

# Chapter One\_Branthor

On the first day of spring, Branthor, the youngest of four brothers, finds joy in the lush landscape and prepares a barbecue in the backyard, alone yet content. His brothers, Orion, Ragnar, and Kairos, tease him about being lonely and needing a wife, but Branthor is unbothered. He appreciates his freedom, unlike his brothers, who struggle with family life. They speak of sleep-deprivation and parenting challenges, which remind Branthor why he prefers solitude.

While grilling boar meat, Branthor contemplates the dynamic in his family. The three women—Holly, Nova, and Maren—are busy making a salad, which Branthor finds amusing given their small stature compared to the “grendels” they married, his family’s name. Towering at 11 feet, Branthor reflects on how rare female grendels are since the “Shift,” pushing his people to mate with human females, a mixed blessing given the complications surrounding hybrid pregnancies.

Observing the children play—his nieces Pearl and Coral, along with nephew Maverick—he feels a deep love for them but remains firm in his decision against fatherhood. The brothers challenge him, suggesting his reluctance stems from selfishness. They argue about the need for family; however, Branthor believes love can manifest in many forms, not just through marriage.

Previous traumas influence Branthor's hesitance. Their mother died tragically young, which lingers in his memory. He doesn't see himself as capable of nurturing or being a husband and is concerned for the well-being of any woman he may become involved with. The situation worsens when brash moves by Maverick lead to an injury on Branthor's arm, which Nova rushes to help bandage, revealing the caring dynamics of their bond as a family.

Branthor recognizes his brothers’ insistence to find a bride stems from genuine care. He loves the closeness of his family and the life they’ve built in Mossdale, surrounded by an intriguing blend of their grendel heritage and human realities. Ultimately, he is grateful for the familial love despite his reluctance to participate in the traditional roles they expect him to fulfill.