

Chapter 6: Branthor

Chapter 6 opens with Branthor at his own birthday celebration, though the event feels far from festive for him. The atmosphere, instead of being filled with joy, feels more like a somber gathering, overshadowed by his family's insistence on an arranged marriage. As his brothers cut the cake and music fills the air, Branthor stands at the sidelines, detached and uninterested. He feels alienated from the festivities, his thoughts consumed by the uncomfortable reality of his impending marriage to Teal. Observing her discomfort among the revelers, Branthor notices how out of place she looks, adding to his unease. Despite the attempts from others to encourage them to join in the dancing, Branthor remains withdrawn, unwilling to engage with the celebration or the situation at hand.

Teal, on the other hand, shares a part of herself with Branthor, revealing that she has never experienced a party before. Her childhood, marked by a lack of celebrations, has left her with a sense of sorrow and longing for something she has never known. As Branthor listens, he feels a mix of concern and guilt, realizing that he might be the one responsible for the fragile situation Teal is now in. This realization only deepens his inner conflict, as he struggles with his reluctance to accept the arranged marriage. After an unsettling conversation with his brothers, Branthor decides to confront them, expressing his dissatisfaction with the forced arrangement. However, they dismiss his concerns, encouraging him to accept the match as a natural part of maturing and starting a family. They argue that marriage is a step toward stability, but Branthor refuses to accept their reasoning, feeling increasingly alienated by their perspective.

As Branthor continues to resist the pressure from his brothers, he points to Teal's delicate nature as a key reason for his refusal to accept the marriage. His brothers, who are happily settled with their own partners, fail to understand his aversion to love and companionship. For Branthor, however, there is an underlying discomfort with

Teal's presence that he can't easily explain. Despite the growing bond between them, he finds himself both repelled and intrigued by the idea of their union, unable to reconcile his emotions with the situation forced upon him.

Eventually, Branthor takes Teal to his home, preparing a separate room for her to stay in. His decision to keep their living arrangements apart highlights his reluctance to embrace the role of a husband. Teal, upon seeing the size of his home, expresses her surprise, as it is something she has never encountered in her own life. Having come from humble beginnings, she has little to bring with her, prompting Branthor to offer her an oversized shirt for comfort. This act of kindness is the first sign of warmth between them, even as Branthor continues to make it clear that he doesn't want a bride. Despite the disappointment, Teal remains composed, accepting the situation with surprising calm. They share a quiet moment over wine, the first true connection they have had, as Branthor's internal struggle regarding their future remains unresolved.

Throughout this chapter, the complexity of Branthor's feelings toward Teal and the arranged marriage is laid bare. His internal turmoil reflects a deeper struggle with the expectations placed on him by his family and society. As he wrestles with his discomfort, he also finds himself drawn to Teal in ways he doesn't fully understand. The chapter delves into themes of personal choice, responsibility, and the tension between societal expectations and individual desires, creating a nuanced portrayal of Branthor's journey. For Teal, this chapter highlights her own vulnerability and quiet strength as she navigates her role in this uncertain relationship.