

Letter 060  
Ramsgate, 17 April 1876

Dear Father and Mother,

You have probably received my telegram, but you will be glad to hear some more particulars. On the train I wrote down a few things, and I am sending them to you, so that you will know all about my journey.

Friday.

In thought we will stay together today. Which do you think is better ... the joy of meeting or the sorrow of parting? We have often parted already; this time there was more sorrow in it than there used to be, but also more courage because of the firmer hope, the stronger desire, for God's blessing. And didn't nature seem to share our feelings, everything looked so grey and dull a few hours ago.

Now I am looking across the vast expanse of meadows, and everything is very quiet; the sun is disappearing again behind the grey clouds, but sheds a golden light over the fields.

These first hours after our parting – which you are spending in church, and I at the station and on the train – how we are longing for each other and how we think of the others, of Theo and Anna and the other little sisters and the brother. Just now we passed Zevenbergen; I thought of the day you took me there, <sup>1</sup> and I stood on the steps at Mr. Provily's, looking after your carriage on the wet road; and then of that evening when my father came to visit me for the first time. And of that first homecoming at Christmas!

Saturday and Sunday.

On the steamer I thought often of Anna – everything reminded me of our journey together.

The weather was clear, and the river was especially beautiful, and also the view, seen from the sea, of the dunes, dazzling white in the sun. The last I saw of Holland was a little grey church spire. I stayed on deck until sunset, but then it became too cold and rough.

At dawn the next morning on the train from Harwich to London it was beautiful to see the black fields and green meadows with sheep and lambs and an occasional thornbush and a few large oak trees with dark twigs and grey moss-covered trunks; the shimmering blue sky with a few stars still, and a bank of grey clouds at the horizon. Before sunrise I had already heard the lark. When we were near the last station before London, the sun rose. The bank of grey clouds had disappeared and there was the sun, as simple and grand as ever I saw it, a real Easter sun. The grass sparkled with dew and night frost. But I still prefer that grey hour when we parted.

Saturday afternoon I stayed on deck till the sun had set. The water was fairly dark blue with rather high white-crested waves as far as one could see. The coast had already disappeared from sight. The sky was one vast light blue, without a single little cloud. And the sunset cast a streak of glittering light on the water. It was indeed a grand and majestic sight, but still the simpler, quieter things touch one so much more deeply.

The train for Ramsgate left two hours after I arrived in London. That is still about four and a half hours by train. It is a beautiful route; for instance, we passed one part that was quite hilly. At the base the hills are covered with scanty grass, and at the top, with oak woods. It reminded me of our dunes. Between the hills was a village with a grey church overgrown with ivy like most of the houses. The orchards were in full bloom and the sky was a light blue with grey and white clouds.

We also passed Canterbury, a city with many medieval buildings, especially a beautiful cathedral, surrounded by old elm trees. I have often seen pictures of it.

You can imagine, I was looking out the window for Ramsgate a long time before we got there.

At one o'clock I arrived at Mr. Stokes's; he was not home but will be back tonight. During his absence his place was taken by his son (twenty-three years old, I think), a teacher in London. I saw Mrs. Stokes at dinner. There are twenty-four boys from ten to fourteen years. (It is a pleasant sight to see them at their dinner.) So the school is not large. The window looks out on the sea. After dinner we took a walk out on the shore; it was very beautiful. The houses on the shore are mostly built of yellow stone in simple Gothic style, and have gardens full of cedars and other dark evergreens. There is a harbour full of ships, shut in between stone jetties on which one can walk. And then there is the unspoiled sea, and that is very beautiful. Yesterday everything was grey. In the evening we went with the boys to church. On the wall of the church was written: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

The boys go to bed at eight o'clock, and they rise at six.

There is another assistant teacher, seventeen years old. He, four boys and myself sleep in another house near by, where I have a little room that is waiting for some prints on the wall.

And now enough for today. What happy days we spent together! Thanks, thanks for everything. Love to all and a handshake from  
Your loving, Vincent

Thanks for your letters, they arrived just now. I shall write soon, when I have been here a few days and have seen Mr. Stokes.

1. To boarding school.