

Letter 194
The Hague, 4 – 12 May 1882

Dear Theo,

If I told you some rather gloomy things about her in my last letter, it's because I want to state from the beginning that I am not living in a garden of roses, but in reality. And because I want to protest against sentimental considerations in advance, for instance, like those Father and Mother would not fail to bring into it, if I asked their advice or merely told them the story.

Sentiment and sentimentality are two very different things which they cannot distinguish between. And if I spoke of it, Father would perhaps think he had to play the part of a gendarme, which would be quite out of place and of little use. So you must excuse me if I don't say a word about it to Father and Mother, and don't want them to interfere. If Father refused to give his consent, there are terms in the law which, as I am of age, guarantee my independence; but I don't think Father will go so far as to oppose me.

They will say, "You are marrying beneath yourself, and you are too poor."

My answer to this is, If I intended to live in style, the result would be very bad. But as I intend to live in a house consisting of a studio, one room, and a little kitchen, with a bedroom in the attic, and as my way of living will be very simple, it can be done; and two persons living together can live more cheaply than one. "On est sûr de périr à part, on ne se sauve qu'ensemble" [You are sure to perish alone, only together you can save yourself].

I asked Kee if she would risk marrying me. You know how I was refused, but the way I was received in Amsterdam was much worse than I let on. They told me I wanted to coerce her; she refused to see me, to speak to me – not during one visit, but during the three days of my stay. Theo, only those who misunderstand me completely would tell me, "You are trying to coerce her."

What I am doing now proves sufficiently that I didn't want to coerce Kee then.

This woman whom I am with now understands me better. In a short time she became as meek as a tame dove, certainly not from my coercing her, but because she saw that I was not rough. Well, this one has understood, and she said to me, "I know that you haven't much money, but even if you had less, I would put up with everything if only you stay with me and let me stay with you; I am so attached to you that I could not be alone again."

If someone says that to me, and shows by everything – in deeds more than in words – that she means it, then no wonder that with her I drop the mask of reserve, almost of roughness, which I have worn so long because I did not want to flatter.

And has this woman been the worse for it, or have I been the worse for it, now that things have turned out as they have? I am quite astonished to see her become brighter and more cheerful every day; she is so changed that she seems quite different from the pale, sick woman I met this winter. Yet I have not done so much for her, I only told her, Do this or that, and you will get well again. She hasn't thrown my advice to the winds, and when I realized this, I tried even harder to help her.

Perhaps I can understand her better than anyone else because she has a few peculiarities which would have been repulsive to many others. First, her speech, which is very ugly and is a result of her illness; then her temper, caused by a nervous disposition, so that she has fits of anger which would be unbearable to most people.

I understand these things, they don't bother me, and until now I have been able to manage them. On her side she understands my own temper, and it is sort of a tacit understanding between us not to find fault with each other.

If you know the large drawing in the Graphic by Frank Holl, "The Deserter," I should say she resembles the woman in it.

Every day she learns how to pose better, and this is worth so much to me. She is no trouble, no hindrance, but she helps and she works with me. She has no pretensions, wanting this or that; when there's nothing but bread and coffee, she puts up with it and doesn't complain.

But, Theo, I am pining to see you and speak to you. I am also longing for a letter. If I knew that you would not turn your back on me for this reason, I should be as happy as a man can be. It is true that at first I shall need some help. If I should have to do without it, it would be very bad indeed for me, and also for her; but that help need not be more than I received when alone. And my energy increases, and although I have been trying hard to get ahead, of course I am trying even harder now; if I may count on your help and sympathy a little longer, I will succeed in earning what's necessary through the sale of my work. The first step I should like to take is to rent the house next door, about which I wrote you. As soon as she comes back from

Leyden, I will marry her – without telling anyone, quietly and without any fuss; then we should be glad to have that house. We are prepared to live as simply as possible.

And if you could come and see for yourself, you would realize that you can count on both her and me working as hard as we can.

I wish her confinement were over – a heavy ordeal is still ahead of her. But so far everything has gone well since the visit to Leyden. But neither she nor I is living in a rose garden or dreaming in the moonlight; we have a hard time ahead of us, so much the better.

I certainly hope you won't take this in a melancholy way. Of course if Kee had only responded a little to my feelings, this wouldn't have happened. But during my visit to Amsterdam I had such a definite refusal that there wasn't the slightest chance of winning her unless my financial circumstances changed totally in a short time. This will not happen now, for though I shall eventually earn so much that this woman can live on it with me, it will not be enough to keep up a social standing; besides, I don't have the slightest inclination or longing for it. You know what I want: just enough to live on, but I don't care for more than that. What I should like best would be to have fixed weekly wages, like any labourer, for which I should work with all my strength and energy.

Being a labourer, I feel at home in the labouring class, and more and more I will try to live and take root there.

I cannot do otherwise, I do not want to do otherwise, I cannot understand any other way. Adieu, a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent