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This side of poetry

Written over coffee
by Michael Frearson
in exciting times, 2008.

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This book is dedicated to sexual melancholy; to family; cheese; to courage, patience and wisdom; to the moments in between; to Deprogrammed and the Vibemakers; to learning; to us, being those people; to change, growth and movement; to superheroes; to all those dedications from then until now; to forgiveness.



Somebody

I want somebody; I need somebody
I can use and abuse and confuse.
I said I want somebody; I said I need somebody
I can choose
and seduce
and then refuse.
Somebody that's stronger than me;
somebody that's longing to be
Somebody to someone, somewhere, somehow.
Somebody to press myself against,
somebody to attack in my defence,
somebody I can turn to,
I can learn through,
I can hurt, too.

Somebody to take the brunt
and see beyond the front and be blunt
and tell me that I'm being a...
This time I am fussed – it takes time to adjust
and I just
wish I hadn't invested quite that much
in a crush, now I need
somebody to lay down with,
somebody to hang around with,
somebody to save the day when I'm flat out and surrounded.
somebody to play the surrogate,
somebody to let me feel comfort.

Somebody who's not afraid to get that close to chaos.

It's a different world alone
it's hard to feel at home, I need
somebody to stop me getting stoned
and reaching for the phone.

“people aren't wearing enough hats” –
this is my text message to say that
in here all this fits together,
it's messy but it's my mess
and I know my way around,
so if you take nothing else from this
take my word for it,
do I think about it? Yes,
I think about it every day,
and if I was leaving tonight
or if I was staying forever,
I'm grateful.
and I hate long goodbyes
so forgive me.

I can't change the past
and that's hard to accept,
but now I'm here and
I've got love to give.
We move and we change course and we lose touch
and we miss us, we miss you,
and we can be in two places at once but
not physically.
And we can work for cheese
and weep like superheroes
but I can't be everything
to anyone.

My pads are full of things
I should have said;
this is for coming home and realising that
nothing really changed that much.
If I was leaving tonight
would you let me go
or would you cause a fuss?
Would you talk in riddles
to keep some control because
maybe it's you that can't seem to let go?
Would it end with ellipsis or kisses
or questions?
Would there be tears for what we've lost,
would there be joy for what we've gained?
And would we hold hands
and that would be enough love
because tonight's Michael isn't performing;
he's wishing there was more time,
and he's trying to figure out how to say goodbye
without it becoming a sermon, and
he's afraid and...

Somebody to help the healing process
and let me deal with the mess and give me rest
and make me feel I'm worth the stress.
Somebody who's needy like that,
somebody who'll call or write back,
somebody who might forgive me acting like a twat.
Somebody who can see me come unstuck,
somebody who can watch me numbing up,
somebody who can hold my head
and tell me that I've done enough.

Somebody who really doesn't deserve it,
that's perfect. Someone to swap words with
and turn around as if it's really worthless.

And outside the body
I can watch myself withdrawing,
be warned:
tonight's Michael won't be with you in the morning
– he's performing,
so be delicate,
be cautious at close quarters
because I'm capable of causing pain
in ways that make me nauseous,
it's thoughtless -
and help me lose myself
underneath the shell,
and concentrate on what I'm feeling now
instead of what I've felt
and what's withheld.
And we can trade caresses,
especially where the mess is.
That's precious.

And we can give and take and let each one forget it.

Okay?

And though we're close
– and we'll be well closer than most –
if something comes to tuck me in
I'll be the one to row the boat,
remember.

I need somebody to go through each step with me
somebody to call and try to keep me busy
somebody to say I'm getting better and to
tell me she forgives me.

So where is she?

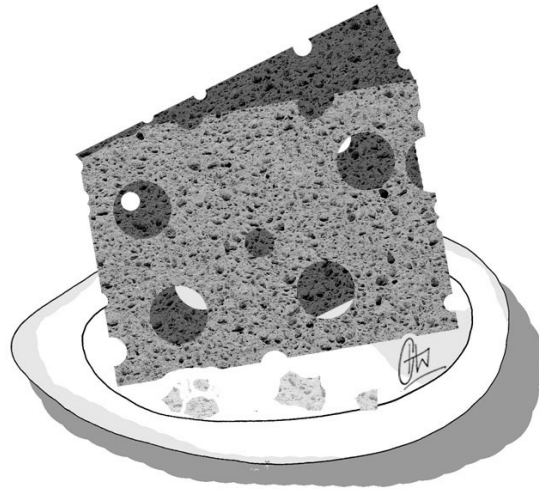
Somebody who just won't give it up,
somebody who just knows giving love;
somebody who'll accept me; who'll protect me.
Who'll regret me.

