

## 2020 in Cadavre Exquis

### I. Lost

When there is no more a whole, nor wholeness in the world, for poems to seek, to hold, to honour, we shall speak of *things*, small and big. Of you. And you. Dear you. And you, as well. A handful of things that went missing, that were missed, through the last one year. Of you, January, incomplete, the first where Eva wouldn't ring in her birthday. And so, down the weeks and months.

Of you, nibble-sized slice of flesh, malignant yet mine. Eyebrows and lashes, who had awoled silently one February night. Just before those swift, delightful double brunches at Le Pain Q by the Eurostar terminal at London St Pancras, brunches gift-wrapped in brioche and black cherry jam with bear-hugs to shore up sinew and spirits all the way till Paris and Gare du Nord and home. Château de Versailles, you, cellophaned in young snow, the flawless symmetry of your royal garden traceable even by my IV-ed hand from a high hospital window in Le Chesnay, now a near-galaxy away. Train stations. In Lille and Luxembourg, Basel and Bruges, Dinard, Douai. Of a brush with their clamour, their shaped stains, their blithe uncaring. One breath, while on it, of your grey-and-gold grandeur, dear Antwerpen Centraal, dear stone-and-glass-and-steel summits that bid me welcome every time these many years, at daybreak, at noon, at dusk, or dead of night. Closer home, the last breathless dash into the closing arms of Line One at Concorde or Bastille, on the other side of midnight, still drunk with wonder at limbs that elude gravity, at the arc

of a spine, at the glory of torque and curve and swirl owning the stage at Théâtre de la Ville or at Opéra Bastille. On another, perhaps half a year's earnings lost from axed postponed or worse, many ousted still have roofs; and with luck, can reopen doors, we'd state, and quickly and leave us in the lurch). The austral or would have touched. Every smile oh, yes, winter went missing too, leaving us splattered with dewy, while all the parks and gardens to touch, even as elm and beech for furtive fondling. Not books labelled contraband, at first. It's keep saying to each other every and thrum of evening clearing signs of being dialed down this and also butter (for some weeks), the 10<sup>th</sup> arrondissement (things, we Marais – again, a galaxy away, in just could not be found, for love sanitizers) vying for second spot. just as faithless, sighed our gentle her team, were their PPE: dearer dose of presidential praise, steep.

dear, for undoubtedly mine, you chose easy to forgive, and we shall speak of bread with loved ones, when the price a whole lot more. But we shall stick to heartbeat nor breath. Give thought &

haps churlish, though crucial note: tours, premieres and performances overnight like these lashes (but we work once more, whenever theatres restate, lest luck should take offence, half of almost every face my lips may in town too, save on-screen. Winter, somewhere by a vernal equinox, silver sunshine, infuriatingly free were kept confined, forbidden and pine leant down from pens but bookshops (just think!) got really the oddest of times, we'd hour. We lost you too, the rattle its vocal cords, with all the urban much. But, even earlier, eggs, oh and buckwheat flour, at least here in heard, were a lot less fraught by the pandemic times). "Proper" masks or money, with surgical gloves (& Meanwhile, my veins had proved Nurse D, but rarest of all, claimed by far, than medals or the regular Immunity, often wayward but still the worst year to play truant (this isn't it some time). The benison of breaking may be too high to pay. There is more, *things* for now, not name lives, nor plot tongue & pen only what they can bear.