

Letter 385
Nuenen, November 1884

Dear Theo,

I am sure you will be interested to hear particulars about the call to Helvoirt that Father has received. Father told the people at Helvoirt that he would not even consider it unless the salary at Helvoirt were brought on a level with the salary at Nuenen. And Father wrote today that they do not seem to object to making up the difference in salary – I think they will have to add 150 guilders. So – although nothing has been settled yet – considering the willingness of the worthy natives, there is definitely a chance that as the result of his own words, Father will have to consider it seriously. This is important to me, as I should certainly not like to go with them to Helvoirt. So I wanted to state precisely how matters stand.

Though it has been freezing pretty hard here for the last few days, I am still at work out-of-doors, on a rather large study (more than 40 inches) of an old water mill at Gennep, on the other side of Eindhoven [F125, JH525].

I want to do it entirely out-of-doors, but it will certainly be the last I shall paint out-of-doors this year. Since I wrote you, I have also been working on other studies, including two heads of poldermen.

I now have three people in Eindhoven who want to learn to paint, and whom I am teaching to paint still-lives.

I can safely say that since your visit I have made progress in the technique of painting and in colour. And that I shall continue to do so, “il y a les premiers pas qui coûtent” in painting; it is easier later, and I have a number of trumps in my hand. And I think tricks can be made with them.

You know that I took steps to make it up with Mauve and Tersteeg after what happened in the past.

I am not sorry I did so.

But they have refused to have anything to do with me, very “definitely” refused. This does not discourage me.

I consider it like sending a picture to an exhibition and having it refused.

At first one must meet with opposition a few times.

So I repeat, I am not sorry for the advances I made, and shall probably repeat them, not at once, but before long.

Now I must tell you that I should be very glad if you did not stay entirely neutral in this, but, on the contrary, if you helped me get what I want. I have owned myself to be in the wrong, not only to Mauve, but also to Tersteeg. I did it the more readily because I believe that later they will see for themselves that, on their part, they have absolutely misunderstood some things. Which they don't see yet.

So on my part this time I went so far as to acknowledge unreservedly and unmistakably that I had been in the wrong as to the past, and for the rest I proposed to show them my work as it gets better – which means that at any rate I am absolved from having to make further apologies in the future. Once is enough, and really it was not necessary for me to go as far as that – namely unconditionally. Getting them to be open-minded on their part is another question – come to my aid in this matter if you feel inclined to do so. If not – don't worry – but then I shall return to the attack after a while.

I do not know how you have taken my last letter, which was not meant unkindly. My affairs can prosper, and in both our interests, I wish we could concentrate all the power at our disposal.

I sent both Tersteeg and Mauve a few words in answer to their refusal, to tell them that “I perhaps agreed with Tersteeg, it was better for me to look for new friends than to try to renew old relations, that this was exactly my own idea too, but that except and besides that, I had enough confidence in the future not even to give up the renewal of old relations, perhaps even better than before.”

This was my answer to Tersteeg, and it is also my answer to you. I believe it possible to be on better terms with you too than we are at present.

But speaking frankly – I think you have been too neutral toward me this past one and a half or two years, and above all things I desire more cordiality, our friendship having been too cool and too inactive for my taste. You may find this conceited if you like, but it isn't; I pointed this out to you before, and again now, for serious, practical reasons.

[Written separately] Margot Begemann will be returning to Nuenen one of these days; I have always remained good friends with her, and it is on my advice that she has not given way to the pressure exerted by her sisters, who showed clearly that they preferred for her to stay away, and who are still annoying her by suggesting that she has made a mess of things. On the contrary, her family is under an obligation to her, for at the time her brother went bankrupt, she put her own money into the business.

The simple fact is that if she and I choose to love each other, if we are attached to each other, which we have been for a long time for that matter, we are doing no harm which people have a right to reproach either one of us with. And in my eyes it is absurd that people should feel obliged to bother their heads about it – with the idea that it is in my interest or hers.

This meant doing a bad turn.

It may be that they all did this with the best of intentions, but... There was Louis Begemann; he too had objections, but he behaved and went on behaving in such a way that she as well as I could talk things over with him, and its not turning out worse was due to his being humane and calm, so that he could help when the thing I knew about happened, whereas the others only hindered. And we were quite of one mind as to the measures that had to be taken then.

As a matter of fact, I had already warned him three days before, and told him: I am uneasy about your sister.

It cannot be denied that at various times she did good turns for almost all the people in the surroundings, either in case of sickness or when they were in some trouble or other. And it is a fact that she and I became attached to each other during Mother's illness. Only the other day she wrote me: If there should be sick people at Nuenen, do go and look them up, and see if they can be given help. In short – there are a thousand things like that in her character. And the very mildest thing one can say of it is that in this case a most deplorable misunderstanding has arisen.

As for you, on looking back I feel sure that now you would not speak the way you did that evening any more.

But that concerned only me, and I could stand it, so on my part there is no question of reproaching you in this matter.

However, only by way of explanation to you alone, I tell you that her sisters spoke to her in the same way you spoke to me, who can stand it; in her case it made her desperate. You were not the least bit at fault in this, for you spoke to me, and I do not take such things lying down, and you did not speak to her. But the real fault lies with her sisters, or rather one of the sisters in particular, who appears to be more hard-hearted, as in fact she is still sulking and bearing a grudge.

You...you would have to tell me yourself that you are bearing a grudge – before I should suspect you of it. No more than I bear a grudge against you.