

Dear brother,

As I feel the need to speak out frankly, I cannot hide from you that I am overcome by a feeling of great anxiety, depression, a *je ne sais quoi* of discouragement and despair more than I can tell. And if I cannot find comfort, it will be too overwhelming.

I take it so much to heart that I do not get on better with people in general; it worries me a great deal, because so much of my success in carrying out my work depends on it.

Besides, the fate of the woman and the fate of my poor little boy and the other child cut my heart to shreds. I would like to help them still, and I cannot. I am at a point where I need some credit, some confidence and warmth, and, look here, I find no confidence. You are an exception, but it makes me feel even more how hopeless everything is just because you have to bear the brunt of it all.

And if I look at my equipment, everything is too miserable, too insufficient, too dilapidated. We have gloomy rainy days here, and when I come to the corner of the garret where I have settled down, it is curiously melancholy there; through one single glass pane the light falls on an empty colour box, on a bundle of worn-out brushes; in short, it is so curiously melancholy that fortunately it also has a comical aspect, enough not to make one weep over it, but to take it gaily. For all that, it is very disproportionate to my plans, very disproportionate to the seriousness of my work – so here is an end to the gaiety.

What can I say? Last year ended with an even greater deficit than I told you, for I have already paid off more than I told you about, including Rappard, but there is a new debt to Rappard, and that weighs on me most because he is a friend, and though for the moment I have paid off everything that was the slightest urgent, I am faced by the fact that I cannot buy colours because I still have to pay for the old ones, or, rather, I dare not take anything on credit, because after some time that would run up a high bill again. You know yourself how we were not exactly in a mood to say more during your visit, but now I declare to you that The Hague has been too much for me, and that I had put off the separation again and again, for one unshakable reason, even though the deficit was unavoidable if I persisted.

Rather than part from her, I would have risked another effort by marrying her and going to live in the country – not, however, without telling you how things were. But I felt sure that this was the straight way, notwithstanding even temporary financial objections; not only might it have saved her, but it would also have put an end to my own great mental anguish, which has now unfortunately been doubled. And I would rather have drained the cup to the dregs.

I do not say I should have been happier or unhappier if either Father or you had been able to feel the same way, and if our rôles had been reversed, you in my place, I in yours, I do not know whether I should have been able to act differently than you have done; but I repeat, it might have saved her. So I look upon it as a decision which did not depend on you both, but on myself (except that I cannot give myself my father's permission to marry, this one point lies beyond my power, and Father replied to my direct question with generalities, in which no vestige of permission could be found). And so I have decided, for the very reason that I was already in debt, and that the future was dark – but this decision brings little relief, and does not remove the exhaustion brought about by a year of too many cares, and a bleeding heart and a void and feeling of disappointment and melancholy also remain which are not easily cured.

It is true I am here now, and as to the finances, I have almost made up the deficit, and after a time I will have made it up entirely, and nature is beautiful here, more so than I expected.

But I am far from being suitably and comfortably settled, for the glimpse I gave you of my little garret is taken from nature.

If I had known everything beforehand, I would have gone to these parts with the woman last year, when she left the hospital; then there would have been no deficit, and then we should not have parted, for she is less guilty in her bad behaviour than her family, which has employed all kinds of mean intrigues, ostensibly for her benefit, but actually the reverse. Besides, I have sometimes wondered whether the mother may not have been backed by a priest, for more has been done on their part to influence the woman than I can explain, particularly because I have not heard anything from her, though I told her before I left that I would send my address to the carpenter next door as soon as I should know it myself. I did send it to him, begging him to pass it on to her, yet I have not heard anything, except from that same carpenter, that she had come to take away all her things (after all, more than she brought with her). Now you can understand that I am anxious about her fate, though I believe if she were simply in need, she would have written; but now there must be something basically wrong. You will understand how I feel about it. I am rather afraid that her family is

telling her, He will certainly write, and then – he will be under our thumb, in short, they are gambling on my weakness, and I will not walk into that trap.

