

Letter 193a
Nuenen, late December 1883

[The first part of the letter is missing.]

...If you think it necessary for me to explain matters more clearly, well, here you are. You say yourself that you want me to leave the woman, yes, leave her completely. All right, but I can't and I won't. Do you understand, my friend? Such a thing would be treacherous – I am thinking of the old Scripture word, “Hide not thy face from thy neighbour,” and now I tell you flatly, No, Theo. (And in case you want to assume that I intend to do this, that or the other thing, you may think exactly what you want; I shall do what I want, Deo volente.)

I know quite well that this is a delicate point, related to money matters – not only in the sense you refer to in your letter, but primarily in another sense. If I accept money from you and do something which you definitely object to, it would be wrong. I have always discussed everything candidly with you, and shown myself exactly as I was; I have aimed at straightforwardness, but I never acted without seeking your advice. Well, if this should stop and we should no longer associate with each other in private life, something like a false position would emerge. And this I reject.

I have spoken without reserve about Father, I have spoken without reserve about you with reference to this summer – why? To induce you to adopt my point of view? No, but because I should consider myself dishonest if I kept such things locked inside my mind. The fact is that I am not perfidious, and if there is something I object to in a person, I say so and am not afraid of the consequences, however serious. I cannot change, I am made this way. I myself want to clear up the situation, and then I say, Stop a bit, for I think quite differently about this or that, and I cannot keep up the same cordial intercourse with you as before. (I am not saying I won't have any intercourse at all with Father or yourself – I'm not as stubborn as that.)

But if something is broken, I feel it. And I say, What is broken, is broken. If I do, at least I regain my serenity; I should lose my serenity if I were not frank enough. I am not afraid to face the future as long as I need not be involved in things which I feel to be dishonest.

And if you want still another reason, then listen to this: In order to keep the woman from ruin, I should even be willing to swallow my pride over this or that principle as far as money is concerned, and more than once I did so for her sake and the children's; but if the woman were not there, I should be prouder than ever. (This is what I told you in The Hague in reply to something you said about being good friends with H. G. T., when you said, “Yes, that's what I thought.”) And as I see it the situation is this: under the circumstances, if I get no support, e.g. from you, I can do practically nothing for the woman; for I think myself that it is not in my power to assist her, at least not at once. So you have me at your mercy, you particularly, along with many others, none of whom can agree with me. And yet you will not be able to force me to renounce her, whatever your financial power. And seeing that I shall make no concessions in the matter of the woman – and I will clearly declare it, loud enough for even ears that are most hard of hearing – I announce in advance that I have resolved to share with her all that is my property and I do not wish to accept any money from you, except what I may regard as my property without arrière pensée.

Vincent

As I myself do not coerce anyone, so I do not want to be coerced myself; I who respect the liberty of others insist on my own liberty.

As for the woman and her children, she is attached to me, even after the separation, and I to her. And now I should in some way agree, tacitly or not tacitly, to abandon her? No, this time I shall make no such agreement. I do not ask you to be responsible for any expenses whatever; on the contrary, I tell you that you may reduce the money or stop sending it altogether, but she shall have her share of all I have.

I should be a coward, brother, if I were ambiguous about this. And if it should come about that I have nothing myself, all right – this would be the very worst that could happen, and perhaps there might be others besides you who would be willing to make life possible for me. And if not, so be it.

In short, rest assured that I believe I am entitled to do anything which does not hurt anyone else and it is my duty to live up to the liberty which not only I myself but every human being has an unlimited and natural right to – this liberty, I say, being the only station in life one should live up to. Before I act, I most decidedly ask myself, Shall I hurt anyone by doing this or that? but unless it is irrefutably proved to me that I shall hurt someone by doing a particular thing, I need not refrain from doing it.