

The Sudden Tenderness Between Us

by [Cristina Nehring](#) (January 2025)



Mother and Child (Pablo Picasso, 1901)

The Sudden Tenderness Between Us
Is like a lovely squatter

Surprised one night
In an exploded apartment block.
What brought her here,
Young and shy
And luminous? What brought her
To this shambles
Of unhinged doors
And smoking ruin,
Charred windows
Like black eyes
That ought not to see or admit?

*What are you doing here,
Beauty?* In the crater that
Once was a bedroom
An infant lies fighting for life.
On the landing three fugitives
Stand waiting for alms.
Do you not see this is the
House of Insistent Emergency?
Do you not know that the gods
Have their hands full
And cannot attend you,
or even clear you a space?

And yet, there you are.
Immovable, impish and pristine,
A pure salt pillar
In the land of Lot.
Fluorescent in your frailty,
Incongruous and irresistible,
Your tissue paper skin as strong
As the edifices of eternity.

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Cristina Nehring's most recent book is *The Child Who Never Spoke: 23 1/2 Lessons in Fragility*. 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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