

Wed to the Grendel

Wed to the Grendel by Elizabeth L. Brooks is a dark, whimsical fantasy that reimagines the classic Beowulf legend. The story follows a young woman who finds herself mysteriously married to Grendel, the monstrous creature. As she navigates her strange new life, she grapples with love, power, and the challenges of being tied to a legendary beast.

Alia Terra

In Alia Terra, a world long transformed by the mysterious event known as the Shift, memories of the past have faded into obscurity. No one can recall the thriving civilization that existed thousands of years ago, characterized by proud nations, vibrant cities, and remarkable technological advancements. Historians and scientists suggest that the world once flourished, full of promise and progress, but all evidence of this earlier age has vanished, erasing any tangible recollections of what life was like before the Shift.

What remains of Alia Terra are its fragmented territories and walled cities, with a stark divide between the privileged and the impoverished. The poor reside at the edges of these cities, scraping by in a harsh reality devoid of the comforts of the past. The existence of monstrous creatures dominates the landscape, casting a shadow over the lives of the inhabitants.

In this grim reality, young women seek to change their fates through a harrowing practice. They can visit temples to undergo DNA tests that match them with one of the monsters. Such arrangements often lead to marriages, which serve as a means of survival for these women and their families, offering a chance to escape the grip of starvation and destitution. In essence, this transactional relationship reveals the power dynamics at play in Alia Terra, where survival often comes at a personal cost.

Ultimately, the prevailing narrative of Alia Terra is one of subjugation and desperation. It is a world where humans have become bound to the monsters that dominate their existence, a stark reminder of the fragility of humanity amidst the ruins of a forgotten past. Life in this restructured society reflects a grim adaptation to an unrecognizable world, leaving its inhabitants at the mercy of the creatures that now hold sway over their lives. In Alia Terra, it becomes clear that the landscape is not only a physical space but also a powerful symbol of the new order that has emerged, one where hope seems fleeting, and the shadows of once-great civilizations now linger only as a distant memory.

Arranged Monster Mates

In the epilogue titled "Six Months Later," the protagonist reflects on the significant changes in his life since marrying Teal, who is pregnant with their first child. He admires her beauty, noticing her physical transformation and feeling a deep sense of joy and fulfillment he had not previously experienced. Before meeting Teal, he felt aimless, observing his brothers with their families and doubting his own capacity for such commitment. However, Teal's love has enlightened him to the values of devotion and happiness.

The scene unfolds in their home, where Teal is attempting to knit a baby jumper, a hobby she picked up from Holly. Despite her determination, her experience is tinged with stress due to pregnancy complications. The first trimester has proven challenging, marked by morning sickness and selective eating habits. The husband is devoted to caring for her, cooking multiple dishes in hopes she will eat something, demonstrating his commitment to her well-being.

He plans to encourage Teal to find relaxation through activities like painting or writing since knitting isn't yielding the desired calm. They share a strong bond, with daily walks to their cherished Thundering Caves, symbolizing his desire for proximity and connection with her. This companionship is vital for him, as he acknowledges how essential she has become in his life.

Teal expresses frustration with her knitting skills, and while the husband holds back laughter, he assures her that he will provide for their baby. Their playful banter highlights their intimacy and the affection they share, despite the physical toll the pregnancy takes on Teal, making her sweat and feel exhausted. She appreciates his willingness to care for her and recognizes the shift in her lifestyle, having come from a background of hardship and responsibility in her family.

As they sit together on the porch under the stars, they acknowledge how their lives have transformed. The protagonist feels responsible for Teal's past and is determined to show her his love and support. Their bond solidifies as he kisses her hand, and he embraces his role as both a devoted husband and soon-to-be father, feeling honored to fulfill this purpose. The chapter closes with a sense of hope, love, and an eagerness for their family's future.

About the Author

The provided text appears to be an excerpt that primarily offers information about the author, Cara Wylde, rather than a chapter from a narrative work. As per your requirements, there is not enough content to summarize while adhering to the specified word limits or maintaining a consistent style and focus on a narrative.

If you have a specific chapter or further content to provide that follows a more narrative format, please share, and I would be happy to assist in summarizing it.

