

Letter 320  
The Hague, 6 or 7 September 1883

Dear Theo,

In my last letter I could not give you any details about my plans, which I can do now to some extent. I begin by telling you about the woman, that what I already suspected has proved true, that she was already making arrangements for the future, even before I had decided to leave her. I had to decide to leave her for the very reason that I was almost sure then as I am now that I know exactly what her plans are.

Now that the decision has been made, I want to carry out my plan of moving promptly and firmly.

The first measure was to give my landlord notice – that has already been done.

The second measure concerns my furniture, which would only be a burden to me, and cause expenses at a time when I do not know exactly where I shall settle down. It will remain here in the house in the garret; I made an arrangement with my landlord about it.

You will ask me if I intend to come back to The Hague? No, but for instance in half a year, or a year, I shall again have to come into contact with some painters here when I have made progress in my work and when I have a lot of studies of the real countryside.

And then for a studio, I shall probably take a very comfortable room, or preferably an outbuilding, from this same landlord, at his own place in Voorburg, not in The Hague; it will be cheaper than living in town, which I shall not readily do again.

So I am rid of all the extra ballast, and at the same time I know where to go when I come to a point (of course not now, but for instance in a year) when a temporary return here would be advisable. Why? For instance, I could become a member of the Society of Draughtsmen by that time, which is one of the things I might desire then and might be able to attain.

You will agree that The Hague is a very remarkable place. It is in fact the art centre of Holland, and at the same time the surroundings are very varied and beautiful, so that one can always work there. And so – though certainly not for the present, but let's say in a year – there will perhaps be a reason for a longer or shorter stay here. And through this arrangement about the furniture, I remain in touch with somebody who knows me and who, as soon as I ask it, can help me get a house. So I am a free man, without ballast, and I can leave when I want. And I can do more now with your 150 francs than when there were so many demands on me. And as I am for once a little freer of the cares that were getting too much for me, I am in a more hopeful mood.

In this way the expenses for the journey are greatly simplified. The only drawback, shadow, or whatever you want to call it, is that I myself had hoped the woman would improve in Drenthe, and now I have misgivings. It is certainly her own behaviour that decided this action of mine, but if I had been able to find the means, I should have taken her with me to Drenthe in a last effort to save her. Well, I had to decide, as each week's delay took me deeper into the labyrinth, without additional benefit to her.

If I should take my furniture, half a van to Drenthe would cost, according to a more detailed estimate by Van Gend & Loos, something over 25 guilders; pick-up and delivery is extra, though that would not amount to so very much.

Besides, I should need some cases, which I should have to buy, and that would be another expense.

It would be convenient to have my things with me, but it is too expensive, especially if one does not stay in the same place.

First I should like to have a look at Katwijk, to make a few marines, and because that is at all events within reach, even if I should have to put off the journey to Drenthe because of the money.

Oh, Theo, you will understand how I feel these days, so very melancholy about the woman and the children – but it could not be helped; at the same time, all my thoughts are concentrated on the work, and I feel a great energy, because now I can do things which were impossible before.

Dear brother – if you could know my feelings exactly, how I spent part of myself on the woman, forgetting every other thing, just concentrating on saving her, if you could feel exactly my melancholy view of life – which, however, does not make me indifferent to it, on the contrary, I prefer feeling my sorrow to forgetting it or becoming indifferent – if you could feel exactly how I find my serenity in “worship of sorrow” and not in illusions, the perhaps, even for you, brother, my inmost soul would be different and more detached from life than even you can imagine now.

I shall certainly not speak much about the woman any more, but I shall continue to think of her very often. From the very first, helping her has been a question of all or nothing. I could not give her money to live by herself, I had to take her into my house if I wanted to be of any use to her. And in my opinion, the right thing would have been to marry her and take her with me to Drenthe, but I admit that she herself, as well as

the circumstances, make it impossible; she is not nice, she is not good, but neither am I, and there was a serious affection just the way we were, notwithstanding everything.

I must set to work, and hope to hear from you soon. Adieu, a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I add another little word – you ask me how much I need; I have been thinking it over, and it is impossible for me to say what I absolutely need; for that would not be little. So let's see what is within our reach and make that do. Probably what is within our reach will be below what is "au fond" necessary, but in life it is already something to be able to carry out one's plans partially. And I tell you that I shall be satisfied with what you can spare. Life is cheaper out there, and I shall be able to economize more than here; and after a year these economies alone will already have helped me on.

Once there, I can have colours sent by parcel post, so if possible, yes, then of course I'll stock up in advance; but if not, I shall not put off the journey for that reason.

I hope that the past year will prove to have been sound after all, for I have not neglected my work; on the contrary, I have corrected a number of weak points. Of course there are more to be corrected, but these will get their turn now.

What I wrote you in my last letter, that the woman had immediately broken certain promises, was bad enough, for she had tried to get a job as servant in a whorehouse, which her mother had set her on to. The woman herself was soon very sorry about it, and has given it up, but it was very, very weak of her to do it just at that moment; but she is like that – at least up to now – she hasn't the strength to meet such a proposal with an absolute no.

Well, she forces me to take measures which I had put off again and again. But on that occasion I saw a kind of crisis within her, as it were – I hope it has been a "hitherto but no further." And it is a fact that she herself considers our separation something which may have good results. And because she is too hopelessly close to her mother, these two must go together, either the wrong way or the right.

Now the plan is that she will live with her mother, and they will take turns going out as charwomen, and try to earn a living honestly. That is their intention, and they have already found a few houses; I have placed some advertisements, and they go out to look for places daily and are beginning to like it.

I will go on placing advertisements as long as it is necessary, and do all those things which can be useful to them. And if I can do so, I shall pay a few weeks rent and a loaf a day for them before I go, to give them more time to carry out that plan well. But I did not yet promise them that I intend to pay these things for them, because I do not know whether I shall be able to do so. It will depend on circumstances.

And for her I decidedly advise a marriage of convenience with a widower, for instance, but I have told her that in that case she must be better to him than she was to me.

And that she herself knows quite well in what respects she failed in her duty toward me, that she should be sensible this time, and learn from it that I do not reproach her with it in the least, because I know improvement or reform does not succeed at once, but goes in what may be called stages. Therefore, if only she stays at the point she has reached now, and does not permit herself to slide back, she need not take her shortcomings to me to heart, nor lose courage; only she should try to make amends by being better to somebody else.

And for the time being she fully understands all this, and I hope to keep it alive. Losing courage and letting things slide is the foible of both of them, but at the same time they are patient in the matter of starting anew; the woman especially is getting this way, and although I know her faults are numerous and troublesome enough, I also know that au fond there is some good in her, which makes up for everything, and therefore I do not despair of the future. For such a one miséricorde, mercy, should lie in nature itself. It is something I should wish to believe fully, and I think it ungodly of myself not to be completely convinced of it and in addition to be resigned to leaving all the things undone which it is not in my power to do; however, I am unable to drop everything I have been at great pains to set right. Write soon, won't you?