



Irene Latham

ARTSPEAK: Happy!

Irene Latham's 2019 National Poetry Month poem-a-day-project

April 30



Yosemite Morning

And the sun said, *Good morning, mountains*
and the rock faces blazed to be so acknowledged

deer drank from pristine pools of water,
bears grazed berries from the thickets

and we dared not blink for fear of wasting
the sun's welcome-to-the-world gaze –

a gift given so freely and so often,
yet we, caught in webs of our own making

so often fail to see –

but this morning, tucked in the valley of giants,
we praise the maker and the miracle

we lift our hearts to the sun,
we say, *burn me*

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April 29

Yellow Irises

wide-awake blooms
dutifully shine
across brightest hours

but when evening comes
they grab handfuls
of purple sky –

a surprise gift
for the next butterfly
who happens by

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"Yellow Irises with Pink Cloud" by Claude Monet

April 28

Anticipation

she pulls
her mother
with her

as she hurls
toward
the open door –

two comets
melting
into the sun

"Woman in a Yellow Jacket" by August Macke



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April 27

Last Day of Summer

"Wheat Field with Cypresses" by Vincent van Gogh

It's true: soon
green hills will fade
to brown

but cypress knows
today is not a day
to cry –

not when cotton candy
swirls the sky

and wheat fields wave
their golden hands,
goodbye,
goodbye!



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April 26



"Girl in Yellow and Blue with a Guitar" by Henri Matisse

The Guitarist

I strum across morning –
I thrum for cardinals
and for squirrels.
How the strings buzz!

Across the bridge
of afternoon, my fingers
don't stop plucking,
picking, twanging.
Dogs sing along.

As night noodles in,
my notes call to frogs
and crickets, who rub
their own happy tunes.

And then we all rest –
the dogs, the crickets,
me and my guitar –
every single one of us
dreaming
of the next day's song.

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April 25



April 24



April 23



Sunflowers by Vincent van Gogh

To a Sunflower

O big bloomer,
you, who won't be ignored –

your boldness reminds me
to face the sun, no matter the hour

your bright face inspires me
to smile at everything –

clouds, rain and even bees,
those busy flyers

who buzz around
dressed in your colors,

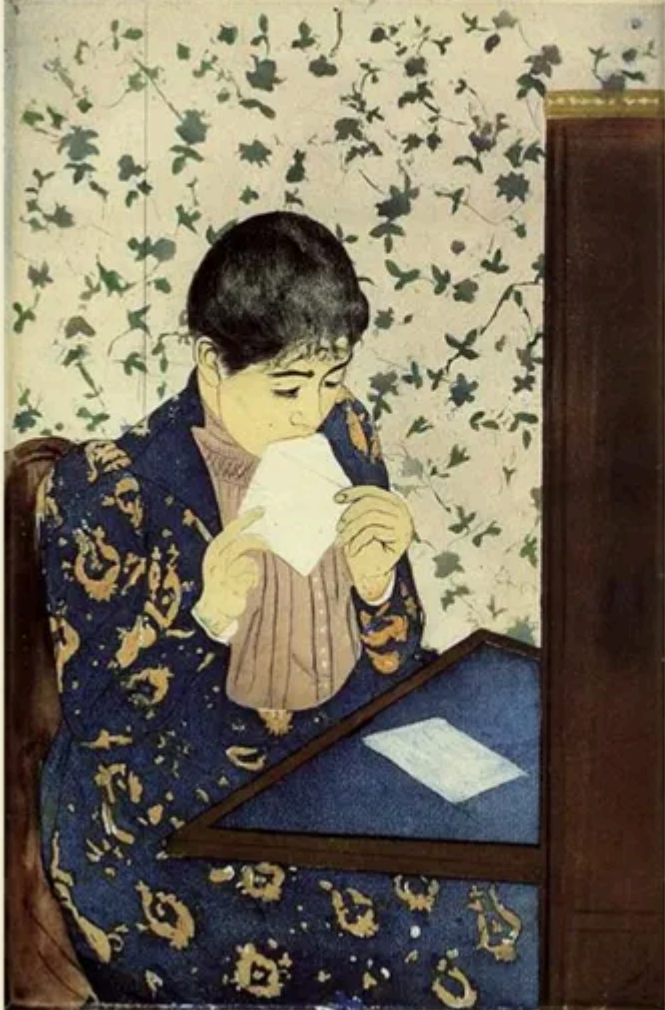
worshipping you as I do,
summer's happy golden queen.

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April 22

The Letter

after "The Letter" by Mary Cassatt



Hi, I write
to my friend
who lives
in a different
town.

