

A young man with short, light brown hair and a light beard is the central figure. He is wearing a black leather motorcycle jacket over a white t-shirt and a light-colored scarf. He has his right hand on his head and is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is a European town square with stone buildings, a church tower, and flower boxes. The lighting is bright, suggesting daytime.

Betsy St. Amant

Midnight
ANGEL

ONE UNFORGETTABLE KISS.
ONE DANGEROUS WEB OF LIES...

Midnight Angel

Betsy St. Amant

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

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Dedication

To the Author and Finisher of my faith, Jesus Christ.
Without Him, my words are in vain.

To Rebecca, the girl with the golden ticket. Thanks for
giving me that first boost!

To my family, especially Marie Raney. Thanks for
being my biggest fans!

To Lori Chally, for your encouraging friendship (and
peanuts!)

To the "real" Shan—thanks for calling me Author when
this was all still a dream.

To all my friends in the ACFW—too many to name,
but each of you hold a special place in my heart!

Prologue

Madison Lawrence tilted her face toward the inky starlit sky, closed her eyes and breathed in the chilly air. The night held a mysterious quality; she could feel it in her bones. A restless feeling resided deep inside her, reaching upward as if trying to grasp the stars above. She could sense it. This night had the potential to be magical.

She wrapped her fur coat tighter against her slender body. The wind picked up, carrying on its tail a bitterness that seeped deep within, but she was so distracted she barely noticed.

"I can't take it anymore." Madison heaved a sigh and watched her breath form a cloud that floated into the night. The cheerful sounds of the adults inside the museum behind her carried through the window. She was so tired of the parties. This was supposed to be a family trip, but her father, as always, had mixed business with pleasure. He was inside the ornate building now, probably making another toast to riches and fame. Madison blinked back tears, not sure if they were from the cold wind or the emotions boiling beneath the surface of her heart.

She sniffed, still able to smell the remnants of spicy cinnamon and eggnog clinging to her garments. She had to get fresh air. Darting a quick glance left and right down the deserted city street, she decided it would be safe to walk just a few

blocks. The streets were brightly lit; the lamps lining the roadside radiated miniature halos that blurred through her teary eyes.

She began to walk. "I just want to be free," she whispered, "Free from the questions, and the stares, and the reputation of being Teddy Lawrence's daughter." Madison loved her father, but sometimes, enough was enough. And tonight, she'd definitely had enough. In all her eighteen years, she couldn't remember ever disliking her dad this much. She kept walking.

Finally looking up from her stroll, Madison paused long enough to gain her bearings. She had been in Germany for almost three weeks, but she didn't remember ever coming to this part of the city before. She thought she had been heading toward the city square, a tourist spot she had visited numerous times over the past several days. She must have taken a wrong turn, for she now stood before a giant, elegantly carved clock tower and a beautiful display of fountains. Despite the cold temperature, different levels of water splashed joyfully into the frigid air. She thought she recognized the garden across the street, but she wasn't sure.

"You shouldn't be out alone this time of night, *fraulein*."

Startled, Madison spun to see a young man slowly approaching. He couldn't have been more than a few years older than she, but Madison tensed, ready to run if necessary. Surprisingly, something about his easy demeanor didn't scare her. She relaxed.

Hands resting casually in his jacket pockets, the

man walked closer until he was standing right in front of her. She lifted her chin.

“Or perhaps angels have no fear.” He grinned and something in Madison’s heart jumped.

“No name, either?” The mysterious stranger asked with a strong German accent. His eyes sparkled with amusement, even in the dim light of evening.

“It’s Madison,” she responded. “Madison Lawrence.” She wondered if the name would register with him. She half hoped it wouldn’t. He was handsome. Mysterious. Alluring. Broad and muscular, he stood several inches taller than Madison. Hair the perfect mixture of blond and brown covered his head in a windblown sweep that brought attention to his startling clear blue eyes. Whiskered stubble covered his lower jaw, giving him a rugged, outdoor look that was far different from the perfectly groomed dates that often swarmed Madison’s door.

“Madison Lawrence,” the man repeatedly slowly, drawing out each syllable as if the words tasted sweet. He ducked down and looked closely at her face. “Of the Lawrence Industries in the United States? The Lawrence Towers? The Lawrence National Bank?”

“The very same,” Madison admitted between clenched teeth. She mentally kicked herself. She should have kept her name a secret. Would she ever learn?

“Well, Madison. I can see that name has left a bitter taste in your mouth. We can’t have that.” He walked in a slow circle around her, studying her closely. “I shall have to call you Maddie.”

Madison's heart leapt at the sound of a nickname coming from this man. Who was he? Lifting her chin, Madison looked into his disarming grin. "And what might I call you?"

"Prince Charming will work fine," he responded without hesitation. He leaned back on his heels and studied Madison seriously. Then he asked the last thing she expected. "Would you like to dance?"

Madison quickly glanced around the deserted courtyard. "Dance? Here? Now?"

"*Ja, tanzen.* Dance." He easily hopped onto the little wall surrounding the fountains and held out his hand.

Everything in Madison's head told her this was ridiculous, that she shouldn't be out with a stranger this time of night, or ever, really. She had no clue who this man truly was or even his name.

"There's no music," she protested, as if that were her biggest hesitation. She wiped her palms down the sides of her fur coat then regretted the action. Her mother would have a fit. Madison took a deep breath. Why did it suddenly feel as though the temperature had risen fifty degrees? She blinked. It was beginning to snow.

"Give me your hand," he coaxed.

And for some reason, she did.

Pulling her carefully onto the wall, he placed one hand lightly on her waist and held her other firmly in his.

"Just feel it," he whispered, beginning to sway back and forth. Madison, almost against her will, found herself moving with him, swaying to and fro on the fountain wall with her very own fairytale prince.

He began to hum softly, a nameless tune that brought strange comfort to Madison's heart. She closed her eyes and moved closer, enjoying the feel of his strong arm under her hand and the soft tendrils of hair that curled over the nape of his neck. Her gut screamed at her that this was crazy, complete and utter nonsense. Her parents would be livid. She knew better than this. But her heart had long since told her to be quiet.

Time seemed to stand still. They continued to dance on the wall, twirling, swaying, and moving to music only they could hear, in a rhythm only they could feel.

The hem of Madison's red party dress fluttered in the breeze, and her hair lifted in the wind.

"Like a halo," he whispered. "You really are an angel, Maddie." Catching her waist, the handsome German brought their dancing to an end and gently cupped her face with his free hand.

Madison's breath caught in her throat at the nearness of him, this stranger with whom she felt such an instant connection. She blinked, and snow fluttered off her eyelashes. This was absurd. Was he going to kiss her?

His gaze locked with hers, then trailed down her face to her lips, then back to her eyes. Warmth draped Madison's body until she no longer felt the cold night air. She stared back, unable and, at the same time, unwilling to break the connection. Leaning closer, he brushed his lips lightly against hers, so softly that Madison wasn't even sure it had happened.

"Maddie," he whispered against her lips. His warm breath sent chill bumps racing down her

spine. *"Mein engel."*

He kissed her again, and this time Madison was sure. The touch of his lips against hers brought such a feeling of completeness, Madison was certain a part of her would be missing once they broke away. He lowered his head, kissing her more deeply, and Madison cupped her hands around the back of his neck. An hour passed, or possibly a minute. She wasn't sure. But none of it mattered—not her parent's inevitable reaction and panic, not her own absence of common sense. Nothing else existed. Just her and her mysterious prince.

Chiming from the clock tower sounded across the courtyard, and she broke away, gasping for breath and more than a little dizzy. "What time is it?" She gasped again and stared at the clock tower unable to comprehend what the pointing hands meant. Her head spun.

"Midnight," he said, loosening his hold on her waist but not completely letting go.

"I have to get back." Madison ran her hands briskly through her hair, feeling as if she had just been through a time warp. Was this a dream? How long had she been gone? Her parents would be wild with worry. But then, she didn't really care, did she?

"Will mein engel turn into a pumpkin?" Her mysterious stranger teased. He leaned forward and rested his forehead against hers.

Madison fought the instinct to stay in his arms and carefully stepped off the fountain wall instead.

He remained on the wall, hands in his pockets, watching her as she stumbled over her own heel and then caught her balance. "You don't understand," she explained desperately, walking backwards and

nearly stumbling again. "My parents, they—"

He cut her off with a simple nod of his head, but didn't move from his sentry on the wall. Watching with what Madison thought to be the most gorgeous, clear eyes she'd ever seen, he gave her a smile that made her legs go weak. "I understand, sweet princess. The ball does not last forever."

Madison hesitated, considering her options. She could stay at the fountain with this handsome stranger, or she could do her duty as a daughter and heir and return to the party with her parents. Her heart twisted and shouted an instinct that Madison quickly rejected. "I'm sorry," she replied, still backing away one step at a time. "I have to go." She wished her heart didn't hurt so badly at the thought.

She turned and walked faster.

"Carsten!" he shouted.

She froze and then slowly turned around.

"My name is Carsten." He repeated, softly this time.

Madison rolled the name around in her head, loving it more with each second that passed. Carsten. Her very own German prince, Carsten.

"Carsten," she whispered out loud. The corners of her lips turned upwards in a smile that she couldn't contain. "Carsten."

"We shall meet again, my angel," he called out. Madison lifted her hand in a wave, and then held it closely over her heart as she turned and walked three more steps away.

Risking a glance over her shoulder, Madison blinked.

He was gone.

1

Six years later...

Madison threw her pen onto her desk in frustration. The design in front of her still didn't look right. Tilting her head, she studied the paper with a practiced eye. Something about the arrangement of the furniture...there was no harmony in the room.

She pressed the intercom button on the phone with a manicured nail. "Shan! I need you!" Releasing the button, she tapped her foot under the desk.

"You rang?" Madison's partner and best friend, Shan Rimmer, stepped into the luxury office, sarcastic as usual.

"This design isn't working. I need your eye."

Shan sauntered around to Madison's side of the desk and leaned over the drawing. Her dark hair spilled over her shoulder. "The angles, maybe?"

While Shan studied the paper, Madison leaned back in her chair and blew at a stray strand that had fallen from her clip. After graduating from New York State with a degree in interior design, Madison had started her own business with a little help from Daddy's Bank Account. The fact that it was a success wasn't surprising, for Madison spent every waking moment in the office or working off the clock. She

had built an impressive clientele within the last year and had decorated everything from her cousin's nursery to the mayor's dining room. Having spent the majority of her life on her parent's plantation home in Georgia, Madison prided herself on being able to give her clients a "little taste of the South".

"You should definitely rearrange the furniture." Shan picked up a pencil from the cup on Madison's desk. Quickly sketching a few lines that indicated which pieces to swap, she dropped the pencil back on the desk with a dramatic flair. "There!"

"You're a genius, my friend." Madison eyed the much-improved design.

"I know." Shan twirled a strand of long hair around her finger and struck a pose beside Madison's desk. "I'm the Queen."

"Of drama," Madison teased. She stuck her tongue out and rolled backwards in her chair. She lifted her arms in a stretch and kicked off her high-heeled shoes to enjoy a moment of relief. With this design almost complete, she could take a quick break. Maybe even go home early, after her last appointment for the day.

And do...what? Madison's shoulders dropped as she contemplated her lack of options. Her job was her life, and her only friend was her partner. A smile tipped the corners of Madison's mouth as she remembered the graduation ceremony from the prestigious design school they had both attended.

"Hey, Madison. I've heard about the business you're planning to open."

Madison had turned and seen Shan approaching, hands on hips. She had smiled at her fun-loving, feisty friend. "That's right. Madison's

Designs. I plan on opening in a few weeks. The paperwork is already under way."

Shan tossed her head in her usual diva fashion. "Well, if you change the name to M & S Designs, then you should have no problem letting me be your partner."

Madison quirked an eyebrow. "And why would I do that?" It didn't sound like a bad idea, but she couldn't let Shan call the shots this early in the game.

Shan grinned. "Because I'm the best, and you know it."

Madison couldn't help but laugh. "Well I don't know about that name you suggested, but let's get some coffee and talk." In the end, Shan had gotten her way, and they became a top team in the city.

Though they were about as opposite as they can get. Back in the present, Madison grinned as she took in the sight of her friend standing by the bookshelves that lined the office walls. Madison, tall, slender, and blonde, was a complete workaholic with a drive for perfectionism, while Shan's easy-going, fun-loving personality complemented her wavy dark tresses and skin the color of rich cocoa. They were opposites, but they were the perfect team.

"Girl, I'm gonna ask one more time. What is the deal with the angel collection?" Shan waved her arm dramatically in the general direction of the bookshelves. Madison rolled her eyes and slipped her feet back into her pumps. "It's just a thing," she insisted. "I wouldn't call it a collection. There's not that many."

Then, just like it always did when someone mentioned angels, her mind raced back to that

enchanted evening several years ago. Closing her eyes, Madison entered her favorite time warp and could almost sense the snow on her face, the feel of a certain German's arms around her and...

"Delivery for Ms. Lawrence."

A deep voice jerked Madison out of her reverie, and she slid down in her desk chair, losing her shoe.

Her regular route UPS man, Tony, stood standing in her doorway with a smirk, clutching a package wrapped in brown paper. "The shipping address is for your home, but I knew you'd be here and would want it right away. The boss said he'd make an exception this once. You are a preferred customer, after all." He set the box on the desk and held out the electronic clipboard. "Sign here."

Righting herself in her chair with as much dignity as she could muster, Madison scrawled her signature on the tiny screen. "Thanks, Tony." She handed back the form and waited until he left the office before grabbing for the box.

Shan was faster. "What do we have here?" She held the box out of Madison's reach. Cutting open the flaps, she dove into the package.

"Aha!"

"What?" Madison questioned with pretend innocence, since she already knew.

"Not really a collection, you said?" Shan grinned as she pulled an antique porcelain angel out of the box and fluffed its' feathery wings.

Feeling a blush creep up her face, Madison bolted from her chair and grabbed for the doll. She reached to put it in place on the nearest shelf, behind a row of smaller angels. "It's nothing," she insisted. She smoothed the wings back into shape and

adjusted its position on the shelf. This one was truly beautiful. The angel's delicate face was hand-painted, and her gown a deep velvety red—the same shade that reminded her of the dress she'd worn the night she danced with Carsten. But how could she possibly explain to Shan something that made no sense even to herself? How could she say that for some unexplainable reason, each time she bought an angel, she felt a little bit closer to her very own fairytale prince?

"One day, I'm gonna learn about this secret you're hiding." Shan crossed her arms over her business suit and shook her head in mock pity. "You're not the collectibles type, Madison. And you definitely don't do things without a reason."

"I never said I didn't have a reason," Madison said softly.

"What was that?" Shan raised an eyebrow.

"I said, let's go grab a latte. I'm parched." She grabbed her designer purse and ushered her nosy partner out of her office.

"I can take a hint," Shan retorted as she locked the door. "Hey, aren't we important enough yet to have someone bring us the lattes?"

~*~

Madison stared out the window of the taxi; absently tapping her finger against the lid of her half-empty cup. A prayer rose within. "Lord, what is with these random flashbacks? Shan mentions my angel collection and it's like my mind can't think of anything but that night." She prayed silently as she continued to gaze at the passing scenery of buildings after buildings. The nearest coffee shop

was only a few blocks away from her office complex, but Shan had insisted that she didn't want to walk in her new high heels. Now, because of the traffic, the taxi ride back was taking forever.

"Get out of the way, you crazy—" The cab driver shook his fist out the open window as he let loose a string of expletives. Madison cringed. Shan giggled.

"I just love New York," Shan commented, stirring her coffee in little circles as she talked. "I couldn't live without the big city bustle! The people, the drama, the action... I love it!"

Madison bit her lip. *The pollution, the crazy drivers, the lack of grass or anything green, for that matter...* It was springtime in New York, but it was hard to tell aside from the weather. Unless one walked uptown to Central Park, it was difficult to find flowers or much greenery. But who had time for those indulgences? There was work to be done, always work to be done.

She stared down at the lid of her coffee cup and thought wistfully of the lush acreage at home in Georgia. The plantation was always so beautiful this time of year, from the azaleas blooming outside her bedroom window to the clumps of honeysuckle covering the fences. Sometimes Madison doubted her decision to move to New York, but she knew her design business would never take off in Georgia. Maybe if she made a big enough name for herself, she could relocate and still keep her clientele. It was a thought she frequently entertained. However, there was the down side that came with spending too much time with her father. Ever since her mother had been killed in a car accident five years

ago, her dad had become incredibly overprotective.

Her stomach twisted as she remembered the past years of being told what to wear, whom to date, where to go... Her natural being was far more independent than that. She shook her head, forcing away the bad memories.

Ignoring Shan's ramblings about how fabulous city life was, Madison once again looked out her window and into the passenger side of another taxi. A man about her age sat perched on the backseat, leaning forward and drumming his fists in an impatient rhythm against the front seat. It looked as if he was as desperate to escape his taxi as she. Madison smiled in amusement, thinking that at least she wasn't the only one with a lack of love for the city traffic.

The man turned and glanced out the window right back at Madison. Madison blushed, embarrassed to be caught staring, and quickly ducked her head. Suddenly, she jerked her gaze back to the window and her eyes widened in shock. No. It couldn't be. He had the same hair color, sure, and the cut was similar, but there was no way. What were the odds? Silly girl, Madison scolded herself. It'd been six years. She wasn't remembering correctly.

She dared to glance once more as her taxi began to pull away. This time, her gaze locked with his and in a heartbeat, she knew. No one else had eyes that color, eyes that reminded her heart of a clear winter sky in Germany. No one but him.

2

“Crazy,” Madison mumbled as she banged her head repeatedly against her desktop. “I’m going crazy. No, I’ve gone crazy.”

“Maddie!” Shan burst into Madison’s office. “What are you doing to the desk?”

Madison’s head snapped up. “What did you just say?” She hadn’t heard that nickname since it had come from Carsten’s lips six years ago.

Shan slowly backed away from Madison. “I think I called you Maddie. Is that bad?”

“You’ve never called me that before,” Madison replied. She stood up and put her hands on her hips.

Shan threw her hands in the air in a sign of surrender. “It just slipped out. I don’t know why, I’m not exactly accustomed to seeing you assault your desk. I probably wasn’t thinking clearly.”

Madison rubbed her pounding temples and sank back into her desk chair. “Never mind,” she muttered. “I’m sorry, Shan. I guess I’ve had too much caffeine today.” She watched as her friend slipped quickly out of the office. Madison knew what had her emotions all stirred up but refused to admit it.

Madison executed a slow spin in her chair, desperate for clarity. “There is no possible way that the man in the taxi was Carsten.” She spoke the words slowly and deliberately. Maybe the more