

# Blanks

by [Cristina Nehring](#) (July 2024)



Seated Woman with Legs Drawn, Egon Schiele, 1917

Experience

Has made my affections gentler.

The bold brave touch

That was my pride and trademark once

Has softened

Its grip.

Today I imitate E.T.

The tentative finger crooked and long

Like a question mark—

May I? It asks.

You won't strike?

You won't cringe?

Safeway sells bite-size kisses,

Big feelings come in small parcels,

Small words, easy to swallow.

"What nice socks you have,"

Says Little Red Riding Hood to the Wolf;

Say I to you,

"What nice poems you send."

Sugar and water drip from my mouth.

My blood stays in my veins.

I won't spit blood just now,

Nor spill kisses

On your clean and contemplated day.

No, we shall trade in trifles—

Discrete, individually wrapped chunks

Of Emily Dickinson—

With lots of dashes

Spaces pauses blanks

For all those things we're leaving out.

Fill in the blanks,  
Scholar, stranger.  
You do it for her.  
Do it, do it, for me.

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**Cristina Nehring** published *The Child Who Never Spoke: 23 1/2 Lessons in Fragility* on October 24, 2023. She is also the author of *A Vindication of Love* which made the front page of the *New York Times Book Review* as well as two books in French. She writes for *Atlantic*, *Harper's*, the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. She lives in Paris with her daughter.

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