

Letter 355a
Nuenen, early January 1884

Theo,

Although I appreciate your proposal to add to the monthly sum of 100 francs, requested by me, 50 francs monthly by way of compensation to Father for my living expenses at home, I most decidedly decline this (the 50 francs, I mean).

You may look upon my having been at home so long without paying for my board as arrogance or indiscretion on my part. I did this for the sake of my progress in painting, and have not profited from it personally, inasmuch as I still have to pay a rather heavy bill for colours, an extra expense. For the rest, I acknowledge that after all it has been advantageous to me. The reason why I cannot regard the present moment as propitious for making a kind of contract with Father is that under the circumstances it cannot be my intention to stay here much longer. Which I should very much like to do, but I am afraid it will prove impossible. If, however, you should want to make an arrangement with Father of the kind indicated in your letter, then leave me out of it – in other words, let it be purely a matter between you and Father, in which I am not involved.

So that I for my part may go on considering it an indiscretion in any case, I mean the fact that I live here, also if you should make a payment.

As soon as I am well again, I shall probably go and live in the studio, at least in the daytime.

It is too much for me to lose you to a certain extent, and to have to pay for my board besides. Gradually I shall try to find other resources of my own. If it gives you any satisfaction to know that what you call “my plans for the future” have practically fallen through, thrive on the thought. But this is no reason for me to approve of your views, so that I am forced to repeat that I continue to think them bad. I cannot give up the studio, I must have some fixed place to work in, and in no event can they demand that I leave the village. However, my having to expect this, and my having to be prepared for it, is the cause of my regretting the fact that I did not already see last year that our arrangement was untenable for both of us.

Goodbye.

Vincent

I must protest against the underlined expression in your letter, which I copy: “and I therefore request you to accept the 150 francs, which I shall go on sending you, according to our agreement when we were good friends, and to give 50 francs to Father, which we both approved of.”

I protest against this: it is not true that “when we were good friends” it was agreed upon between us that I should pay 50 francs. I clearly remember the conversation – in the garden – about this matter, and far from agreeing to anything, I did not want to make any agreement in this direction on that occasion, and the upshot was that I pointed out rather emphatically that I wanted money in order to undertake a number of larger canvases I had in mind, and that I had expenses enough besides. If anything was agreed upon, it was meant for later, when I should be in a more favourable position.

This letter is meant to tell you explicitly that I utterly refuse to have anything to do with any agreement you might make with Father on the possible payment of board.

In order to obviate any misunderstanding as to the payment of 50 francs for board, I let Father read your today’s letter and this one. I do not want to hear anything further about this affair; settle it with Father. I say once again that it is not true that I agreed to pay 50 francs for board – if I had agreed to, I should have kept my promise, but I remember the whole conversation about it, and it’s simply the opposite of what I told you – namely that for the time being I had to pay for so many other things that I could not do it yet.

If I should drop dead – which I should not try to evade if it happened, but which I should not seek expressly – you would be standing on a skeleton, and this would be a damned insecure standpoint. As long, however, as I am alive and painting, well, you may expect a feeling of gratitude and of obligation from me – but – seeing that I feel that I must carry on my work vigorously, and that otherwise I shall not be able to stick it out, I dare speak to you about what is wrong. If you did not listen to this at the time, and after that began to think ill of me – it may well be that this feeling was not analyzed incorrectly by you – and might really have been a presentiment of something that – not through any fault of mine, but in consequence of your own act and state of mind – might come to pass, and that we should do well to avoid, very much so. Let’s separate, old fellow, for a time, as friends, that will do no harm, neither to you nor to me. Staying together would end badly if things went on like this.

I dare say, if you were to make a more correct analysis of your own feelings, what you call “suspicion” may really have been something quite different. I mean a kind of presentiment that something was going to happen between you and me – and that otherwise things would not go well. You are in an elevated position, but this is no reason for being suspicious of those who are standing on low ground – where I stand – and where I intend to say.