So today I wrote, not to her, but to the carpenter, that he must see to it that she gets my address, but that I will not write her first, and if she writes, I shall see how things really are.

I would definitely try to help her if the family disowned her altogether. But since she is in fact backed by her family, it is clear enough to me that she is in agreement with them, and has been for a long time, so that I may not and cannot have any more to do with it; or if, as I thought, there is a Catholic priest behind it all, she will get help, but only on condition that she have no dealings with me; this then being the reason for their silence.

This much I can tell you, however – I am not yet so far that I can resign myself to the idea of separation; at present I am very, very worried about her fate, just because she has left me in the dark about it. And besides, these last few days I have been overwhelmed by forebodings about the future, and also about the miserable state of my stock of painting materials, the possibility of doing the most necessary, useful things the way they ought to be done. Because from the very first I have found so much beauty here that, if I could afford it, I would send for my things in The Hague, and I would fit this very same garret up as a studio (by making a little more light) or I would hunt up some other room. And then I should like to replenish and renew all my materials.

I wish I could do that thoroughly for once, and if somebody would help me to do that, my greatest cares would be relieved. But now, either everything falls on your shoulders or I find nobody who trusts me; this is the circle which my thoughts describe, and I see no way out. A painter who has no means of his own cannot do without a rather large credit, a credit which not only the painter's profession demands, but which I think the shoemaker's, the carpenter's and the blacksmith's profession would demand equally if they wanted to establish themselves or had to move to a new place.

It is especially this rainy weather, which we may expect to continue for months, which handicaps me so much.

And then, what shall I say? – sometimes my thoughts go this way: I have worked and economized, and yet I have not been able to avoid getting into debt; I have been faithful to the woman, and yet I had to leave her; I have hated intrigues, and yet I have neither credit nor any money. I do not think lightly of your faithful help, on the contrary, but I cannot help asking myself if I must not tell you, "Leave me to my fate, there is no help for it; it is too much for one person, and there is no chance of getting help from any other side. Isn't that proof enough that we must give it up?"

Oh, boy, I am so melancholy – I am in a splendid country, I want to work, I absolutely need it – at the same time, I am absolutely at a loss as to how to overcome the difficulties, when I think that all my things are in a most miserable condition, and that I am here without a studio or anything, and shall be handicapped on all sides until I can mend matters.

The models refuse to pose when there are other people around, and that is the main reason why a studio is necessary.

I now have the very same feeling I had when I started a studio in The Hague: "If I don't do it now, I shall never be able to manage." And as for The Hague, I am not sorry I acted then as I did; I only wish that I had come here a year and a half sooner, and had started a studio here instead of back there.

Father wrote to ask if he could help me, but I have kept my cares to myself, and I hope that you too will not mention it to Father. Father has his own cares, and if he knew that I was not getting on well, it would worry him even more. So I wrote Father only that I like it here exceedingly, which is absolutely true as far as the scenery goes. As long as the weather was fine I did not mind the troubles because I saw so many beautiful things; but now that it has been pouring incessantly these last days, I see more clearly how I have got stuck here, and how handicapped I am. What can I do? Will it get better or worse in time? I do not know, but I cannot shake off a feeling of deep melancholy.

In every life some rain must fall
And days be dark and dreary.

It is true and it cannot be otherwise, but the question is, isn't the number of dark and dreary days sometimes too great?

All the same, I had models again in the barn, but with very unfavorable light. Well, I do not refuse to do anything that can be done, but can I do what is necessary under the circumstances? And this letter is a cry for more breath, and if this winter is the way it has been these last days, I should be badly off. It is

beautiful, yes, very beautiful with the rain, but how can one work, how can one, when so many things are lacking?

Goodbye, boy, I wish everything would come out all right, but we need to find more sympathy from others, otherwise I am afraid it won't. I hope to hear from you soon. Did you receive the studies? With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent