

Letter 210
The Hague, 2 July 1882
Sunday afternoon

My dear Theo,

As I told you in yesterday's letter, I have been to Leyden. Sien was confined last night; has had a very difficult delivery, but thank God has come out of it alive and with a particularly nice little boy as well. Her mother and little girl and I went there together – you can imagine how very anxious we were, not knowing what we should hear when we asked the orderlies in the hospital about her. And how tremendously glad we were when we heard: "Confined last night...but you mustn't talk to her for long..." I shall not easily forget that "you mustn't talk to her for long"; for it meant "you can still talk to her," when it could easily have been, "you will never talk to her again." Theo, I was so happy to see her there, lying close to a window overlooking a garden full of sunshine and greenery, in a sort of drowsy state of exhaustion between sleeping and waking, and then she looked up and saw us all. Ah, my dear fellow, she looked up and was so happy to see us exactly 12 hours after it had happened, as luck would have it, even though there is only 1 hour a week when visits are allowed. And she perked up so, and in a moment she had got her wits about her and asked about everything.

But what I cannot marvel at enough is the child, because although it was delivered by forceps it is not injured in any way and just lay in its cradle with a sort of worldly-wise air. How clever these doctors are! But by all accounts it was a critical case. There were 5 professors standing by when it happened and they put her under with chloroform. Before that, she had suffered a tremendous amount because the child was stuck fast from 9 in the evening until half-past one. And she is still in a lot of pain now. But she forgot everything when she saw us and even managed to convey that we should soon be back drawing again, and I should not mind in the least if her prediction came true. There has been no rupture or anything, which can easily happen in such cases.

Heavens, how grateful I am! Still, the grim shadow goes on threatening, as master Albrecht Dürer realized only too well when he placed Death behind the young couple in that marvellous etching you know. But let us hope that the grim shadow will remain a passing shadow.

Well, Theo, I don't have to tell you that without your help, Sien would probably not be here any longer. One more thing, I had urged Sien to ask the professor to give her a thorough examination, because she often had something they call the whites. And he did that and told her what she must do to get well again. And he says that she had been very close to giving up the ghost more than once, especially when she had had quinsy, during an earlier miscarriage, and again this winter – that she was thoroughly enfeebled by years of worry and agitation, and that now, when she no longer has to lead that sort of life, she will get well by herself if nothing else happens, through rest, through restoratives, by being out in the fresh air a great deal and by not doing any heavy work.

With her earlier misfortune behind her, a completely new period of her life will start, and though she cannot regain her spring, which is past and was but barren, her midsummer growth will be all the greener for it. You will know how in the middle of the summer, when the greatest heat is over, the trees put out fresh young shoots, a new young layer of green over the old, weathered one.

I am writing to you at Sien's mother's, beside a window overlooking a sort of courtyard. I have drawn it twice, once on a large scale [F 942, JH 147] and once on a smaller one [F 941, JH 146]. C. M. has those two and they were the ones Rappard was pleased with, especially the large one. I should like you to have a look at them if you happen to be at C. M.'s, for I should like to know what you think, especially of the larger one. When are you coming? I look forward to seeing you very much.

Well, brother, you are to blame for my being so happy today that it made me cry. Thanks for everything, my dear fellow, and believe me, with a handshake in my thoughts,

Ever yours, Vincent