

Dear Theo,

I am writing a letter to Father at the same time as this one, in which a few things are set forth which now I need not write twice. Be so kind as to read Father's letter. In this letter for you, I say again that more and more it seems to me that not looking too far or aspiring too high is the most practical and direct way to make progress with my work. It is stimulating to think of London, know this well, but the question is only, is it to be done now? Is now the right moment? In fact, isn't it better to say to myself straight out: "Don't think yourself ripe enough yet, because what you want and mean to do does not yet seem comprehensible enough to those who see it – as they are, so to speak, more or less frightened by it; keep on going – work faithfully and firmly after nature. Seek it once more in nature only, on the heath or in the dunes, and for the present don't mind that those who have seen it don't think much of it yet. Don't go on showing it, don't think of immediate approval in London – it must get even better." I say all these things to myself, and after thinking over what I write about the woman, you too will perhaps find there are reasons for hesitating about going to London directly. I cannot decide yet.

But a simple thought, which seems good to me just because of its simplicity, is that I should take no step other than going and living more cheaply someplace in the country where the scenery is striking. I am anxious to know whether Father and you can comprehend my feelings about staying with the woman. I should wish it were possible that, instead of sending her out into the street again, we might return her promise to better herself with a cordial pardoning and forgetting.

It is better that she be saved than that she be ruined.

This morning she said to me, "As to what I did before, I do not even think of it, and have not mentioned it to Mother either. I only know that if I have to go, I shall not earn enough, especially as I shall have to pay board for the children; and if in that case I walk the street, it will be because I must, not because I want to." I think I wrote you once what passed between us when she was in the hospital and I had not yet decided whether I should take her into my house or not. She never asked anything then either, which contrasts very much with her more ordinary behaviour.

I cannot say exactly what her expression was, but it was something like a sheep that would say, "If I must be slaughtered, I won't try to defend myself." At any rate, something so pathetic that I can only pardon fully – aye, feel guilty myself – rather than accuse her. However, I kept this to myself, and made her promise several things: that she would be more orderly, more zealous, pose better, not go to her mother, etc.

And now I have completely forgiven and forgotten, without reservation, and I take her part just as I did before.

It is a heartfelt pity which is so strong that everything gives way before it, and I cannot act otherwise than last year in that hospital, and I say now as I did then, As long as I have a crust of bread and a roof over my head, it is yours. It was no passion then, it is no passion now; it is understanding each other's vital wants. Knowing now, however, how her people upset her last year, and fearing she might fall back again, I should like to live with her someplace in a little village where she could see nothing of the town and could live a more natural life. However, I have known from the beginning that her constitution required years to recover, and so there is still hope.

Well, the little boy really dotes on me. Now that that he is beginning to crawl and stand, he is always at my side wherever I go in the house.

Look here, Theo, by acting according to what we feel, firmly and resolutely, I think we may fall into mistakes, may meet with deceptions several times; but I think we shall be saved from a great evil and from despair if we ask what our duty is – and do what ought to be done as well as we can.

Now about the work, I do not doubt it has its faults, but neither do I doubt that I am not entirely wrong, and that I shall succeed, though it be after a long period of seeking.

And I believe that it is dangerous to expect success anywhere else but in the work.

I wish I had, for instance, Mauve or Herkomer for a friend. However, I believe that isn't the most important thing, neither would they consider it the most important. By working on faithfully, it may last a longer or a shorter time, be more or less successful; sooner or later one will meet among the painters the lifetime friend, as for instance M. or H. might be.

And perhaps it will come sooner if one goes on working quietly than if one goes begging for it, or visiting people, which for me has the smaller chance of success because of some eccentricities in me which you notice even more than I, though I occasionally notice them myself too, but I do not think them so bad that I

should not be astonished at the continuous obstacles when trying to get some people to have some confidence in me. Suppose my faults are as bad and as obvious, for instance, as the woman's: then I should wish that some people did for me what I am now doing for the woman – and have already done several times – forgive, not just partially, but completely, as though nothing had happened or would happen again. If you have perhaps said something to C. M. about my leaving the woman, please take it back immediately; I cannot do a thing which will prove to be cruel or unmerciful. I do not know whether I shall be happy with the woman in the future, maybe not, it certainly won't be perfect; happiness is not anything we ourselves are responsible for – but we are responsible for how far we heed conscience.

Adieu, boy, let me hear from you while you are still at Nuenen.

I cannot speak differently.

Just read Father's letter.

If I deserted the woman, she would perhaps go mad, but because I have already often found the way to calm her in her fits of unbearable temper, by quieting a fear which oppressed her, because in the course of this year she has learned to understand that she has found in me a true friend, on whom she can lean in her weakness, who understands her troubles, it has given her a feeling of rest when I am with her; and I hope she will improve in time, especially if she is no longer attracted by what draws her back to the past, of which she had better not be reminded.

Moving to the country would be a good thing, but at the same time it must be an economy measure. She has been told, for instance, that I should leave her because of the children. That isn't true, it would never be my reason, but it is one of the things which upset her and make her wish she did not have children.

Theo, as a matter of fact she does improve, but one has to show her the same thing over and over again, and she can make one feel discouraged; but when – which rarely happens – she tries to say what she means and thinks, it is wonderful how pure she is, notwithstanding her depravity. As if, far deep in the ruin of her soul and heart and mind, something had been saved.

And in those rare moments her expression is like that of a "Mater Dolorosa" by Delacroix or like certain heads by Ary Scheffer.

That's what I believe in, and now that I have seen it again, I respect that depth of feeling and won't mention her faults.

I hope, boy, you will see a few beautiful sunsets over the silent quiet country, far away from the city, before you go back.

As to the change of residence, I know that I could find it in more than one place. But of course we do what must be done, in all calmness, and we shall write each other about it yet.

Adieu, have a good time and know that whatever the future may bring, I have hope for better times.

Yours sincerely, Vincent.