

Chapter 3: Teal

Chapter 3 begins with Teal contemplating her painful departure from her father's house, where she faced his harsh rejection. In an attempt to shame her for wanting freedom, her father calls her a "whore," his words ringing in her ears as she walks away from everything she has ever known. Despite the deep emotional pain his rejection causes, Teal decides she will not allow herself to be defined by his cruelty. She leaves with nothing but the clothes she is wearing, making a silent vow to never return. Her journey begins at the train station, where her mind is filled with anxiety and uncertainty. With no money to purchase a ticket to the Marriage Temple, which is located two cities away, Teal feels trapped by her circumstances. The villagers from Fortitude, where she grew up, had long discouraged women from seeking matches with those considered "monsters," further isolating her from the rest of the world. These social pressures and judgments only add to her sense of abandonment, yet she is determined to continue.

Fueled by her desire to escape and find a new life, Teal boards the train without a ticket, her heart pounding in her chest. When the conductor confronts her about her lack of fare, she admits to her situation. However, to her surprise, an elderly woman sitting nearby overhears and offers to pay for her ticket. The woman shares her own story, explaining that she once too had been in a desperate situation and found solace in kindness. Her act of generosity resonates deeply with Teal, reminding her of the warmth her mother once provided before her untimely death. This moment of connection helps restore some of Teal's hope, allowing her to believe that despite the hardships she's faced, there is still kindness in the world, and perhaps, still hope for a better future.

Upon her arrival at the Marriage Temple, Teal is overwhelmed by a mixture of hunger, fear, and uncertainty. She anxiously prepares for the next day when she is to meet her

future husband, but the thought of what lies ahead fills her with dread. The servants at the Temple treat her with care, offering her soothing ointment for the bruises on her skin—a reminder of the painful past she is trying to leave behind. Despite their kindness, anxiety churns within her. She worries that she may not be attractive enough for her future husband and begins questioning what her life will look like in the days to come. The fear of rejection, the weight of her past, and the uncertainty of the future all collide as she faces the unknown. Her journey toward this new life is fraught with tension, and she can't help but wonder if she is truly ready for what's to come.

The following day, instead of meeting Branthor, her intended husband, Teal is greeted by Holly and Kairos, her future sister-in-law and brother-in-law. They explain that Branthor is not present to sign the marriage contract, a situation that leaves Teal uncertain about her future. The priest's words add to her growing anxiety as he reveals that Branthor has yet to arrive. The situation feels more complicated than Teal had anticipated, and she is left wondering whether this marriage, which she had so desperately hoped for, will ever come to fruition. This sudden shift forces Teal to confront the reality that her future is far from secure. After learning that her husband-to-be is not coming, Teal decides to keep the money that was given to her, symbolizing a small victory over the uncertainty of her circumstances. She begins to imagine a life for herself outside the confines of her troubled past in Fortitude, picturing a future where she doesn't have to rely on anyone or anything but her own resolve. Though uncertainty looms over her, she clings to the belief that she will not return to the life she left behind, no matter the challenges ahead.

This chapter represents a pivotal moment in Teal's journey, highlighting her resilience in the face of adversity. Her internal struggles are laid bare as she faces the harsh realities of her past and the uncertainty of her future. Yet, amid the turmoil, Teal finds moments of hope, fueled by the unexpected kindness of strangers and her determination to carve out a life for herself. Through these small gestures, readers witness the beginning of Teal's transformation, as she starts to shed the constraints of her upbringing and imagine a life full of possibilities. This chapter serves as a reminder of the strength found in moments of kindness, the power of self-determination, and the

importance of forging ahead even when the path ahead is unclear. Teal's journey is one of self-discovery, and through her experiences, she shows that despite the weight of past struggles, there is always a chance for a fresh start.

