Mise En Place

by coreopsis

Summary

Between tours, Frank watches too much Food Network. And angsts and has epiphanies and also knits. (inspired by Frank's tweet about being pissed about not getting Food Network on his cable)

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.

They'd been off tour for seven days when Gerard let himself into Frank's house and walked into the living room. Frank waved, said "hey", and kept watching Paula Deen doing something disgusting to a chicken. It was actually a little disturbing but he couldn't look away.

"What the fuck is she doing?" Gerard asked, sounding as horrified as Frank felt. Frank glanced over and Gerard's face was a hilarious blend of disgusted and fascinated.

"I know, right?" Frank laughed at him and then went back to staring at the carnage on screen. The woman sure did love her butter.

Gerard settled down on the couch close to Frank, close enough for Frank to feel a hint of his body heat under the blast of winter he'd brought in with him. "Why are you watching this?"

"I like her accent. And I got a wicked case of Train Wreck Syndrome, man." Frank dropped a hand on Gerard's knee and wagged it back and forth for a second. "It's a burden."

"Yeah," Gerard said slowly, like he couldn't tear his gaze away either. A commercial finally came on and broke the spell. They looked at each other a little sheepishly until Gerard cleared his throat, licked his lips, and said, "I dropped by to see if you wanted to go get some lunch, but I'm not sure I'm ever going to eat again."

Frank blinked and drew his gaze away from Gerard's wet mouth and said, "Yeah, I'll bet going vegan sounds pretty good right now."
"Maybe just for today." Gerard nodded and then pointed at Frank excitedly. "Hey, we could go to that vegetarian place you like so much."

"Cool," Frank said and finally levered himself up off the couch where he'd been all morning. He was a little bummed that he'd be missing Everyday Italian and The Barefoot Contessa, but it was lunch with Gerard and he could never pass that up. And anyway, if they hurried at least they could be back in time to see Sandra Lee. He needed a TiVo.

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Mikey came over right in the middle of Ace of Cakes, and rang the doorbell about eighteen times and finally started banging his fist on the door, yelling, "Frank, I know you're in there. I can see the glow from the TV, asshole. If you don't open the door, I'm calling 911."

Frank still waited until a commercial break to let him in. Mikey was just taking his phone out of his pocket when Frank opened the door.

"What the fuck, Frank? It's freezing out here." Frank snorted. As if Mikey could feel the cold through the massive wool coat, knitted gloves, hat, and fifteen foot long scarf he had wound around his neck and shoulders.

"Dude, you do not interrupt Ace of Cakes," Frank said gravely. "It's a new episode."

"Oh shit, is that tonight?" Mikey headed for the living room shedding his outerwear in a trail from the door to the couch. Frank didn't bother to pick it up; the break was almost over and there was another episode coming on. He'd give Mikey a spare key before he left, just to avoid close calls like this in the future. If he'd missed the part where the client sees their cake for the first time because Mikey was a worrywart who called the cops or something, he'd have been pissed. When he said as much out loud, Mikey gave him a slightly incredulous look. "Yeah, and I'd be pissed if you were dead in here."

Frank just thumbed up the volume. "Dude, this cake leaks brains."

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"Oh, wow, it's beautiful. Frankie, come look," Gerard said rapturously from where he was standing by the window with the curtain pulled back. He'd been inside Frank's house for less than five minutes and was still wearing his coat. Frank would have thought he'd gotten enough of the outside when he'd been out in it.

"Mario Batali's on Emeril Live," Frank said, not too unkinkdly, and didn't pull his gaze away from the screen. "They're doing their favorite Italian dishes."

Gerard ignored the unspoken point of Frank's comment and kept talking anyway. "Come see this. The snowflakes are tiny and the sun is hitting them just right. It looks like silver glitter floating through the air."

"It's snow, Gee." Frank hit the volume button on the remote, nudging it up just a bit, hoping that Gerard would get the hint. "In Jersey. Happens every year."

"Not like this. Come look." Frank glanced up to see Gerard watching him with a weird look on his face so, since a commercial break just started, he moved the dog off his lap, stepped over the one curled up at his feet, and walked over to the window.

He stepped up close to Gerard so that he could look out the opening where Gerard held back the
curtain. The sunlight hitting the snowflakes did make them look like glitter, and Gerard was right that it was pretty amazing. But still...Mario Batali. He turned his head toward Gerard to say something to that effect, but the intent look on Gerard's face as he stared not at the snow but at Frank made the words die on his lips.

In the background, Frank could hear the annoyingly peppy jingle of some restaurant chain segueing into the theme to let him know the show was back on but it sounded a million miles away. His entire universe had shrunk to Gerard, just inches away, the sunlight through the window picking up the gold flecks in his eyes and highlighting the curve of his lips as they twitched slightly in an aborted attempt at a smile. Something old but not completely familiar tightened and twisted in his stomach, reminding him in a rush of all those feelings he'd had for Gerard back at the beginning before the band took off and became so important to both of them that anything else got shoved to the side and only brought out on stage in front of hundreds or thousands of people. He never felt like this--never allowed himself to feel like this--when it was just the two of them. Alone. In his living room with no one but his dogs to witness whatever happened next.

Everything that Frank had ever felt for Gerard--every moment of attraction, every stinging slap of longing, the warmth of belonging and friendship, every flash of arousal, the confusing tangle of worryfearanger of the really bad times--all slammed into Frank so hard his throat tightened and he felt a pain in his chest and he realized he'd stopped breathing. He sucked in a breath and Gerard reached out in concern, his hand wrapping around Frank's upper arm, and said, "Frank? Are you okay?"

Frank closed his eyes and focused on Gerard's fingers pressing into his arm through the sleeve of his shirt, the faint sound of Gerard breathing. He struggled with what to say, whether to say anything at all. He couldn't just hit Gerard with 'oh, hey, apparently it's still you, after all these years it's still you, always has been, and always will be' and expect Gerard to be on the same page. Even though neither of them had managed to keep a girlfriend or boyfriend for more than a few months at a time, even though they'd often joked about being each other's longest relationship, even though they professed their platonic love for each other all the fucking time. He couldn't possibly expect Gerard to have waited for him like Frank had been subconsciously waiting for Gerard. Except he kinda did.

"What the fuck are we doing?" asked Frank, his voice caught between a plea and a demand, as he opened his eyes and stared into Gerard's. The curtain had fallen shut and a shadow had fallen across Gerard's face, but Frank was close enough to see Gerard's eyes widen and his lips part on an indrawn breath but he was silent. "I..., Frank started, but shook his head. "The show's back on."

When Gerard followed Frank back over to the couch, he sat down all the way at the other end instead of practically pressed up against Frank as he usually did. They watched the wrap up in silence and the applause and cheering on the television almost drowned out the pounding in Frank's chest. He could feel Gerard staring at him, but he didn't look back as the show went off and the next one came on. Frank watched it for ten minutes and couldn't have said what it was, who was on it, or what they were cooking.

When he couldn't handle the pressure of Gerard's silence and his own epiphany any longer, he turned off the TV and stood up. He briefly considered telling Gerard he didn't feel well, to let himself out, but Frank knew that would just make Gerard hang around and try to take care of him which would lead to Frank having some kind of breakdown because right now he really needed to be somewhere that Gerard wasn't before he did something stupid. He glanced at his watch and said, "Aw shit, is that the time? I've got an appointment that I need to leave for soon."

"What kind of appointment?" Gerard was looking at Frank like he was 95% sure he was lying and
only that 5% of uncertainty was keeping him from calling Frank on it.

"Tattoo artist," Frank said quickly, knowing that was the one visit Gerard would never invite himself along on.

"You're getting new ink? And you didn't even tell me?" The confusion in Gerard's voice was about to break Frank as it was, so he shrugged and turned away so he didn't have to see the disappointment in Gerard's eyes.

"Yeah, there's not much to tell yet, so." Frank shrugged again and started upstairs. "Let yourself out, will you?"

"Yeah. I'll...uh...I'll see you when I get back from New York," Gerard said quietly.

"Yeah, see you," Frank replied, and stood at the top of the stairs until he heard the door close. He dropped to the first step, head in his hands. What the fuck was he going to do now?

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Frank was doing laundry and singing along to the Bouncing Souls when Ray called. "Hey Frank, are you watching Diners, Drive-ins, and Dives right now?"

"No," Frank turned down the stereo just a little. "Why?"

"Guy is about to go to that little hole-in-the-wall we stopped at in Texas a few months ago."

Frank thought back and then laughed, "The place with the rattlesnake? No shit?"

He could still remember the look on Gerard's face when the waitress told them the daily special had rattlesnake in it. Mikey and Ray had giggled like little kids when Bob had volunteered to be the one to try it. Frank had leaned into Gerard's side, holding his fingers up as fangs and trying to hiss but he'd been laughing too hard for it to come out right. That had started Gerard laughing and the waitress had rolled her eyes at them and said she'd come back after they calmed down.

Frank laughed along with Ray about a place they'd been to being featured on the show and didn't think of the way Gerard's face had been pink all over and he'd had tears caught in his eyelashes and he'd been grinning so big at Frank his eyes were nearly squeezed shut. He definitely didn't remember the soft huff of Gerard's warm laugh on his neck.

He didn't watch Food Network for the next two days.

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Frank really only knitted when he was making a gift for someone or when he was really stressed out. So when Bob came over and found him with a lap full of yarn and his needles going clickety clack at a hundred miles an hour, he looked at the ceiling and tapped the fingers of one hand together like he was counting something. "Nobody's got a birthday soon, so what the hell's wrong?"

"Just felt like making an afghan," Frank said, and motioned with his head for Bob to take a seat. "Maybe it was for you and you've ruined the surprise, did you think about that?"

"Wow, you've finally turned into my Grandma."

"Shhh," Frank pointed a needle at the tv. "Sit down and be quiet, Good Eats is on."

Bob rolled his eyes and wandered into the kitchen and helped himself to a soda from the fridge,
then settled on the other end of the couch. Frank glanced over at him and all he could think of was Gerard sitting way over there. He resolutely turned his gaze back to the TV and knitted harder, ignoring the stitches he was fucking up while Alton Brown told them all about the history of sushi.

Neither of them said anything until Alton started explaining how to make the rice. When he threw the rice cooker out the window, Frank snickered and said, "Mikey should be watching this."

"Mhh huh." Bob reached out and poked at the afghan-in-progress that completely covered Frank's knees by now. "What's up with you?"

"What?"

"I've been in New Jersey for over two weeks and I've seen you twice, including now, watching the fucking Food Network." Frank looked over and Bob was watching him intently. "Why are you turning into a hermit?"

Frank opened his mouth to deny his hermitage or tell Bob to mind his own business, but what came out was, "I can kiss Gerard on stage in front of ten thousand people but not in my own house."

"Ohhhhkay." Bob nodded and considered this for a moment, and Frank had no idea how he felt about Bob's lack of surprise. Bob might not have expected Frank to say that, but he wasn't shocked about it either. "Do you want to kiss Gerard in your house?"

"That is the question."

"I know. That's why I asked it."

"I kind of do. I think. Maybe." Frank was prevaricating and he knew it. He desperately wanted to kiss Gerard in his house, on stage, and anywhere else Gerard would let him, but it wasn't just a question of what he wanted.

"Well, as long as you're sure," Bob said with a smirk.

"No, I mean, I do. I really, really do." Frank paused and watched Alton Brown explain making tekamaki for a minute or two, before continuing, "But there's all this other stuff--band stuff, reasons not to. I dunno." Frank looked at Bob questioningly. "Why are you taking this so well?"

Bob shrugged. "I thought the two of you were...uh, together before I ever went to Europe with you. I was shocked when I realized you weren't. Then I got over it."

"Maybe we should have been, maybe if we had, if I had just said something then, maybe Gerard wouldn't have been such a fucking wreck--"

"Hey," Bob interrupted firmly, his hands suddenly heavy on Frank's shoulder, "don't be fucking stupid, Frank. You know better than that. All the love in the world can't stop someone from self-destructing if they're determined to and Gerard was really fucking determined."

"Yeah." Frank shook his head and carefully put down his knitting needles before rubbing his face with both hands. "Fuck, Bob. I don't know what the fuck's wrong me."

"I know what's wrong with you," Bob said, still serious, almost contemplative. He settled down next to Frank.

"Yeah?" Frank looked over hopefully and Bob grinned at him.
"Did you want the whole list or just the top ten?"

"Fuck you." Frank flipped Bob off, pushed at his arm, but he laughed a little, not because it was funny but because it was normal and he hadn't felt that way in a while, since even before his epiphany. It felt weird to finally not be feeling weird. The whole Gerard thing aside, it felt good just hanging out with Bob. *He* felt good just hanging out with Bob. "So," he said, setting his knitting aside, "you wanna play some X-Box?"

"After this is over."

"You want to learn how to make sushi?" Frank poked him in the leg. "Are you trying to get in Mikey's pants? Because making him sushi would definitely be the way to go."

"What? No!" Bob said, looking everywhere but at Frank. "It's just interesting and the show's almost over anyway."

"You want to woo Mikey with sushi, admit it," Frank teased, now poking Bob in the side and finding all his ticklish spots with accuracy born from years of practice.

"Shut up, Frank." Bob planted his hand on the side of Frank's head and pushed him down into the couch cushions. "I liked you better when you were all emo and soul sucking."

By the time Frank struggled free of Bob's hold, he'd mostly forgotten about Mikey and sushi. The show was all ready over and he had no problem turning the channel on Sandra Lee and her oddly low breasts and overdone kitchen set. "Fire up the X-Box. I need to school your ass in Halo."

"In your dreams, little man," Bob said, but he did get up and turn on the game.

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Bob showed up for Good Eats the next night but announced during the first commercial break that they were going to Ray's for dinner. Frank grumbled a bit but Bob insisted that he needed to get away from Food Network and, giving a pointed look to Frank's messy afghan, knitting for awhile. Eventually, Frank gave in and it had nothing to do with Bob's unbreakable headlock.

Christa met them at the door, pointed toward the kitchen and said, "He's watching Food 911 or something, I don't know." She rolled her eyes but her smile was fond as she hung up their coats and shooed them into the other room.

Bob snorted a laugh and dragged Frank--who was going to stop laughing at any time now, really--into the kitchen. Ray was sitting on a barstool at the island with his chin propped in one hand, taking notes on a yellow legal pad with the other. He gave them a little wave without taking his eyes off the small undercabinet TV where Tyler Florence chattered on about making chocolate chip cookies.

"Hey, Toro, is there going to be a test on this?" Frank asked, still giggling a little. "Are you going to study for it later in homeroom?"

Ray gave Frank a fake laugh and the finger, then said, "Hey, Bob, did you have to use a cattle prod to get him out of the house?"

"No, I just told him you'd feed him." Bob poked at Frank's ribs and tried to wrap his fingers around Frank's biceps. "Look at this skinny motherfucker."

Frank jerked away and punched Bob in the gut, but not very hard. He could see the genuine worry
in the way Bob and Ray were looking at him. "I'm fine."

"I don't know," Ray said, scratching his jaw as he considered Frank carefully. "You look like you usually do after a bout of the flu."

"That good, huh? Nice. Thanks a lot, fucker." Frank gave Ray a sarcastic smile and thumbs up, but it did make him wonder. Maybe that's why Gerard seemed weird the other night. Frank looked all sickly and then seemed to freak out for no reason. The poor guy had to have been really confused.

"Well, you're in luck," Ray said, and drew Frank out of his thoughts of Gerard. "I was planning to try a new recipe for vegetarian lasagna tonight. Mikey and Gerard are coming over as soon as Gerard gets back from his meetings in the city."

Frank shot Bob a betrayed look. "You didn't mention that part, Bob."

"Eh. Must have slipped my mind." Bob, the big fat liar that he was, smirked at Frank and nudged him toward a stool and said, "Sit down and watch Ray cook. It'll be just like seeing one of your Food Network shows live."

"I'll even shout "bam!" occasionally if you like," Ray said, as he started bustling around the kitchen pulling out utensils and pans and ingredients.

Bob reached out and turned off the little television and then patted Frank on the back. "I think you've had enough."

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With typical Way timing, Gerard and Mikey showed up about thirty seconds before Ray took the lasagna out of the oven. Gerard gave Christa a hug and said "hey" to everyone else. Frank didn't think he was imagining the intensity with which Gerard looked at him, but he was feeling so weird about looking at Gerard that maybe he was projecting.

Frank was torn between wanting to jump Gerard right then and there in front of their friends and wanting to run away and be ridiculous and emo in private where no one could see how very ridiculous and emo he was capable of being. They might have thought they knew but they had no idea. But since he could do neither of those things and get away with it, Frank just didn't make eye contact and twitched a lot. He also didn't say much for fear of what would come out of his mouth. "Please pass the garlic bread" might become "I'm so in love with Gerard it hurts" if he wasn't constantly vigilant.

