Strip the cities of brick.\*Dismantle them.

Strip out the wires\*and cover the land with grass.

- Force chrome and aluminum back into the earth.\*- Cancel all flights from the international airport . . .

. . . and people the sky with angels.

- Erase the Saturday carpark from the marketplace.\*- Shatter the printing press.

- Make each new book a precious object, written on skin.\*- Rub out the white lines.

Make way for the wild primrose\*and slow torture of criminals.

Fade out the living:\*snap back the dead to life.

The woman?

Was married age fourteen.

Can’t write. Not taught to read.\*Grey-eyed. Intelligent. No children.

And the man?

The man is her husband and protector.

Calm. Powerful.\*Addicted to purity and violence.

Stand here. Look.\*My house is perfect.

At night, stars wheel over my vines\*according to the strict mechanism of the world.

And day by day – says the Protector – fruit trees,\*blue heads of iris, pink cups of eglantine turn to the sun.

I own the fields:\*I own everyone in them.

Every beech, each visible oak,\*is as much my property as my dog, my millstream . . .

. . . or my wife’s body, her still and obedient body . . .

. . . is my property.

Make me a book.

Fill it with illumination.

Paint me the life to come.\*Paint deeds of angels.

Show me graves opening,\*the damned shoveled into ovens, and the just . . .

. . . us, my family, the pure and just,\*show us in our rightful place.

Show us in Paradise.

- A book costs money, says the Boy.\*- I’ll give you money.

- A book needs long days of light.\*- I’ll give you money. I’ll give you light.

But first: show me proof.

The Boy takes from his satchel\*an illuminated page.

This – says the Boy –\*shows a Work of Mercy.

Here, look, three men, all starving:\*two wheeling on this cart the third.

And here’s a rich man – see him? -\*in a red satin coat lined with green.

In his face, round his eyes, see his expression\*as he offers the three sick men wine and bread.

Not just kind – explains the Boy –\*kind is too easy – but merciful.

Not just kind, but merciful.

Merciful.

No! No! says the woman.

Nobody here starves.\*No! Nobody here begs.

- But the Protector takes the page gently to the window . . .\*- What does this Boy want?

- . . . looks deeper and deeper into the page . . .\*- What does this thing, this picture, mean?

. . . recognizes in the rich and merciful painted man\*himself. Says to his wife:

His talent’s clear. I’m satisfied.\*You will welcome him into our house.

- Stone the Jew: make him wear yellow.\*- Crusade against the Moslem.

Map out new territory with blood.

- Invent the world.\*- In seven days invent the whole world.

- Invent sun . . .\*- In a single day, moon, man.

Invent man and drown him.

- Good.\*- Burn him alive.

- Good.\*- Bulldoze him screaming into a pit.

- Invent a woman.\*- Invent her.

- Take her naked out of the toy-box. Play house with her.\*- Strip her. Dress her. Strip her again. Play families.

Play birth and death.

Blame her for everything.

- Blame her mouth. Blame her intelligence.\*- Tint her flesh with a soft brush.

Make her curious.

The woman takes off her shoes,\*steps through a stone slit . . .

. . . turns up the spiral stairs,\*pads into the writing room, where the Boy . . .

. . . ah, yes, look . . .

. . . the Boy bends over a new page.

What is it she feels\*between her bare feet and the wood floor?

Grit.

What do you want,\*says the Boy.

- To see, says the woman.\*- See what?

To see how a book is made.

What is that tree?

The Tree, says the Boy,\*of Life.

- Ah. Odd.\*- I invented it.

Ah. Yes.\*And who is that woman?

Eve, says the Boy.

- Invented too?\*- Yes, says the Boy, invented too.

She doesn’t look real,\*laughs the woman.

That’s not how a woman looks.

You’re in my light,\*says the Boy.

- Yes, in my light, too close . . .\*- Oh? Too close in what way?

- Too close to the page. You’re in my light.\*- Too close?

Too close.

What else can you invent?

Can you invent another woman,\*says the woman . . .

. . . not this, but a woman who’s real,\*a woman who can’t sleep . .

. . . who keeps turning her white pillow over and over\*from the hot side to the cold side . . .

. . . until the cold side’s hot?

- Can you invent that?\*- What is it you mean – says the Boy.

- And, if the woman said – says the woman.\*- If the woman said what – says the Boy.

What if you invented a woman\*who said she couldn’t sleep . . .

. . . who said that her heart split and shook\*at the sight of a . . .

. . . of a boy, the way light in a bowl of water\*splits and shakes on a garden wall . . .

. . . who said that her grey eyes,\*at the sight of a boy, turn black . . .

- What boy?\*- . . . with love.

- You can decide what boy. You can decide what love.\*- What love?

Invent her.\*Invent the woman you want.

When you know the color of her eyes,\*the length of her hair, the precise music of her voice . . .

. . . when you’ve quickened her pulse, entered her mind,\*tightened her skin over her back . . .

. . . when you have invented and painted\*that exact woman . . .

. . . come, come to me, show her to me.

I’ll tell you if she’s real.

The Archer appears in the sky:\*the grapes are picked and crushed.

The Protector inhales the wine, watches hot blood\*from a pig’s throat splatter the snow at the visitors’ feet . . .

. . . thinks: my wife has changed, won’t eat,\*won’t speak to me, resents and avoids the Boy . . .

- How are you – says Marie.\*- . . . turns away from me in bed, pretends to be sleeping.

- How is my sister, says Marie.\*- . . . but in the dark . . .

. . . her eyes are wide open, and all night I hear\*her eyelashes scrape the pillow, click, click, like an insect.

How is my sister?

My wife?

My wife is well. Sweet and clean.\*Soft, still, obedient.

And your house?

Increasing in value daily.

- Nobody starves. Everyone freely obeys.\*- And the book?

- Yes, how’s the book? Still eating money?\*- The book . . .

The book will be magnificent.

The Boy works with azurite and gold.

Both Boy and book are faultless.

- Ah. Faultless.\*- The Boy, yes, is faultless.

- The Boy is faultless?\*- Don’t, Marie.

- The Boy is, yes, is faultless.\*- What kind of man pays to keep a boy like that in his house?

Be quiet, Marie.

Listen to me:\*I love the Boy.

What kind of man sits a stranger . . .

- . . . a stranger next to his own wife at his own table?\*- Anybody who faults the Boy faults me.

- Do not fault the book, John.\*- Nobody is faultless.

- Nobody on this earth is faultless.\*- No not fault the Boy, Marie . . .

. . . you will not pass the black dog at my gate.

Woman . . . alone . . .

Night.\*Her visitors?

Gone. Her husband?\*Sleeping in front of the kitchen fire.

What can she hear inside of her?\*Her own voice.

What does the voice want?\*To wind and to wind itself around another.

- Who does she catch click shut the black rectangle of the door?\*- Him, the Boy.

- What do you want – says the woman.\*- To show you the page – says the Boy.

- Here.\*- It’s dark.

Then concentrate.

This – says the Boy – shows a house in winter.

Here . . . look . . . white stars . . . Orion . . .\*And in this wide, blank space, the moon.

See how I’ve lifted the roof\*like a jewel-box lid.

Inside’s the woman . . . see her?\*Unable to sleep.

Buried in the hot white pillow,\*her head feels heavy like stone.

Round her legs, round her arms,\*I’ve twisted a lead-white sheet like a living person . . .

. . . and tightened her skin,\*darkened her veins with blood.

This is the woman’s picture.\*Now you must tell me whether it’s real.

It’s dark.

Then look more closely.

What color are her eyes?

Grey . . . turning black . . .\*like my eyes now.

*Like yours now.*

And her hair?\*Pay attention.

- Dark, damp, heavy . . . the weight of mine.\*- *Of your hair now.*

- And her mind? *I’ve given her your mind, skin, mouth . . .*\*- You’ve given her my mind, skin, mouth, voice . . .

. . . drawn its exact music.

And here . . .\*Here, under the bone . . .

In the hot space between her ribs . . .

- I’ve painted the woman’s heart.\*- No! Not “the woman.”

I am Agnès.\*My name’s Agnès.

What use to me is a picture?\*A picture – says Agnès – is nothing.

- Love’s not a picture.\*- Agnès . . .

Love is an act.

People are saying,\*saying the book eats TIME.

- Saying the book eats what?\*- CORN. RENT.

Say it’s a crow eating the seed, making the people\*TALK . . . LAUGH . . . STARVE.

Not just the book – say that the Boy –\*DRAWS FROM LIFE.

Say there’s a page where the skin never dries –\*SKIN STAYS DAMP.

- Wet like a woman’s mouth . . .\*- Wet like the white part of an egg . . .

- Where a woman screams, shrieks like a fox . . .\*- Licking her lips, flicking her tongue . . .

- In the night, in a secret bed.\*- Gripping the Boy in a secret bed.

1What kind of a man\*WILL NOT SEE?

The Protector wakes up,\*feels in the half-light . . .

. . . for the reassurance of a human body . . .

. . . puts out his hand to be reassured by a human body . . .

Feels for his wife.\*Where is she?

Here – smiles Agnès – I’m here by the window.

You were thrashing in your sleep. Why?

What is it you’re watching?

Nothing. Sunrise.\*Plum trees flowering.

And smoke . . .\*Why that black smoke in May?

- We’re burning villages.\*- Ah. Why?

- To protect the family.\*- Ah. Yes. Good. From what?

- Don’t look.\*- And in the meadow, I saw a guard reach into the buttercups . . .

- Don’t look.\*- . . . to pick up a baby, to pick it up, how odd . . .

. . . on the point of a stick.

And I, I saw the Boy out riding into the wood\*like a picture out of his own book.

Touch me.

Kiss me.

Take my head in your hands.

- Don’t be a child, Agnès.\*- Grip my hair in your fist. Yes.

Put your fingers in my mouth. Yes.\*Your tongue into my mouth now. Yes.

Kiss me. Yes.\*Kiss me now.

Only a child, Agnès, asks for a kiss.

I’m not a child.

- No pure woman asks for a kiss.\*- I’m not a child. Don’t . . .

- No clean woman asks to be touched.\*- Don’t call me a child.

- You are. You are a child, Agnès. Say it.\*- Don’t call me a child.

- I refuse to be called a child.\*- I said to you . . .

Say it. You will say to me\*“I am a child.”

- Ask *him* what I am.\*- Say, “I am a child,” Agnès.

Go to the wood.\*Ask *him*.

Ask who?

The one who writes on skin.

Ask him what I am, the Boy.

He finds the Boy sitting against a tree,\*looking at his own reflection in the blade of a knife.

Lovesick, thinks the Protector . . .

. . . easy to strangle, like a girl.

What are you doing here?

- Nothing.\*- What is it you’re looking at?

Nothing, says the Boy,\*thumbing the knife.

Thinking about?

I’m thinking that when this wood and this light\*are cut through by eight lanes of poured concrete . . .

. . . I’m thinking that the two of us and everyone we love . . .

. . . everyone will have been dead for a thousand years.

- The future . . . the future’s easy.\*- A thousand years.

Tell me about now.

Now there’s just one slit\*of pink light cut in the sky.

Tell me about now.

Now there’s just you, me and a knife.

Tell me about now.

Who is this woman? –\*The one they say …

- I thought you trusted me.\*- Taunt me and say screams out from a secret page . . .

- I thought you loved me . . .\*- And sweats with you in a secret bed?

- . . . and protected me?\*- What is her name? What is this woman’s name?

Is it Agnès?

- Not Agnès, no . . .\*- Is what? Her name is what?

- No, Marie, her name’s Marie.\*- Her name is what?

Marie: her sister.\*Look at her.

She came to me.

- I’m bored.\*- She was bored.

- I want to be Venus.\*- She wanted to be Venus.

I want to be Venus.\*Put me in the book. Illuminate me.

- AH! THAT HURTS!\*- Sorry.

Then she wanted to be an angel.

- Make me an angel.\*- She wanted . . .

- Give me power. I want . . .\*- She wanted to crank the universe round on its axis.

