

Chapter Nine_Branthor

In Chapter Nine of the story, Branthor finds himself captivated by Teal, who is wearing a shirt he gifted her the previous night. Their morning together is filled with an unusual intimacy, heightened by their shared history. Teal's appetite for the breakfast he prepared is fascinating—she digs into leftover cake while asking about Mossdale, revealing her curiosity about their town's history and the grendels. Branthor explains that the town was built post-Shift by grendels, who divided due to differing views on interbreeding with humans, leading to a scarcity of female grendels.

Teal poses thought-provoking questions about the grendels' beliefs, their lineage, and his own stance on such traditions. He expresses his belief in personal freedom, free from the constraints of their ancestors, which Teal appreciates. Their playful exchanges reveal a chemistry between them, accentuated by stolen glances and innocent touches—an intriguing blend of daring and innocence.

Their discussion turns to Branthor's favorite place, the mysterious Thundering Caves, which spark Teal's interest. However, when she expresses a desire to explore the caves together, he firmly refuses, highlighting their dangers. Despite the danger, Teal expresses confidence in his ability to protect her, which leaves Branthor torn between inclination and his protective instincts.

As they continue their breakfast, Branthor grapples with his feelings for Teal, uncertain about her motivations for wanting to stay with him, particularly given their recent bond. Moments later, Ragnar arrives with family, disrupting Branthor's morning. Ragnar jovially probes about Branthor's new situation with Teal, teasing him about marriage, while Branthor insists nothing has happened and denies any formal bond.

Ragnar presents Branthor with books on human anatomy and the art of pleasing a bride, which Branthor dismisses with annoyance. However, the visit stirs conflicting feelings within him about Teal as he overhears her chatting happily with Nova. Teal's excitement about trying on clothes from Nova's wardrobe highlights her energy, and despite his reluctance, Branthor allows Teal to go with Nova, demonstrating a reluctant affection for her happiness. As he contemplates the day ahead, Branthor realizes that Teal may linger longer than expected, pushing him into a territory he thought he was avoiding .