

The Hague, c. 21 January 1883

[The first and last part of this letter are missing; probably it was the answer to the remittance of January 20.]

You will say that I write pretty often. I can't help it, for as you have taken me into your confidence, I must tell you that it touched me very deeply. It is curious in such cases, that it is so very difficult to know how far one must go. You, too, will experience this. One asks oneself, "Must I help this woman and, for the rest, see her only as a friend, or must I choose this woman for my wife, with whom I want to live forever – is she or isn't she the one?"

I think you have not been without this struggle, and perhaps are still in the midst of it. It would seem rather unnatural to me if it were otherwise.

I, at least, had that struggle, and it was so difficult that for myself I could not answer those questions when circumstances forced me to make a decision.

For I thought, I do not have the means to maintain two separate households, but perhaps I have them for one, and so I must tell her how things are, what I might be able to do and what I certainly could not do. Perhaps we'll be able to struggle through together, but I haven't enough unless we live together. Perhaps the struggle is similar for you, but in a different form. I remember a saying of yours last year which I thought very correct and true, "Marriage is such a queer thing." Yes, indeed, it certainly is. Then you said to me, "Do not marry her," and I admitted then that circumstances were such that it was better not to talk about it for the time being. And you know that since then I have not mentioned it again, but she and I have remained true to each other. And just because I cannot think you were wrong in saying then, "Do not marry her," I give you your own words to consider; and besides, you will think of it yourself, for it is not I who say so, but you yourself. And I remind you of it only because I think it was well it didn't take place at once. Don't let that idea go, for it is a good thing for love to ripen, so that marriage becomes subordinate to it. It is safer and it doesn't hurt anybody.

First of all, I want to tell you one thing which will be perfectly obvious to you. Whether it gets you in trouble or not, I respect the noble feeling which prompted you to help her, and because I respect it, I hope you will think me worthy of your confidence even though you may encounter greater or lesser difficulties. However, I do not take a melancholy view of the matter, but am quite hopeful of a good result – that is, happiness for you and for her. But I repeat – it is probable that sooner or later a crisis will occur, arising from a kind of mutual disappointment – if there were a child, it would be a kind of lightning rod for you both. But in your case there isn't, so especially when the crisis comes – not now, but later – confide in me and consult me; for there are cliffs on which, alas, many a love is wrecked which might have been saved. When one has got past those rocks, a period of clear sailing follows.

Though I have written you often, I am very hard at work. I cannot tell you how I long to speak with you about many things. Tomorrow I get a sou'wester for the heads. Heads of fishermen, old and young, that's what I have been thinking of for a long time, and I have made one already, then afterward I couldn't get a sou'wester. Now I shall have one of my own, an old one over which many storms and seas have passed.