I want to control the universe.

- Her marriage was banal.\*- How do I look? - We’re late.

THE GET ME MY SHOES!

- She longed for excitement.\*- NOT THOSE! THE RED ONES!

- Feed me pomegranates and soft-cooked eggs.\*- She volunteered to be Greed and Luxury.

Roast meat for me and drown me in wine and cream.\*Wash me in goat milk.

- Strip me . . . dress me . . . strip me again.\*- I don’t want to hear. I don’t want to know.

- Toss me naked into the toy-box.\*- She was happy to let me draw from life . . .

- Draw my mouth as a scarlet thread.\*- Let’s go, Marie.

- Shame me. Chain me. Drag me to hell.\*- We’re late. We’re going to be late. Let’s go.

- Shut me in eternal darkness with the devil.\*- We’re going to be late. Let’s go.

I’M READY!

And her husband?

- Was complicit.\*- Is this the truth?

Oh yes, believe me, it’s the truth.

And since this is what the man so much needed to believe,\*so he, the man, this man, believed it.

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And that same evening tells his wife . . . entertains her . . .\*reveals . . . ha! . . . how . . . secretly the Boy enjoys . . . guess!

. . . that whore, her sister. Yes! And how that other man, \*the fool, the husband – smiles the Protector – is complicit.

Agnès puts on her shoes . . .

. . . steps through the stone slit . . .

. . . turns up the stone stairs, slips into the writing room . . .

. . . where the Boy, him . . .

. . . yes, the liar, look, lifts his head.

Why are you crying?

You lied to me.

In what way lied?

All night your voice in my head\*wound itself round and around and around my sister.

Her mouth fastened to yours in a bad dream,\*and her hair stuck . . .

. . . stuck like gold leaf to your skin in a bad dream\*and covered your eyes.

What dream?

My sister . . . you … the liar . . .\*you and my sister.

I lied for you, not to you.

Prove it.

- I lied to protect you.\*- Protect . . .

To protect me or to protect yourself?

This isn’t true.

Prove it. Let him see.\*Show him us.

Show him us how?

Or do you love him too?

Do you fasten your mouth to his mouth too and bite,\*bite on his lip like you bite on mine?

What is it – says the Boy –\*you want from me?

While the dead heap up in the meadow,\*while human beings burn in the marketplace . . .

. . . make me a new page.

Push our love into that man’s eye\*like a hot needle.

Blind him,\*blind him with it.

Make him . . .

. . . cry blood.

- Here are your enemies, lined up on a gibbet.\*- Hanging . . . excellent . . . like Judas.

- A vine-hook cutting a traitor’s throat.\*- Yes, yes. And who are these?

These naked boys have dug their own graves.

They’re waiting in the orchard to be shot.

And what are these streaks of light?

A night bombardment:\*Gomorrah – see it? – being turned to dust.

Now show me Paradise.

- An aquamarine flash . . . streets running with human fat . . .\*- I see it, but show me Paradise.

- A carmine flame licking a field of wheat . . .\*- I SAID NOW SHOW ME PARADISE.

Paradise?\*But this is Paradise.

Here is your mill and here are your cherry trees.

Here’s . . . look . . . Marie shopping at the shopping mall\*and John at the airport collecting air miles.

- This is Paradise. These are its concrete walls.\*- If this is Paradise . . .

- And here, with a diamond skull, is the black dog at its gate.\*- If this is Paradise – says Agnès –

Here . . . here . . .

- Then where is Hell?\*- Here – smiles the Boy – it’s on this secret page.

Where are the pictures?

They’re here: I’ve painted them with words.

- What words?\*- Read them.

Read? Read? How can a woman read?\*What words? Is this a word?

- Or this? This?\*- The book is finished.

Where does a word end and another word begin?

- My work – smiles the Boy – is done.\*- Where? Where are the pictures?

What? What use to a woman is a word?

Mouth . . . see it . . . mouth . . .\*– writes the Boy.

Heart, hair, mouth, nail, hand, skin, blood, her neck –\*writes the Boy – of amethyst …

Her long white back,\*even the gold-flecked iris of her eye . . .