Epilogue _Branthor

The chapter presents a heartfelt epilogue, set six months post the main events, focusing on the protagonist's transformed life with his pregnant wife, Teal. Initially, he reflects on how driftless he was prior to her arrival, observing his brothers' families and realizing that he had misunderstood the essence of love and dedication. Teal's presence has brought him joy and fulfillment, prompting a deep commitment to serve her in every way possible.

Teal, struggling with knitting a baby jumper, finds solace in the craft suggested by her friend Holly, despite its frustrations during her challenging pregnancy. The protagonist prepares multiple dishes in the kitchen, cheerfully determined to ensure she eats, understanding her nausea limits her appetite. Their tender relationship shows as he supports her through her discomforts, embodying a balance between caring and humor.

The passage emphasizes their close bond, illustrating how the protagonist insists on spending time with her, not out of necessity, but out of a deep emotional longing for her presence. The narrative captures moments filled with warmth as they navigate the ups and downs of pregnancy, sharing light-hearted banter despite the challenges.

As they enjoy a peaceful evening on their porch, the protagonist cannot help but reflect on Teal's past, feeling guilty about the hardships she endured before their union. He acknowledges how her life has radically changed, expressing gratitude for the opportunity to provide her a different reality.

The chapter closes with a profound sense of purpose found in their relationship. The protagonist recognizes his sole mission as being a good husband and father. Their shared moments signify fulfillment and an ability to take joy from their journey together, beating the odds of previous struggles. The celebration of their love amidst the trials of pregnancy culminates in a deeper understanding of their partnership, framing their family's future with hope and commitment.

Chapter Nineteen_Branthor

In Chapter Nineteen of the story, Branthor finds himself in a critical condition due to gunshot wounds. His brothers, Teal, Maren, and Nova rush him home, where they set him up on the couch with pillows and blankets for comfort. Sava and Varna, two elderly grendel females, are called for their expertise in plant medicine, but they lack the means to extract the bullets from Branthor's body. Meanwhile, Nova goes to fetch Gwen, a human doctor married to a grendel, to assist in the procedure.

Gwen arrives with a first aid kit and expertly works alongside Nova to extract the bullets while administering painkillers. Although Branthor initially hesitates to take them, the pain leads him to request their use, and Gwen injects him for quicker relief. The extraction prolongs into the night, leaving him exhausted and nauseous. Despite his insistence that Teal take care of herself, she stays by his side, showing care and devotion.

For the following two days, Branthor recovers, feeling embarrassed about his weakness. However, amidst recovery, Teal moves into his room, and they develop their connection without the distractions of physical intimacy. Branthor appreciates this time to bond with Teal, experiencing a deeper form of love. On the third day, he feels rejuvenated enough to cook breakfast and goes outside to watch the sunrise, despite Teal's worries.

Later, Branthor's brother, Kairos, arrives, preoccupied and agitated. He reveals that a delegate from the Temple is scheduled to visit for a marital check-up on Teal, a condition set for them to officially take her in. Branthor is surprisingly pleased by this and decides to embrace the situation enthusiastically. Teal, excited by the news, begins to prepare for the meeting, hinting at the importance of the day as she considers which dress to wear.

When the delegate arrives, Teal looks stunning in her chosen white dress, reflecting the warmth of their union. As they make small talk over lunch, the Temple delegate inquires about Teal's adaptation and Branthor's treatment of her. Through the laughter and light-hearted banter, Branthor presents the delayed marriage contract, explaining that he wishes to sign it in the presence of the delegate. The moment solidifies their commitment, and as Branthor signs the contract, Teal expresses her joy, capturing the happiness they have found in each other .

Chapter Eighteen_Teal

In Chapter Eighteen titled "Teal," the story unfolds as Branthor struggles with his injuries, having been shot multiple times by Teal's brothers. Despite his heavy frame, he attempts to reassure Teal that he can manage as they navigate the wilderness together. Teal expresses concern over his wounds, realizing he is coated in blood but is in disbelief at his resilience. As they slowly make their way toward Mossdale, Teal attempts to shift the blame for their predicament away from Branthor, defending her decision to leave her family for a moment of peace.

Their conversation deepens as Branthor questions why Teal never spoke about her brothers' cruelty, prompting her to reveal her embarrassment and the oppressive nature of the Peacemakers, the authority her

family holds. Teal explains that once bound in marriage, a bride's family relinquishes claim to her, which is significant in their current situation. The bond between Branthor and Teal evolves as he apologizes for his earlier decisions. In a light-hearted exchange, she calls him her "idiot," and although Branthor expresses guilt, Teal reassures him, reflecting on their connection.

As they reach a critical point, Branthor insists Teal fetch help while he rests, acknowledging his vulnerability. Before she leaves, he solemnly declares she is his mate, vowing to sign the marriage contract upon reaching Mossdale. Their parting moment is tender, marred by Branthor's discomfort from his injuries. Teal rushes toward the village, reflecting on her past as she recalls the pain inflicted by her brothers, but focusing instead on securing help for Branthor.

Teal arrives at Orion's house, seeking immediate assistance for Branthor. She finds solace in Maren's embrace and informs them of Branthor's dire condition. Without hesitation, Orion and his brothers leap into action, and Teal finally feels supported, noting the exhaustion in her own body. As they race back to Branthor, her new friends promise care and support, solidifying a newfound sisterhood in her life filled with hardship. This chapter illustrates themes of loyalty, the significance of chosen family, and the struggles of overcoming the scars of the past.

Chapter Seventeen_Branthor

In Chapter Seventeen of Branthor, the narrative centers on the protagonist, who is gripped by worry after Teal goes missing. After searching at the homes of Nova, Holly, and Maren without success, panic sets in. He reflects on their earlier confrontation, recognizing his selfishness had pushed her away, making him feel guilty and helpless. Teal's last known direction is towards the mountains outside Mossdale, a dangerous choice for someone like her who seemed agitated and needed space.

As he searches, he begins to notice subtle clues indicating her passage—broken twigs and shoe imprints—leading him to the Thundering Caves. His dread amplifies when he finds signs of a struggle: flattened grass and larger footprints, which fills him with fear. The imprint of Teal's small shoe is unmistakable, hinting she had an encounter with two human males. It becomes clear that she might have been taken.

Branthor rushes toward the sound of voices and discovers the two men—uniformed Peacemakers—abusing Teal. Anger fuels his approach as they shoot at him, yet he is unfazed, driven by a protective instinct. As he confronts the men, they claim to be Teal's brothers, leaving him furious at their actions. Teal's desperate plea reveals the truth: they've always been abusive, and their claim of family is a facade.

Ultimately, Branthor releases his anger when Teal, still shaken but grateful, claims him as her true family. He confronts the brothers, warning them against returning, as he gains strength from her faith in him and their community. They escape, both humiliated and hurt, while Branthor and Teal share a tender moment, confessing their love amidst the turmoil. Despite Branthor's injuries from the confrontation, they share a tentative return towards safety, knowing that their bond has only deepened through this crisis.

Teal, now back in Branthor's presence, feels secure, and they begin to understand the strength of their connection, even in the face of danger .

Chapter Sixteen_Teal

In Chapter Sixteen, titled "Teal," the protagonist is feeling overwhelmed in the bustling town of Mossdale. Surrounded by friendly faces eager to learn about her, Teal yearns for solitude to process her complicated

emotions regarding Branthor, who has refused to sign their marriage contract. The cheerful townsfolk's excitement contrasts sharply with Teal's inner turmoil, as she grapples with feelings of rejection and a growing sense of uncertainty about staying in Mossdale. Despite her desire for independence, she finds herself still longing for Branthor, confused by his accusations that her actions were manipulative.

In search of peace, Teal evades the crowd by slipping behind the houses and heading towards the mountains, where the fresh air and tranquility soothe her. She discovers a large rock where she can lie and breathe in the natural beauty around her, a stark contrast to the polluted environment of Fortitude. As she explores, she stumbles upon the mouth of a cave, potentially the Thundering Caves Branthor had mentioned. Drawn by curiosity, Teal steps inside, hoping to connect with the space that holds meaning for Branthor.

While exploring the cave, Teal reflects on her feelings and the nature of her relationship with Branthor. Despite the chill inside, she finds solace in the quietness, wishing to uncover secrets within the cave that could convince Branthor of their love. However, thoughts of being accused of manipulation weigh heavily on her heart. After spending what feels like an hour in contemplation, she begins to feel rejuvenated but is soon startled by the sounds of footsteps in the forest.

Before she can react, Teal is seized from behind by her brothers, who cover her mouth and abduct her, insisting they are saving her from the giants. Despite their claims of love, Teal feels trapped and views their actions as a betrayal. The chapter closes with her despair as she wonders about Branthor's absence and fears that their connection has been severed for good.

Chapter Fifteen_Branthor

In Chapter Fifteen, Branthor reflects on his feelings for Teal as he watches her sleep. He struggles internally with the reality that Teal is now his bride, which he had previously denied wanting. Despite planning to return her to the Temple, he realizes he cannot let her go. She is his, destined to be with him, and this acceptance brings a sense of fate into their relationship.

As dawn approaches, Branthor carefully rises without waking Teal and prepares breakfast. He notices the marriage contract left by his brother, Kairos, and considers signing it in Teal's presence to mark their commitment more personally. Teal soon awakes, appearing a bit unsteady, which leads to a light-hearted exchange about the effects of the oil they had used. Branthor presents the contract to her, seeking to make their marriage official.

Teal is ecstatic at the notion. However, as Branthor expresses his intent to sign the contract, he inadvertently brings up his fears about her motives, questioning whether she had physical intimacy with him to manipulate his decision. Teal, shocked and offended by the accusation, insists that her feelings were genuine and that she had acted out of love, not manipulation. This confrontation escalates as Branthor's accusations push Teal away from him emotionally.

Teal, feeling hurt and disrespected, storms out of Branthor's home, leaving Branthor in a state of confusion and regret. He realizes that his distrust has driven her away and that he must apologize sincerely. Branthor vows to give her space but understands that he must confront his insecurities to mend their relationship. His inner turmoil heightens as he confronts the possibility of losing Teal forever, realizing his love for her is unwavering, despite the earlier doubts. The chapter ends with Branthor reflecting on his mistake and preparing himself to genuinely apologize when Teal returns.

Chapter Thirteen_Branthor

In Chapter Thirteen, Branthor grapples with a moral dilemma as he confronts Teal's passionate desire for intimacy. Teal, with her blue-green eyes and naked body, exudes an allure that challenges Branthor's resolve. Despite his inner turmoil, he assertively informs her that they cannot proceed, especially with their impending visit to the Temple. Teal, however, counters with an emotional appeal, sharing that she has been waiting for this moment for five years since she sent her blood to the Temple, leading to their union.

Her revelation that she chose this path at a young age leaves Branthor bewildered. The idea that an eighteen-year-old would willingly opt for an arranged marriage to someone perceived as a monster raises questions about her motivations. Teal insists that this connection is special and implores Branthor to reconsider his hesitation. Although he acknowledges the wrongdoings of his brothers in orchestrating the match, he cannot reconcile his feelings about abandoning the life he thought he could have.

As Teal expresses her determination to spend the night with him, Branthor is torn. He warns her about the consequences of losing her virginity, believing that the Temple's DNA matching system would disallow any future prospects. Teal's reaction is one of resolve, as she states that her match is Branthor, dismissing the worry of other potential suitors. Unable to maintain eye contact, Branthor finds himself drawn into her warmth and desire yet struggles with the implications of their actions.

Teal's gentle entreaties prompt Branthor to confront his conflicting emotions around intimacy and commitment. She yearns to experience a bond with him, even if it is fleeting. Her sincere request for a shared moment pushes him to a breaking point. Ultimately, he takes the bold step of pouring oil into his palm, signaling willingness to embrace their shared destiny, even if only for that night. The tension between duty and desire hangs palpably in the air as they prepare to cross the boundary from mere connection to physical intimacy.

Chapter Eleven_Branthor

In Chapter Eleven, Branthor grapples with his conflicting emotions regarding Teal and the prospect of extending her stay in Mossdale. Initially, he insists that he won't sign the marriage contract, acknowledging that he relishes his freedom. Despite seeing her joy, he feels a deep sense of dread about her extended stay. As they walk through the village, he admires Teal's beauty and innocence, noting the way she interacts with the townspeople and the natural charm of her appearance.

