

My dear brother,

I seemed to see so much brotherly anxiety in your kind letter that I think it my duty to break my silence. I write to you in the full possession of my faculties and not as a madman, but as the brother you know. This is the truth. A certain number of people here (there were more than 80 signatures) addressed a petition to the Mayor (I think his name is M. Tardieu), describing me as a man not fit to be at liberty, or something like that.

The commissioner of police or the chief commissioner then gave the order to shut me up again.

Anyhow, here I am, shut up in a cell all the livelong day, under lock and key and with keepers, without my guilt being proved or even open to proof.

Needless to say, in the secret tribunal of my soul I have much to reply to all that. Needless to say, I cannot be angry, and it seems to me a case of *qui s'excuse s'accuse*.

Only to let you know that as for setting me free – mind, I do not ask it, being persuaded that the whole accusation will be reduced to nothing – but I do say that as for getting me freed, you would find it difficult. If I did not restrain my indignation, I should at once be thought a dangerous lunatic. Let us hope and have patience. Besides, strong emotion can only aggravate my case. That is why I beg you for the present to let things be without meddling. Take it as a warning from me that it might only complicate and confuse things.

All the more because you will understand that, while I am absolutely calm at the present moment, I may easily relapse into a state of overexcitement on account of fresh mental emotion.

So you understand what a staggering blow between the eyes it was to find so many people here cowardly enough to join together against one man, and that man ill.

Very good – so much for your better guidance; as far as my mental state is concerned, I am greatly shaken, but I am recovering a sort of calm in spite of everything, so as not to get angry.

Besides, humility becomes me after the experience of the repeated attacks. So I am being patient.

The main thing, I cannot tell you this too often, is that you should keep calm too, and let nothing upset you in your business. After your marriage we can set ourselves to clearing all this up, and meanwhile I beg you to leave me quietly here. I am convinced that the Mayor as well as the commissioner is really rather friendly, and that they will do what they can to settle all this. Here, except for liberty and except for many things that I could wish otherwise, I am not too badly off.

Besides, I told them that we were in no position to bear the expense. I cannot move without expense, and here are three months that I haven't been working, and mind, I could have worked if they had not vexed and worried me.

How are our mother and sister?

As I have nothing else to distract me – they even forbid me to smoke – though the other patients are allowed to – I think about all the people I know all day and all night long.

It is a shame – and all, so to speak, for nothing.

I will not deny that I would rather have died than have caused and suffered such trouble.

Well, well, to suffer without complaining is the one lesson that has to be learned in this life.

Now with all this, if I am to take up my task of painting again, I naturally need my studio, and some furniture, and we certainly have nothing to replace them with in case of loss. You know my work would not permit being reduced to living in hotels again. I must have my own fixed niche.

If these fellows here protest against me, I protest against them, and all they have to do is to give me damages and interest by friendly arrangement, in short, only to pay me back what I have lost through their blunders and ignorance.

If – say – I should become definitely insane – I certainly don't say that this is impossible – in any case I must be treated differently, and given fresh air, and my work, etc.

Then – honestly – I will submit.

But we have not got to that, and if I had had peace I should have recovered long ago.

They pester me because of my smoking and eating, but what's the use? After all, with all their sobriety, they only cause me fresh misery. My dear boy, the best we can do perhaps is to make fun of our petty griefs and, in a way, of the great griefs of human life too. Take it like a man, go straight to your goal. In present-day society we artists are only the broken pitchers. I so wish I could send you my canvases, but all of them are under lock and key, guarded by the police and keepers. Don't try to release me, that will settle itself, but warn Signac¹ not to meddle in it, for he would be putting his hand into a hornets' nest – not until I write again. I shake your hand in thought. Give my kind regards to your fiancée, and to our mother and sister.

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Ever yours, Vincent

I will read this letter just as it stands to M. Rey, who is not responsible, as he was ill himself. Doubtless he will write to you himself as well. My house has been closed by the police.

If, however, you have not heard from me direct for a month from now, then take action, but as long as I go on writing you, wait.

I have a vague recollection of a registered letter from you which they made me sign for, but which I did not want to take because they made such a fuss about the signature, and I have heard nothing about it since.

Explain to Bernard that I have not been able to answer him. It's quite a production to write a letter, there are as many formalities necessary now as if one were in prison. Tell him to ask Gauguin's advice, but give him a handshake for me.

Once more kind regards to your fiancée and Bonger.

I would rather not have written to you yet for fear of dragging you into it and upsetting you in what is before you. Things will settle down, it is too idiotic to last.

I had hoped that M. Rey would have come to see me so that I could talk to him again before sending off this letter, but though I sent word that I am expecting him, no one has come. I beg you once more to be cautious. You know what it means to go to the civil authorities with a complaint. At least wait till after you've been to Holland.

I am myself rather afraid that, if I were at liberty outside, I should not always keep control of myself if I were provoked or insulted, and then they would be able to take advantage of that. The fact remains that a petition has been sent to the Mayor. I answered roundly that I was quite prepared, for instance, to chuck myself into the water if that would please these good folk once and for all, but that in any case if I had in fact inflicted a wound on myself, I had done nothing of the sort to them, etc.

So cheer up, though my heart fails me sometimes. For you to come just now, honestly, would precipitate everything. I shall move out, of course, as soon as I see how to manage it.

I hope this will reach you all right. Do not be afraid of anything, I am quite calm now. Let them alone. Perhaps it would be well if you wrote once more, but nothing else for the time being. If I have patience, it can only strengthen me so as to leave me in less danger of a relapse. Of course, since I really had done my best to be friendly with people, and had no suspicion of it, it was rather a bad blow.

Good-by, my dear boy, for a little while, I hope, and don't worry. Perhaps it is a sort of quarantine they are forcing on me, for all I know.

1. Theo had heard from Signac that he was going to the South, and had asked him to visit Vincent.