I said I want somebody,
I said I need somebody
I can use and abuse and confuse.
I said I want somebody,
I said I need somebody
I can choose and seduce and then refuse.
Somebody that's stronger than me,
somebody that's longing to be
somebody to someone, somewhere, somehow.
Somebody to press myself against,
somebody to attack in my defence,
somebody I can turn to,
I can learn through,
I can hurt, too.

And we can pool anxiety,
and you can lie to me,
and I confide in you and
we can reach something we're trying to.

Goodbye

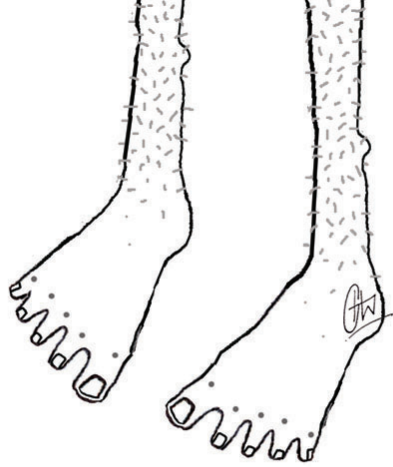
I hate long goodbyes
and I'm not that hot at
thinking on my feet, but
I'll write you a retrospective
if you're prepared to wait
for a couple of weeks.
I'd like to tighten up a touch
and change my working style:
a bit more exercise
and focus, a little less
Girls Gone Wild. I'm learning, remember,
nothing stays
and nothing waits til later so
I'd like to be
less a theorist and more a
demonstrator; I'm not the future anymore,
I'm just another
generation trying to
cipher out a message under all this
misinformation because
we all need to work together;
that means
everybody has to do it my way
but I say this with love so
that pretty much makes it okay.
As we break bread
I'll ask the question, if I was
leaving here tonight
would you tell me what a fool I was
or would you
drive me to the flight?
Thanks for the lift, by the way.



It's not about religious cheese
or passing festive cheese,
I'm talking boundary-crossing
cheese that sets us free and
lets us rest in cheese.

So, yes, invest in cheese, together we can make it there;
just bring some pickle
and we'll head off to the places where
they don't know cheese like we know cheese,
where evil regimes veto cheese,
we'll spread cheese through communities
until the world can live in cheese.
I work for cheese.

Ride with me.
That's why I keep my eye open, high hoping,
just coping until
I find someone else that's tightropeing –
lean on me.
And what's emerging is
I'm nothing if not uncertain if
this version of a person to which
I'm urgently referring is
her in me.
And something's displaced or misjudged in this case,
but I'll risk face to learn to accept these mistakes;
escape with me.



Standing

I'm standing in a line of men.
Maybe ten of us,
and I'm afraid. We all are.
The light is scarce
but I can make out
their bare chests to the left and right of me
as we stand shoulder to shoulder
along a wall.

Then a man appears.
He's big.
But I'm not looking.
He walks slowly down the line
and we know he's got all night.

I try to focus on my breathing
and wonder why I can't hear
anybody else.

He stops in front of me and turns
and looks me right in the eye.
He steps in.

and we can read it in the greasepapers:
"Thank god we've got our cheese at last"
and
"Blessed are the cheesemakers."

So spread the message:
won't you please give cheese a chance?
That piece of cheese for tea,
you'll see
how it can season your romance.

And maybe cheese can work for you.
I tell you, cheese is worth you turning to.
It hits the spot that simply nothing else on earth will do.

Well, maybe not nothing,
but choosing either war or cheese,
it's surely obvious:
you're going to go for something you can eat.
Because it's a basic human need,
the big three:
Freedom,
Love
and Cheese,
we need
cheese on earth
and goodwill toward each.

We need to have some faith in cheese
because cheese means
no more pain or vagrancy,
so lose the armaments,
stop killing in the name of cheese.

Work for cheese

I used to wonder what to do with these degrees
I shouldn't have worried though –
these days degrees mean
I can work for cheese,

a cheese peddler, speeding round
peddling the cheese,
like a disease,
like when hear the word I'm
weakening at the knees.
I work for cheese, I've got that cheese love.
Look out now, I'm a cheesy brother.
We all are, man,
it's just that you lot keep it undercover,
we work for cheese.
Ha – feed us shit and keep us in the dark,
as long as I can get my brie and bacon bit
I'll play the part.

