


Irene Latham

ARTSPEAK! Portraits

Irene Latham's 2017 National Poetry Month Poem-a-Day Project



Mona Lisa in Love

**You say my eyes
hold oceans of mystery,

that questions nest
in my hair.**

**You want me to show you
what's hiding behind
my sly smile.**

**What if I told you
I'm sleepy, dreamy –

swept away on a tide of
memory?**

**It's simply you
I'm remembering,

the two of us sailing together
across a boundless canvas
of blue.**

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Promise

Mama says
I must sit
for a bit
a little bitty bit

and if I
don't throw a fit
not even
a little bitty fit

afterwards
we will get
in the garden
to dig for a bit

and to watch
the butterflies flit.

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When Papa Paints

I am no longer
just me –
I become
a white boat
with a bluebird
sail
aswirl on
a summer sea.

"Portrait of Anne" by
George Wesley Bellows

Weather Report

This city cracks
me open
like parched
ground.

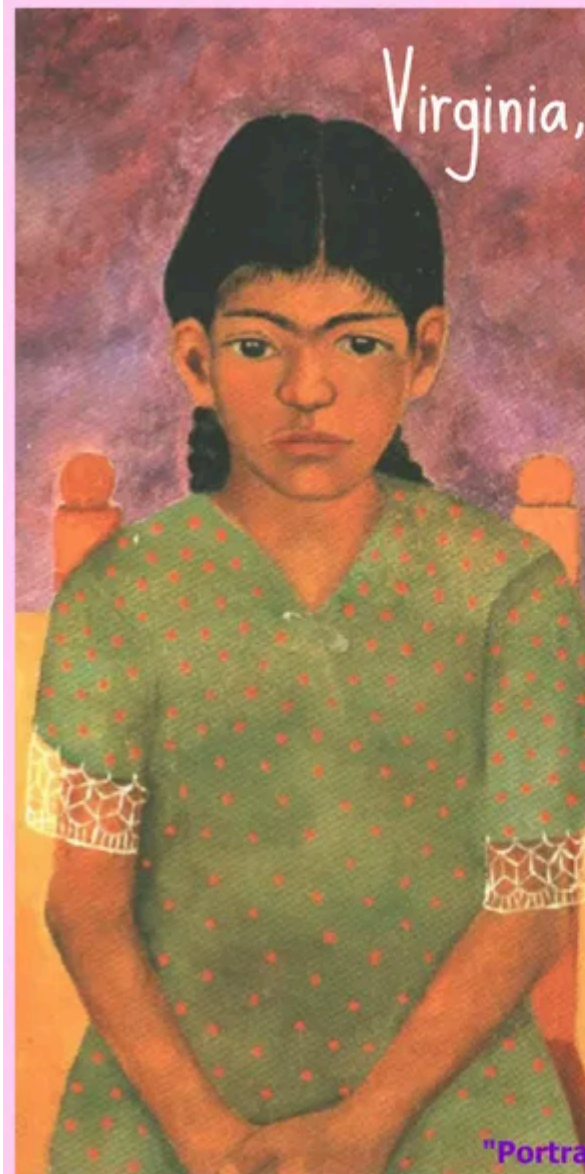
Would you
have me pray
for *la lluvia*
or *la sombrilla*?

All I want
is to hold
your hand.



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"Self-Portrait 1923" by Abraham Angel



Virginia, Sitting for a Portrait

Mama says I must *siéntate tranquilo* – sit still, be quiet.

But I want to know everything:
how the brush knows where to go,

how much paint to leave on the bristles,
what kind of strokes can smooth my
tangled hair.

I want a dress of lace and polkadots,
not the boring white one I'm actually
wearing,

though I'd like to keep the safety pin,
which Mama says

is God's one eye always watching –
guarding my *corazón* from harm.

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"Portrait of Virginia (Little Girl)" by Frida Kahlo



The Postman in Spring

I am more
than brass buttons
and a postman's cap.

See?

My beard isn't just brown –
it's gingersnap.

My eyes nail
you to the floor
for at least a minute,
maybe more.

