

Letter 209
The Hague, 1 July 1882

Dear Theo,

I have just got back to my studio and am writing you at once. I cannot tell you how delightful it is to be better again, nor can I tell you how beautiful all things appeared to me on the way from the hospital; and how the light seemed clearer and the spaces more infinite, and every object and figure more important. But there is still one drawback, for next Thursday I must go to see the doctor again and tell him how I feel; he has warned me that I may have to go to the hospital clinic for another fortnight, or a shorter or longer period, depending on what's necessary, or even be readmitted. At all events, it would be a piece of good luck if I did not have to go back.

I must go there as soon as I feel some trouble, and even if I don't feel anything in particular, I must go next Tuesday to be examined. The channel by which the urine is excreted has to be widened little by little, but this cannot be done violently or hurriedly. Gradually the bougies they use get bigger, and every time one is introduced, things are stretched a little more; this is not only very painful but also extremely nauseating, as the thing is left inside for some time. There is bleeding when the bougie is taken out; afterwards one feels relatively free for some days, and the soreness it caused gradually disappears. And I am now here during one of those intervals. In the meantime I can urinate pretty easily, consequently I feel swell, as if this were something highly extraordinary. Only it will have to get quite normal again, which will take time. The feeling of recovery makes one forget all possible catheters, bougies and syringes. But one sees the doctor arriving with them after all, and that is not a pleasant moment.

Well, those are the little miseries of human life.

But pregnancy and confinement is something we call a "grande misère." Sien's last letter was very melancholy; she has not been delivered yet, but awaited it every hour. Now that the waiting has lasted for days, I am very anxious about it, and it was especially to visit her that I asked the doctor if there were any possibility of his giving me a short leave instead of walks in the garden. So tomorrow morning I am going to see her with her mother and her child, Sunday being the only day for visitors. The last letter from her was not written by her but by the nurse, who asked if we could not come sometime. But maybe we shall not be allowed to see her after all. Poor girl; she is plucky enough though, and not easily frightened. No, according to that last letter there was no real danger, but she was very weak. I cannot tell you how I long for her now, and there have been moments when I was not sorry I had to suffer a little too, rather than stand there in perfect good health, for then it would have been too unjustly divided.

If everything goes well, however, Sien will be back this month; may it be so. But the proverb goes, "Mal de mère dure longtemps." This still throws a gloomy shadow over the delightful feeling of recovery. I long for tomorrow and dread it at the same time.

The first person I met here in the Schenkweg was my friend the carpenter, who has already helped me many a time with some little jobs, and by making the perspective instrument, and who is at the same time foreman for the owner of the studio about which I wrote you. His boss happened to be in the yard (of which you have the drawing, the one with the meadows in the distance) [F044, JH 153], and they coaxed me to go with them, and showed me they had left the room that would be my studio unpapered, awaiting my decision. I said I could not decide even now.

All right, said the man, but I could choose what I liked from different papers; then he would paper it, and I was not committed to anything.

And though I said I did not want this because I had to go back to the hospital, they have already started it, as they wanted to show me the finished job before Tuesday.

I must say the house is exceedingly comfortable, and looks very neat and well built. The enormous attic alone would be a beautiful studio, though the room on the north would have to be used as such. And the price is very low indeed; in town it would be twice as much. Three guilders a week for a large upper floor is very little, even compared to neighbourhoods like the Noordwal or the Buitensingels, and the location is excellent for a painter. The view from the attic window is enchanting. However, I did not want to make any decision because I am ill, as well as Sien. But as soon as we are better, I shall take it. There is air and space, delightful for working in and keeping healthy; light from the north, and in the other room, from the south. There is a little kitchen, which I hope to draw often, also with a little window looking out on the courtyard. Then I must not forget to tell you that while in the hospital, I had an unexpected visit from Mr. Tersteeg, which in a way greatly pleased me, though we did not speak about anything in particular, as it was not necessary. But I was very glad to see him. And then a few days later Iterson also came, but I cared much

less for that. And then Johan van Gogh came; I thought he was in Helvoirt, but it seems that at present he is living here in the Stationsweg.

In case you send me something at the beginning of this month, will you address the letter to the hospital? Then it will be all right, because the porter promised to keep the letters for me in case of absence (according to the rules of the hospital – as long as one has not left definitely and asks for it). On Tuesday I have to pay the hospital again, and the rent, too; I have the money left for it.

The most delightful thing about the whole recovery is that the love for drawing revives, and also the feeling for things around me which seemed almost extinct for a long time and had left a great void. I am again interested in everything I see. And then, I have not smoked a pipe for almost a month, and it's like renewing an old acquaintance. I cannot tell you how happy I am to sit here in the studio again after having been surrounded by chamber pots, etc., for so long, though the hospital is also beautiful, very beautiful, especially the garden with all those convalescent people – men, women and children. I made a few scratches, but as a patient one is not free to work as one should, nor is one fit for it. Well, adieu, write soon and believe me, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent