

Chapter 2

surrounding. Bear tugs at the leash again, as if alerting me, but my gaze is fixated on the man who now, for a moment, takes off his sunglasses revealing sharp, concerned eyes.

"My car," he starts, gaze shifting from me to the crumpled metal of his sports car leaning against the streetlight. "Are you sure you're okay?" His concern seems genuine, but there's an underlying tension, a silent acknowledgment of the cost of the accident.

I scramble to my feet, brushing off the rain-soaked debris, feeling a twinge of embarrassment mixed with anxiety. "I think so. I'm sorry about your car," I manage to say, voice shaky. Bear, sensing the change in tone, quiets down but stays alert.

"It's just a car," he replies, but his eyes linger on the damaged vehicle with a hint of regret. "The important thing is you're not hurt." Despite his reassured words, the seriousness of the situation hangs between us like the rain-soaked air.

We exchange a few more words, an awkward dance of apologies and reassurances. He introduces himself as Alex, a name that feels out of place in Thornfield Estates, too simple, too normal.

As we stand there, the difference between us couldn't be more glaring—the luxury and excess of Thornfield Estates and my simple existence just outside its reach. Yet, here Alex stands, amidst the wreckage of his expensive car, concerned more about my well-being than the material loss.

Before we part, he brushes off the incident with a nonchalance that belies the expensive taste evident in his attire and damaged car. "These things happen," he says with a half-smile. "Let me know if you need anything. And please be more careful next

time."

As he drives away, his car now emitting a sad, uneven hum, I'm left standing in the rain, Bear by my side, pondering the unexpected encounter. It's a glimpse into the complexities and contradictions within Thornfield Estates, a place of luxury SUVs and carefully manicured lawns, yet also of genuine concern in unexpected circumstances.