Those bouquets dancing
behind my head?

They're there
so you'll know
my soul is soft
as a featherbed.

Speaking of the Weather

Should you compare me
to a rocky mountain
I would say,
I, too, have faced
cruel winds
and relentless rain,

I, too, know the sun's
greedy gaze,
and how it feels
to oh so slowly
crumble.

Yet each night
when that garden
of stars
blossoms and bears fruit,
I am first to call it
light.

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"Portrait of a Woman" by Fujishima Takeji



"Jeanne Hebuturne-1919"
by Amedeo Modigliani

Sixteen

Some days the world
is an ocean pressing
against my every shore,
and each moment
feels like drowning

Some day my heart
is a plastic boat
teasing a circle
of sharks

Some days I drift
beneath a sleepy sun,
easy easy

Some days my net
yields only trash-fish

Some days
I am the shark

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"a bull" by Lee Jung Seob

Warning

My bellow
does not mean *hello*,

I am not at all
pleased to meet you.

I'd rather you stay
out

of my barbed wire
kingdom.

Remember, for me,
the sky is always red.

The sun blinks
danger danger danger –

so don't touch my cows
or my calves.

Please, just leave me
in peace

so I can breathe
the clover-sweet air.



The Lady Confesses

You want to know
who I really am,
without the mask?

I thought you'd
never ask.

Sometimes
my mouth is tart
as these cherries.

I've got pits
hard enough to crack
your teeth.

See how I color
your fingertips
and lips?

Even sweetness
can leave a stain.

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"Portrait of a Lady with Mask and Cherries" by Benjamin Wilson

Paint-by-Number

My cheeks grow
strawberry fields,

my ears sprout
a pine forest.

You can hike
along

the chocolate ridge
of my nose,

then rest
on a bed of violets.

Before you go,
paddle out

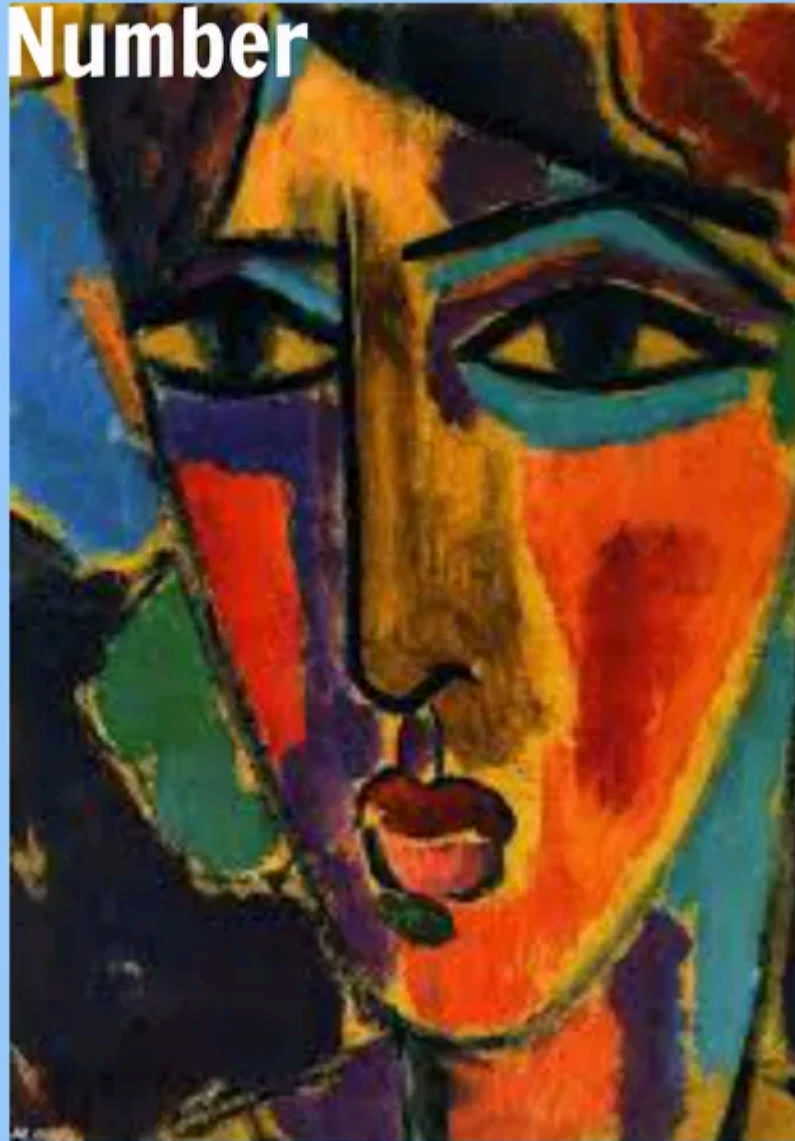
in my red rowboat
mouth.

