

Letter 154  
Etten, 7 November 1881

Old boy,

This letter is for you alone, you will keep it to yourself, won't you?

I should not be surprised, Theo, if my last letter made a somewhat strange impression on you. But I hope the impression has been such as to give you some idea of the whole situation. I tried to indicate the proportions and planes with long, straight charcoal strokes; when the necessary auxiliary lines have been traced, then we brush off the charcoal with a handkerchief or a wing and begin to draw the more intimate details.

So this letter will be written in a more intimate, less harsh and angular tone than the former.

In the first place I must ask you if it astonishes you at all that there is a love serious and passionate enough not to be chilled even by many "never, no, nevers"?

I suppose far from astonishing you, this will seem very natural and reasonable.

For love is something so positive, so strong, so real that it is as impossible for one who loves to take back that feeling as it is to take his own life. If you reply to this by saying, "But there are people who put an end to their own life," I simply answer, "I really do not think I am a man with such inclinations."

Life has become very dear to me, and I am very glad that I love. My life and my love are one. "But you are faced with a 'never, no, never,' " is your reply.

My answer to that is, "Old boy, for the present I look upon that 'never, no, never' as a block of ice which I press to my heart to thaw."

To determine which will win, the coldness of that block of ice or the warmth of my heart, that is the delicate question about which I can give no information as yet, and I wish that other people would not talk about it if they can say nothing better than, "The ice will not thaw," "Foolishness" and more such nice insinuations. If I had an iceberg from Greenland or Nova Zembla before me, I do not know how many meters high, thick and wide, then it would be a difficult case, to clasp that colossus and press it to my heart to thaw it.

But as I have never yet seen an ice colossus of such dimensions loom up across my course, I repeat, seeing that she with her "never, no, never" and all is not many meters high and thick and wide, and if I have measured correctly, might easily be clasped, I cannot see the "foolishness" of my behaviour. As for me, I press the block of ice "never, no, never" to my heart; I have no other choice, and if I try to make it thaw and disappear – who can object to that??? What physical science has taught them that ice cannot be thawed is a puzzle to me.

It is very sad that there are so many people who object to it, but I do not intend to get melancholy over it and lose my courage. Far from it.

Let those be melancholy who will. I have had enough of it, and will only be glad as a lark in spring! I will sing no other song but *aimer encore*! Theo, do you like that "never, no, never"? Indeed, I think you don't. But there seem to be people who like it and, perhaps unconsciously – "of course with the best intentions and for my own good" – they occupy themselves with trying to wrench the ice from my breast; unconsciously they throw more cold water on my ardent love than they are aware.

But I do not think many pails of cold water will be able to cool my love soon, old boy...

Do you think it considerate of the family to insinuate that I must be prepared to hear in a short time that she has accepted another, richer suitor; that she has become quite handsome and will no doubt be asked in marriage; that she will take a positive dislike to me if I go further than "brother and sister" (that was the utmost limit); that it would be such a pity if "meanwhile (!!!) I let a better chance go by (!!!) ..."

Does a man who has not learned to say, "She, and no other," know what love is? ... When they said those things to me, then I felt with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind: "She, and no other."

Perhaps some will say, "You show weakness, passion, stupidity, ignorance of the world, when you say, 'She, and no other.' Add another string to your bow, do not commit yourself definitely." Far from it! Let this my weakness be my strength. I will be dependant on "her, and no other"; even if I could, I should not want to be independent of her.

But she has loved another and her thoughts are always in the past; and her conscience seems to bother her even at the thought of a possible new love. But there is a saying, and you know it, "Il faut avoir aimé, puis désaimé, puis aimer encore" [one must have loved, then unloved, then love again].

"Aimez encore: ma chère, ma trois fois chère, ma bien aimée – " [love again: my dear, my three times dear, my beloved –].

I saw that she was always thinking of the past and buried herself in it with devotion. Then I thought, Though I respect that feeling and though that deep grief of hers touches and moves me, yet I think there is some fatalism in it.

So it must not weaken my heart, but I must be resolute and firm, like a steel blade. I will try to raise "something new" which will not take the place of the old, but has a right to a place of its own.

And then I began – at first crudely, awkwardly, but still firmly – and I ended with the words, Kee, I love you as myself... Then she said, "Never, no, never."

What is the opposite of "never, no, never"? Aimer encore! I cannot say who will win. God knows, I only know this one thing, "I had better stick to my faith." When it happened this summer, though I was not unprepared for it, it was at first as terrible a blow as a death sentence, and for a moment it absolutely crushed me to the ground.

Then in that inexpressible anguish of soul, a thought rose in me like a clear light in the night: Whosoever can resign himself, let him do so; but he who has faith, let him believe! Then I arose, not resigning but believing, and had no other thought than "she, and no other."

You will say, On what will you live if you win her? Or perhaps, You will not win her. But no, you will not talk like that. He who loves, lives; he who lives, works; he who works has bread.

So I remain calm and confident through all this, and it influences my work, which attracts me more than ever just because I feel I shall succeed. Not that I shall become anything extra-ordinary, but "ordinary"; and by ordinary I mean that my work will be sound and reasonable, and will have a right to exist, and will serve some purpose.

I think that nothing awakens us to the reality of life so much as true love. And whoever is truly conscious of the reality of life, is he on the wrong road? I think not. But to what shall I compare that peculiar feeling, that peculiar discovery of love? For indeed when a man falls seriously in love, it is the discovery of a new hemisphere.

And therefore I wish that you were in love too, but then a woman must come into your life; however, as with other things, who seeks will find, though the finding itself is due simply to luck, not to any merit of our own.

And then it is a great surprise when you have found someone, and – and – and – if you then find yourself faced, not with a "yes, and amen," but with a "never, no, never," it is not pleasant at first, but terrible. But as Uncle Jan rightly says, The devil is never so black as he is painted; so is it also with a "never, no, never."

Now when you have received and read this letter, you must surely write me soon if you haven't already done so, for since I've told you everything, I long very much for a letter from you. I do not think you will take what I have told you in bad part, but rather that you have pretty much the same thoughts about the question of the necessity of a "she, and no other" in general.

However it may be, write to me soon, and believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent