

The Settlers

Chapter 5

They all scrambled for the door as the flames grew and spread through their new home. Burning reeds dripped from the roof like liquid. Skylark began to wail.

The family gathered together and ran from their home. The settlement was in chaos, with families running to and fro followed by men in huge furs with black plumes on their right shoulders, which showed they were from the settlement on the other side of the mountain. Some had axes, some flaming torches and others spears and daggers. They all roared.

The people of Ash's settlement ran, fleeing in every direction. Some had been wounded by flying axes and were clutching at their injuries. Some were just crying and some roared back, defending their territory.

Bear stopped, gathering his family.

"River, take the children to the cave, and don't stop. I will rally the men. We will fight them. This is our place." He thrust a spear and two daggers into her hand. She tucked a dagger into her belt and handed a spear to Ash and the remaining dagger to Skylark. It looked far too big and violent an object for such a little girl to be holding. She looked terrified.

River nodded and gripped both Ash and Skylark by the arm. She ran, dragging them along with her, Arrow tucked inside Ash's jacket and each holding a weapon out at the side. There was a swishing noise and Ash ducked as an axe twirled through the air just above his mother's head and smashed into a house behind them. It made a hole in the wall. River let out a desperate cry and Ash could see the tears on her cheeks. She gripped the children harder, then they put their heads down and ran for the cover of the cave.

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Instead of the comfort of the shadows, torches and silhouettes greeted them at the entrance to the cave. River dropped to her knees and put her face in her hands. Skylark cuddled in close to her mother, trying to comfort her but still sobbing herself.

"Mother, where do we go now?" asked Ash's little sister. River just kept crying.

Ash stepped forward, facing the cave. He raised the spear.

"What are you doing in our cave?" he shouted, in his most manly and threatening voice. He tried to hide the fact that his hands were shaking.

There was a laugh, quickly followed by more laughter.

The men in the cave stepped forward and their faces became clear in the flickering torchlight. There were three of them, each as big as Ash's father and all wearing black plumes of fur.

"Oh, the little man wants to know why we're in his cave, does he? Do you think you can frighten us, son?"

Ash held his ground. "Why are you attacking us?" he shouted. "Why have you destroyed our houses?"

The men laughed again, and the one Ash had decided was the leader stepped forward.

"Because," he boomed, "this is our territory. Nobody asked us if they could build their flammable little houses on our territory."



"We didn't know!" shouted Ash. Now he was shaking with rage. "You've known all along that we were building houses. You're nothing more than a big bully!"

Ash lunged forward with the spear. The bully grabbed the stick and spun Ash round so that he was right in front of him. He held the flint point up to Ash's neck. Ash wriggled but he couldn't get out of the man's grip.

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River was crying and reaching for Ash but the men were pointing spears at her and Skylark too. "No!" she cried. "Don't hurt my son, please, don't hurt him!"

"What do you think, lads?" said the man holding Ash, looking at the other two men. "Should I slaughter the little lamb?" Ash could see the man's spit flying out over his head as he spoke. He pushed the spike and Ash felt blood trickle down his neck. He was trying so hard to remain brave but he couldn't help but let out a whimper.

The men laughed once more. Ash heard a familiar growl and something small and grey shot up from beside his mother. Arrow!

The little dog jumped and bit the man right on the arm that was holding the spear. The man cried out and loosened his grip.

Ash took his chance. He wriggled free and set off running into the woods.