

Dear Theo,

One cannot always find the right words to speak absolutely straightforwardly – but I am so firmly resolved to speak my mind to you without reserve – I don't give a damn whether you are suspicious or not – that after some consideration I have now perhaps found clearer words for the feelings I want to express.

I believe that it is in our mutual interest that we separate.

Your position – isn't this true? – does not admit of our associating with each other intimately, frequently, cordially. Your position – to mention only one thing by way of example – would not admit of my going to live at your house in Paris, let's say, either with the intention of studying or for financial reasons however necessary and useful it might be, and might become more and more, if circumstances permitted. For – against my person, my manners, clothes, words, you, like so many others, seem to think it necessary to raise so many objections – weighty enough and at the same time obviously without redress – that they have caused our personal, brotherly intercourse to wither and die off gradually in the course of the years. To this must be added my past, and that at Goupil & Co.'s you are quite the plush gentleman, and I am a black sheep and an ill-natured fellow. Enough – this is how things are – aren't they? – and as here it is a question of analyzing, of manfully facing a situation, I suppose you are not going to contradict me in this matter.

Only – but I do not mention this by way of reproach – the moment is not opportune for this – it is past – I just mention it for clarity's sake – only I had thought that you had attached some value to our not drifting too far apart – that by your being on the qui vive in this field, by executing some adroit maneuvers, you might have been able to find a more satisfactory solution for this ticklish problem. For instance, in such a way that I could have got I don't say on friendly terms, but at least into touch with Tersteeg and Mauve again, and so on. But – a struggle is going on in your mind about this, which you prefer not to be reminded of. So as to the point in question, you don't even dream of doing it, and you don't think it nice of me to take the liberty of referring to it. In any case you think me foolish in these things, and you won't touch them with a bargepole.

This is the dark side of your character – I think you are mean in this respect – but the bright side of your character is your reliability in money matters.

Ergo conclusion – I acknowledge being under an obligation to you with the greatest pleasure. Only – lacking relations with you, with Tersteeg, or with whomever I knew in the past – I want something else by way of compensation.

For – personally I have to think of my future – I want to get on. If a hussy won't have me, it's all right with me; I can hardly take it ill of her – but nothing is more certain than that I shall try to find compensation elsewhere. And the same is true of other relations. I shall not obtrude myself upon you, neither shall I force you to be affectionate toward me – but – as a friend – let alone as a brother – you are too cool for my taste. Not as to money, old fellow; I am not speaking of that. But personally you aren't of the slightest use to me, nor am I to you. And it is possible, and it ought to be, that we should mean more to each other personally.

Well, we won't quarrel over it – things have their periods – the period of quarreling is over – the period of parting follows, I think. But remember that there are fellows who most certainly love you, and whom you ought not to be suspicions of, whose sympathy becomes powerless because of your distrusting them too much, whereas you would do better if you strengthened a man's self-confidence. So much for that.

I do not think it impossible that Marie – you know whom I mean, the one you helped when she was sick – notwithstanding full appreciation of your character and assistance, must have felt something of what I feel.

Instinctively I dare suppose it.

Now I will take the liberty to say one thing – we shall separate – for me this is a precarious transition – and one coupled with financial difficulties that will certainly be a great worry to me. However, I shall try to see things through – but I most decidedly demand of you that at this moment, which is critical for me, you on your part will be very frank. I know that you will agree to our separation – for the very reason that it will be settled peacefully.

Tell me without reserve whether you approve of Antwerp – including my retaining my studio here in the country, which is too cheap to let go, and which for that matter I cannot do without as a storeroom and a refuge if necessary. And, if it is not asking too much, help me to see things through – financial embarrassment in this period, toward the end of the year, is always worse for me. I should wish the period of the transition to be short if possible, because it is torture to feel that one thing is disappearing and you haven't got the other. I cannot help thinking of the reason for Marie and you parting company. I don't know any details, do I? – but you did not think she was a good woman. Maybe you are right, but it may also be that you did not understand her. And as for me, it is quite possible that

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similarly I am not a good man – this may well be – but in my case too, are you sure that you understand and feel the right way? I neither can nor will be the judge of this.

In Proudhon you may read “la femme est la désolation du juste” – but isn’t it possible to answer this with, The just is the desolation of woman? Quite possible.

And ditto ditto one might say, “The artist is the desolation of the financier,” and conversely, “The financier is the desolation of the artist.”

You see – I do not know the final solution myself – but I see two sides to one and the same problem.

So you know my irrevocable intentions – for both our sakes I hope the time of transition will be short, and – because I know you agree to a separation – how can we act most quickly and satisfactorily?

With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent