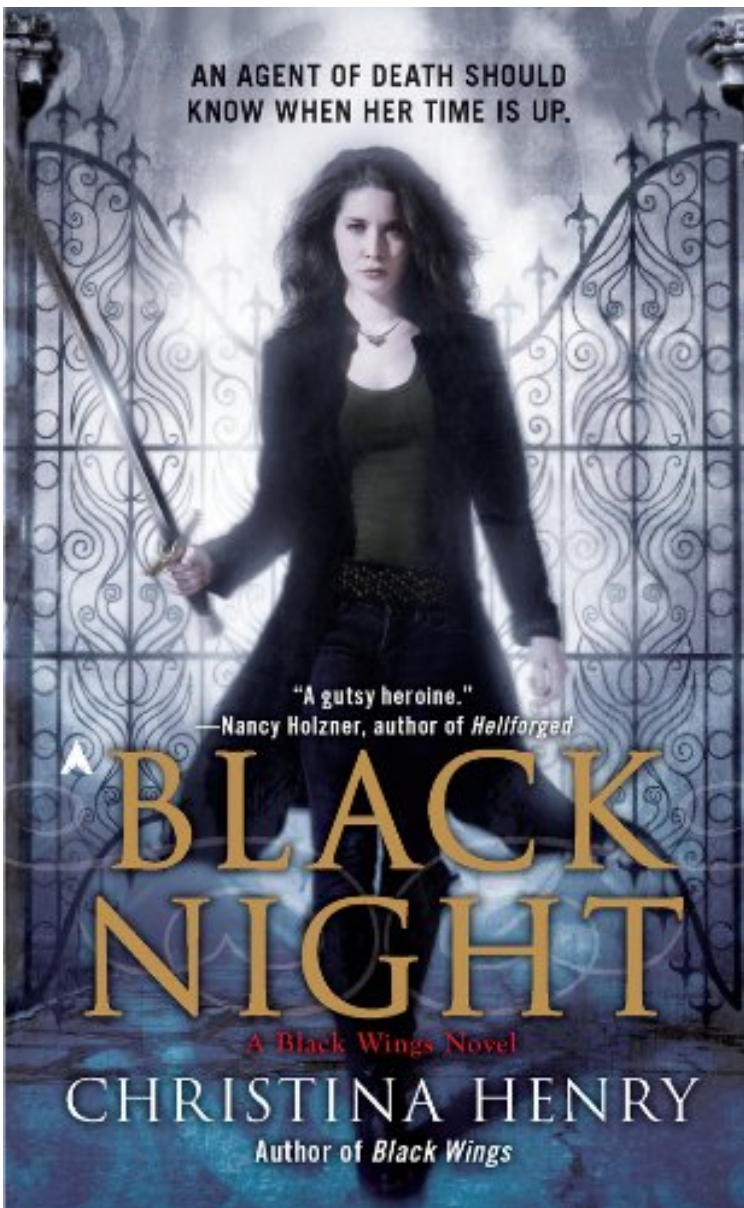


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# Black Night



*Par Christina Henry*  
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**Par Christina Henry : Black Night** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Black Night:

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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurMadeline Black is an Agent of death, meaning she escorts the souls of people who have died to the afterlife. Of course, not everyone is happy to see her... If obstinate dead people were all that Maddy had to worry about, life would be much easier. But the best-laid plans of Agents and fallen angels often go awry. Deaths are occurring contrary to the natural order, Maddy's being stalked by foes inside and outside of her family, and her two loves-her bodyguard, Gabriel, and her doughnut-loving gargoyles, Beezle-have disappeared. But because Maddy is Lucifer's granddaughter, things are expected of her, things like delicate diplomatic missions to other realms.ExtraitChapter OneI stood in the alley between Damen and

Wolcott in the recently trendy neighborhood of Wicker Park. There was a parking lot filled with cars directly across the alley from my position. It was bordered on the other three sides by four-story apartment buildings. Behind the wall that I leaned on, the clubs, bars and restaurants of Division Street did a brisk trade in liquor and lust for the upscale singles who had purchased all the new condos in the area. The cold November night was no deterrent to business. After all, if you lived in Chicago, then you understood that there are only two seasons—winter and construction. If you let a little cold slow you down, then you should probably move somewhere else. I shifted a little, flexing my toes inside my boots in a vain effort to keep them warm. When I had died and been reborn a month ago, my human heart had been replaced by an angel's heartstone. As a result, I was usually a little warmer than ordinary human beings, since angels' hearts are made of the sun. But a half angel's body is still no match for the Windy City. My gargoyle, Beezle, poked his head out of the lapel of my wool peacoat. He's the color of stone, about the size of an overweight guinea pig and he's got little wings, the better to flap around my head and annoy me with. Before we had left the house he had trimmed a child-sized scarf for his own use. He had a small strip of rainbow-colored wool wrapped around each horn and a longer piece wound several times around his lower face. The edge of his beak poked through the material. He mumbled something through the cloth and I glared at him. "I can't understand you when your mouth is buried like that," I said. Beezle narrowed his cat eyes at me and commenced unwinding his muffler. He huffed melodramatically before speaking. "I said, have you got anything to eat?" "How can you possibly be hungry? You ate a whole bowl of popcorn before we left the house." "But I am. And I'm cold. And I want a doughnut," he whined. "Stop wriggling. We're supposed to be undercover here. In point of fact, you're not supposed to be here at all. You're supposed to be at home, being a home guardian, like all the other gargoyles." "Do you think I would trust your life to him?" Beezle snapped. "He can hear you, gargoyle," Gabriel said dryly. My tenant and bodyguard, Gabriel, had been so quiet I'd almost forgotten he was there. Almost. He's a little difficult to overlook—six foot plus, dark hair, dark eyes, the face of an angel. I mean that literally. Gabriel was half-angel. Have I mentioned that I am in love with him and he with me, and that our love is doomed, in a really melodramatic we-will-both-be-killed-if-we-ever-act-on-our-feelings sort of way? I'm a half angel, too. My father is Azazel, a fallen angel and a chief of the Grigori, a right-hand man of Lucifer himself. I'd discovered this tidbit only recently, having spent most of my life believing my father to be an ordinary deadbeat (or possibly dead) human dad. Beezle had been a little unreasonable about my safety ever since I'd had my human heart torn out by a nephilim long ago and now refused to let me leave the house without him. You'd think the fact that I'd managed to come back from the dead would count in my favor. Azazel's orders stated that Gabriel was not supposed to leave my side when I was out of the house. I had spent the last month with a beautiful bodyguard at my elbow and an overweight gargoyle hanging off me like a baby orangutan. It was making my job a little difficult—very difficult, in fact. It's not easy being unobtrusive with those two around. When I'm not Azazel's daughter and Beezle's doughnut enabler, I'm an Agent of death. It's not as glamorous as it sounds. Every week I get a list of names, places and times. I go to the appointed place at the appointed time, pick up the soul and bring it to the Door. At the Door the soul chooses whether to pass on to whatever is behind the Door (don't ask me, I'm not allowed to know) or to stay and haunt the earth forever. Most of the time my job is as straightforward as it sounds. I'm kind of like a UPS delivery guy. I don't know what's in the boxes and I don't care. It's just my job to deliver them on time and to the correct location. I also have to file paperwork—lots and lots of paperwork, and the forms are annoying and redundant. Being an Agent of Death isn't such a great gig, really, but it's an inherited job (I got mine when my mom died) and one that doesn't go away until you take the trip to the Door yourself. So there I was, a week before Thanksgiving, shivering in thirty-degree weather and thinking longingly of my crocheted blankets and a cup of hot chocolate, waiting to pick up a soul who was scheduled to die at 1:27 A.M. somewhere in this alley. Beezle carefully rewrapped his scarf around his chubby neck. It draped over his wings in the back. "I hope that this isn't one of those disgusting alley murders," he said conversationally. "The last one put me off my feed." "Is that even possible?" Gabriel murmured for my ears only, and I smiled. Then I straightened a little, pushing away from the wall. Gabriel came to attention beside me. "What is it?" "I don't think you have to worry about hacked-up body parts this time, Beezle," I said. "Why not?" "Because I can see the vampire." I nodded at the innocuous-looking man making his way across the parking lot. He looked like any moderately successful single guy out on a Saturday night. His hair was blond and stylishly cut, his clothes were good without being flashy, and his face was sort of ordinary-handsome. You wouldn't know he was a vampire, which is good for their kind. The most successful hunters are the ones with the best camouflage. He crossed out of the lot and into the alley, his footsteps slowing as he approached us. We were

tucked unobtrusively in a little four-foot depression in the building, one of those architectural oddities that seem to have no explanation. The building went straight across and then it dipped in, like someone had planned to put a closet there, and then resumed its normal course. It was just enough to keep us from being seen by anyone who passed by. The vampire stopped dead, a few feet away. I saw his nostrils flare. "I know you're there, Agent," he said. I stepped out of the depression and into the light of the one yellow streetlamp that hung over the parking lot. Gabriel followed and stood behind my shoulder. I said nothing. The vampire's eyes widened a little when he saw Gabriel. He smirked. "You must be the famous Madeline Black, the only Agent with a guard dog." If the vampire thought he could make a little sport for himself by getting a rise out of Gabriel, he had another think coming. Gabriel is the type that burns slow so slow, I wonder sometimes if he's got a pulse. "What is your business, vampire?" I asked. "If you are here, then you know my business," he said. He raised an eyebrow at me. "You will not interfere?" "You know I am bound against it," I said, and there was a little shivering of magic as I said it, as if the source of my power was affirming the truth of that statement. That was one of the suck things about being an Agent. I saw a lot of death, and most of those deaths would break my heart if I let them. Stupid accidents, horrific murders, deaths of children and young mothers and college kids before their time. But it was not for me to judge which lives should be saved. If their name was on my list, then their death was fated and I was bound not to interfere. I'd learned early on to adopt a circle-of-life attitude for my own sanity. It didn't mean that I liked it. The vampire sidled a little closer to me, and I could almost feel Gabriel's hackles rise. He loves me, he can't have me, but he does not like other men coming near me. If Gabriel had his way, there would be a thirty-six-inch man-free radius around me at all times. "I have heard stories of your beauty," the vampire purred. His nostrils flared again. "I see that they are not exaggerated." I crossed my arms. My beauty is so not legendary. "Do I look like I just fell off the turnip truck? Get lost. I'm not the helpless victim you're looking for." I saw a glint of fang as he stepped closer. He seemed hypnotized by some scent. "But the blood of angels I have always wanted and you are Lucifer's own." I opened my palm in front of me, extended my will, and a little ball of blue flame about the size of a baseball hovered above my hand. "I understand that fire is unpleasant for vampires." The vampire hissed and backed away several feet. He shook his head, seeming to come out of a trance. For a moment I thought he would try again, but then he appeared to think better of it. "Perhaps you are right," he said, regaining his composure. "There must be easy prey awaiting me if you are here." I closed my fist and the ball of nightfire disappeared, leaving behind a lingering trace of sulfur. I flicked my fingers at the vampire. "Move along, then." He gave me a sarcastic bow and continued past us. Gabriel stared stonily at the vampire's back as he went by. A few feet past us, the vampire stopped. I couldn't see his face but I was sure he was scenting the air. I felt the thrum of magic that told me a soul was approaching that was marked for death. A moment later a too-skinny blonde came tottering into the alley on four-inch heels. I sighed and slipped back into the shadows. I didn't need to see what happened next. I just had to be there to pick up the pieces, like always. Presentation de l'diteur Madeline Black is an Agent of death, meaning she escorts the souls of people who have died to the afterlife. Of course, not everyone is happy to see her... If obstinate dead people were all that Maddy had to worry about, life would be much easier. But the best-laid plans of Agents and fallen angels often go awry. Deaths are occurring contrary to the natural order, Maddy's being stalked by foes inside and outside of her family, and her two loves-her bodyguard, Gabriel, and her doughnut-loving gargoyle, Beezle-have disappeared. But because Maddy is Lucifer's granddaughter, things are expected of her, things like delicate diplomatic missions to other realms.