About halfway through dinner, Mikey, who was sitting next to Frank, looked at him and said, "What's the matter with you? Are you getting sick?"

"No," Frank said and didn't ask why Mikey was asking.

"You're unusually quiet," said Gerard, and he leaned over in front of Mikey so he could reach out and put his hand on Frank's forehead. His hand was cool and dry and Frank wanted to bite it, but he sat perfectly still while Gerard trailed the backs of his fingers down the side of Frank's face and finally said, "You're a little warm but you don't seem to have a fever."

Frank pulled his head back and tried not to snap when he said, "Because I'm not sick. Fuck's sake."

He shoved his chair back and stood up, making his escape to the bathroom with a muttered apology to Christa because he could be as big a bastard to the guys as he wanted but his mother would psychically kick his ass from another city if he was rude to Ray's girlfriend.
When he was done using the bathroom, he took his time washing his hands, scrubbing at them as if he'd be performing surgery later. He tried to avoid looking at himself in the mirror, because he didn't want to know what Gerard was seeing tonight, but he caught a glimpse of his pale face and shadowed eyes anyway. He jerked his gaze away and opened the door.

Gerard was waiting for him in the hall, back against the wall, hands in his pockets, teeth worrying his lower lip. Frank closed his eyes and swallowed hard, shoving down the longing that pierced his chest. He rubbed one hand over his jaw and sighed. "Bathroom's free," he offered and turned to go back to the dining room.

Gerard's hand shot out of his pocket and grabbed Frank's wrist before he could get by. "I just wanted to make sure you were okay," Gerard said quietly. His fingers were warmer than before and soft and a little shaky, and Frank got a sudden, very vivid mental image of those fingers exploring his body. He knew what they felt like on his face and in his hair and shoved down the front of his shirt, but every memory of those touches was soaked in the sound of music and screams. He didn't know what they felt like in the privacy of his bedroom with only the sound of his and Gerard's entwined breaths for accompaniment.

And fuck he wanted to.

"Frank." Gerard's voice was low but his gaze was intense and when he didn't say anything else, Frank felt a little unreasonably angry. Fuck Gerard for being everything Frank wanted, everything he needed, and just his fucking best friend and not his...not his. He wasn't Frank's and he wasn't going to be. That window of opportunity had slammed shut a long time ago when he'd joined My Chemical Romance and placed his professional life in Gerard's hands and tucked his personal life away into a neat little box marked "other".

"Let go," Frank said tightly, as he tried to tug his wrist out of Gerard's grip. Gerard's fingers squeezed harder, just short of actually hurting and he said Frank's name again. "What, Gerard? What the fuck do you want from me?"

"You tell me, Frank, because every time you can bring yourself to look at me, I feel like I've failed you and I don't know why." Gerard looked both sad and angry, and he made a sharp gesture with the hand still gripping Frank's wrist, not even noticing how he jerked Frank's arm. "I don't know what I did or how to fix it because you won't just tell me what the problem is. That's not like you. You're the one of the few people in my life who tells me when I fuck up."

"I can't. I want...this is just--" Frank knew he was babbling but he couldn't seem to get his thoughts to line up and present themselves in a way that he could share with Gerard and still salvage their friendship. "This is us, right? The band. Best friends. Outside my family, you're the most important person in my life, you know?"

"Yeah. I mean, you are to me too." Gerard's eyes were huge and his fingers were stroking Frank's wrist now, and Frank wasn't even sure if Gerard knew what he was doing. He probably didn't know what it was doing to Frank, making him light-headed and achy. "I love you, Frankie, you know that."

"Yeah, but it's--" Frank bit his tongue to keep from saying 'not enough' because there was no good way for Gerard to take that and Frank didn't actually want to hurt him. He was saved by Bob walking down the hall and stopping a few feet away.

"Everything all right out here?" Bob's gaze went from Frank to Gerard to Gerard's hand on Frank's wrist and back to Frank's face.
Gerard let Frank gently withdraw his wrist and stumble back a couple of steps. Frank shoved his hands in the back pockets of his jeans and started to nod but that felt like a lie, so he shrugged instead.

Gesturing at the bathroom door behind Frank, Gerard said, "I need to--"

"Oh, right." Frank moved out of the way and when the door shut behind Gerard, he looked at Bob and said, "Don't ask."

"I wasn't going to," Bob said with his most innocent expression.

"Liar. You're dying to know everything." Frank walked back to the dining room with Bob.

"So sue me for being curious." Bob smiled and it looked way more sympathetic than Frank was ready to deal with so he took his seat and made more of an effort to actually eat the delicious lasagna that Ray had prepared instead of just pushing it around his plate.

"Curious about what?" Ray asked, his gaze darting between Frank and Bob. "Everything okay, Frank?"

"Fine," Frank said shortly, shoving a big bite into his mouth so he wouldn't be expected to say anything else. He chewed determinedly and ignored the sidelong glances Mikey shot him.

Gerard came back a moment or so later and launched into a story about New York and a couple comic artists he'd had dinner with. Then Mikey told them all about the band he'd gone to see the night before, which led to Bob talking about seeing that same band in Chicago last year, and gradually everything started to feel normal again.

When Bob and Frank got ready to leave, Gerard said, "So...I'm still coming over for that Iron Chef marathon tomorrow night," and it almost sounded like a question, but mostly like a challenge.

With Mikey, Bob, and Ray all looking at him, Frank couldn't say anything but, "Sure. If you want to."

Mikey's face lit up like he was about to invite himself over too, but Bob pulled him aside and said, "Hey, Mikey, I was thinking about going for sushi tomorrow night. You have any suggestions?"

Mikey launched into an enthusiastic review of what sounded like every sushi bar in the area, and Bob finally threw up his hands. "Maybe you should just go with me."

Frank laughed at him and said, "Called it."

Mikey and Gerard both said, "What?" at the same time in that freaky brother thing that they sometimes had.

Bob said, "Nothing." and punched Frank's arm. "Ignore him."

Ray just smiled in this mysteriously satisfied way, like he knew everything. And he probably did.

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When the doorbell rang on Saturday evening, Frank was a little confused. Gerard had his own key and he wasn't expecting anyone else. As he walked down the stairs to answer it, he almost hoped it would be Bob having some kind of weird Mikey-and-sushi related crisis just so Frank would have something to focus on outside of himself and his weird Gerard thing that had weighed on his mind
all day.

Unfortunately, it was just Gerard, shivering on his doorstep holding a plastic container, which he shoved into Frank's hands. "Ray sent tiramisu. Don't worry, it's vegan."

Franked blinked, took the container, and stepped out of the way so Gerard could come inside. "Thanks."

"I had a taste over at his place and it's really good," Gerard said enthusiastically as he unwound his scarf and took off his coat. He hung them neatly on the hooks and took off his shoes. Little chunks of snow that didn't get kicked off on the porch fell to the floor and Gerard looked up apologetically. Frank waved it off and took the dessert to the kitchen.

"So what did you do today?" Gerard asked as he followed behind Frank. "Watch more Food Network?"

"Actually, I wrote a lot and worked on some music that's been kicking around the back of my head for a while." Frank put on a pot of coffee as he talked so he had something to do besides stare at Gerard, who looked amazing. Snowflakes were melting in his hair where he'd missed brushing them off and his cheeks were pink from the cold. The collar of his shirt was jacked up in the back and Frank's fingers itched to reach out and fix it, but all he did was pour water in the coffee maker and push the button to turn it on. He glanced up to see that Gerard had moved closer and was beaming at him.

"Is it anything you're ready to share?"

Frank shook his head and opened a cabinet to take out a couple of mugs. "Not yet. What've you been up to?"

"Oh, you know, the usual. Spending some time with my folks. My cousin Francine came over for lunch and it was nice to catch up with her." Gerard moved his hands in time with every word spoken, and Frank found himself mesmerized by the graceful movements, and only half listening to what Gerard was saying. "She's having a baby in a few months, and I guess her husband is having a hard time with it. Freaking out over having to be a responsible adult or some shit." He launched into a litany of complaints and Frank wondered what would happen if he reached out and grabbed Gerard's hand and brought it to his mouth. Wondered what he would taste like and if his fingers were still cold from outside.

Gerard paused and looked at Frank expectantly, and Frank scrambled to figure out what Gerard had been talking about while he'd drifted off into a fantasy of sucking on Gerard's fingers. He finally settled on, "Oh yeah? That sucks."

"Yeah," Gerard agreed and then made gimme hands at the mugs Frank was still clutching. "The coffee's ready."

Frank handed him the mugs and turned to get bowls out of the cabinet. He let Gerard fix them each a cup of coffee while he dished up the tiramisu. When they were settled at the table, Frank took a bite and nearly moaned as it melted on his tongue. He waved his spoon at the universe and murmured, "I love you, Ray Toro."

Gerard laughed. "Way across town, Ray just perked up like a prairie dog popping out of its hole, and he doesn't even know why."

"You're so weird," Frank said fondly, content in the knowledge that at least some things never
"I know." Gerard licked his spoon clean before scooping up another bite.

"I wouldn't have it any other way," Frank said, because it was what Gerard would expect him to say, but it wasn't exactly the whole truth anymore. He did like that Gerard was a little odd. Frank felt a little odd himself, so meeting Mikey and Gerard had made him feel much less alone in the world. He could always console himself that no matter what, there would always be two dudes in the world that were weirder than him. But other things could definitely change for the better, like how close he could get to Gerard.

After they finished off the tiramisu, Frank topped up their coffee and said, "Come on. Iron Chef is on a couple minutes."

Gerard gave him an inscrutable look and followed him into the living room. When Frank sat down in the chair instead of on the couch, Gerard frowned. "Why are you over there? You know the best view is from your end of the couch."

Frank nodded, but didn't get up and move. He just pulled the ashtray on the coffee table closer and lit a cigarette.

"Frank? What the fuck is going on?"

Frank smoked fast and furious for a minute and then crushed out his cigarette and exhaled a long exhausted breath.

"Look, Gerard," he started and then stopped, unsure where he was going and how much he was going to reveal. "Fuck it. You know the music I was working on?"

Gerard made a soft sound of encouragement. "All my half-written songs are about you. I can never seem to finish them. I don't know how the story ends yet."

"It doesn't," said Gerard, quick and surprised and so fucking earnest as he slid down to the end of the couch, leaned forward, and grabbed Frank's hand. "Maybe it doesn't? I mean, it doesn't have to end, right?"

"Come on, Gerard, we've been avoiding this for years, why stop now?"

"Yeah, I guess..." Gerard paused as if really thinking about it, and then shook his head with a determined set to his mouth, his eyes fierce and dark. That was the same look he got when people called them fags on stage, and Frank got a familiar tremble in his stomach. "No, you know what? I'm fucking tired of avoiding it. I want you more than I want to avoid complications and the probability of being hurt."

"What?" Frank couldn't believe what he was hearing. He'd been angsting for days (okay, probably more like weeks or months, if he was totally honest with himself), and Gerard just blurted that shit out like it was no big deal? Fucking Gerard, always had to be the bravest, most amazing person Frank ever knew, damn him.

Gerard tightened his grip on Frank's hand, leaning forward so much his ass was barely still on the edge of the couch. After an awkward moment of trying to balance, he finally stood up and pulled Frank to his feet. "Every time I kissed you on stage or touched you like a lover, I meant it. I wanted more so hard it hurt, but I thought that was just us. Or not us. I thought you didn't want anything more than to make a point." Gerard stared at him desperately and tugged on Frank's hand. "Say something. Please."
"It's been killing me, wanting you and not...lately it's been unbearable." The words poured out of Frank with surprising ease, but he still didn't have the heart to tell Gerard how cruel he could be when he was clueless. Frank knew it wasn't intentional and Gerard would be upset at the very idea, and Frank couldn't handle an upset Gerard right now.

One of them moved forward and one of them leaned in and they were kissing, Gerard's hands cradling Frank's face and Frank's fingers buried in Gerard's hair, cupping the back of his head. Frank found himself half-listening for the roar of the crowd, but all he could hear was the little sound Gerard made in the back of his throat. It was like a dozen other kisses--those ones onstage were just as sweet and dirty--but it mostly felt like the very first kiss ever, an expression of every long held feeling and impulse and desire.

When their mouths finally parted, Frank leaned his forehead against Gerard's and sighed, "What the fuck took us so long?"

Gerard smiled--Frank couldn't see it with his eyes closed, but he knew--and whispered back, "Do you think you can finish those songs now?"

"Ask me again in the morning," Frank said, and turned off the television before leading Gerard upstairs.

The end.

End Notes

Thanks to Milenaa and Offonmars for beta reading, and Nemoinis for salvaging, cheerleading, handholding, and all around awesomeness. She worked as hard on this as I did.

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