

# The Settlers

## Chapter 3

It was quite difficult for Ash to carry the bowl of goat's milk without it slopping over the edges. He stuck his tongue out in concentration as he hobbled over the lumpy ground.

"We got the milk!" his father announced proudly as they approached the cave.

"Oh!" said his mother. "Did you have any trouble with the goats?" She was smirking.

"No," protested Bear, "we showed them who was in charge." He clapped Ash on the shoulder, almost knocking the milk everywhere. His mother took the bowl.

"Careful, Bear," she said.

"I am always careful, River, my love." He smiled. She glared at him and took the milk over to a large cooking pot that was on the floor beside the fire.

Bear kissed River on the head and walked away, out of the cave and into the woods.

Skylark came skipping around the corner, singing and waving a handful of plants, roots and all. She bounded into the cave.

"Wild garlic!" she shouted.

"What are we making?" said Ash.

"I thought we could make a big pot of frumenty to have when the rest of the settlement comes to welcome us."

"Tonight?" said Ash.

## The Settlers

“No,” said River, “the day after tomorrow: there is much preparation to be done.” She tore the roots off the wild garlic and handed them to Skylark with a disapproving look. “We want this to be our home. So we want the whole community to welcome us and accept us. We have invited them to share our food and stories.” She tore the leaves into pieces and put them in the pot. She poured in the milk and then emptied in a pot of grain that had been soaking in water.

“Your father has even invited the settlement from the other side of the mountain.” Ash looked up; that would mean he would get to see the girl, Red, again.

“Now we're here to stay, in this one place, we can grow our own grain and fatten up the goats, pigs and cattle for milk and meat. We'll have regular harvests, and security. And friends.” She stirred the mixture with a wooden spoon and placed the large pot over the fire.

“Dull,” said Ash.

“Ash,” she said, frowning, “don't you want to be safe and know that you will be looked after and well fed?”

Before he had a chance to respond there was a commotion from the entrance to the woods. Bear was back.

“Oh, Bear,” they heard one woman shout, “he's such a handsome little chap!”

“Oh, Bear,” said another, “he will help so much with the farming and protecting your home.”

Ash rushed to see what they were talking about, and there in the clearing stood his father, surrounded by people, with a tiny little animal by his side: a puppy. The other families in the settlement had dogs, too, which were sniffing around the new puppy with interest, making a fuss of him.

Ash ran over and made his way through the people, then ducked down to the puppy. It looked just like a wolf cub, with grey fur and a long muzzle. It sniffed his hand and then licked it. Ash picked the puppy up and it licked his face too. He held it over one arm to stroke it and noticed it

## The Settlers

had a ridge of lighter fur shaped like an arrow on its back. He looked up at his father, who was smiling at them.



## The Settlers

“What’s his name?” asked Ash.

“I thought you could decide that, son. After all, he is your dog.”

Ash thought his chest would explode. His dog; his very own dog. “Oh, Father,” he cried, with the excitement of a much younger child, “he has to be called Arrow!” Everyone laughed fondly. He had forgotten that everyone was gathered around. “Father,” he said, in a more grown-up voice, “thank you.” His father chuckled and clapped him on the shoulder.

“He will have to help with the farming,” said Bear, “as will you.”

Ash was far too excited to have Arrow by his side to ever, ever mind about helping with the farming.

He put Arrow on the floor and all of the other settlers' dogs came to sniff and lick him and make him feel welcome.

Ash couldn't wait to get to know his new dog either. They could go into the forest together; they could go hunting. They could have adventures and prove to his mother and father that it was better to be on the move, not stay in one place and be boring.