Drop a hook
into my clear,

deep
mountain pools.


Never lose sight
of your dreams.

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"Portrait of a Woman" by Alexei von Jawlensky

What If?



"Portrait of Camille Roulin" by Vincent van Gogh
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What if
the sky
really was
yellow?

What if
I pressed
the red button
and it opened
a secret
green
door?

What if
my hat
held a stormy
blue
ocean?

What if
I wasn't shy
and could
instead
meet your
rainbow
eyes?



PORTRAIT OF A WRITER

- after "Oskar Maria Graf" by Georg Schrimpf

Forget the suit; my pen is
moved by yeast and flour-dust,
by warm milk jetting into a pail.
Many lives have shuffled through my hands,
their names stamped and ink-stained.
Once we might have met in a lift –
what floor, please? –
my gloved fingers punching the buttons.
And now we meet here, at the intersection
of paint and friendship. Together
we scritch-scratch a phrase, a line.
We build skyscrapers with glass walls.
We say, *Let there be light!*

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Wild Horse

unbroken geography

**choreography
with hooves**

**calligraphy with
a heartbeat**

poetry

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"Rearing Horse" by Leonardo da Vinci

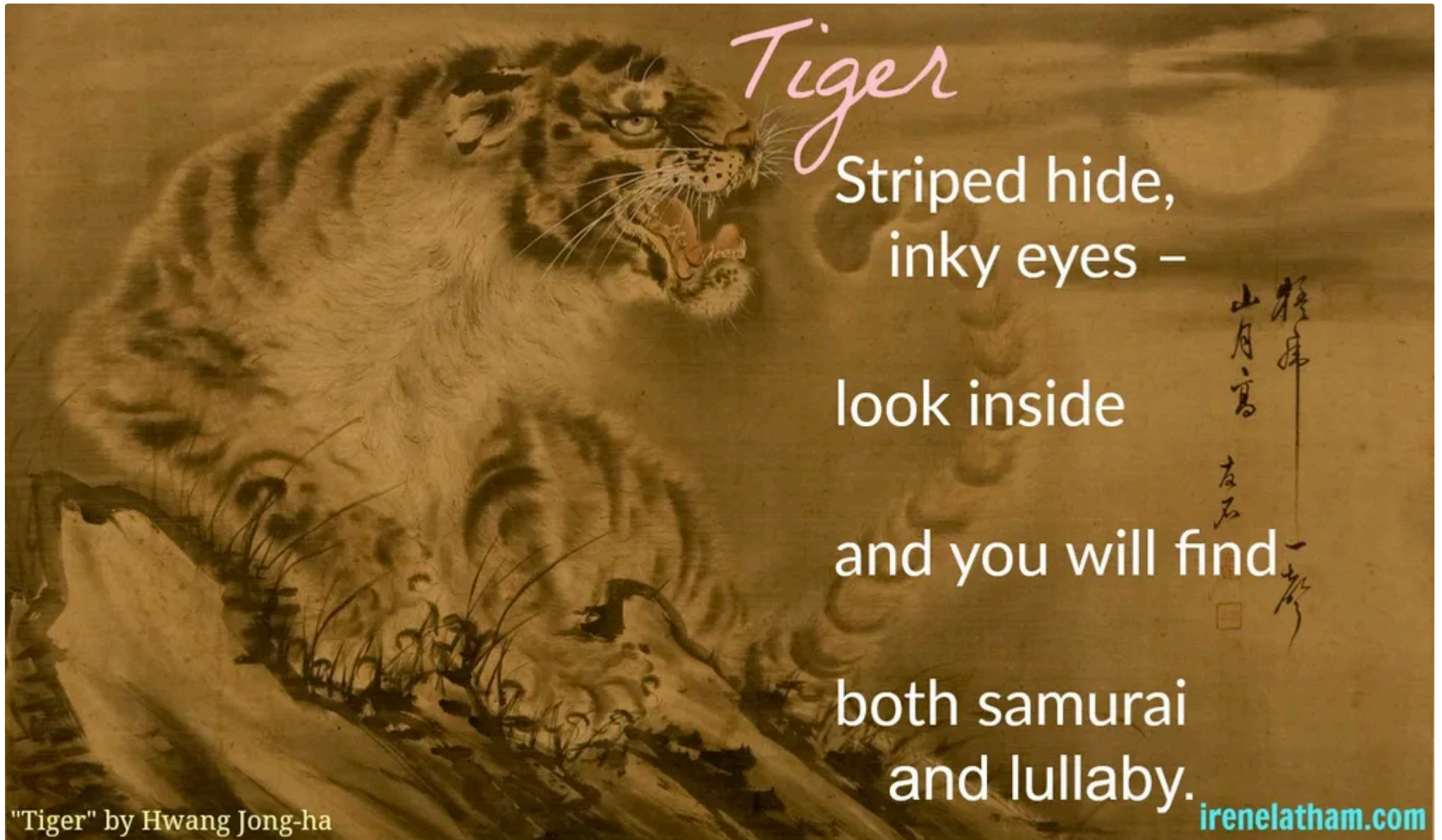
WHISTLER'S MOTHER

It's true my life
has been
a symphony
of storms: grey,
black, charcoal.
But for now
I am not thinking
of my death,
or anyone else's.
I am buttersoft
in this chair,
my feet at ease,
my insides
candlelit.
I am thinking *art*.
I am thinking *joy*.
I am in a room
with my boy.



