unable to understand that your being suspicious of me is positively improper. Most certainly I think differently, I feel differently, I act differently. But it is quite consistent when viewed in its proper relation.

And considering that when I was in Drenthe and I advised you to become a painter, you wrote me that I was speaking about your affairs from afar and I conceded this point, the reverse is most certainly true too, namely that you can only make a wild guess about my doings here. So give up your suspicions, for they are simply improper. And the means must be found in the good progress my work is making – leaving the matter of more or less mutual sympathy out of the question – to be at least inoffensive to each other, however much our ways may run in opposite directions.