

The Hague, 25 or 26 February 1883

Dear Theo,

Just a little word to tell you I received your letter and to thank you for it.

And I was very glad to hear the good news about your patient. That's good.

In every love there are many different loves – and when the woman recovers, it will be quite different again – and that is something delightful, too. The principal thing is to continue and to persevere, he who wants variety must remain faithful. And he who wants to know many women must stick to one and the same.

Spring is coming fast here.

For the moment the studio is in a terrible mess.

Enclosed is a little scratch, made in a hurry, on a scrap of paper, while they were putting up the shutters I mentioned. Why am I sending it to you, unimportant as it is, in its unfinished condition? Because I believe you will see one thing clearly from it, that now I can get a quite different light effect in my studio than the too-strong light of those three large windows.

The lower part of window Number 1 in the scratch is closed, and the rest, partly so – now it looks like the door of a little room in an almshouse, for instance.

Window Number 2 is closed at the top, and looks like a little window which the figures are sitting by.

The background to the left is dark, for window Number 3 is completely closed.

Just think of the difference between the effect of the crude light which the three windows would be letting in at this moment if they weren't shuttered, and you will understand how infinitely better I can work now.

Besides the glaring light, there used to be an enormous reflection which neutralized all effects.

It often made me desperate, when, for instance, I saw a woman pattering around a small room and found something typical and mysterious in the figure, which absolutely disappeared when I had the same woman in the studio. Thus the old man was also much more striking in a dark passage than in my studio.

And it was very aggravating, and the space the three windows took up was so large that the light couldn't be dimmed sufficiently by screens or cardboard.

But now I am going to overcome all that.

However indistinct the little sketch may be, it has been done from nature, in a great hurry, while they were working on the window; and from it you will see that one can now get fine effects, and vary them greatly. I am sending you this rather than explain the thing in words.

Well, now the light in the studio is somewhat under my control, and when I have seen a little figure in some other house, I can easily reconstruct the effect back home if I pay attention to the way the light strikes it, and regulate my light accordingly. How much light was there? Did it strike the figure in front, from behind, to the right or left, from above or from below?

I think it will please you when you come. The closet is also excellent. It has been a rather difficult job, as the shutters were too large for the windows and had to be cut down. But now everything is finished so far, and only now can I really enjoy the studio, and it is, in fact, in keeping with what I want. Later on, perhaps, they will make me another little room in the attic – when there is some leftover lumber again. They could make quite a picturesque and intriguing little room there, but it is of secondary importance.

But the studio is ten times better.

However, the expenses have been rather more than I expected, as so much of the old shutters had to be altered.

Therefore I must ask you, as I have promised a payment on the first of March – if you can, send it a day sooner rather than later. I know you will understand that the studio has been quite changed by it; oh, I am so delighted with it – it has worried me so because I couldn't get it right.

I mentioned the good news about your patient, but her wanting to go back to her own country doesn't seem quite right to me; but as you say, little can be said about the future before she has recovered. May spring do her good!

Well, boy, I am writing in a hurry, as I still have a great deal of cleaning up to do; I am so very happy about that improvement in the windows.

As far as I can tell, it is quite effective. You will remember from your visit last summer that the light was too crude, and couldn't be changed. From this little sketch you will probably see how it can be varied infinitely, and that the effects one sees in little houses can be reproduced here. And the special advantage is that in the small houses one can't get the right distance for drawing the figures, and in the studio, one can.

Adieu, with a firm handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I think tonight I shall probably dream of fellows in sou'westers and oilskins, on which the light falls and makes piquant highlights, accentuating the shape.