Their stroll takes a turn when they are invited for tea by Sava and Varna, female grendels who have moved to Mossdale seeking some familial connection. Branthor finds himself embarrassed by their prying questions about his relationship with Teal, notably the implication that she might have been affected by similar experiences to a past visitor, Holly. This causes Teal to turn pale with embarrassment and leaves Branthor feeling overwhelmed.

He quickly decides to leave the tea visit and redirect Teal's focus onto the orchards, her excitement evident as she professes eagerness to see his "happy place." Branthor is acutely aware of how his choice to let her stay is complicating his life, yet he can't shake the feeling of peace when she is near. The day unfolds with a leisurely walk through the apple orchard, which culminates in Teal resting her head on Branthor's arm and falling asleep. This moment ignites unfamiliar feelings within him—an undeniable intimacy that disturbs his previous resolve.

As Branthor observes her serene face, he realizes he has become emotionally invested, feeling a heartbeat rhythm unlike any he has known before. Ultimately, he contemplates the unexpected depth of his feelings stirred by Teal, leaving him in a state of acceptance concerning the inexplicable peace she brings into his life.

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 .

Chapter Six_Branthor

In Chapter Six of the story, Branthor finds himself at his own birthday celebration, which has turned into a funeral-like atmosphere for him. As his brothers cut the cake and the festivities continue with music and dancing, Branthor feels detached and unwilling to participate, feeling as if his birthday has been overshadowed by an unwanted matrimony arranged by his family. He observes Teal, his newly chosen bride, who appears uncomfortable and shy amid the lively celebration. Despite attempts from others to engage both of them in dancing, Branthor remains withdrawn.

Teal confides in Branthor that she's never attended a party before, revealing a sad childhood marked by a lack of celebrations. His concern for her transitions into a realization that he doesn't want to be responsible for her fragile nature, an internal conflict growing within him as he battles with his reluctance to accept the situation. After unrest with his brothers about his forced arrangement, Branthor takes them aside, expressing his displeasure. They believe he is being unreasonable and encourage him to accept his match, citing it as part of him evolving into a settled family life.

Branthor adamantly refutes their attempts to persuade him to embrace marriage, citing Teal's delicate nature as a key reason for his refusal. His brothers express confusion about his avoidance of love and companionship as they reveal their happiness with their own partners. Underneath, Branthor grapples with considerations about Teal's presence and how it makes him uncomfortable yet intrigued.

Eventually, Branthor brings Teal to his home, where he prepares her a separate room, emphasizing his reluctance to cohabit as a couple. She expresses surprise at his home's size, unable to fathom its normalcy

from her perspective. Teal reveals she has nothing to bring with her, leading Branthor to fetch her an oversized shirt for comfort. He finally makes it clear that he doesn't want a bride, clarifying the arranged aspect of their pairing. Although disappointed, Teal remains calm, and they share wine together, creating an unexpected moment of connection amidst Branthor's turmoil regarding their future.

Chapter Seven_Teal

In Chapter Seven, titled "Teal," the protagonist grapples with the reality that Branthor, a giant being, has no interest in having her as a bride. Despite this, she is determined to change his mind, hoping to create a connection between them. As they share wine by the fireplace, Teal senses Branthor's gentleness, contrary to his imposing physical presence. This contrast makes her feel safe for the first time.

Teal takes the initiative in their conversation, sharing her love for reading adventure books, a passion cultivated through her mother's influence. Branthor reveals his own interests—gardening and growing fruits—which helps establish a bond, and they both open up about their losses, finding solace in each other's experiences of losing parents. Teal's recounting of her relationship with her mother emphasizes the emotional connection she seeks to foster with Branthor.

Throughout their conversation, Teal struggles to keep Branthor from thinking about the inevitable parting that awaits them the following day. She avoids mentioning her troubling family situation in order to maintain their growing intimacy. Their interaction grows more intimate as they share personal stories, and Branthor's fears about hurting her due to his size and strength surface. Teal reassures him of his gentleness, and they share a kiss, which sends her emotions into turmoil.

