

Chapter 13: Branthor

Chapter 13 explores the emotional and moral turmoil Branthor faces as he contemplates Teal's passionate desire for intimacy. Teal, with her captivating blue-green eyes and her vulnerable, naked form, stands before Branthor, challenging him to confront his deepest fears and desires. He is torn between his attraction to her and his internal resistance to the idea of physical intimacy, especially given the complex and uncertain nature of their relationship. Despite his inner conflict, Branthor maintains his resolve, initially telling Teal that they cannot move forward, primarily due to the impending visit to the Temple. He is deeply aware of the stakes surrounding their marriage and feels an overwhelming sense of responsibility that pushes him to keep their bond at a distance. However, Teal counters his objections with an emotional plea, explaining that she has been waiting for this moment for five years—ever since she sent her blood to the Temple to initiate their union. Her words cause Branthor to pause, forcing him to reassess the depth of her commitment to him.

Teal's openness about choosing this path at such a young age leaves Branthor stunned and full of questions. The idea that an eighteen-year-old would consciously choose an arranged marriage with someone like him—whom she knew would be seen as a monster—forces Branthor to question her motivations. He struggles with the implications of her decision, feeling both honored by her dedication yet confused by the complexity of her feelings toward him. Despite this, Teal insists that their bond is unique and that she has always known that he was the one she was meant to be with. Her strong conviction and unwavering confidence in their connection challenge Branthor's doubts. He acknowledges the role his brothers played in orchestrating their match, yet he cannot completely accept that this is the life that is meant for him. Branthor finds himself at a crossroads, uncertain about whether he should fully embrace the life Teal is offering or continue rejecting it in favor of the future he had

once imagined for himself.

As Teal presses forward, expressing her desire to spend the night with him, Branthor is torn between his sense of duty and his undeniable attraction to her. He attempts to reason with her, warning that losing her virginity would have serious consequences, particularly regarding the Temple's DNA matching system, which could potentially block any future relationships for her. Teal, however, is resolute, dismissing his concerns and declaring that her only match is Branthor, and she has no interest in anyone else. Her words hit Branthor like a wave, leaving him both humbled and stunned by her certainty. He can feel the warmth of her presence and the undeniable chemistry between them, yet he remains trapped by his fear of making the wrong decision. Unable to meet her gaze for fear of giving in, he struggles internally, unsure of how to proceed without jeopardizing both their futures.

Teal's persistent entreaties push Branthor to confront his emotions head-on, forcing him to evaluate what intimacy and commitment truly mean to him. She longs for a shared experience with him, even if it is temporary, and her request strikes at the heart of his hesitation. Teal's vulnerability and sincerity challenge his self-imposed boundaries, making it increasingly difficult for him to stay detached from the emotional and physical connection between them. Finally, with a mix of reluctance and yearning, Branthor decides to take the bold step of pouring oil into his palm, signaling that he is willing to take a leap of faith in their shared destiny. This act marks the pivotal moment where duty and desire collide, and the air between them becomes charged with anticipation. The tension is palpable as they stand on the threshold of crossing the line from emotional connection to physical intimacy, with both characters uncertain of what the future holds. This chapter portrays the complexity of their relationship, illustrating how Branthor's internal conflict slowly dissolves, giving way to a deeper, more profound bond that challenges both their lives in unexpected ways. The emotional stakes are high, as both characters must navigate their insecurities and desires to move forward in their relationship, setting the stage for the profound changes that lie ahead.