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"Arrangement in Grey and Black, No. 1" by J.M. Whistler





"The Laughing Boy" by Robert Henri

Sun & Moon

Mama says
I am her sunshine,
and my brother
is her moon.
So I do my best
to make her laugh –
especially in
the afternoon.
That's when
my brother gets
cranky
and weariness
clouds Mama's eyes.
Look at this, I say,
and make a face.
I tell some silly jokes.
Our laughter
lifts into the air
like a pair of
of dancing kites.
It's true
I am my mama's
sunshine.
But I am also
my brother's
Northern Lights.

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"Self-Portrait as a Painter" by Vincent van Gogh

Self-Portrait as a Painter

These brushes hold stars
in their bristles,
and steeples and people.
This canvas grows irises
and sunflowers,
wheatfields and crows.

Can you see
the yellow house in my eyes,
the Arles bedroom, the boots?
Paris glitters in my beard.
The colors shout, *Faster!*
But I am neither God nor saint.
I do the one thing
that keeps the tigers away –
I paint.

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Night

You think I'm alone,
that I will fade
into darkness.
But I am joined
by this steady mount,
this cold steel
across my thighs.
I know every river.
From this grassy hill
I can see the beast's
teeth, I can feel its
August breath.
What else would
you take from me,
the moon?



"The Outlier" by Frederick Sackrider Remington



"Buki Rinsen" by Tsuchida Bakusen

Morning

I wake
to gleaming,
to drifting.

I am not cold.

Mountains
embrace me,
the lake
is my pillow.

I rest
on the ancient.
I wait for
the unfolding.