As the kiss intensifies and becomes more passionate, Branthor ultimately pulls away, displaying a conflict within him between desire and fear of his own strength. The chapter ends with Branthor tenderly laying Teal in bed and saying goodnight, leaving open the question of what will happen next between them as they face the uncertain future ahead.

Chapter Twelve_Teal

In Chapter Twelve of the story, titled "Teal," the narrator describes an evening spent cooking with Branthor, highlighting the challenges posed by his oversized kitchen equipment. The cooking experience turns into a shared activity as Branthor assists her, although their banter reveals some underlying tension regarding their arrangement. When she questions why he lacks the specialized utensils used by his sisters-in-law, they both acknowledge, in a light-hearted manner, that he doesn't want a human bride.

Throughout the chapter, Teal reflects on personal habits, such as the taboo of licking spoons while cooking, which she questions after observing Branthor's playful insistence on trying it. Their playful teasing escalates in the kitchen, and Teal finds herself increasingly attracted to him, particularly when he licks the spoon clean, triggering unexpected desires.

They enjoy a romantic dinner of spaghetti and meatballs on the back porch, illuminated by beautiful lights in the garden. While they share conversations, Teal notices Branthor's reluctance to embrace their potential relationship, despite their obvious chemistry and a DNA match that suggests compatibility.

As the evening progresses, Teal grows tired but feels hesitant to retreat to her own bedroom, unwilling to face the next day's reality at the Temple where Branthor plans to deliver her. Instead, she takes a bold step by sneaking into his bedroom naked and snuggling into his sheets, creating a playful, intimate atmosphere.

When Branthor finds her, a mixture of embarrassment and attraction fills the moment. Teal teases him about the comfortable bed, and their flirtation escalates as they discuss a mysterious oil Branthor has. He explains that it assists brides and grooms with significant size differences, hinting at the physical challenges their relationship may present. Teal expresses a desire to understand how it feels, and Branthor appears conflicted yet undeniably drawn to her.

The chapter captures a blend of humorous moments, budding romance, and the tension surrounding their arranged marriage, culminating in Teal's determination to act on her feelings, reinforcing the emotional stakes in their relationship.

Chapter Ten_Teal

In Chapter Ten, titled "Teal," the protagonist finds herself in a confounding situation at Nova's house. While initially brought to borrow clothes, it becomes clear that this was also a gathering with Nova's friends, Holly and Maren. The atmosphere in the kitchen is friendly and familial as the girls push for details about the previous night with Branthor. Teal explains that they slept apart because Branthor refuses to sign the marriage contract, even convincing her that he would send her to the Temple if not for Nova's intervention.

Maren dismisses Teal's concerns, suggesting Branthor won't go through with it. The girls rally support for Teal, asserting that Branthor is infatuated with her despite her skepticism. Holly and Maren share playful anecdotes, suggesting that unconventional actions, like climbing a partner, could ignite passion. This quirky advice amuses Teal, sparking her imagination about physical moves to gain Branthor's affection.

As they discuss, Nova leads the way into her impressive walk-in closet filled with clothes, revealing new potential for Teal's wardrobe. The camaraderie deepens as Nova insists on giving her outfits that she believes Teal will love, promising that their friendship means sharing is essential. Despite initial hesitation about wearing something so revealing, Teal tries on a short, floral dress, which elicits excited reactions from the other women, who encourage her to wear it to captivate Branthor.

Upon Branthor's arrival, his reaction to Teal in the dress is immediate and profound, as he seems momentarily lost for words. The chapter balances playful banter with the seriousness of Teal's predicament, portraying her inner conflict regarding her relationship with Branthor. Teal longs for affection but ends up questioning the likelihood of their union, revealing her uncertainty about the future as she heads outside with him, pondering whether she truly has any influence over his feelings or if her time may already be running out.

Chapter Eight_Teal

In Chapter Eight, titled "Teal," the protagonist wakes up early, feeling a mix of excitement and anxiety about convincing Branthor to pursue their relationship further. Despite her small stature compared to his giant frame, she believes they are made for each other, especially after sharing a passionate kiss that indicated a connection. Teal reflects on the impending return to the Temple, where she fears being vulnerable and the potential fallout of her choices, especially concerning financial issues related to Branthor's arranged marriage.

