

Dear Theo,

I received your letter today, and also one from friend Rappard in the same mail. Let me begin by thanking you for the money.

And let me add at once that I appreciate it that both you and Rappard approve of my coming here. This gave me courage at a moment when I myself was hopelessly discouraged about my coming here, and bitterly regretted it, because on my part I perceived deep in the background of all the discussions I had with Father a *je ne sais quoi* of cold reticence over reconciliation, a cold evasiveness, which made me desperate because I saw that there would remain a cancerous root which would later make everything as impossible as in the past.

But your letter and a very intelligent, very kind, very cordial letter from friend Rappard, and both your opinions that my journey hither might bring about some good, have induced me not to consider the case as lost yet, but to practice patience and wisdom.

Have patience with me, brother, and do not suspect me of ill will.

As for me, in many respects I know Father very intimately and thoroughly, and in the matter we are faced with it is impossible for me to leave things as they are. I had to get Father's opinion about this and that in order to compare it with certain precedents. For instance, I directed the conversation to subjects that had nothing to do with the matter in question, and then I got enough troubles.

Do you know, your advice "do not speak to them about certain things" makes me think you refer to one particular thing, of which you take a correct view.

But in reality that question of long ago was of the utmost importance (at least to me personally, I mean) – entering upon a new future with Father is once again a highly important thing, which nobody can ask me to engage upon, leaving things as they are.

At the moment, particularly after the receipt of your letter, Father and I are on the best possible terms, and Father is not even disinclined to make certain arrangements.

Besides, I want you to know I quite agree with you that they mean well – I do not suspect them of consciously wishing any adversity to befall me, although at times they bring it on me, or of intentionally putting obstructions in my way, although occasionally I am thwarted by them ("not without good intentions," as Mauve would express it). But Father's character is highly variable and at the same time highly obstinate – (I know, most people do not know this) – Father's character is dark (*rayon noir*, I once reminded you), Father has a very narrow-minded or rather icy cold quality. I cannot express this, I can only feel it. I have often thought this problem over, I have paid a great deal of attention to Father, I know Father from various angles, very often I have tried to come to an agreement with Father, yet I do not think Father good. I cannot declare that I think Father straightforward or simple or clear-headed enough.

And now there is, and there will remain, a *je ne sais quoi* that worries me, and at the back of it all I am aware of the same fatal atmosphere as in the past.

I was struck by the fact, Theo, that friend Rappard now writes that he had perceived that during the summer of the year I stayed at Etten I changed so much (it was then that I met her). And at the same time he hints that he understands something happened then, though he does not know what. As I see it, Father and Mother and some others acted with very little delicacy at the time.

If you should be able to agree with me on that, Theo, I should like to say to you, They show the same lack of delicacy now, and you should know something of it.

So, although you need not attach much importance to some conversations with Father in the beginning, by which I only attempted to discover what Father thought of things, although all this means nothing, and at the present moment some arrangement might be made, which in many respects would make my work easier for me and give me the inner quiet to work, yet I see at the outset a *je ne sais quoi*, especially in Father, which fills me with anxiety, a heavy, still anxiety about the future.

Keeping the peace with Father is a hard job. Once again I understand my own rebellious attitude in the previous period. I do not say it will lead to nothing, but I point out – it will be difficult. You will point out to me what I know full well myself, that in many respects I personally am very difficult to deal with. Yes, that is true, and I must take it into account, too. There is an excuse for me, and that is the passion and the frequent absorption which everyone who paints, writes, or composes must needs have.

Does the same apply to Father? No – it is something else. If you should say, But Father is also a thinker and a writer – then I answer, I wish he were this in another way, for now I cannot call him happy. I say this more sadly than you may think; what I say is serious. Is it impossible for you to enter into my feelings?

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I wrote you my last letter in a moment's desperation, of which the real purport was, "I cannot do it after all." And I thought a decisive separation from Father, irrevocable and with éclat, the only thing I could do. "If I do not do this, I should seem to be of one mind with a person whose principles I do not even respect, and I cannot stand the least appearance of being in agreement with him, for I am dead against him, absolutely in opposition to him."

But now today I received your letter, and at the same time a letter from Rappard, written in a tone which I can understand and appreciate. And after another discussion with Father, we have arrived at a provisional arrangement and calmness.

A calmness which perhaps is "It," but which to a far greater extent is not "It." Que faire?

I hereby declare that, for myself, I agree with Rappard when he says, "Stay at home for a long time" – he stresses this.

There are a lot of reasons for this, Theo. Oh, if only you could see all that I see in it – how much security it might grant us for the future! – I hope it will prove to be possible.

In Father's case there is an eternal contrast between what he says and what he does, but it took me a long time to discover it and to understand that usually Father is not conscious of it, so that one is often unable to decide whether he really wanted to do what he actually did. I shall tell you frankly, brother, what I think of it. Father does not always know what he does – though he chooses his words awfully systematically, his actions are most haphazard. In short, it will be a hard job to get good results from my stay here.

However, the circumstances are such as to make it urgently necessary that an arrangement is brought about that will really be carried through.

I have proposed that the room that can most easily be spared shall be used to keep my things in, and if necessary as a studio, in case not only I but you and I think it necessary and suitable that I work at home for a time, especially when there are financial reasons to force us to it. Business is business, and it is clear enough to you as well as to me that this is a good arrangement.

I have been too long without this resting place, and I think that it must be settled in this way if we want to succeed in our enterprise.

I believe it is possible, and I shall have the courage to start it when you and I agree that we must carry it through and settle that you will not be vexed with me if, in case of some disagreement with Father, I do not take it as seriously as I did two years ago.

I will go my own way quietly and follow your advice not to speak with Father about several things provided only that I find in you the person to whom I can speak about them, and to whom I can say, I should like to do this or that, for this or that reason.

Then I can leave Father out of it, and not discuss the problems with Father. But it was necessary to break the ice, and this I did by going to Nuenen, and on that occasion I had to have an explanation with Father; however, I am going to leave it at that.

I can tell you now that I have succeeded in getting Father's permission to fix a room here.

If you approve of it, this will become my regular storeroom and my studio in times when we have no money to be elsewhere. And about further arrangements and business, I will not speak first with Father but with you – and you and I together will get Father so far that things will steadily improve in the long run too.

I think you will approve of my having insisted on getting some fixed arrangement. I think it decidedly a good thing that I shall have a studio here (though I shall not always be in that studio).

So let's stick to that, and let this letter, and not the last one, be our starting point. Well, brother, I am only writing you on this one subject, but your letting me know what you think of the Paris trade is very important to me. I shall let you do whatever you want to do, even in case you should turn to painting, for in the latter case I am convinced you would land on your feet.

With a handshake,

Yours, Vincent

Yes – que faire? I tell you I do not choose to go through the same experiences as two years ago. It does not depend on me alone (no more than it depended on me alone at the time) to keep the peace. Can, must one keep the peace with Father?

Perhaps you do not understand this – my even saying "must," my going so far as to say that. I shall give you an example: if they should reproach you, Rappard, or me with something – suppose undeservedly – we should never budge, we should answer back, and we should make them feel our nails a little. But because we are what we are, we should never say, You must not reproach me with anything. We should say, Reproach me as much as you like, I am a match for you. Father sees sacrilege in observations that are not reproaches at all, observations unavoidable when

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discussing things. Observations that one should never avoid if they refer to things about which an understanding must be arrived at before one engages in an enterprise. Proudhon says, “La femme est la désolation du juste” – I think one can feel and understand this pronouncement, although one does not claim to be “un juste” oneself, or to be looked upon as such. Although in general a clergyman, and in particular Father, is certainly not a woman, there is something equally unutterably hopeless in his way of speaking and acting.

A phenomenon I have often tried to analyze, but which remains a mystery to me, for which I can give no other and no more correct definition than Hugo’s words: “Il a le rayon noir,” or the words of somebody else, “The gentlest of all cruel men.”

I say this to explain what I think, and in order to throw light on the problem which we face. You will gradually have begun to understand that usually my mind is calm.

But now, what is to be done? If it were possible, it would be an excellent thing if I could get a studio at home. In Rappard’s case things went marvellously well, and Rappard writes me, “I considered it your greatest misfortune that you could not live at home.” And this is true, and I felt it terribly, not only afterward, but also at the moment, two years ago now, when I had to face it. Father did not do this intentionally – I say Father has little delicacy of feeling, and even now, although I at last told him so for the first time, Father does not yet know that it was a great difficulty for me. Father still says – and this is something so icy cold that I shudder when I think of it – Father says after two years that in the past he acted according to his convictions and principles. An ordinary person, you or I, if we had done something like that, we should, I believe – I hope – I trust – have already regretted it for a long, long time, whether it was our fault or not. If you say Father did not mean to do so much harm, it may be true, but what one means to do is one thing, and the result of what one does is another. However, Father’s convictions are undoubtedly well-intentioned and all that – but as for myself I hope his Honour is not going to acquire new convictions of the same kind.

[Enclosed in letter 348] What Father is like you may see from what he went on to say, for instance, after stating that he could not take back anything of what he did in the past and so on, which in fact embodies a basic implacability. He immediately followed up with, “But we do not lack indulgence.”

Indulgence combined with implacability.

This too is in reality a “désolation du juste.”

In short, this is what Father is – he is “a stupid one.” To speak with whom is unutterably hopeless for me.

If Father were not Father, I should not worry, but can one always act as if one’s father did not exist? This is impossible for me too.

But the fact is that I am not the man to swallow “indulgence” when basically I see implacability.

Every once in a while C. M. also used to trot out the word “unpardonable.” And people like Father and C. M. stick to it – and act upon it year after year – save for “indulgence.”

Bah, I think it’s utterly disgusting. Approving of it, and entering into it – no! Then I prefer a refreshing row, and I personally will not mince words. You see what I am, brother, and think whatever you like, but never suppose that I will have anything to do with that sophism of indulgence together with implacability.

I want to be reconciled “efficaciously” – effectively, thoroughly, else I prefer an open disagreement, a conflict, in such a way that the world can perceive it – ah well....

Vivre tout haut is simply one’s duty – one should not act like the Jesuits and their kind.

Vincent