

Chapter 1: Branthor

Chapter 1 begins with Branthor, the youngest of four brothers, finding peace and contentment on the first day of spring. He enjoys the vibrant landscape of his backyard, where he prepares a barbecue by himself, reflecting on the quiet joy he derives from his solitude. His brothers—Orion, Ragnar, and Kairos—tease him, suggesting that his single life might be a sign that he needs a wife. Branthor, however, is unmoved by their comments. He values his independence and freedom, which stands in stark contrast to the burdens his brothers bear. They talk about the challenges of parenting, including sleepless nights and the pressures of raising children, reminding Branthor why he prefers his quiet life away from those responsibilities.

As Branthor grills boar meat, he reflects on the dynamics within his family. His brothers' wives—Holly, Nova, and Maren—are busy preparing a salad, and Branthor can't help but find the contrast amusing. Despite their small size, these women are married to men who, like Branthor, stand at towering heights, a common feature of their "grendel" heritage. Branthor, who stands at an imposing 11 feet tall, knows that female grendels have become rare since the "Shift," which has led to the grendels forming unions with human women. This shift has brought its own set of challenges, especially when it comes to hybrid pregnancies, which are fraught with complexities. Branthor's reflection on these changes only strengthens his decision to remain unmarried, as he continues to navigate the complexities of his heritage.

While watching his nieces, Pearl and Coral, and his nephew, Maverick, play in the yard, Branthor feels a deep love for them. However, his resolve not to have children remains unshaken. His brothers challenge him on his reluctance to start a family, suggesting that his decision may be rooted in selfishness. They argue that family is important, but Branthor believes that love can take many forms and that it doesn't have to come

through marriage or parenthood. The pressure to conform to traditional family structures is something Branthor struggles with, as he feels that the love he shares with his family, in all its forms, is just as valuable.

Branthor's reluctance to father children is influenced by the traumas of his past. He still carries the pain of losing his mother at a young age, a tragedy that haunts him to this day. The idea of being a father or a husband seems beyond his reach, as he doesn't believe he is capable of providing the nurturing that such roles demand. His fears deepen when his nephew Maverick's reckless actions result in Branthor injuring his arm. Nova rushes to help, bandaging the wound, and in that moment, Branthor is reminded of the warmth and care that exists within his family. Despite his hesitation to embrace the traditional roles of marriage and fatherhood, the strong, supportive relationships within his family continue to shape his understanding of love and connection.

Branthor begins to understand that his brothers' insistence on finding him a bride comes from a place of genuine concern. They want him to experience the same joy they've found in their families, but Branthor is still unsure if that path is right for him. He values the closeness and love that exists within his family in Mossdale, where the unique blend of grendel heritage and human influence has created a life full of complexity and warmth. While Branthor may be reluctant to conform to the traditional expectations placed on him, he recognizes that his family's love and support are powerful forces in his life. He may not be ready to take on the roles his brothers envision for him, but he is grateful for the familial bond they share, even as he carves out his own path.