

Chapter 2: Teal

Chapter 2 begins with Teal feeling the crushing weight of her responsibilities as she prepares dinner for her father and brothers. Despite the physical and emotional exhaustion from a day filled with household chores and the added stress of a recent plumbing disaster, she quietly sets about making the chicken stew they've asked for. The task, though mundane, serves as a small escape, allowing her mind to wander back to the painful memory of her mother's death. Her mother had passed just a week before Teal's eighteenth birthday, a loss that marked a significant turning point in her life. During her final days, her mother had whispered words that Teal would never forget: a plea to send her blood to the Marriage Temple. These words lingered in Teal's mind, urging her to take action toward escaping her oppressive home life, which had grown unbearable after her mother's death. Teal had followed through on this promise, secretly submitting her blood to the Temple in the hopes of securing a match, all in the hope of finding a better life away from the cruelty she had been enduring.

Teal's life has been shaped by the constant control her brothers have exerted over her. Since their mother's death, she has been left to manage the household, taking on the role of caretaker for her father and brothers. This responsibility has robbed her of her youth and freedom, making her feel more like a servant than a daughter. The oppressive demands of her brothers have isolated her from the outside world, and they continuously reinforce the idea that she is to serve them without question. Any attempts she made to run away from the harsh grip of her family were thwarted. Her father and brothers maintained an iron grip on her, ensuring she would never escape the suffocating life they had forced upon her. Fear and violence have become the norms in her home, and Teal has been conditioned to believe that escape is a distant, if not impossible, dream.

As she carefully prepares the meal, Teal is gripped by a deep sense of anxiety. She knows her efforts will never be enough to meet the high expectations her father and brothers have for her. Their constant criticism and demands have worn her down, leaving her with a constant sense of inadequacy. When they arrive home earlier than usual, Teal can sense the tension in the air before they even speak. She attempts to appease them with her cooking, but her father's suspicious demeanor signals that her efforts are futile. The situation grows even more charged when her father presents a letter from the Marriage Temple—a letter that could represent the future Teal had secretly hoped for. This letter, however, is something her family fiercely opposes, as it threatens to shatter the control they have over her. In a violent outburst, her father accuses her of betraying the family and physically assaults her, as rage and disbelief consume him. Teal, battered and bruised, feels a strange sense of liberation as she contemplates the possibility of marrying someone far removed from the toxic environment of her family.

After enduring the attack from her father and brothers, Teal retreats to the sanctuary of her room, needing time to process the chaotic emotions swirling inside her. It is here that she reopens the letter from the Marriage Temple, reading its contents over and over, trying to draw comfort from the prospect of a future where she can escape. The thought of leaving behind the violence and fear of her family fills her with a mixture of dread and excitement. She begins to imagine what life could be like away from her father's oppression, possibly marrying a man who would treat her with the respect and care she has never known. The letter represents more than just a contract—it symbolizes a chance at freedom, a chance to build a new life outside the shadow of her troubled past. In the quiet of her room, Teal allows herself to dream of a life where she is cherished, free from the suffocating control of her family. Despite the overwhelming uncertainty and the fear of what lies ahead, Teal clings to this hope with all her might, refusing to believe that her life is destined to be nothing more than a series of painful sacrifices. For the first time in a long while, she dares to imagine a different future, one where she is not trapped, but free.