I work for cheese, get paid in cheese,
this country's made of cheese;
the way we teach: there's people training cheese
in public funded agencies.

Let's work for cheese, get hurt for cheese,
let's skip a sweet dessert for cheese;
that savoury staple we all turn to in emergencies.
I want World Cheese,
cheese in my heart and
cheese of mind,
we'll fill the world with cheese
and finish something even Jesus tried.

Let's work for cheese –

Still right in the eye
- and I can't look away, for Christ's sake –
he raises his hand into the air.
Now I have to close my eyes
and sob a little:
it's the guy next to me
that takes it on the shoulder.

But the big man still looks at me
and I know that next time –
next time he's coming for me.

And then I think this:
maybe that's what it takes.

This man also weeps

This man has strength,
he has wisdom.
He takes risks because he's 26
and life isn't going any slower.
This man also weeps.

This man has greatness inside
that needs to be used.
This man has love.
This man can lead, can teach,
can speak, can listen.
This man can be trusted
with the safety of your children.
This man also weeps.

This man stands and looks at his naked form in the mirror
with mild amusement –
not in disgust,
not in admiration -
with mild amusement.
This man has travelled over three continents
to be with you in this form tonight.
This man has scaled mountains,
has sunk to depths,
has fought and lost,
has lost through winning
and grown through losing
and gets up every morning
to see what the new day brings.
This man also weeps.

This man loves to eat and sleep.
And read and run and procreate and rest.
This man sings. Badly.

Venice was mega busy,
and that tonight I'm coming home.

In the city there's suddenly a massive new grey building
Besides all the old grey buildings and I think,
"Jesus, how long was I gone?"
and then we hit the one-way system
and it's even more fucked up than before,
so I'm reading between the lines and dodging boy racers and
this is my city
but it really doesn't feel like that at the moment.
Now I'm on foot, which is the only way to cross the city really,
and I navigate by the feel of the pavement under my feet,
and the touch of the brickwork
as it changes to glass,
to sandstone and back again,
and then I cross the road and I'm riding the current,
and the facades lean in like passing willows on the riverbank,
and this is my city,
you can see it in the browns and the greys,
the sixties concrete armpit from which
Derby Boy was raised;
I walk these streets amidst the ghosts
of all my lives here,
seeking my next Renaissance.
For this is my city and I can feel it this time
because there's movement,
and when the people talk
they might actually be saying something,
so listen, look,
there's people here
and this is Derby, my friends,
as if there's nowhere else it could be,
this is our city
and tonight I'm coming home.

Coming home

I already have a seatbelt tanline
that crosses my chest from my right shoulder,
but now the sun is on my left
as the clock on my Holden ticks off the kilometres,
and I swear the Coast Road feels longer
heading south than it does going north.
Crossing time zones over an eight hour period means
two different breakfasts and an evening meal,
and the roof garden in Singapore airport is so humid
it feels like I'm in a greenhouse,
and this is my first taste of South East Asia,
but the rest of it will have to wait
because tonight I'm coming home.

Stood at Heathrow waiting
for a tent to come round on the conveyor belt
isn't as bad a feeling as it sounds.
After all this is England,
and England is about waiting,
and about complacency and excuses.
It's not like clocking the size of the gun on a Thai guard
who's insisting you pay for a seat you don't occupy
on a midnight train that's already moving.
So a missing tent with a hole in it is
really neither here nor there and,
watching the streetlights flash past one by one,
I imagine I'm returning to a country
that's managed to somehow right itself
over these past eight weeks,
a country that will pat me on the back,
pour me a coffee,
and tell me that I'll never have to pay for insurance again.
Just in case this has happened I take out my telephone
and dial the folks to tell them that we're safe,

This man is fortunate,
this man is well educated and rich
by world standards,
this man can fly.
In an aeroplane.
This man can take you places.
This man has stood in front of a full-sized Caravaggio
and gone, "...Jesus..."
This man also weeps.

This man is not without fear,
not without courage;
this man is competent in the kitchen,
this man dances.
This man makes up in enthusiasm
what he lacks in talent,
this man can play the part,
be it hero or villain.
This man sees room for improvement;
this man will make it there
one day.
This man also weeps.

This man has goals –
he doesn't know what they are yet
but he has them.
This man is trying to be
the change he wants to see,
this man is not content
to settle for mediocrity.
This man laughs
and encourages others to laugh.
This man can be loud,
can be aggressive, even violent

because this man would go all the way
to protect the people he loves.
This man also weeps.