How are you?
I am fine.
Except ...
I miss you
all the time.

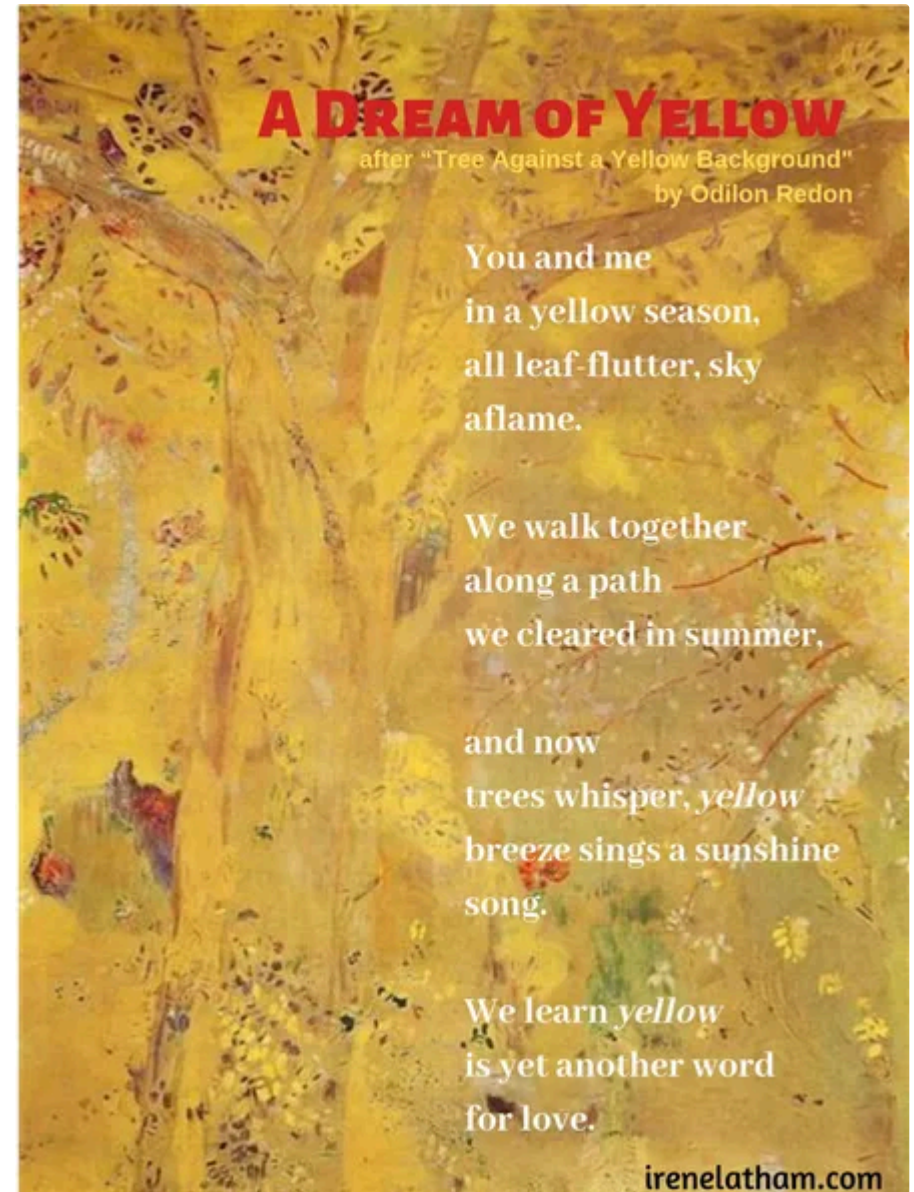
I sign my name.
I fold
stuff
seal.

I imagine
my friend
reading
this letter –

right away
I feel better!

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April 21



April 20



Fiddle Song

In winter the fiddler
shrugs into his boots,
takes to the roof
to shake snow from the sky.

Soon clear melodies
climb smoking chimneys.
Birds waltz with steeples,
and townsfolk gather
to sing along.

Nothing can cheer you
like the fiddler in winter –
can you hear
that sweet fiddle song?

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April 19

When a Horse Writes a Poem

- after "Horse Head on a Yellow Background" by Fernand Leger

Words prance onto the page,
all rhythm and grace.

That poem has ears that twitch,
deepdark eyes that gaze.

Yes, there are fences
but also open gates –

when a horse writes a poem,
you can't look away.

Giddyup! the poem says.
So you graze on poems all day.



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WHAT A CAT NEEDS

"Julie Manet with Cat" by Pierre-Auguste Renoir

a nice warm lap –
doesn't matter if it's bumpy
or flat –

a dish of cream,
a morning sunbeam.

