

# Chapter 7: Teal

In Chapter 7, Teal faces the painful reality that Branthor, despite his towering presence and gentle nature, has no interest in her as a potential bride. The harsh truth hangs in the air, and yet Teal remains determined, refusing to give up on the possibility of forging a meaningful connection with him. Her resolve grows stronger as she sits by the warmth of the fireplace with Branthor, their glasses of wine in hand, quietly contemplating how to break down the emotional barriers between them. As they share the evening, she begins to sense a tenderness in Branthor's demeanor, one that sharply contrasts his imposing figure, and it fills her with an unexpected sense of safety and calm that she has never felt before.

Teal takes it upon herself to steer the conversation forward, revealing her love for reading, particularly adventure novels. This deep passion for literature was nurtured by her mother, and the memories of reading together are something she holds dear. Her words about her mother are laced with a mixture of nostalgia and sadness, hinting at the loss of such an important figure in her life. Branthor, for his part, shares something quite different but no less personal—his love for gardening. The simplicity and quiet nature of growing fruits and nurturing plants reveal a nurturing side to him that Teal finds both surprising and endearing. Their dialogue continues to unfold naturally, as they talk about the shared experience of losing their parents. This exchange becomes a moment of deep connection, with both opening up about their grief and finding common ground in their losses. In that shared vulnerability, a bond begins to form between them, something that goes beyond the physical and taps into an emotional closeness neither expected.

As their conversation deepens, the looming reality of their separation weighs heavily on Teal's mind. She cannot bring herself to mention the family struggles that still haunt her, choosing instead to focus on the warmth of the connection they are building

in the moment. The thought of their time together coming to an end the following day is a painful one, but she swallows it down in favor of preserving the intimacy between them. As their discussion turns more personal, Branthor's insecurities surface, and he expresses his fear that his physical strength and size could harm her. Teal reassures him with a gentle smile, conveying that his size does not frighten her and that she feels safe in his presence. This reassurance helps ease his anxieties, and the emotional wall between them starts to crumble. Their growing closeness naturally leads to a more intimate exchange, and Branthor, unable to resist the pull of their chemistry, leans in for a kiss. The kiss begins soft but quickly intensifies, stirring a whirlwind of emotions in Teal. The passion between them becomes palpable, yet Branthor's internal conflict takes hold—he fears that his strength could hurt her in ways he cannot control. Reluctantly, he pulls away, leaving the moment suspended in uncertainty.

The chapter closes on a tender note as Branthor carefully tucks Teal into bed, his actions a blend of care and hesitance. His goodnight is soft, his gaze lingering on her, but the future between them remains unclear. The emotional connection they've fostered is undeniable, yet the unresolved tension about what lies ahead leaves both of them in a state of uncertainty. Teal is left to ponder the moments they've shared, her mind racing with questions about what the next day will bring, while Branthor is left to wrestle with his own doubts about the depth of his feelings and his ability to truly protect her. The chapter ends with a quiet tension, a sense of anticipation building for the uncertain path that lies ahead for both of them.