

Chapter 4

The clerk Alistair hesitated. “Ah, Madam Radcliffe... unfortunately, the Voidfire Crystal has just been taken.”

Madeline’s perfectly shaped eyebrows lied. “Oh?” Her gaze flickered toward Robin. The moment recognition struck, her lips curled into a slow, amused smirk.

“Oh dear, look who it is.”

Samantha, praccally her mother’s mini-me, took one look at Robin and let out a drama c gasp. “No way! He’s the one who took it?”

Madeline feigned concern, resting a manicured hand over her chest. “Robin, darling, you’re still in the city? I thought after my daughter dumped you, you’d have crawled back into whatever hole you came from.”

Samantha giggled, hiding her mouth behind her hand. “Right? I mean, he was barely good enough to be Sarah’s pet. Now he thinks he can afford Voidfire Crystal? What’s next, pretending to own a bank?”

Robin ignored them and turned back to the clerk. “I’ll pay for it now.”

Madeline wasn’t done. “Oh, sweetheart, don’t embarrass yourself,” she cooed, stepping forward as if speaking to a slow-wied child. “This isn’t some street market where you can haggle for le overs. That crystal is worth more than your en re wardrobe.”

Samantha leaned against the counter, inspecng her nails. “Seriously, do you even know what that crystal is for? It’s not instant ramen. Maybe you shouldck to, I don’t know, ea ng cheap takeout?”

Robin exhaled sharply, keeping his composure. They’re irrelevant. Pay and leave.

Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out the black card his father had given him and placed it on the counter. “Charge it.”

Silence.

Then Madeline laughed—a sharp, piercing sound that could sha er fragile egos.

“Wait—wait—” she gasped between cackles. “Did he just pull out a black card?”

Samantha wiped fake tears from her eyes. “Oh my God, is this one of those plas c novelty cards? Maybe he got it from a vending machine!”

The clerk hesitated, clearly conflicted.

Madeline crossed her arms, her voice dripping with mock sympathy. “Look, I don’t know whose purse you stole that from, but let’s be real. You? A black card? Uerly ridiculous.”

Samantha sighed drama cally. “Poor guy, s ll trying to impress us. It’s actually kind of sad.”

Robin finally turned, his eyes cold. “If you’re done flapping your beaks, I have a purchase to complete.”

Madeline snorted. “Oh, honey, this isn’t a charity. The clerk isn’t going to risk his job processing a fake card.” She turned to the man behind the counter. “Be a dear and hand the crystal to someone who can actually afford it.”

The clerk glanced between Robin, Madeline, and Samantha. One was an infamous pauper suddenly claiming to be rich, and the others were wealthy individuals. Who was he to choose?

There was silence for a moment before he lied his gaze. “I’m sorry, sir, but the crystal is no longer available for purchase.”

Robin frowned. “No longer available for purchase? What do you mean? I came here first.”

The clerk sighed as if in a difficult posion. “We both know you can’t afford to pay for this. Why do you insist on embarrassing yourself?”

Madeline let out a mock gasp, placing a hand on her chest like she’d just witnessed a great tragedy. “Oh dear, do you see this, Samantha?”

Her daughter smirked. “It’s so embarrassing.”

Madeline sighed drama cally. “It really is. I mean, imagine walking into a high-end store, pretending you can afford something, and actually expcng people to believe it.”

The clerk straightened his back, his eyes turning cold. “Sir, please leave, or I’ll have no other op ons but to call for security.”

“Is this how you work?” Robin’s face darkened. “I demand to see your manager!”

Samantha rolled her eyes. “Ugh, the manager? Who do you think you are that the manager would bother to a end to?”

Madeline let out a patronizing sigh. “Samantha, swee e, some people don’t understand their place in life.”

Robin ignored them. “Call your manager!” He repeated.

The clerk laughed, his tone dripping with mockery. “You want to see my boss? Fine, I’ll call him. But note, when he finds out you are a fraud, you’ll have yourself to blame for what he’ll do to you!”

The clerk picked up the telephone in front of him and pressed some numbers. “Sir, there’s a pauper causing trouble in the lobby. He refuses to leave and demands to see you. Please can you come handle this?”

“Okay, sir. Thank you.” He dropped the telephone and glowered at Robin. “The manager will soon be here.”

Robin said nothing, acng as if he didn’t hear him.

A few minutes later, an older man in a tailored suit walked into the lobby, his gaze sweeping the room.

“Mr. Flynn,” the clerk greeted, relief evident in his voice. “That is the pauper! According to Madam Radcliffe and her daughter, he is just a loser. Yet, he claims to want to purchase the Voidfire Crystal. He even presented this.” He handed the black card to him.

The manager, Ryder Flynn, first took a glance at Robin before taking the black card from the clerk and glancing down at it. Then, suddenly, he burst out laughing. “A black card? From him?” he snorted. “That’s hilarious.”

He turned to Robin, asking condescendingly. “Punk, where did you pick this?”

“Probably found it in the trash.” Madeline ridiculed.

Samantha nodded, giggling. “Right? Or maybe he printed it out at a copy shop.”

They burst out laughing.

The clerk chuckled too, clearly taking cues from his boss.

Robin clenched his jaw. This is beyond annoying.

“I don’t have me for this,” he muered. Then, pulling out his phone, he pressed a buon.

“Katherine,” he said, his voice sharp, “come inside. Now.”

Silence.

Then, Samantha lted her head, a mock grin tugging at her lips. “Who is this ‘Katherine’ supposed to be?”

Madeline scoffed. “It’s probably some poor girl he hired for ten bucks to pretend she’s important.”

Ryder crossed his arms, laughing under his breath. “Oh, wonderful. Calling for backup? What’s next, asking your mom to write a complaint le er?”