

Letter 377
Nuenen, 2nd half September 1884

Dear Theo,

Just a word to tell you that I have been to Utrecht to visit her.

I also had an interview with the physician with whom she is staying, because I wanted to get his advice as to what I must or must not do, for the sake of the patient's health and future, i.e. either continue our relation or break it off.

In this matter I want no other advice except that of a physician. And I have heard that her health is greatly shaken – though she is recovering – that in fact, according to the doctor, who has known her from childhood, and who was also her mother's physician – she had always had a very frail constitution and will always have; that for the moment there are two dangerous things, that she is too weak to marry, at least for the moment, but that at the same time a separation would be dangerous too.

So some time will have to pass, and then I shall receive a definite hint of what will be best for her, separation or not.

Of course I shall always remain her friend, mutually we are perhaps too much attached to each other. I spent almost the whole day with her then.

I went to see Rappard for a moment, but he wasn't in town.

Last week I made the sketch for the last of the six pictures for Hermans.

Wood-gatherers in the snow, so he has all six of them to copy; when he has finished this one and they are thoroughly dry, I shall work them up into pictures. I wish you could see all six of them together in the panels for which they are destined. His copies are very correct as to the drawing, but I think his colour is bad; and as for mine, the warm grey, often bituminous, tone in which I kept the whole thing harmonizes with the woodwork and the style of the room. Goodbye.

You should not have the impression that what you write, "that it is evident she is like an angel of patience," is correct.

This is decidedly not the case; it is the very thing I asked the doctor about – "She has always had a highly irritable temper," he said.

I do not think it impossible or improbable that you – sooner or later when you put your theory on marriage into practice yourself – that is to say, after you have gained a nice secure position for yourself and ask a girl in marriage – you will think of me once in a while.

It is true that I myself have twice met with great sorrow, sorrow of a totally divergent nature. So be it – but you will live to see that your own theory on this subject is not always sure to yield the results that one would be inclined to expect. When you have gained a secure position, then you will find a wife and children and domestic happiness. This is a beautiful promise society makes, but does society keep this promise?

Generally speaking, society disappoints everybody in all kinds of behaviour.

I say this quite good-naturedly and not by way of reproach – not at all!

Il y a du bon en tout mouvement énergetique, I often think.

Theo, now that I know more than at first what made her so desperate – do you want to know what it was?

That night her family spoke to her approximately in the same tone – as you did to me. Well, then I decidedly lost my temper with you – this is over now – and she would have taken it in extremely bad part if she had my temperament. Well, the things that were said – naturally not the things you said, but what her sisters said – made her so desperate and so excessively melancholy that she did what I wrote you about.

Looking at it from your point of view, I, who am more of a philosopher, can say – at least on reflection, He now thinks that way, let him.

But she, when they expostulated with her, believed she had done something frightful. And this without having done anything she ought not to have done. She took it so much to heart that she felt deserted by everyone and everything.

[Written in the margin] She is still greatly incensed by her sister's conduct, though it is subsiding – and, for that matter, the sisters have withdrawn a good deal of what they said. One of them, however, goes on being sulky, and this one also tried to speak to me, but I gave her as good as I got.

All yours, Vincent

[Enclosed herewith] I think it deeply pathetic that this woman (while she was so weak and defeated by five or six other women that she took poison) says kind of triumphantly, as if she had gained a victory and as if she had found rest, "I too have loved at last."

She had never really loved before.

As for me, these days are sometimes full of an anguish which makes me sick, which can neither be diverted nor stilled, as with much forethought I have always respected her on a certain point that would have dishonoured her socially (though if I had wanted it, I had her in my power), so that socially she can maintain her position perfectly, and if she understood it well, she would have a splendid opportunity to take her revenge and get satisfaction from those very women who defeated her. And I will lend her a helping hand in this, but she does not always understand, or else she understands too late. Well.

It is a pity that I didn't meet her before, for instance, ten years ago. Now she gives me the impression of a Cremona violin which has been spoiled by bad, bungling repairers.

And the condition she was in when I met her proved to be rather too damaged.

But originally, it was a rare specimen of great value, and even now she has, in spite of drawbacks, great value.

The only thing I ever saw again of Kee was a picture taken a year later; was she changed for the worse? On the contrary, more interesting.

That disturbing the tranquillity of a woman, as theological people call it (sometimes theologians sans le savoir), is sometimes the breaking of stagnation or melancholy, which steals over many people and is worse than death itself. Some people think it terrible to hurl them back into life, into love, and one must consider very carefully how far one may go. But if one does it with motives other than egoism, well, then the women themselves will sometimes get angry, and may even hate instead of love, que soit.

But they will not easily despise the man who did it, while they do despise the men who have extinguished the manliness in themselves. Well, those are the deep things of life. But as for anyone who does not think about them or laughs at them, Mouret justly calls him a "dupe," and in his anger, even "bête."