*691*

*To Theo van Gogh. Arles, on or about Saturday, 29 September 1888*

My dear Theo,

Thank you very much for your letter and for the 50-franc note it contained. It’s not a rosy prospect that the pains in your leg have come back – my God – it should have to be possible for you to live in the south as well, because I always think that what we need is sunshine and fine weather and blue air as the most dependable remedy. The weather’s still fine here, and if it was always like that it would be better than the painters’ paradise, it would be Japan altogether. How I think of you and of Gauguin and Bernard, everywhere and at all times! It’s so beautiful, and I’d so much like to see everyone over here.

Included herewith little croquis of a square no.30 canvas – the starry sky at last, actually painted at night, under a gas lamp. The sky is green-blue, the water is royal blue, the fields are mauve. The town is blue and violet. The gaslight is yellow, and its reflections are red gold and go right down to green bronze. Against the green-blue field of the sky the Great Bear has a green and pink sparkle whose discreet paleness contrasts with the harsh gold of the gaslight. Two small coloured figures of lovers in the foreground.

…

Good handshake and more soon, and thank you very much, and I hope your pains won’t last. Have you seen a doctor again? Look after yourself, because physical pain is so annoying.

Ever yours,
Vincent

*705*

*To Theo van Gogh. Arles, Tuesday, 16 October 1888*

My dear Theo,

At last I’m sending you a little croquis to give you at least an idea of the direction the work is taking. Because today I’ve gone back to it. My eyes are still tired, but anyway I had a new idea in mind, and here’s the croquis of it. No. 30 canvas once again.

This time it’s simply my bedroom, but the colour has to do the job here, and through its being simplified by giving a grander style to things, to be suggestive here of rest or of sleep in general. In short, looking at the painting should rest the mind, or rather, the imagination.

The walls are of a pale violet. The floor — is of red tiles. The bedstead and the chairs are fresh butter yellow. The sheet and the pillows very bright lemon green. The bedspread scarlet red. The window green. The dressing table orange, the basin blue. The doors lilac.

And that’s all — nothing in this bedroom, with its shutters closed. The solidity of the furniture should also now express unshakeable repose. Portraits on the wall, and a mirror and a hand-towel and some clothes. The frame — as there’s no white in the painting — will be white.

This to take my revenge for the enforced rest that I was obliged to take.

I’ll work on it again all day tomorrow, but you can see how simple the idea is. The shadows and cast shadows are removed; it’s coloured in flat, plain tints like Japanese prints.

I won’t write to you at length, because I’m going to start very early tomorrow with the fresh morning light, to finish my canvas.

How are your pains? Don’t forget to give me news about them. I hope you’ll write in the next few days. One day I’ll do you some croquis of the other rooms as well.

I shake your hand firmly.

Ever yours,
Vincent

*877*

*To Theo van Gogh. Auvers-sur-Oise, Tuesday, 3 June 1890*

My dear Theo,

For several days now I’d have liked to write to you with a rested mind, but have been absorbed in work. This morning your letter arrives, for which I thank you and for the 50-franc note it contained. Yes, I think that it would be good for many reasons that we were all together again here for a week of your holidays, if longer isn’t possible. I often think of you, Jo and the little one, and I see that the children here look well in the healthy fresh air. And yet it’s difficult enough to raise them, even here, all the more is it rather terrible sometimes to keep them safe and sound in Paris on a fourth floor. But anyway, one must take things as they are.

Mr. Gachet says that father and mother must feed themselves quite naturally, he talks of taking 2 litres of beer a day &c., in those amounts. But you’ll certainly enjoy furthering your acquaintance with him, and he’s already counting on it, speaks of it every time I see him, that you’ll all come. He certainly appears to me as ill and confused as you or I, and he’s older and a few years ago he lost his wife, but he’s very much a doctor, and his profession and his faith keep him going however. We’re already firm friends, and by chance he also knew Bruyas of Montpellier and has the same ideas on him as I have, that he’s someone important in the history of modern art. I’m working on his portrait the head with a white cap, very fair, very light, the hands also in light carnation, a blue frock coat and a cobalt blue background, leaning on a red table on which are a yellow book and a foxglove plant with purple flowers. It’s in the same sentiment as the portrait of myself that I took when I left for here.

…

I hope that the little one will continue to be well, and you two also until we see each other again, more soon, I shake your hand firmly.

Vincent

*676*

*To Theo van Gogh. Arles, Saturday, 8 September 1888*

My dear Theo,

Thank you a thousand times for your kind letter and the 300 francs it contained1 — after some weeks of worries I’ve just had a much better one. And just as worries don’t come singly, nor do joys, either. Because actually, always bowed down under this money problem with lodging-house keepers, I put up with it cheerfully. I’d given a piece of my mind to the said lodging-house keeper,2 who isn’t a bad man after all, and I’d told him that to get my own back on him for having paid him so much money for nothing, I’d paint his whole filthy old place as a way of getting my money back.

…

The room is blood-red and dull yellow, a green billiard table in the centre, lemon yellow lamps with an orange and green glow. Everywhere it’s a battle and an antithesis of the most different greens and reds; in the characters of the sleeping ruffians, small in the empty, high6 room, some purple and blue. The blood-red and the yellow-green of the billiard table, for example, contrast with the little bit of delicate Louis XV green of the counter, where there’s a pink bouquet.

The white clothes of the owner, watching over things from a corner in this furnace, become lemon yellow, pale luminous green.

I’m making a drawing of it in watercolour tones to send you tomorrow, to give you an idea of it.

So many thanks and good handshake; till tomorrow.

Ever yours,
Vincent