

Excerpt from *The Perfect Moment* Copyright Bren Christopher Dec. 2013

Michael headed through the thinning crowd to the front of the gallery, noting with pleasure the *Sold* stickers being placed on several of the paintings by the gallery staff. The reception was winding down. He hoped Jude wouldn't need to stay much longer.

"Michael," Jude called. "Look who's here."

The first thing Michael noticed was the excitement lending a slight tremor to Jude's no longer weary voice. The second was Jude's hand resting on a muscular arm encased in royal-blue silk. As his gaze traveled upward from that disturbing sight, Michael took in a broad chest clearly defined by the tight dress shirt. Blond hair cut short along the sides and back and longer in the front allowed bangs to dip stylishly across startling blue eyes. Michael had to look up an inch or so to see those blue eyes—not something he was used to doing. Tight black jeans encased long, muscular legs.

Michael hated him on sight.

He plastered on his best professional smile as he approached, holding out his hand.

"Michael Cove. Glad to meet you."

Jude introduced him. "Michael, this is Pierre Laurent. You remember me telling you about Pierre."

"Of course." The original owner of the too-big Greenpeace T-shirt Jude wore around the house. Michael had always thought Jude looked sexy in it.

"Ah, the new boyfriend. I am so pleased to meet you." Pierre had a firm, warm handshake. Just the right amount of pressure. Just the right amount of time before he released the

grip. And that French accent...yeah, that damn T-shirt was going right in the trash now that he'd met its first owner.

"Not so new." Michael gave a polite laugh through gritted teeth. "We've been together almost two years." Wasn't this guy supposed to be in Alaska or something? Why hadn't Jude warned him?

"*Bon dieu*. Two years?" Pierre turned the full force of his thousand-watt smile on Jude. "I have been so out of touch with my friends. *Mince alors*, I am ashamed."

He didn't look ashamed. He looked intent and confident as he stared into Jude's eyes. And why was Jude's hand still on the man's arm?

Pierre covered Jude's hand with his. "It is so good to see my old friend again."

Enough of that. Michael didn't care how it looked. He thrust the glass of water at Jude, forcing him to take it, and then placed his hand on the small of Jude's back. "Why didn't you let me know he was coming, babe? We could have planned dinner or something."

Jude finally caught on that perhaps—just perhaps—Michael found the unexpected visit a bit irksome. Of course, the little bastard only raised an eyebrow and grinned at him. But he did shift away from Pierre and closer to Michael.

"Please," Pierre said. "It's my fault. I didn't tell him." Now that both hands were free, he waved them around to emphasize his words. "I badly wanted to attend my friend's first art show, but I didn't know if I would be here in time. My plane only arrived from Rio de Janeiro this afternoon."

Jude positively glowed at him. "Pierre has been in Brazil," he explained to Michael without looking at him, "protesting the government's deforestation policies."

"And how did that go?" Michael asked politely.

“What can you do?” Pierre gave an exaggerated Gallic shrug. “Sometimes I think the world has gone mad.” He threw up his hands in disgust. “*Fou!*”

Michael just managed to keep from rolling his eyes. Jeez, it wasn’t like the guy was even *really* French. Jude had said his old college boyfriend came from Montreal.

“Oh no,” Jude told Pierre earnestly. “You mustn’t think like that. If everyone did, then nothing would ever change, would it? You are making a difference, my friend.”

Pierre smiled at Jude gratefully and started to reach for him—to hug him, Michael assumed, and gave Pierre a narrow look. Pierre stopped himself.

“Have you seen my grandmother yet?” Jude asked Pierre. “She’ll be so glad to see you again.”

“She is here?”

“I saw her headed toward the back hall.”

“I must say hello. Perhaps we can go for a drink when you are done?” He looked at Michael and quickly added, “All of us, of course.”

He went to find Jude’s grandmother, leaving them alone by the wall.

“Of course,” Michael mocked under his breath.

Jude grinned at him.

Michael scowled. “You have a type, don’t you?”

The grin disappeared and a puzzled frown took its place. “What are you talking about?”

“At least now I know what to look for when we go out. Keep you away from tall blue-eyed blonds.”

“You’re nothing alike.”

“Why? Because he’s got muscles?”

“Don’t be a dumbass.”

“Come on. Tell me you don’t see it.”

“Okay, so maybe there’s a superficial—very superficial—resemblance. It doesn’t mean anything. Maybe I like blonds.”

“So who’s the pale imitation?”

“What?”

“Who are you more attracted to? He’s way more buff than me.”

“Maybe I like ’em skinny.”

“You think I’m too skinny?”

“I didn’t say—Christ, I can’t win this, can I?”

Michael rested his hands on Jude’s hips, and then pulled him closer. He leaned forward and breathed into Jude’s ear, reveling at the shivered response. “You think you know what jealous boyfriend sex is all about?” He tightened his grip. “Just wait till I get you home, young man.”

He let go of Jude, then crossed his arms and lounged back against the wall.

Jude swallowed. “Maybe it’s time to go?”

“What about drinks with Pierre?”

“Pierre can wait.”

That was more like it.

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