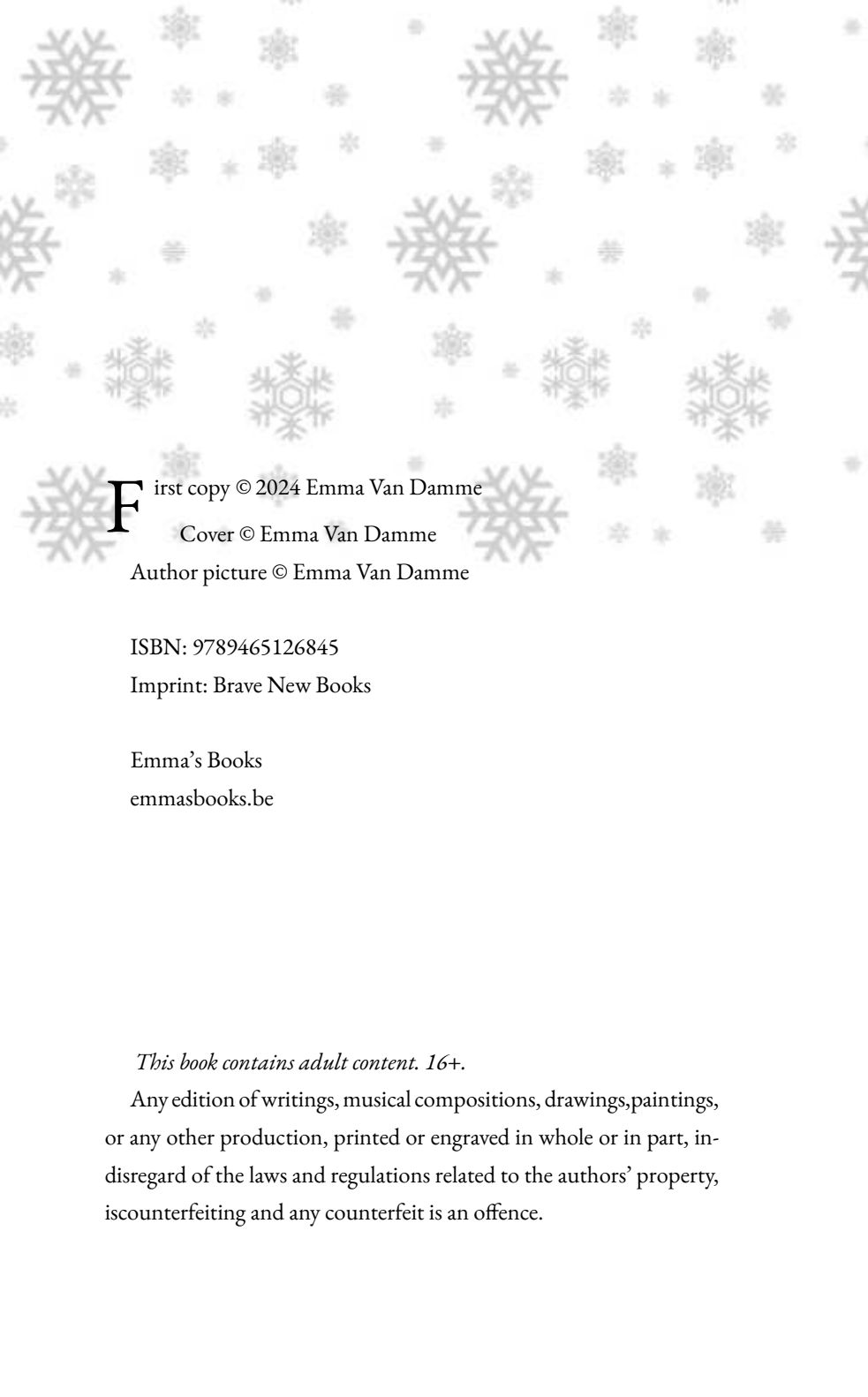


Avoiding Santa

Emma Van Damme



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For my mom, because she taught me what Christmas truly means.

Chapter 1

‘And then he kissed her hard, pulling her towards him.’
“No, no, no, no! That’s not good enough!”

Maeve throws her laptop shut and stares out the window. There aren’t many things she hates, but writer block sure is one of them.

She hasn’t been able to write a decent line, let alone a chapter, for over a week now. Not since *him*.

Romance has always been the easy thing to write. That is until Brennan broke up with her. Since the second she found out he was sleeping with that girl from his office, she hasn’t been able to get a single good letter out of her fingers.

A knock sounds on the door.

“Hey, sis. You okay?”

In the doorway stands Kai, Maeve’s brother. He seems a bit out of breath.

“Yeah, I’m fine. Just a bit stuck on this scene I’m writing.”

“Oh,” he sighs. “That sucks.”

“What have you been doing? You look like you are hot. Which is pretty strange since it’s freezing outside.”

It’s mid December and New York is frozen all over the place. Only it isn’t like you would think. There’s a lot of ice instead of snow to play in. Not that she would go outside and freeze to death. Unlike her brother, who loves the cold. What she likes to do around these days is

just to get cozy with a blanket and a hot chocolate with cinnamon and do some writing or watch a Christmas movie.

“Oh, I’m just packing for next week.”

Kai and Maeve were adopted by the same foster family. They’ve been living together almost their entire life. Kai is two and a half years older than her and ever since they were old enough, they’ve been living together. They still visit their adoptive parents often, they just never really felt like part of that family.

Since Christmas is coming up, Kai spent his off-work time finding their blood related family members. That’s how he found his aunt. He’s planning to go visit her for Christmas.

“Are you sure you’re not coming with me?” Kai asks hopefully once again.

Maeve nods. “I’m very certain. Besides, I still need to finish this book in time for publishing.”

Her publisher is very... how to call it? ‘Enthusiastic.’ They really love her last romance novel ‘Secrets in Spring,’ which is about two people meeting each other on a train to Italy. They fall in love, but she has a secret mission. He needs to win her love while she secretly falls for him. Turns out he was her secret mission all along.

The publishing company wants her to have a book finished by the end of the year. So, she can start the new year with a new book. Normally this would be easy to accomplish, but without inspiration, she fears she won’t be successful.

“You know,” Kai starts as he comes to sit next to her on the bed, “you could get a lot of inspiration in that town.”

“How do you know? You’ve never been there.”

“Indeed, I haven’t, but I checked something we call ‘the Internet’.” He gives her one of his smirky little half smiles that makes her want to kill him, but also love him even more.

She throws him a smile and stomps her elbow in his side.

“Aw! What’s that for?!” he yells out.

Maeve’s smile grows wider. “Cause you’re an ass.”

Thanks to that comment from his sister, he has no other choice but to give her his most adorable puppy eyes.

“No, no, no, no, no! Don’t do that! KAI!!!!!!” she hits him with a pillow and once he steadies himself, she finally gives in.

“Fine, I’ll look on the website and I’ll think about it.”

Kai makes a noticeably clear ‘yes!’ sound, while hugging his sister. He thanks her and leaves the room to continue packing.

When the silence in her room returns, she turns back to her novel. It just isn’t working. Every time she even thinks about two people kissing or sharing a moment, she wanders on to what Brennan did to her.

She leaves out a deep sigh and opens a new Google window on her laptop. She goes to the search bar and starts typing only to realize she doesn’t know the place’s name.

Her voice echoes through the hallway as she calls out for her brother. Instead of walking over to each other, they just yell from room to room until Maeve has her answer.

‘Northmoore,’ she types. When she hits enter, her computer gives her a lot of white looking photographs. There is snow everywhere in and around the town. The houses and other buildings aren’t very big, but then again neither is their apartment. There are some pictures of what looks like a bar or a bed & breakfast. *Let’s call it a bar & bed*, she thinks.

She continues scrolling down the website and discovers, despite the town’s size, there are various activities to do there. Especially now around the holidays. She discovers that there is a market and a local Santa with his elves. Also, fun crafty activities for the kids to help them send their letters to Santa or bake cookies for him (or themselves).