

Dear brother,

I sense what Father and Mother instinctively (I do not say intelligently) think about me. They shrink from taking me into the house as they might from taking a big shaggy dog who is sure to come into the room with wet paws – and is so very shaggy. He will get in everyone's way. And his bark is so loud. In short, he is a filthy beast.

Very well, but the beast has a human history, and although he is a dog he has a human soul, and what is more one so sensitive that he can feel what people think about him, which an ordinary dog cannot do.

And I, admitting that I am a sort of dog, accept them for what they are.

This house is also too good for me, and Father and Mother and the family are so exceedingly refined (though not sensitive underneath), and – and – there are clergymen, lots of clergymen.

The dog appreciates that if they do keep him, they are only putting up with him, only just tolerating his presence “in this house,” so he will try to track down a kennel elsewhere.

In fact this dog used to be Father's son once upon a time, and it was Father who left him out in the streets a little too long, so he was bound to become rougher, but seeing that Father forgot this many years ago and has never thought deeply about what the bond between father and son means, we had best say nothing about it.

And then – the dog could easily bite – he could easily become rabid – and the village policeman would have to come round and shoot him.

Oh yes, all that is perfectly true, no doubt about it.

On the other hand, dogs can also be guard dogs. But there's no need for that, they say, it's peaceful here, there's no question of any danger. So I shall say no more about it.

The only thing the dog regrets is that he came back, because it wasn't as lonely on the heath as it is in this house – despite all that kindness. The poor beast's visit was a weakness, which I hope will be forgotten, and which he will avoid repeating in the future.

Because I have had no expenses since I have been here, and because I have twice received money from you, I paid for the journey myself and also for the clothes Father bought me because mine weren't good enough, and at the same time I have repaid the 25 guilders to friend Rappard. I'm sure you'll be pleased about this, everything was such a mess.

Dear Theo, enclosed is the letter I was writing when I received yours. Which I shall now answer, having carefully read what you say.

I shall start by saying I think it noble of you that, believing that I am making things difficult for Father, you take his part and give me a brisk dressing-down. I value this in you, although you are taking up arms against one who is neither Father's enemy nor yours but who would nevertheless like to present a few serious questions for Father's consideration and yours, who tells you what I am telling you because that is the way I feel, and who asks: Why is this so?

In many respects, your answers to various passages in my letter bring out certain aspects of the matter with which I am not unfamiliar myself. Your objections are partly my own objections, but they are not sufficient. So once again I appreciate your goodwill and likewise your desire for reconciliation and peace – which, indeed, I have never doubted.

Even so, brother, I could easily raise a great many objections to your suggestions, except that I think that would be tedious and there is a shorter way. There is a desire for peace and reconciliation in Father and in you and in me. And yet we do not seem able to bring peace about.

Well, it is my belief that I am the stumbling block, and so it is up to me to find a way of not to “making things difficult” for you or for Father any longer. And I am now prepared to make things as easy as possible and as peaceful as possible, for both of you.

So you are also of the opinion that I am the one who is making things difficult for Father and that I am a coward. So...

Well, I shall do my best in future to keep everything from you and from Father, I shan't visit Father again and, if you approve, shall stick to my proposal that (for the sake of our mutual freedom of thought, and for the sake of not making things difficult for you as well, a view I fear you are inadvertently beginning to take) we put an end to our financial arrangement by March. I ask for a little grace for the sake of order and to allow myself time to take a few steps which, though they have very little chance of success, my conscience does not allow me to put off in the circumstances.

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You must take this calmly and in good heart, brother – it is not an ultimatum to you. But if our feelings differ too greatly, well then, we must not rush to sweep everything under the carpet. Isn't that more or less your opinion as well?

You do realize, don't you, that I'm sure you have saved my life and I shall never forget that. Even after we have put an end to relations which, I fear, would place us into a false position, I shall still not only be your brother, your friend, but I shall also owe you an infinite debt of loyalty because you held out your hand to me and because you have gone on helping me...

Money can be repaid, not kindness such as yours.

So leave me to carry on by myself – I am only sorry that a complete reconciliation has not proved possible, and wish it might still come about, but you people do not understand me, and I am afraid you never will.

Please send me the usual by return of mail, if you can, then I shan't have to ask Father for anything when I leave, which I ought to do as soon as possible.

I gave all the 23.80 guilders you sent on December 1 to Father, for 14 guilders borrowed and 9 guilders for shoes and trousers. I gave all the 25 guilders you sent on December 10 to Rappard. I still have a quarter and a few cents in my pocket. So that is the financial position, which you will understand if you also take into account that I paid for the expenses in Drenthe over a long period out of the money from November 20, which arrived on December 1, because of some hitch that was later put right, and that I paid for my journey, etc., out of the 14 guilders (which I borrowed from Father and have since given back).

From here I shall go to Rappard's. And from Rappard's, perhaps to Mauve's. My intention is thus to try to do everything in a calm and orderly fashion.

There is too much in my candidly expressed opinion of Father which I cannot take back in the circumstances. I appreciate your objections, but many of them do not convince me, others I have already thought of myself, even though I write as I do. I have put my feelings in strong terms, and they have naturally been modified by my appreciation that there is much good in Father – that modification has been substantial, of course.

Allow me to tell you that I never knew that someone of 30 was 'a boy', particularly when he has probably had more experience than most during those 30 years. But do think of my words as the words of a boy if you want. I am not responsible for how you view what I say, am I? That is your business.

And as far as Father is concerned, I shall take the liberty of putting what he thinks of me from my mind the moment we part.

It may be politic to keep what one feels to oneself, but it has always seemed to me that serenity is a duty, especially for a painter – whether people understand what I say, whether they judge me rightly or wrongly, is neither here nor there as far as I am concerned, as you once pointed out to me.

Well, brother, even if there is a separation in whatever way, know that I am your friend, perhaps much more than you realize or understand – and even Father's friend. With a handshake,  
Ever yours, Vincent

In any event I am neither Father's enemy nor yours, nor shall I ever be.