Teal's determination propels her to make bold moves, leading her to step out of the bath nude, fully aware of the impact her body might have on Branthor. When he knocks and steps inside without waiting for an invitation, his reaction to her nakedness reveals his attraction to her. They engage in a flirty conversation; Teal learns he has prepared breakfast, which pleases her. She teasingly seeks a morning kiss but encounters Branthor's hesitation, as he struggles with his feelings and the implications of their situation.

Despite his resistance, Teal boldly touches him, recognizing the physical tension between them. Branthor grapples with his emotions and his stated unwillingness to take a bride. Nevertheless, Teal is confident in their chemistry, leading Branthor to admit that she is right about his attraction. Just as he appears to yield to temptation, Teal pulls away, maintaining the playful dynamic while suggesting they have breakfast outside.

Branthor suggests eating on the porch, and Teal eagerly anticipates the opportunity to admire his garden, believing she has made a good impression with her playful and confident demeanor. As the chapter concludes, Teal dresses in Branthor's oversized shirt, feeling optimistic about how the morning is unfolding and the potential for their relationship to grow. Her confidence and charm seem to be paving a promising path forward with Branthor.

Chapter Five_Teal

In Chapter Five, titled "Teal," the protagonist finds herself in an embarrassing situation at a gathering where everyone is watching her, concealed inside a birthday cake. She silently wishes that Branthor, her intended husband, would acknowledge her as his bride while feeling out of place in this vibrant setting. As he approaches her, his deep green eyes scan her form, revealing he is equally disconcerted by the situation. He offers her his hand, and with some relief, she takes it, expressing her desire to escape the cake without ruining it.

Branthor lifts her effortlessly, highlighting the difference in their sizes, reinforcing her feelings of awkwardness and fascination. He stands much taller than her, a grendel with striking features, including long dark hair and expressive green eyes. Teal wrestles with her perception of beauty in him—he represents a more than imposing figure, strong and undeniably handsome.

Their conversation is laden with pauses as they navigate the unfamiliarity of their new relationship. Branthor's attempts to make her comfortable lead to moments of hilarity, particularly as he chooses a seat for her that is too high. As they settle in, Teal begins to acclimatize to her new surroundings, and as a wave of fellowship washes over her, she is introduced to other women, including Nova and Maren, who ease her integration into this diverse family.

The lively chatter around the table allows Teal to relax as she observes the camaraderie, rich with feminism and acceptance. This sense of community is novel to her, igniting both desire and fear about her place among them and with Branthor. Teal wants their connection to flourish, yearning for acceptance and an affirmation of her belonging.

Amidst the laughs and the delightful food, Teal notices Branthor's quiet demeanor—his preoccupied expressions leave her feeling an underlying tension about their marriage, highlighted by her memory of the marriage contract signed by his brother, Kairos. The chapter paints a vivid picture of Teal's journey towards belonging within a new family while grappling with the tentative nature of her union with Branthor .

Chapter Four_Branthor

****Chapter Four Summary:****

As my sixtieth birthday approached, the atmosphere around me became increasingly bizarre and anxious. Residents of Mossdale, including my family, seemed overly agitated, as if they wanted me out of their sight. Traditionally, my brothers and their partners loved organizing celebratory events, particularly birthdays, which had transformed into grand feasts of food, gifts, and, notably, elaborate cakes since the human brides entered our lives. Somehow, a simple day of marking my aging had shifted into a worrisome spectacle, and I

began to suspect a conspiracy was brewing among my kin.

My unease intensified when Holly and Kairos vanished for an entire day, supposedly using our solitary portal for errands. The night before my birthday, sleep eluded me as I sensed something ominous in Holly's absence. When I inquired about her, Ragnar responded with vague comments about her not feeling well, which only deepened my apprehensions. The uncertainty about my birthday's plans left me feeling uneasy.