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IN THE COMPANY OF KITTENS

mew mew mew mew
massaging my belly

purr purr purr purr
squashing my belly

a chase a pounce a race a bounce
a leap a catch a creep a scratch

whiskertwitch tailswish
jumpswitch!

mew mew mew mew
a furry flurry of feet

purr purr purr purr
a mama's sweet sleepy treat

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"Contentment 1900" by Henriette Ronner-Knip



I Am

**I am White Cloud, Chief of the Iowas.
I smear my face with vermillion**

**so you will know the strength
and power of my hands.**

**I clothe myself in gifts from my animal
brothers: eagle feathers, wolf skin, otter fur.**

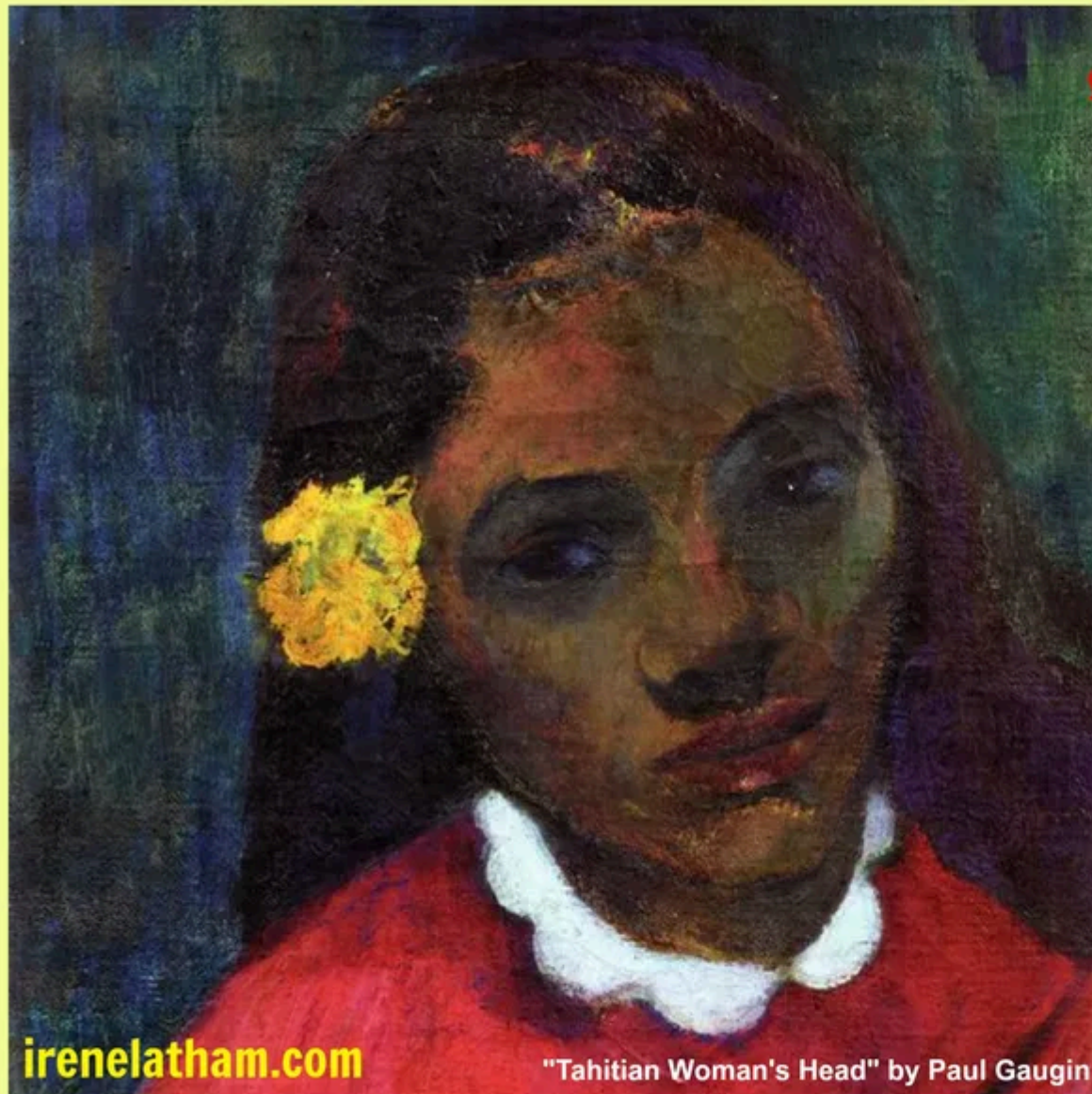
**Of all my enemies, the white man
is the one I cannot honor,**

the one I will never defeat.

