



Big Easy Temptation (The Perfect Gentlemen)

By Shayla Black, Lexi Blake

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The *New York Times* bestselling authors of the Masters of Ménage series present the third scintillating novel featuring the privileged, wealthy, wild men of Creighton Academy—the Perfect Gentlemen.

Years ago, Naval officer Dax Spencer and NCIS agent Holland Kirk indulged in a steamy affair—until she betrayed him in the wake of his father’s death. Dax tried to put her behind him with a payback of his own. But he never forgot Holland...

Now, as Dax and his fellow Perfect Gentlemen unravel a web of lies, he discovers his family’s tragedy is part of a much larger conspiracy. Soon, all clues point him back to New Orleans...where Holland waits, protecting her deadly secret and holding a torch for the only man she’s ever loved.

Once reunited, they can’t fight the passion flaring hot and wild. But something sinister lurks around every corner, from the elegance of the Garden district to the beauty of the bayou. Dax and Holland may find their way back to each other—if they survive...

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Editorial Review

Review

“Shayla Black and Lexi Blake never fail to heat up the page, and the Perfect Gentlemen series is no exception. Hot and edgy and laced with danger, the stories in the Perfect Gentlemen series are just that—perfect.”—*New York Times* bestselling author J. Kenner

About the Author

Shayla Black is the *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of over 40 sizzling contemporary, erotic, paranormal, and historical romances, including the Wicked Lovers series (*Wicked for You*, *His to Take*, and *Theirs to Cherish*). She lives in Texas with her husband, munchkin, and one very spoiled cat.

Lexi Blake is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the Masters and Mercenaries series (*You Only Love Twice*, *Cherished*, *A View to a Thrill*). She lives in North Texas with her family.

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One

New Orleans, Louisiana

Three years ago

Holland Kirk sighed as she packed up her laptop. Another case closed. She liked the simple ones. Two enlisted sailors had gotten into a bar fight over a

local and one of them had waited two days before deciding to jump his opponent back on base. He'd nearly gutted the other man. Luckily, she'd found a witness and now the seaman was sitting in a jail cell.

If only all her cases were so easy.

She stood and stretched, trying not to think about the news she'd heard earlier today. Courtney had waltzed in with two chicken salad sandwiches and the latest gossip.

Captain Dax Spencer had taken a one-month training assignment right here in New Orleans. Could Holland believe it? One of the Perfect Gentlemen here in their backyard. Courtney had been star struck.

Holland kind of wanted to hide.

Her cell phone trilled and she looked down to find a text from Courtney.

He's even hotter than I imagined. I'm the writer assigned to him for this project! Squee! I need an entirely new wardrobe. And a mani pedi.

A flurry of emoticons followed, all conveying her excitement. Holland wasn't sure what a couple of them were, but they definitely looked happy. Courtney

knew she'd met Spencer at some point, but had no idea he was basically the man of her dreams. And now she meant to avoid him at all costs.

Sounds good! Hope you two have fun.

She sent the text, trying not to admit that her stomach dropped at the thought of pretty, curvy Courtney with Dax. Courtney looked like a swimsuit model.

She was exactly the type of woman Holland would expect on the arm of one of the infamous Perfect Gentlemen.

Absolutely not her. Never Holland.

It had been years since she'd spoken to the gorgeous Dax Spencer, but she dreamed of him often. It wasn't like she hadn't dated, but she ended up comparing every single man who came into her life to Dax, and they always came up short.

She'd seen him at his father's funeral. She'd shown up quietly and sat in the back. It had been a travesty how few people had been in attendance. Admiral

Harold Spencer's exemplary reputation had been washed away with one indiscretion.

"Hey, I've heard we're going to have trouble." Jim Kellison leaned against the door to her office, his dark eyes grim. "Your friend was telling everyone Captain Spencer has come back to town for a while."

She was certain that had a couple of special agents thinking about early retirement, including the one in front of her. "Apparently he's agreed to help write the documentation on the new training procedures. He's been testing them on his ship."

"Sure. That's what every captain dreams of," Jim shot back. "Spending several weeks writing training manuals. I've heard a rumor you run in his circle."

She shook her head. "God, no. I'm friends with his sister. I was very close to the wife of one of his friends."

Joy Hayes. It was hard to believe she was really gone, the victim of a single bullet from a lone shooter. Tears threatened. They did every single time she thought about the day Joy died. How could she ever forget it? Some TV news show rolled the video of her friend dying at least once a week.

Joy had been killed by a man who'd wanted to assassinate her husband. The news stories claimed the assassin was a mentally ill man who hated Zack and couldn't stand the thought of him in the White House. Three days later, Zack Hayes had been elected president.

Six weeks after that, the terrible scandal involving Admiral Spencer had blown up. In the thick of the gossip and media speculation, he'd killed himself. Holland could only imagine how dark those days had been for Dax.

So much pain in a short amount of time.

She would love Zack Hayes to the end of her days because while everyone else had abandoned the

Spencer family, the man with the most political capital to lose had sat beside Dax in the church for the admiral's funeral that day. All of the Perfect Gentlemen had been there—Crawford, Bond, the scary one, Hayes, and Calder. They'd deflected the press from Dax and protected their friend.

She might not always understand the ties that bound those men together, but she sometimes envied them.

Jim nodded sympathetically. "Yes, Mrs. Hayes was a gracious lady. We all mourn her loss."

More tears burned her eyes. She blinked them back. "Has Captain Spencer been in touch with you? You and Bill closed the case on his father, if I recall."

That was an understatement. She knew exactly who had worked the case, but she'd tried to stay far from it. Being close to Augustine Spencer, Dax's sister, meant recusing herself from participating in the admiral's open investigation. She hadn't even read the file. She couldn't bring herself to do it.

Harold Spencer, upright family man and naval officer, a beacon of New Orleans society, had been caught on camera in bed with an underage prostitute. She'd heard that a witnesses close to the admiral told NCIS the man had been a pedophile for a very long time. Rumors had spread like a bad virus and the jackals had shown up to drag the Spencer family through the mud.

And then, before he could be court-martialed, he'd been found with a bullet in his brain.

"We closed the case, but the captain made it very clear how unhappy he was about it." Jim huffed. "We did a thorough investigation."

Jim was one of the finest investigators she knew. He'd been a special agent for more than fifteen years. "I'm sure you did your best. These kinds of cases are always hard. There was a lot of media scrutiny."

The press had been like a pack of wolves. The office had been inundated with their calls. Once the

salacious story hit the tabloids, reporters had written

article after article speculating on the lurid details of the admiral's organized sex parties and the supposed ways in which he'd defrauded taxpayers to host them.

NCIS had been forced to investigate each and every rumor. All of them had been proven false, except the original allegation.

God, she hoped the admiral hadn't known the girl's true age. Amber Taylor had been fifteen, but on camera she'd looked at least a half dozen years older.

"I have gray hair from that case," Jim acknowledged. "And I swear Bill went bald after that last press conference. I've never seen a man look so terrified on camera. There's a reason he didn't go into the entertainment field."

It was probably for the best since Bill had a brilliant mind but a potbelly that wouldn't look great on screen. "I remember. So I guess you're afraid

Captain Spencer's return will mean more media attention? If it's any consolation, I don't think he liked the press coverage any more than we did."

"I'm not worried about the press," Jim ran a hand over his hair. "I'm worried about *him*. I don't need his harassment again. He was like a dog with

a bone, Kirk. He called ten times a day, sent so many e-mails I couldn't keep up with them, and I won't even go into all the times I could have arrested

him for interfering with an investigation. I didn't, because I like his mother and sister. I thought they'd been through enough, but I won't put up with that crap again."

Holland had stayed away. She'd actually taken a couple of weeks off and gone to visit some friends because the temptation to interfere had been so great.

But she'd heard stories of Captain Spencer causing trouble. He'd apparently been particularly angry when his father's death had been ruled a suicide.

It would be a hard truth for a man like Dax to take.

Still, according to Gus, her brother was trying to move on. Holland liked Augustine Spencer. She was wild and smart and larger than life. She also worked at the White House and had been close to Joy. The three had formed a special friendship, and she still cherished the time Gus spent in New Orleans.

“Maybe the captain simply took the assignment to be close to his mother for a while,” Holland suggested. “I know this mess has been hard on her.”

Gus had offered to turn down the job with the Hayes administration and Dax had offered to leave the Navy, but Judith Spencer had insisted her children continue with their lives. Their mother had been adamant. Still, Holland checked in on her from time to time. She had to be lonely in that huge house.

“I don’t buy it.” Jim shook his head. “He’s been in the Gulf for six months. Lots of action there.”

“Maybe he’s ready for a change.” Holland shrugged.

“Does Captain Spencer strike you as a desk-job sort of man?”

She frowned and bit her lip.

“You know I’m right. He’s not a man who likes peace and quiet. And he didn’t choose a New Orleans training post for the gumbo.”

“You think he’s here to try to get the case reopened?” She really hoped not.

“I think he’s a son who loved his father and can’t handle knowing that the man who raised him wasn’t who he thought. I wouldn’t want to believe it of my own father. It’s got to be doubly hard on a man like the captain, who’s used to getting his way. All that money must have made his life pretty cushy up until now.”

In an instant, Holland remembered him, so handsome and earnest, that day in the library.

Do you know what I like about the Navy? I'm not royalty there. No one gives a crap that my family has money. No one cares what my last name is. I work hard and I'll continue to do so.

At the time she'd thought he was naive. Having worked NCIS for the last few years, she'd figured out that for all of the captain's connections, his father had been as much of a negative as a positive. He'd had to work twice as hard to prove he wasn't moving up the ranks due to nepotism. During the war, he'd served his country valiantly in the Persian Gulf. She'd read reports of his bravery and knew he'd earned his captaincy.

"The Spencer I knew was a hard worker despite the fact that he could have coasted through," she argued. "He's honest and loyal. Just because he's rich doesn't make him soft. He's a good man, and you should treat him with respect when he shows up."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Holland."

She stopped, her focus narrowing to that deep voice dredged up from the depths of her memory. Dax Spencer had the sexiest accent, having been raised right here in New Orleans. His father had been career Navy, but Judith Spencer had insisted on a somewhat normal childhood for Dax and Gus. They spent time with their father, but also lived in a big mansion in the Garden District. Dax had gone off to Creighton Academy at the age of twelve, but he'd never lost that thick, molasses-rich NOLA drawl. When he spoke, his tones deep and dark, it did something to Holland she couldn't explain.

"Speak of the devil. You could have knocked, Captain Spencer." She turned, and the sight of him was like a punch to the solar plexus. She breathed through the reaction, trying to hide the fact that being this close to him already had her heart pounding.

Damn, but he looked good. The years had been kind to him, turning a beautiful boy into a gorgeous,

powerful man. He filled out his khakis in a way most sailors couldn't. Tall and broad and powerfully built, he was a glorious hunk of masculinity.

He gave her a lopsided grin that threatened to stop her heart. "I didn't want to interrupt."

Jim had gone a nice shade of red. "Captain Spencer, it's good to see you again."

Dax didn't seem fazed at all that he'd overheard them talking about him, but then he was likely used to it. He simply gave Jim a friendly grin. "Now I'm absolutely sure that's a lie. I'm sure I was a pain in the ass and the last couple of months without me have likely been pleasant. How about I promise to be respectful this time around. I wasn't in a good place the last time we talked."

"That's understandable," Jim allowed, holding out a hand. "Let me know if I can help you, and welcome back to New Orleans."

Dax shook his hand with a nod. "Thank you, Agent Kellison. I promise I'm not going to make your life hell." Jim left with a friendly wave, and Dax turned his attention to Holland. "I called him a lowlife cocksucker who deserved to have his entrails eaten by a gator. I might have been in a bad mood at the time."

"It seems so." Why did she sound so breathy? She wasn't the vampy type.

"You look good, Holland," he said. "Did I ever thank you for coming to my father's funeral?"

She shot him a startled glance. "I didn't realize you'd seen me there."

"Sweetheart, there were so few people I couldn't have missed you. I truly appreciate it. I know my momma and Gus did as well."

As Holland's heart continued to race, she thanked goodness the office door stood open and she could see people moving out in the hallway. She wasn't sure she could handle being alone with him, knowing the last time she had been she'd kissed him. The press of their bodies and lips had been the single most erotic moment of her life. She'd slept with men and not felt as close to them as she had to Dax Spencer in that one moment.

Sometimes she could still feel the way his tongue had moved against hers, sliding in a silky dance. She could feel his hands on her body. He'd been subtle, but she'd felt the possession in his grip. If Admiral Spencer and Constance Hayes hadn't barged in, she'd likely have found herself on top of that desk with her legs spread and clinging to Dax Spencer as he drove into her.

"Why are you here, Captain?"

"Can't you call me Dax? You have dinner with my mother twice a month. You see my sister every time she's in town. Can't we at least be on a first-name basis?"

Her reticence sounded ridiculous when he put it that way. They actually did run in the same small circle. She simply avoided him at all costs and had since the moment she realized she wanted him in a way she'd never wanted any man. "All right. Dax, welcome back to New Orleans. What are you doing here?"

He cast her a sidelong glance. "Well, Holland. I'm in the Navy and I was recently stationed at the Joint Reserve Base New Orleans in a training capacity. I've been involved in new training methods on modern ships."

"Yes, because Captain Awesome really wants to spend a month writing training manuals." That was the moniker the sailors had given him after his wartime bravery. He'd been creative and smart and he'd stood by his men. They loved him. They would lay their lives on the line for him. He was everything the Navy looked for in a captain.

Dax's eyes widened in surprise. "Captain Awesome? Are you serious?"

As a heart attack

. “It’s what everyone calls you. After what you did in Operation Iraqi Freedom, can you doubt it?” In the middle of unexpected enemy fire, he had devised and implemented a battle plan on the fly. He’d used his ship in a way that had shortened the skirmish and saved lives.

His gorgeous mouth turned down. “That was supposed to be classified.”

He wasn’t that naive. “Nothing that cool is classified, Captain. Dax.”

“Captain Awesome might be the worst call sign I’ve ever heard.” He shook his head woefully. “I’m back in New Orleans because I was asked to spend a couple of months providing insight on the new training procedures. Since I implemented them on my ship, I decided to help out.”

She didn’t believe that for a second. “And that’s the only reason you’re here?”

He sent her an unreadable smile. “I have some other things to accomplish while I’m here.”

“You want us to look into your father’s case again.” Nothing else made sense to her.

“I’m here for numerous reasons. One, my mother’s birthday is soon. Two, Gus is taking a little time off. So I came to be with my family. After everything that happened, family is my priority.”

She understood. “I’m glad. I think your mom is lonely. I’m pretty sure Gus isn’t.”

Dax shuddered, proving he’d heard about Gus’s proclivities. “I do not need to know what my sister is doing. Or who. I came back to make sure my mother is all right . . . and to take care of a few other loose ends.”

Finally they were getting to the point. “Did you come to see Jim or Bill?”

His eyes pinned her. “I came to see you, sweetheart.”

Damn, but she was in trouble. “Why? I can’t help you.”

“Oh, I think you can. Holland, have dinner with me. Give me a chance.”

She shook her head because even if the Spencer name wasn’t as shiny as it had once been, they still came from different worlds. “I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

Besides, Holland wasn’t entirely sure what he was after. He might be asking for her to reopen his father’s case. Or he might be asking her for a date.

Either would be a bad freaking idea.

“Holland, listen. Please. You’re the only one who might give me a shot, the only one who might hear what I have to say.” His jaw hardened to a stubborn line. “Have dinner with me. Let me plead my case.”

“Or?” There was always an “or” in these types of conversations.

“I spend the rest of my life knowing I didn’t do everything I could to honor my father.”

Shit. What was she supposed to do with that plea? He’d given her the one argument that guaranteed she wouldn’t turn him away. “All right. My place. Eight o’clock. Don’t be late.”

He flashed dimples, sending her into a tailspin. “I’ll bring the wine.”

He turned and strode out, leaving her watching his amazingly hot backside and wondering what the hell she'd agreed to. She'd known she couldn't handle him when he'd done his best to persuade her to give him a shot during Joy and Zack's reception years ago. Not much had changed. Besides, she'd wanted a career of her own then. She still did. Certainly, she didn't want to be like her mother, following her father from base to base, always having to make new friends and find a way to fit in. If she'd allowed herself to date Spencer back then, she would be his wife now and she would have had his children, watching him as he rose through the ranks and left her further and further behind.

She wanted more for herself.

Yes, she was stronger now. More mature. She'd had more experience with the opposite sex. Could she handle him? Ready or not, it seemed she was going to find out.

Users Review

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