

Chapter 4: Branthor

Chapter 4 begins with a growing sense of discomfort as my sixtieth birthday nears. The air in Mossdale feels thick with tension, and the behavior of my family and the townspeople grows increasingly erratic, as though they're all hiding something from me. Normally, my brothers and their partners love organizing grand celebrations, especially for birthdays, transforming what would be a simple occasion into a lavish event filled with elaborate feasts, extravagant gifts, and towering cakes. However, this year, the atmosphere feels different—there's a strange undercurrent of anxiety and secrecy surrounding the usual festivities. What was once a day to mark the passing of time and enjoy the company of loved ones had somehow shifted into a far more worrisome spectacle, leaving me wondering if my family had planned something that I wasn't meant to know about.

My suspicions begin to grow when Holly and Kairos, two key members of the family, vanish for an entire day under the pretense of running errands. Their unexplained absence only adds to my unease, as the night before my birthday approaches. I try to sleep, but a restless feeling keeps me wide awake, sensing that something isn't right. When I ask Ragnar about Holly's whereabouts, he gives me a vague response, mentioning that she's not feeling well, but his words do little to reassure me. Instead, they only serve to deepen the growing anxiety in my chest. The more questions I ask, the more I realize that no one is willing to be transparent with me, and this only fuels the sense that something is being hidden. The uncertainty surrounding the plans for my birthday begins to take on a life of its own, heightening my discomfort and leaving me feeling isolated.

When the morning of my birthday finally arrives, I head to Ragnar's house, hoping to uncover some answers, but chaos greets me at the door. His son Maverick is having a meltdown over a broken toy, and Ragnar dismisses the tantrum as just a temporary

phase. However, I can't shake the sense that the family is hiding something much bigger. Despite my repeated attempts to get to the bottom of the preparations for my birthday, Ragnar and the others dismiss my concerns, brushing them aside as if I'm overreacting. Ragnar insists that it's just a simple birthday celebration and nothing more, but my gut tells me otherwise. There's something dark lurking beneath the surface of the day, and I can't ignore the feeling that the celebration is merely a façade for something far more sinister.

By noon, the entire town has gathered by the river for what appears to be the start of a grand celebration. A massive party tent has been set up, overflowing with food, drinks, and music, and the sounds of children playing add to the festive chaos. Holly approaches me, a knowing smile on her face, and asks me to close my eyes for a surprise. Though hesitant, I trust her and comply, my heart racing as I wonder what's about to happen. She leads me to the center of the tent, and with every step, I can't help but feel a sense of dread mixed with anticipation, as though I'm walking toward something I'm not prepared for.

When the scarf is finally removed, I am confronted by an unexpected sight: a gigantic cake, so large that it dwarfs everything around it. Before I can fully process what I'm seeing, the top of the cake bursts open, and a stunning woman emerges, jumping out and shouting, "Happy Birthday, Branthor!" The crowd around me erupts into cheers, and I stand frozen, unable to understand what's happening. The woman, dressed in a breathtaking gown, is introduced as my bride, a shocking revelation that turns my world upside down. This extravagant surprise, something I had never anticipated, leaves me speechless. I had thought I was merely attending a typical birthday celebration, but this surreal twist challenges everything I believed about my family's intentions. I find myself caught in a whirlwind of confusion, struggling to comprehend how my simple milestone birthday had been transformed into an overwhelming spectacle, leaving me questioning the decisions that had been made on my behalf.

As the shock of the moment settles over me, I realize the enormity of what has just happened. The woman before me, her presence so grand and unexpected, is now my

bride, and I have no idea how to react. The people around me, including my brothers and their partners, seem to be watching with bated breath, waiting for my response. The celebration, once a source of minor anxiety, has now taken on a life of its own, and I am left to grapple with the realization that my future may no longer be in my hands. What I had hoped would be a simple day marking my aging and reflecting on my past has instead turned into a convoluted and bewildering turn of events, forcing me to reconsider everything I thought I knew about my family, my role in Mosssdale, and the life that had once seemed so certain. This bizarre twist of fate will undoubtedly change the course of my life, and I am left to wonder how much of what I thought I wanted will ever be the same again.



Summaryer