**Even a bear will give you the mark of its claws.
But the white man takes**

**and takes and takes, until all that's left
is a curl of smoke vanishing into air.**

Look at me: I am here. I will always be here.



Gratitude

And I would give you
milk
from the morning's
first coconut

a symphony
of palm fronds,
the scent of salt

I would give you
the eye of every hurricane,
waves to bathe
your every shore

this red dress
with its lace collar,
this brown skin

all the sunshine
that lives inside
an island flower

all the sunshine

the sun

The Way You Look at Me

as if I am all rainshimmer
and skyglaze

as if I am a waterfall
of moonlight
tumbling out of an apple

as if I am not borne
of salt and currents

as if I've never been lost

as if I don't grit
against your teeth

as if there was never
any oyster -

only you

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"Girl with a Pearl Earring" by Johannes Vermeer

What To Do in the Desert

wander

drink the stars

bury your doubt
in a shipwreck of wind

walk along
a skeleton of forever

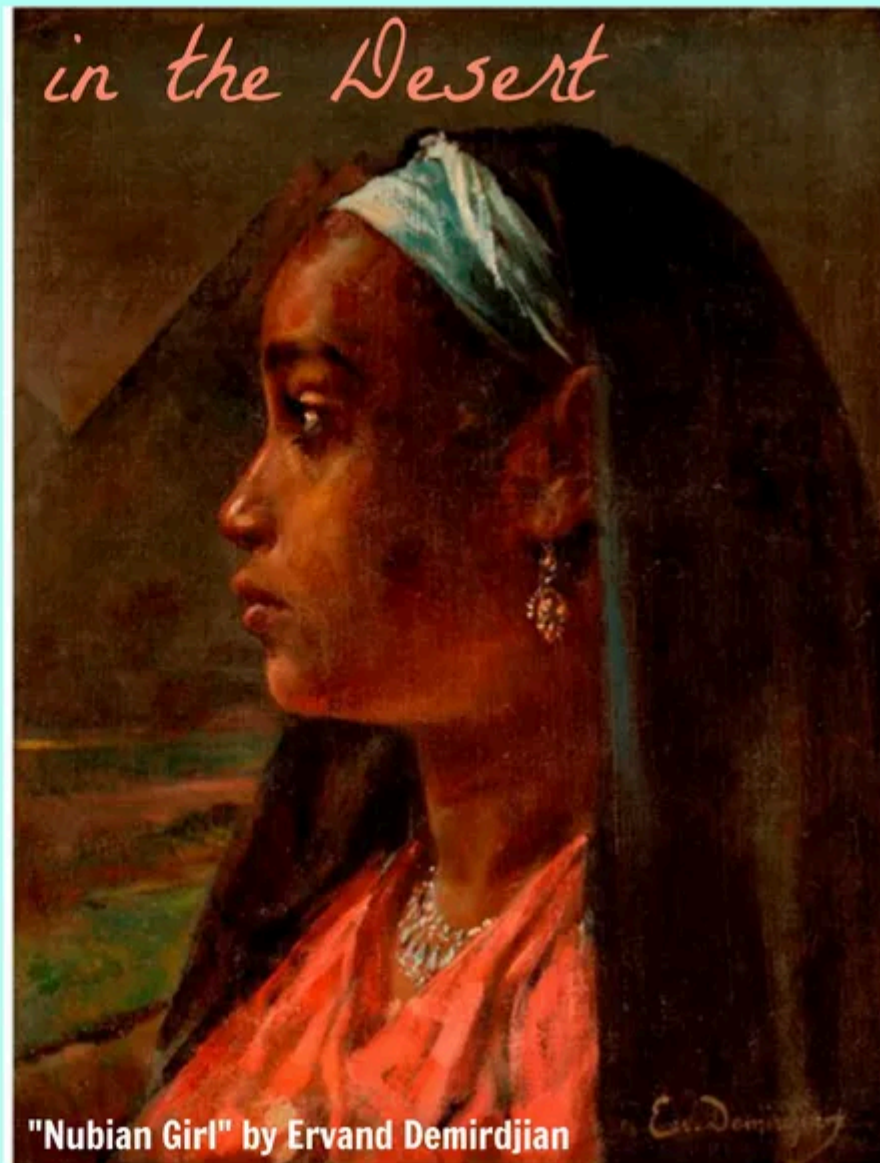
don't stop

draw your sword
of sunshine

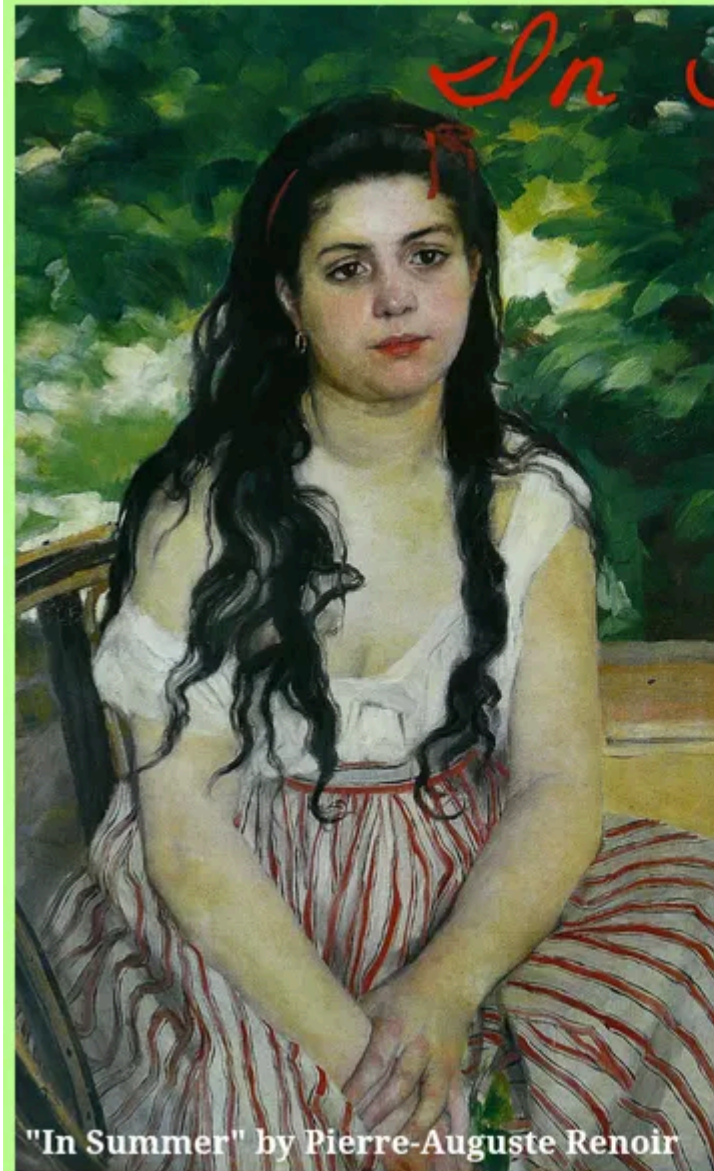
invite sand
to nest in your eyes

shout *I'm alive*

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"Nubian Girl" by Ervand Demirdjian