. . . each part of her body – writes the Boy –

She has offered and has used for her own pleasure.

Like the man – writes the Boy –

Like the man who bends down the branch in summer\*to cut the most high-up flower – writes the Boy –

I have reached up for her love\*and have bent her willingly to the ground.

And at her own invitation,\*her own invitation – writes the Boy –

We have used and used and used\*have used each other as – writes the Boy . . .

. . . pornography.

This is what the woman, what Agnès,\*what your wife, your property – writes the Boy –

. . . asks me to say to you.

Read it, oh read it again.

- Keep away.\*- And show me, please show me . . .

- I want to see.\*- Cover your arms.

Cover your face and hair.

Stitch shut your lips before your pink flicking tongue\*snakes back into my mouth the way it burrowed into his.

NOW KEEP AWAY FROM ME.

Please let me see the word for love.

Set the earth spinning.\*Fill it with iron and stone.

- Make a man out of dust.\*- Good.

- Prop him naked on two stick legs.\*- Good.

- Prop him tottering next to a tree.\*- Good.

Tempt him, taunt him, clothe him,\*spit him out.

Expel him from joy\*with a lacerating whip.

- Make him sweat, cry, scratch at the earth’s crust.\*- Make him jealous.

Make each man ashamed . . .

. . . ashamed to be human.

Put voices into his mind.

Confront the Boy – says one –\*follow him into the wood.

No – says another voice –\*be wise, be calm, be merciful.

Take his hair in your fist – says the third –\*pull back his head for a kiss.

And as you are cutting one long clean incision\*through the bone, examine your own portrait . . .

. . . in the glass-black mirror of his eyes.

Woman and her Protector . . .

Night. A room.

A balcony. A long white table.

What has he placed in front of her?

A silver dish.

What does she lift from the silver dish?\*I said, what does she lift from the silver dish?

The warm round silver lid.

What does the woman do now?

- I said, what does the woman do now?\*- I’m not that woman. I’m Agnès.

- Eats. The woman eats.\*- Good. Say it.

What makes the woman eat?

- I said, what makes the woman eat?\*- Hunger. Appetite. Her curiosity.

No: her obedience. Her obedience.\*Say it. I need you to say it.

- Her obedience now makes her eat.\*- Her obedience to her husband. That is correct.

How does it taste – says the man.

Good, she says – salt and sweet.

Why?

- Good?\*- Yes, she says – good, she says – salt, strange and sweet.

Why?

- Good? How is it good?\*- Sweet as my own milk, yes, good . . .

- But salt as my own tears. Why?\*- Good? How is it good?

- What has my husband, my Protector, given me to eat?\*- His heart, Agnès.

- What heart?\*- His heart – the Boy –

- No.\*- His heart – the Boy –

- No, nothing, nothing you can do . . .\*- His heart, his heart, the Boy, his heart . . .

Nothing I ever eat, nothing I drink,\*will ever take the taste of that Boy’s heart out of this body.

No force you use, nothing you forbid, can take away\*the pictures that Boy’s hands draw on this skin.

He can unfold the tight green bud, unwrap the tree,\*darken the wood, lighten the sky, blacken the dust with rain.

Each mark he makes on me is good,\*each color clear.

Crush. Burn. Break. Tear.

Put out my eyes. Hang. Drown. Stone. Stab.\*Cut out my tongue.

Nothing, not if you strip me to the bone with acid,\*will ever take the taste of that Boy’s heart out of this mouth.

This – says the Angel –\*shows the Woman Falling.

Here, look, the man takes a knife . . .

But the woman’s quicker, and jumps.

See how her body has dropped from the balcony,\*how I pause her mid-fall at the exact center of the page.

Here in the night sky, see them, stars\*hold in a bright web her black silhouette on blue.

As she drops from the house, three small angels, look,\*are watching her calmly from the margin.

In their face, in their eyes, see their cold fascination\*with human disaster . . .

. . . as they turn from the fallen woman . . .

. . . to where the white lines of the Saturday carpark\*cover the heaped-up dead.