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Vincent

Living to paint

Translated from the Dutch by Lorraine T. Miller



Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo | Uitgeverij Leopold, Amsterdam

The sun shines over the fields of Brabant.
Vincent stops every few steps to examine an insect or an interesting twig.
In his bag, he already has an abandoned bird's nest he found.
'Theo, come and look!' he calls.
They crouch down beside a dead field mouse.
'Ew, yuck,' says Theo.
'No, it's quite beautiful,' Vincent says.
But Theo has already gone on ahead.
If I'm quick, I can still draw it, Vincent thinks.



1853–1878, YOUTH IN ZUNDE
Vincent van Gogh was born on 30 March 1853 in the south of the Netherlands. He was the

eldest of six children and given the same name as a baby brother who died before he was born. His father was a minister. Vincent

was a quiet, sensitive boy who loved nature. At sixteen, he got a job at an art gallery in The Hague managed by his uncle. He later

Vincent loves to draw.

But I'll never amount to anything as an artist, he thinks.

His father does God's work – that's what Vincent hopes to do as well.

I want to help people, he thinks. Just like my Pa.



worked in Brussels and London, where he visited museums and took drawing lessons. In England, he became a teacher

and assisted at church services before going to Belgium to study to be a preacher. Vincent had an incredible bond with his younger

brother Theo. In 1872, he wrote his first letter to him and continued to do this for the rest of his life.



At twenty-five, Vincent is given a chance to do God's work.
He's sent to a mining region, where people spend their days deep underground.
Vincent quickly grows fond of them.
He reads aloud from the Bible and brings them comfort.
He even goes down into the mines to see what it is like there.
Soon his face is as black with soot as the miners.

**1878-1879, BORINAGE REGION,
MINERS AND THE CHURCH**
In 1878, Vincent went to the south of Belgium to work as a

preacher. He visited the sick and cared for people injured in mining accidents. He lived in a small brick hut and slept on

straw. Vincent lived in poverty, fell ill and became depressed. He spent a lot of time reading books and began to draw.



The church is extremely displeased.
'Such a filthy man preaching God's word!'
Vincent isn't permitted to work for the church anymore.
He becomes ill and no longer knows what to do with himself.
One day, he sees an old man coming out of the mine.
He walks slowly, wiping the coal dust from his face.
Vincent's feels his fingers itching to draw.
With a piece of charcoal, he begins to sketch the people
around him.

Vincent writes a letter to his brother:
*Theo! I've been drawing again.
I enjoy it so much! Here are some sketches.
Could I still become an artist one day?
Do you think there's a chance?
Write back soon!*



His uncle and former boss at the art dealership sent him a set of watercolours and his brother

Theo, who now worked in Paris, helped him financially. So, Vincent's life took a different

turn: he parted ways with the church and chose to become an artist.