

Letter 153
Etten, November 3 1881

Dear Theo,

There is something on my mind that I want to tell you about. You may perhaps know something of it already and it will not be news to you. I wanted to let you know that I fell so much in love with Kee Vos this summer that I can find no other words for it than, "It is just as if Kee Vos were the closest person to me and I the closest person to Kee Vos," and – those words I spoke to her. But when I told her this, she replied that her past and her future remained as one to her so that she could never return my feelings.

Then I was in a tremendous dilemma about what to do. Should I resign myself to that "never, no, never," or consider the matter not yet settled and done with, keep in good heart and not give up?

I chose the latter. And to this day I do not regret this approach, although I am still up against that 'never, no, never'. Since then, of course, I have had to put up with quite a few "petites misères de la vie humaine," [Minor irritations of human life] which, had they been written about in a book, might well have served to amuse some people, but which if one experiences them oneself must be deemed anything but pleasant. However, to this day I am glad that I left the resignation – or the "how not to do it" method – to those who have a mind for it and for myself kept in good heart. You will understand that in case like this it is surprisingly difficult to tell what one can, may and must do. Yet 'we pick up the scent as we wander about, not as we sit idly by.'

One of the reasons why I have not written to you about all this before is that my position was so uncertain and unsettled that I was unable to explain it to you. Now, however, we have reached the point where I have spoken about it, not only to her but to Father and Mother, to Uncle and Aunt Stricker and to our Uncle and Aunt at Prinsenhage.

The only one to say to me, and that very informally and privately, that there really might be a chance for me if I worked hard and made progress, was someone from whom I least expected it: Uncle Cent. He was pleased with the way in which I reacted to Kee's never no, never, that is not making heavy weather of it but taking it in quite good humour, and said for instance, 'Don't give grist to the never, no, never mills which Kee has set up, I wish her all the best, but I rather hope those mills will go bankrupt.'

Similarly, I didn't take it amiss when Uncle Stricker said that there was the danger that I 'might be severing friendly relationships and old ties'. Whereupon I said that in my view the real issue, far from severing old ties, was to see if the old ones could not be renewed where they were in need of repair.

Anyway, that is what I hope to go on doing, and cast out despondency and gloom, meanwhile working hard – and ever since I met her, I have been getting on much better with my work.

I told you that the position has now become more clear cut. 1st. – Kee says never, no, never and then – I have the feeling that I'm going to have an immense amount of difficulty with the older people, who consider the matter settled and done with now and will try to force me to drop it.

For the time being, however, I think they'll go about it very gently, keeping me dangling and fobbing me off with fair words until Uncle and Aunt Stricker's big celebration (in December) is over [their silver wedding]. I fear they will be taking measures to get rid of me.

Forgive me for expressing myself somewhat harshly in order to make the position clear to you. I admit that the colours are somewhat glaring and the lines somewhat starkly drawn, but that will give you a clearer insight into the affair than if I were to beat about the bush. So do not suspect me of lacking in respect for the older people.

However, I do believe that they are positively against it and I wanted to make that clear to you. They will try to make sure that Kee and I neither see or speak or write to each other, because they know very well that if we saw, spoke or wrote to each other, there would be a chance of Kee changing her mind. Kee herself thinks she will never change her mind, the older people are trying to convince me that she cannot change it, and yet they fear such a change.

The older people will change their minds about this affair, not when Kee changes her attitude but when I have become somebody who earns at least 1000 guilders a year. Once again, forgive me the hard contours with which I am outlining matters. If I receive a little sympathy from the older ones, I believe that some of the younger ones will be able to understand my position.

You may, Theo – you may hear it said of me that I want to force things, and expressions like that. Yet everyone knows how senseless force is in love. No, nothing is further from my thoughts.

But it is neither unfair nor unreasonable to wish that Kee and I, instead of not being allowed any contact with each other, might see, speak or write to each other so that we could come to know each other better, and even be able to tell whether or not we are suited to one another. A year of keeping in touch with each

other would be salutary for her and for me, and yet the older people have really dug in their heels on this point. Were I rich, they would soon change their tune. But now you will realize that I hope to leave no stone unturned that might bring me closer to her, and that is my intention:

To go on loving her
Until in the end she loves me too.
Plus elle disparait plus elle apparait. [The more she disappears the more she appears.]

Theo, are you by any chance in love as well? I hope you are, for believe me, even its 'petites misères' have their value. One is sometimes in despair, there are moments when one is in hell, so to speak, yet there is also something different and better about it.

There are three stages.

1. Not loving and not being loved.
2. Loving and not being loved (the present case).
3. Loving and being loved.

Now, I tell you that the second stage is better than the first, but the third! That's it!

Well, old boy, go and fall in love yourself and tell me about it some time. Keep your own counsel in the present case and have some sympathy for me. Of course I would much rather have had a yea and amen, but I am almost pleased with my 'never, no, never'. (I take it for something, although older and wiser heads say it is nothing.)

Rappard has been here, and brought some watercolours that are coming on well. Mauve will be calling soon, I hope, otherwise I shall go to him. I am doing a good deal of drawing and have the feeling it is improving; I am working much more with the brush than before. It is so cold now that I do almost nothing but indoor figure-drawing, a seamstress, a basket-weaver, etc.

A handshake in my thoughts and write soon and believe me,

Ever yours,

Vincent

If you ever do fall in love and get a never, no, never, don't resign yourself to it whatever you do! But you are such a lucky dog that nothing like that will ever happen to you, I hope.

They tried to make me promise that I would speak or write absolutely nothing more about this business, but I refused to promise that. In my opinion no one in the world should in fairness demand such a thing of me (or of anyone else in the same position.) All I did was to give Uncle Cent the assurance that for the time being I would cease writing to Uncle Stricker unless unforeseen circumstances should necessitate it. A lark cannot help singing in the spring.