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## Van Gogh's Asylum Days

Jennifer Sullivan

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## Sullivan: Van Gogh's Asylum Days

### VAN GOGH'S ASYLUM DAYS

Jennifer Sullivan

I follow that which Dickens offered  
as a remedy to suicide: a glass of wine,

a piece of bread with cheese, a pipe  
of tobacco. Still, open-armed and hungry,

sorrow sashays to me. Voices burrow  
into my head, subtle and muffled,

a prostitute slipping out from the sheets.  
The curtain of consciousness slithers

shut. I wake up hours later, face pressed  
against the stale floor, taste of turpentine

loitering in my mouth. Soon,  
the doctor will seize my brush

and canvas. Until then, I paint  
with the fury of a madman. I paint

desperately, a yellow-eyed drunk  
begging for one more drop of wine.

My tongue becomes the palette.

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"A glass of wine, a piece of bread with cheese, a pipe of tobacco" is excerpted from a letter Vincent van Gogh wrote to his sister Wilhelmina on April 30, 1889.