Add a singing cricket
or a high-flying bird

and you'll soon learn
another word for "happy"

is purrrrrr



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April 18

April 17

Autumn Prayer

God is red. God is orange.
Let us thank Him for this harvest.

And for the yellow sky and sun,

for the backs that bend,
the hands that give –

God bless them, every one.
Amen


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"Red Vineyards at Arles" by Vincent van Gogh

April 16

On the Water
after "On the Water" by Mary Cassatt



One day I asked a duck,
How do you stay afloat?
He glided ever so close
and said, *my feathers
are like a raincoat;
my feet like the paddles
of your rowboat.*

Thank you, I said
and decided if I was a duck,
I'd want my raincoat to be red –
not boring as today's dress,
which makes it seem like
the only thing I'm ready for
is bed.

And then I tossed
that friendly little duck
a nice hunk of bread.

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April 15



On a June Afternoon

nothing more pleasing
than a fat-feathered pigeon
perched on a peach branch

nothing more sumptuous
than a sun-drunk peach,
cozy in its fuzzy summer sweater

nothing more inviting
than the blooming sky
that asks them to rise
and fall

just for the joy of it all

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April 14

When Grandma Reads



*Please, I say
please don't stop!
I've got to know:
does the boy
find his Pop?
Will the weather hold?
What about
the buried gold?
I used to complain
about the train's
endless huff-puff-chuff,
but when Grandma reads,
the ride is never
long enough.*

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April 13



Three Black Cats

Three black cats
with October eyes –
they watch
they hunt
they hypnotize.

I see three cats.
They see me.
Which of us
will be first to flee?

Surprise!

Three black cats
with October eyes –
they rub
they purr
they harmonize.

These three cats
are really angels
in disguise.

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April 12

To an Olive Tree

You sit squat and happy,
your gnarled branches
reaching across blazing sun,
no rain,
and herds of grazing goats.

You say, *shine on me!*
Come, or don't come.
Welcome.

For the hungry, you drop fruit.
For the troubled, you offer
a balm of oil.

For me, you share
a fallen twig
shaped exactly like a smile.
I spread my quilt
beneath your limbs
and rest for a while.

"Olive Trees with Yellow Sky and Sun" by Vincent van Gogh



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April 11

So many suns -
more than enough
for everyone!
And fishes
and birds
and an elephant too.
A turtle,
a butterfly -
all for you
and you
and you!
So many suns
we hold in our hearts -
Shine!
Glow!
Let those suns go.

So Many Suns

- after Kohbar of Mithila



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April 10



Backstage

**Legs tangled in tulle,
arms eager to lift**

swing

swoop

**we wait for
that ecstatic breath of music --**

**our time
to bloom!**

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April 9

Girl in Hat

You may think I'm hiding
behind my hat,
but there's a reason I sit like that.
I like the way the world shrinks,
becomes a just-me space
where you can't see the feelings
as they pass across my face.
So if you see me (hatted) in a crowd,
remember: beneath the brim
I am the sun – still shining! –
and my hat is simply a passing cloud.

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Girl with Yellow Hat by Norman Lewis

April 8

Two Cows

Two cows in a pasture
grazing on grass –
they lift their heads
whenever we pass.
They amble over.
We climb the fence.
We offer them ripe grapefruit,
and their ears twitch-twitch.
But the best part
is the way their mouths
squish squirt squish.



"2 Cows" by Maude Lewis

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April 7

Sister Song

- after untitled folk art by Henry Darger



My sister is a daffodil.
She creeps up quietly,
then explodes the roadside
with a ROAR!

I pretend to be a butterfly –
flit flut flutter fly –
I am quiet, too.
I find every open door.

We meet in the meadow.
We play, sing, explore.
Me and my sister,
this daffodil I adore.

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April 6

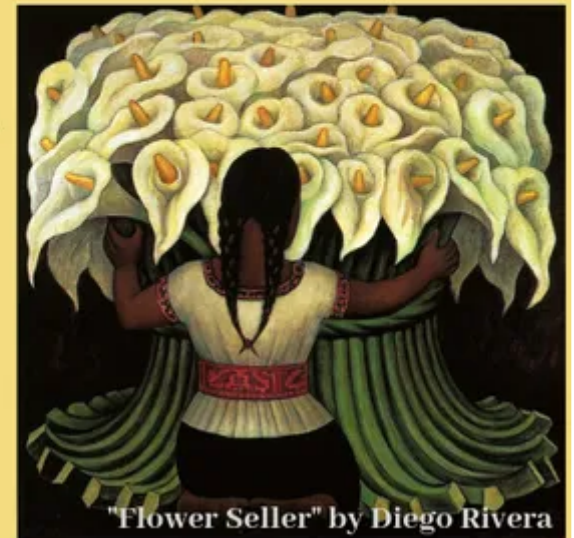


April 5

The Weight of Happiness

And the world swarmed yellow,
buzzed with the scent of home
as she fell to her knees,
wanting to take it all in –
the sun the sky the rain the bees
her father's expectations
her mother's dreams –
this day, this moment
the velvety petals
pressing against her cheeks,
declaring their wild promises.

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"Flower Seller" by Diego Rivera

April 4



a sweet time
a let-sand-kiss-your-cheek time

so fill your bucket
with sunshine and salt

dig a little crabhole
skitterflap with seagulls

watch the waves get fat,
then flat –

and when it's time to go

bring a bit of seaside
home in your hat.

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April 3

On a Golden Day in May

after "Checkered House" by Grandma Moses

People passing on the road
wave, *hello hello!*
as spring's green envelope unfolds
to reveal fields of gold.

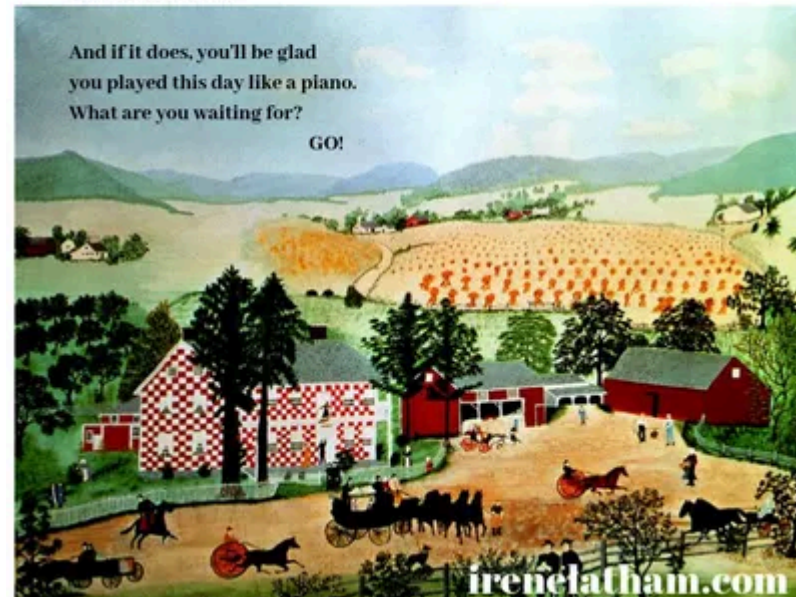
And the checkered house
with its wide-open windows
watches them go –

because the house knows
it's sun and rain that make the gold grow,
and not every dawn holds such a glow.

Time now to relax and enjoy the show.
Who knows? Tomorrow might
blow in a tornado.

And if it does, you'll be glad
you played this day like a piano.
What are you waiting for?

GO!



April 2

When the Stars Come to Town

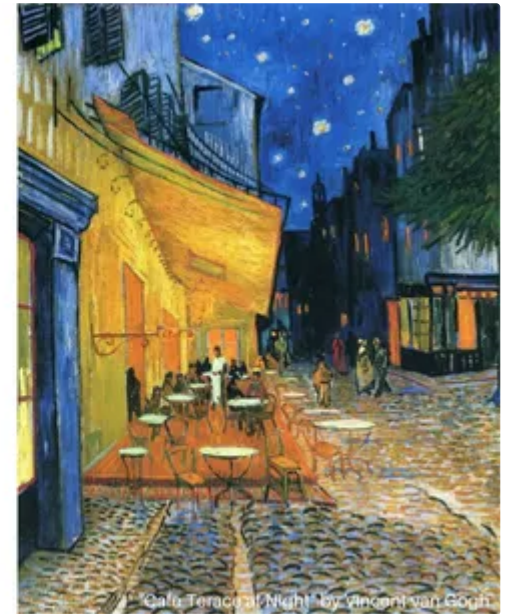
When the stars come to town
and the moon rises round
we cobble down stone streets
counting the smiles we meet.

Little dogs prance,
someone's playing guitar.
We forget for a while
our worries, our scars –

And the world is electric,
our feet step-glide-kick

as we feast on laughter – so easy, so sweet!
and dance our way down the street
when the moon rises round
and the stars come to town.