The morning dawned, and I hurried to Ragnar's house, where chaos reigned as his son Maverick screamed over a broken toy. Ragnar assured me it was just a fleeting phase for the boy. My attempts to uncover the secret behind the preparations were met with playful resistance. Ragnar dismissed my concerns, insisting it was just a birthday celebration. Yet I could sense something darker was afoot.

By noon, the town gathered by the river where a massive party tent overflowed with food and drink. Among the noise of playful children and bustling villagers, Holly approached me, asking me to cover my eyes for a surprise. Trusting her, I complied, but as I was led toward the center of the tent, my heart raced with anticipation.

When the scarf was finally removed, I was stunned to be face-to-face with a gigantic cake. As things grew chaotic, the top burst open, revealing a stunning woman who jumped out, proclaiming, "Happy Birthday, Branthor!" The crowd erupted in cheer, and I was confused, bewildered by the revelation that this ethereal figure was meant to be my bride. This unexpected twist upended my certainty about what I wanted and left me grappling with the implications of this bizarre celebration.

Chapter Three_Teal

In Chapter Three titled "Teal," the protagonist reflects on her uneasy departure from her father's house, where he cruelly disowns her, labeling her a "whore" for seeking freedom. Despite the emotional turmoil wrought by her father's words, she resolves to leave with merely the clothes on her back. Her journey begins at the train station, where she grapples with anxiety and a lack of funds to buy a ticket to the Marriage Temple, which lies two cities away. The villagers of Fortitude discourage women from seeking matches with those deemed "monsters," leading to her isolation.

Determined to escape the city, Teal boards the train without a ticket, convincing herself that her desperate circumstances are not insurmountable. When approached by a conductor, she admits to having no money. Fortunately, an elderly woman sitting nearby offers to pay for her fare, expressing her own experience and reinforcing Teal's hope for happiness. The act of kindness from the woman mirrors her feelings for her deceased mother, strengthening Teal's resolve.

Upon her arrival at the Temple, Teal experiences a mixture of hunger and fear, as her future husband is expected the following day. The attentive servants provide her with care and an ointment for her bruises, symbols of her painful past. As she prepares to meet her future husband, anxiety surges; she worries about not being attractive enough and questions her future.

The next day brings unexpected developments. Instead of meeting her husband, Branthor, she is greeted by Holly and Kairos, her future sister-in-law and brother-in-law, who inform her of the arrangements made in her absence. The priest explains that Branthor is not present to sign the marriage contract, raising Teal's concerns about her future. The chapter culminates in a mix of hope and uncertainty as Teal contemplates the implications of not meeting her match and decides to keep the funds given to her, envisioning a new life away from her troubled past. Though apprehensive about the future, she clings to the belief that she will not return to Fortitude.

Chapter Two_Teal

Teal's evening begins with the pressure of preparing dinner; she reluctantly makes a chicken stew requested by her father and brothers, despite her exhaustion from chores and a recent plumbing disaster. Teal reflects on her harsh reality since her mother died a week before her eighteenth birthday. Her mother's parting words about sending her blood to the Marriage Temple linger in her mind. This promise led her to secretly submit her blood for an arranged marriage, a step she took to escape her oppressive home life.

Teal's brothers, comforting their need for control, have enforced a life of servitude upon her—one marked by isolation and physical domination. After her mother's death, she was left managing the household alone, becoming the replacement for her mother's care. Her attempts to run away were thwarted by her father and brothers, reinforcing her sense of entrapment within a brutal family dynamic that thrives on fear and violence.

As she prepares the meal, anxiety grips her; she worries she hasn't met her family's high expectations. When they arrive home earlier than usual, tension fills the air. Teal attempts to appease them with her cooking, but her father is already suspicious. The mood darkens significantly when he presents a letter from the Marriage Temple—indicative of the future that Teal hoped for but her family fiercely opposes. In an explosive confrontation, her father physically assaults her, enraged by her secret actions.

Teal endures the attack from her father and brothers, feeling powerless yet oddly liberated by the prospect of marriage to someone who could potentially be far better than the familial "monsters" she has known. After isolating herself in her room, she reads the letter over and over, envisioning escape and the chance for a different life. In the shadow of her troubled past, Teal clings to the hope of finding freedom and the possibility of being cherished in her new future.

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.