

Dear Theo,

I already wrote you the day before yesterday that although on the one hand I felt far from well, I nevertheless began to see some light.

However, I am sorry to have to tell you more categorically that I am literally worn out and overworked. Just think, I went to live in my own studio (in Nuenen) on May 1 and I have not had a hot dinner more than perhaps six or seven times since. I do not want you to tell Mother that I am not well, for good reasons, for perhaps she would begin to worry, thinking that it was not kind to let things happen as they did, namely – that I did not stay at home to avoid these very consequences.

I will not mention it, so don't you, either.

But I have lived then, and I do here, without any money for a dinner, because the work costs me too much, and I have relied too much on my being strong enough to stand it.

What the doctor tells me is that I absolutely must take better care of myself and until I feel stronger I must take more rest.

It is an absolute breakdown.

Now I have made it worse by smoking a great deal, which I did the more because then one does not feel an empty stomach so much.

Well, manger de la vache enragée, that is what I have my share of.

For it is not just the food, at the same time it is all the worry and trouble one has.

You know how, for various reasons, the time in Nuenen was far from easy for me. Then I came here, and am very glad I did, but it has also been a difficult time for me.

What we must do, and where the greatest trouble lies, is this. To pay the models oneself is too great a burden; as long as one hasn't enough money, one must use the opportunities offered by the studios like those of Verlat or Cormon. And one must live in the artists' world, and work at the clubs where one shares the cost of the models. It is true that I haven't thought of this before, at least I haven't done what was necessary, but now I wish I had done it a year earlier. If it could be arranged so that we lived in the same city, it would certainly be by far the best, at least for a time.

But the more I think about it, the more certain I am that it would perhaps be better not to spend too much on a studio the first year, because that first year I shall mainly have to draw.

For speaking of Cormon, I think he would tell me much the same thing as Verlat, namely that I must draw from the nude or plaster casts for a year, just because I have always been drawing from life.

That is not asking too much, for I tell you that there are some fellows here who have been plodding at it for three years, and are not yet allowed to give it up, yet they paint too. In that one year I must drill myself in the man's and the woman's figure, both in detail and as a whole, and then I shall know it almost by heart.

Drawing in itself, the technique of it, comes easily enough to me. I am beginning to do it like writing, with the same ease. But at that very point it gets more interesting if one is not satisfied with the skill gradually acquired, but aims seriously and thoroughly at originality and broadness of conception – the drawing of the mass instead of the outlines, the solid modelling.

And when people like Verlat or Cormon, for instance, demand this of a fellow, I assure you it is no bad sign.

For there are plenty of those whom Verlat simply lets drudge on, for they will never attain anything. You speak of clever fellows in that studio of Cormon's – just because I would damn well like to be one of them, I feel for myself that I must insist on devoting at least a year in Paris to drawing from the nude and from plaster casts. For the rest, let me do what presents itself in the way of painting, when an effect out-of-doors strikes me or when I have a good model, etc. And do not think this is a long way, for it is a short one. One who can draw a figure from memory is much more productive than one who cannot. And you will see how productive I shall become by taking the trouble to draw for a whole year.

Neither must you suppose that those years of drawing out-of-doors have been wasted. For that is just the thing that those who have worked only at academies and studios lack – the power to see the reality in which they live and the ability to find subjects. Well, wouldn't it be wise to postpone renting a studio, at least for the first half year, just because we need the money so badly?

But for the rest, I am very sympathetic to founding a studio, inasmuch as one might combine with other painters to take models together.

The more energy, the better. And in hard times especially, one must look for friendship and co-operation.

But, Theo, this indisposition is a damn bad thing just now; I regret it terribly, but yet I keep courage. It will right itself.

You understand that if I had put off doing something about it, it would have become worse and worse. But my opinion is that one must not think that people whose health is impaired, wholly or partly, are no good for painting. It is necessary to reach the sixties, or at least the fifties, if one begins at thirty. But one need not be

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perfectly healthy, one may have all kinds of ailments. The work need not suffer from it. On the contrary, nervous people are more sensitive and refined.

But, Theo, just because my health is decidedly impaired, I am resolved to apply myself to the higher figure, and to try to refine myself. It overtook me so unexpectedly, I had been feeling weak and feverish, but I went on anyway; but I began to feel worried when more and more of my teeth broke off and I began to look more and more sick. Well, we will try to remedy it.

I think having my teeth attended to will already help, because my whole mouth being painful, I swallowed my food as quickly as possible; and it may help to improve my looks also.

As to this month, I paid for my room in advance (25 fr.); for food, 30 fr. in advance; and 50 fr. to the dentist; then a visit to the doctor and some drawing materials; there now remain six francs.

The main thing will be not to fall ill this month, which is not easy to achieve; it certainly might happen. I always believe that I have a certain toughness in common with the peasants, who also do not eat so particularly well, and yet live and work on.

But don't you worry about it. If you can send some more money, very well; but if you can't, I'll await events in all calmness.

What I do not like is that I am feverish, and I argue in this way: I may have become weak, but I have been as careful as I could not to take unwholesome food. Neither is the overexertion too great – because, notwithstanding everything, I keep up my spirits, so it is only that I am overstrained because I am weak. I think it will redress itself. But you understand, if it got worse and took a vicious turn, it might develop into malignant typhus or at least typhoid fever. And the only reason why I do not suppose this will happen is, in the first place, that I have had a great deal of fresh air; in the second place, I repeat, though I obviously haven't had enough nourishment, I have been careful to take very simple food instead of the rotten things in the cheap restaurants; and thirdly, that I have a certain calmness and serenity, notwithstanding everything, so we must wait and see how things turn out.

You must not worry about it, for I don't either. I repeat, suppose I got a fever; I have lived and nourished myself so simply that it is improbable that it should become so very malignant. After all, things don't just happen, and there is a reason for everything.

Do write soon, for I badly need to hear from you. As to going to Nuenen, I should like to know what you think best.

But it is not necessary for me to go, for somebody like Rijke, the gardener, for instance, can do the necessary packing or dispatching just as well. But if you think it would be better, I can be ready by March.

Goodbye, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent