

CHAPTER
1

Friday morning, November 23
Mall of America
Bloomington, Minnesota

Rebecca Cory stood her ground despite another elbow shoved into her shoulder blades. She'd let the first two shoves go. A quick glance back at the tattooed man convinced her to ignore this one, too. The man towered over her, wearing camouflage pants and a muscle T-shirt. No signs of a coat. Quite a strange fashion statement considering it was twenty degrees outside and snowing, but not a bad idea in the crowded mall.

Even with a glance it would have been hard for Rebecca not to notice the purple-and-green dragon that snaked down the man's arm, its tail curling up around his neck and its fire-breathing head squeezing out of the T-shirt's tight armhole. The tattoo crawled all the way down past the man's elbow. The same elbow that kept finding its way into the middle of Rebecca's shoulder blades.

She told herself to be patient. She could finally see the order counter as the line to the mall's coffee bar grew shorter. It wouldn't be much longer. She tried to concentrate on the Christmas music, what she could hear of it through the crowd's chatter and the temper tantrums of impatient toddlers.

"...in a winter wonderland."

She loved that song. But it certainly didn't feel like winter in here. Sweat trickled down her back. She wished she had left her coat back with Dixon and Patrick who were guarding a rare find, a bistro table and four chairs in the mall's overcrowded food court.

Rebecca hummed with the music. She knew all the words. They had sung Christmas songs on their long road trip, Connecticut to Minnesota. Twenty-one hours. Thirteen hundred miles. Surviving on Red Bull, convenience-store coffee and McDonalds. She hadn't caught up yet on sleep although yesterday they all crashed after

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