"In Summer" by Pierre-Auguste Renoir

In Summer

I long for
the peppermint
days of fall

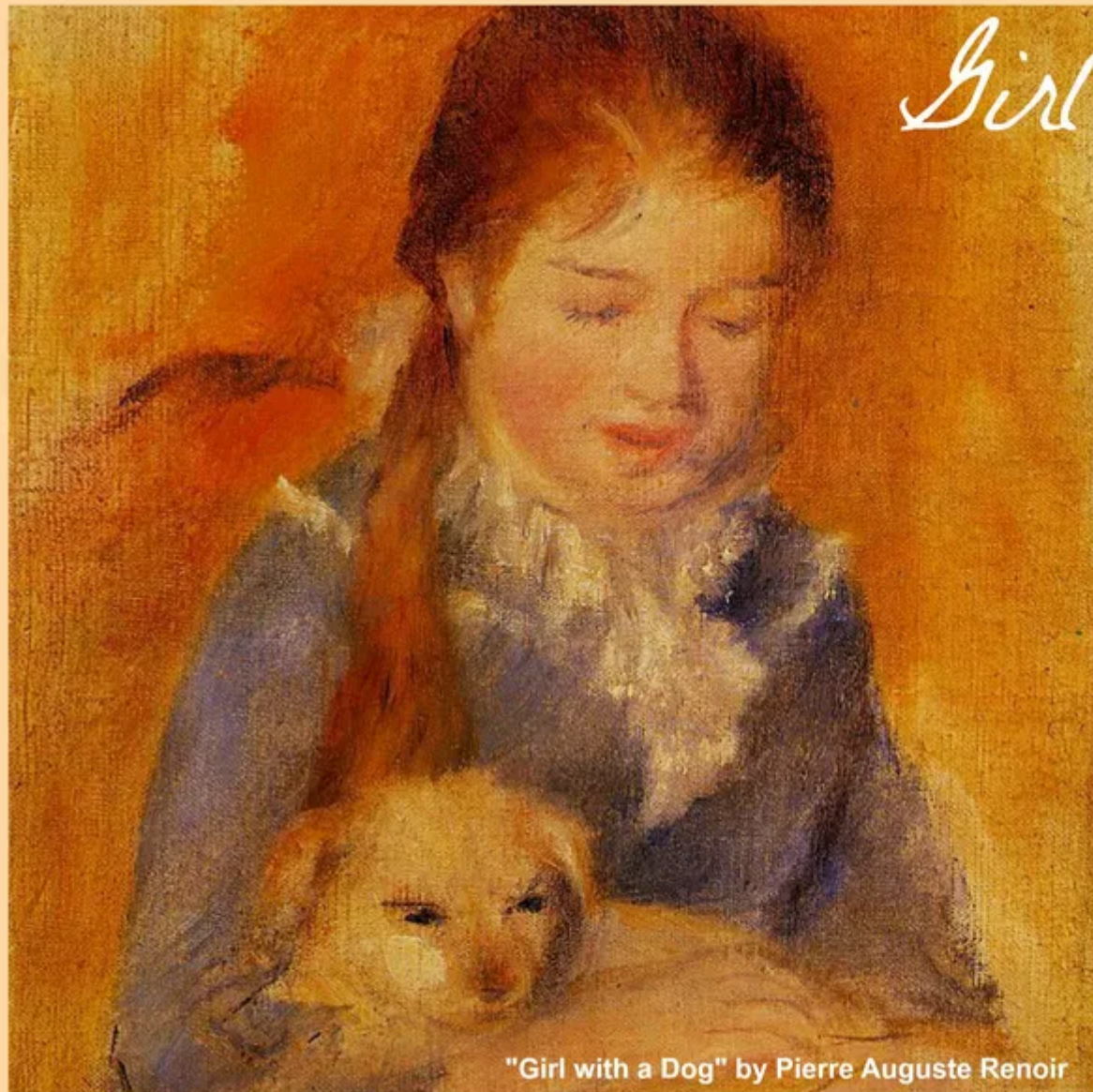
when the future
isn't a worry
at all

the air is sharp
to keep me
awake –

not like these
taffy days
at the lake

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"Girl with a Dog" by Pierre Auguste Renoir

Girl and Dog

**bone and hole
spoon and bowl**

**lick and wag
brush and rag**

**beg and fetch
throw and catch**

**feet and rug
kiss and hug**

**lock and key
you and me**

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"Bubble Boy" by Paul Peel

Boy Blowing Bubbles

Is there anything
more hopeful

than a fat
soap-bubble

rainbowing its way
across a July sky?

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