This man writes poetry
in order to capture pieces of his soul
he feels are precious.
This man performs on stage
and the butterflies never go away,
but the energy, the excitement,
and the exultation of a shared connection...
this man can feel the vibe.
This man took this long to get here;
this man can be all that and more
for you.
This man also weeps.

the delicacy of that tender flesh,
so innocent as birth, she stood her ground and
let a solitary tear rock the earth.
At that very moment rain began to thrash
and thunder roll;
what this Supergirl had lost, it shook us,
every single soul
and muted every mouth
and blinded every eye and deafened every ear.
When our sense was finally restored
the girl had disappeared.

There was nothing more to look at,
so we started to disperse,
I took the scenic route
to pick a fist of flowers from the church.
When I stepped inside the graveyard
it was old and overgrown and
as I left the path that's when I saw her,
sat against a stone.
I pulled my coat around her shoulders
and I wiped her snotty nose and promised her
we'd get her all cleaned up
and in some other clothes.
When she looked at me I knew
that day a Superhero died,
and she was left behind a legend
as my SuperWoman cried.

and not a paving slab unstuck.
And Supergirl just stared in disbelief;
well, everybody did, 'cause
we had seen her save a man before,
and never lost her grip. And she was on all fours,
and someone said, "I saw her let him go"
and soon the crowd joined in,
all chanting out this song
from down below. And I just stood there,
muted, not a word;
I'm sure she looked at me but
next thing anybody knew was
Supergirl was on her feet.
She turned to face us
one by one
and all these people lost their stones
'cause she was Supergirl,
and we only
pathetic flesh and bone.
And then she opened up her mouth
and let out this
almighty scream
with every single sinew taut,
her outfit straining at the seams.
The windows in the office buildings
shattered on the street
and with that crash
we each one must have thought
the agony complete, I know I did.
But then, with every fickle eye on her,
our Supergirl ripped off her leotard
and threw it to the kerb. And suddenly
each man and boy was left with this
divine disgrace but none of us
looked at the naked Supergirl
but in the face;

The day Supergirl cried

There will be many people tell you
how they saw Supergirl weep
and many tales pass the lips of folks
who didn't even see what really happened there,
and though it's not that people lied
alone I hold the truth behind that fateful day a Superhero
cried.

It was typical,
a bright blue comic strip kind of a day,
as I was walking down the street
I saw this guy coming the other way.
His pace was odd and
he didn't look all that composed
as if he had that
being followed feeling everybody knows.
We were both
minding our business
as I passed this agitated man and
bit into the chicken lettuce sandwich in my hand,
when from behind me,
and almost
underneath my feet the loudest crash
I ever heard and
screams rang out along the street.
So I spun around
and dropped my chicken sarnie
as I saw the man that passed me
on his knees before a chasm in the floor.
A furnace spat out flames
that lit the street to either end
and by then everyone
had stopped to turn and
watch the dire event. And still

the man was on the ground
and then the whole street heard him shout,
his face contorted
in some kind of suffering we couldn't quite make out.
Well, I was dumbstruck,
I admit, I stood and watched as
talons reached from underneath the street and grabbed him
just below the crotch.
As if expecting it,
he didn't turn around but
he was wailing
as the monster dragged his body 'cross the ground.
Some people ran
to help him up and
took him by the sleeve but then
the arm that had a hold of him
just shook him like a leaf and
bodies scattered over pavement;
I was certain he was dead
and someone else was screaming, "Help!"
and then I swear
the sky
turned
red.

As we looked
into the firmament above
she landed by his side, her eyes red-raw,
she stood
with both her Superboots untied.
And I was standing at the front,
and as I saw him
lift his face to look into her eyes
I swear he glared at her with such distaste.
But Supergirl
she shook her head and shouted, "No!"

and everybody heard
and after that
we neither moved an inch
nor said a fucking word. We watched her
wrestle with the beast, all black and spitting steam
and poor old agitated man
was swung and stretched
from in between.

Supergirl was gaining
inch by inch, when
something sang below, the hallowed echo
of the martyr's song,
entreating to let go. The man,
he heard it too,
we saw him look into the void and when he
finally met her eyes again
Supergirl was destroyed.

They say
she should have kept a hold on him,
she shouldn't have let him go
but if you stood
where I'd been standing
you'd have seen it wasn't so, 'cause Supergirl
wasn't the one to blame and,
Jesus, she was strong but
this man simply let his fingers open wide
and slid along. We watched him
slip into the darkness,
crying out, and clench his fists and
Supergirl was on her belly
trying to grab another wrist. But it was too late,
he disappeared,
and then the hole closed up and
not a crack was out of place,