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April 1

Girl in a Yellow Dress

after "A Girl in a Yellow Dress" by Amedeo Modigliani

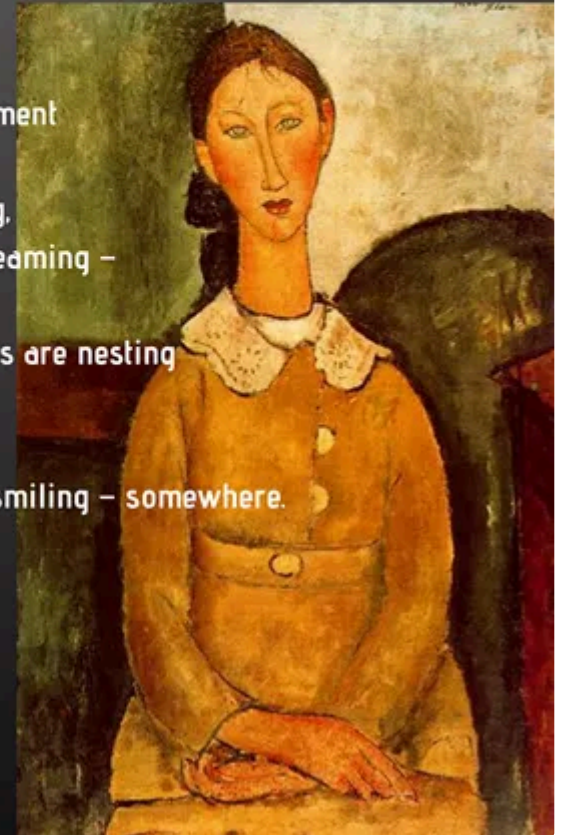
Sometimes I sit and stare
and you think I'm not going anywhere.

But in that moment,
that tiny, precise moment

my heart is dreaming,
mind-movies are streaming –

sailboats and pelicans are nesting
in my hair!

Truth is, I'm always smiling – somewhere.



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Introductory "Happy" poem

Give Me a Happy Poem

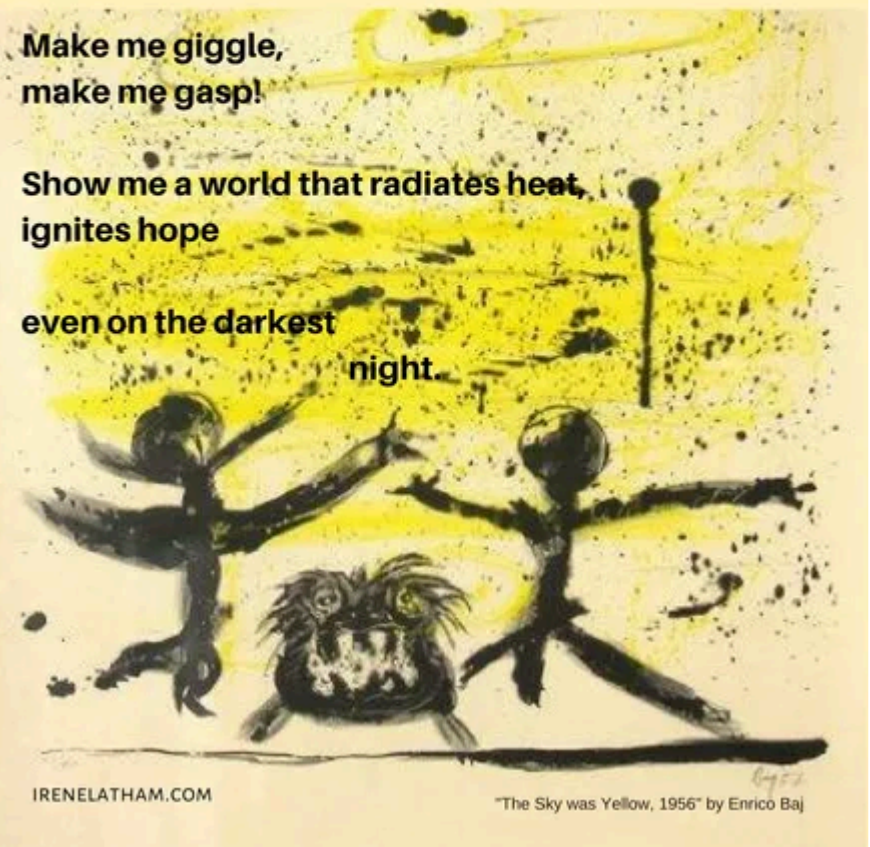
Give me a happy poem
a burn-away-the-blues poem -

where words sizzle,
stanzas dance.

Make me giggle,
make me gasp!

Show me a world that radiates heat,
ignites hope

even on the darkest
night.



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"The Sky was Yellow, 1956" by Enrico Baj