

Dear Theo,

This morning we got your letter. We think that it is already something that you have broached the subject – and broken the ice as you have spoken about it with the gentlemen in Holland, etc. And I do not think that my “elle sera à la vapeur” was wrong; I myself see that “à la vapeur” in the future. And as to the immediate present, you will remember that I said to you: meet with a refusal this time if necessary, but then in any case the subject is broached – and then there will have to follow a second trip to Holland by Bonger and you together. For the time being there is every reason to say with Father Pangloss: tout est pour le miex dans le meilleur des mondes.

[Everything is for the best in the best of worlds.]

But, old fellow, the solution to the S. problem which you mention in today’s letter, namely “either she gets out or I will,” would be very succinct and efficacious – if it were practical. But you will run your head against the same difficulties Bonger and I had to face the last few days, and which we are taking the utmost trouble to clear away. These difficulties are of a nature other than you suppose, but this is not the moment to discuss details; we shall tell you all about it as soon as you get back.

So no catastrophes, please! Well, I told Bonger what I told you, namely that you should try and pass her on to somebody else, and I told him more explicitly what my feelings on the subject are that an amicable arrangement, which would seem obvious, could be reached by your passing her on to me. So it is certain that, if you could reconcile yourself to it, and S. too, I am ready to take S. off your hands, preferably without having to marry her, but if the worst comes to the worst even agreeing to a marriage de raison.

I am writing this in a few short words in order that you may have time to think things over before your return. As in this way she could keep house for you, and as she would live on what she earns by working, it would be rather a saving of expense than the reverse. Lucie has been given notice; I told her that you could not continue paying her, as it was too expensive, but I have kept her on until your return, so that you may be able to decide what you will do about the housekeeping, and in case the decision cannot be arrived at on the first day, it may be desirable to let the housekeeping go on on the same footing, as far as Lucie is concerned, until you have decided about what to do with S.

If you could agree with this arrangement, the first consequence, as I see it, would be that you would feel a free man, and your own engagement would become à la vapeur. Keep courage and be calm!

As for my work, I painted the pendant of those flowers which you have. A branch of white lilies – white, pink, green – against black, something like black Japanese lacquer inlaid with mother-of-pearl, which you know – then a bunch of orange tiger lilies against a blue background, then a bunch of dahlias, violet against a yellow background, and red gladioli in a blue vase against light yellow.

I have read Bel Ami by Guy de Maupassant.

Do you know that Bonger is sleeping here as well as S., and these are queer days; at times we are afraid of her, and at other times we are almighty gay and lighthearted. But S. is seriously deranged, and she is not cured yet by a long shot.

However, the moment you meet again, you will both feel that the liaison between S. and you is definitely off and so you need not be afraid of getting tied to her again. But you must talk a lot with her, and try to get her settled down. Please think it over in the interval between now and your return, and remember: aux grand maux les grands remèdes.

Bonger is sure to add something to this letter, if he does not write to you directly from his office.

I quite agree to the exchange for two watercolours by Isabey, especially if they are figures. Try to make an exchange for the pendant that I have here, and to get something else with it. I say, would it not be possible to get the Otto Weber from Prinsenhage, that beautiful autumn? I would give them a series of four in exchange. We need pictures more than drawings, but do what seems best. Love to all at home.

With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

[Andreis Bonger]

The basis of V.’s reasoning corresponds with my own conviction. The problem is that S.’s eyes must be opened. She is not the least bit in love with you, but it is as if you have cast a spell on her. Morally she is seriously ill. It goes without saying that we could not leave her to her fate in this condition. On the contrary, we have been as kind as possible to her. If we hadn’t, she would have gone mad. What makes me optimistic about her recovery is something she said last night: “que je suis bête de ne pouvoir me faire un raisonnement.” [how stupid I am not to be reasonable.] So it seems she feels what is the matter with her. The great difficulty is her obstinacy, which we have repeatedly bumped our heads against, as against a stone wall. Nothing is to be gained by harsh treatment. For the time being it is extremely difficult to make a plan, (Vincent’s is impractical, as far as I can see), but I hope you are fully convinced that your handling of her has been wrong; during the past year

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your relations have had no other result than getting her hopelessly muddled. Perhaps it would have been better to live together completely; then she would have seen of her own accord that you are not at all well matched. If she could live a month with somebody else who would be able to satisfy her sensuality and take care of her (for she requires a lot of care) so that she may recover her health, you would be forgotten. Her condition greatly resembles the nervous overexcitement of most girls in Holland. It will prove no less difficult to convince S. of hers than it would be to give rest to those minds at home.

I don't suppose you have met my sisters Jo and Annie; as far as I know, both of them are out of town. We are both anxious to know how things are in Amsterdam. It gave me great pleasure to hear that V. is appreciated now. What a satisfaction for you, because of the firm confidence you have always had in him! He has made a number of very beautiful things; those on a yellow background are quite striking. The flower pieces are most gay and colourful as a whole; but some pictures are flat, a thing I am unable to convince him of. He persists in replying, But I wanted to introduce this or that colour contrast. As if I give a damn about what he wanted to do! Write soon when you will come back. Try to come back with a renewed physical strength, and a clear mind, and an inflexible will. You will need all three of them.

For the matter, the situation is not at all hopeless, though it is precarious. Spijker is recovering only very slowly. Remember me to your family, and believe that I am with all my heart
Your friend, Bonger