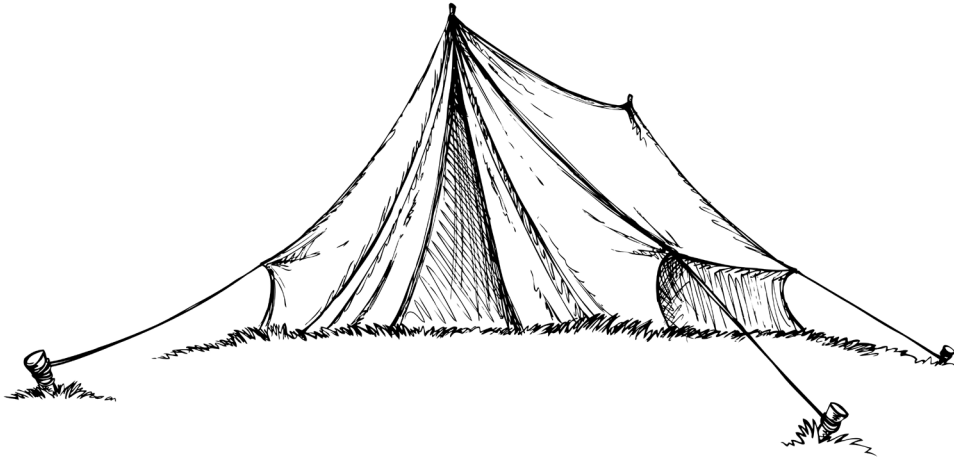


the GROWLY books

The Astonishing Spectacle of Growly's Seventh



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A brisk wind whistled up through the meadow, gently swaying the long, leafy branches of the apple trees and flapping the sides of the little tent. It was almost morning. Growly could hear the happy warble of birdsong in the darkness. As he peeked out into the meadow he could see the faintest hint of sunrise over the Lower Lands to the east.

"Ash!" Growly whispered, looking at the bundled lump of sleeping bag and blankets on the other side of the tent. A muffled groan came from somewhere under the lump, followed by a couple of snorts that sounded very much like snoring.

"Ash!" Growly said it louder this time, giving the lump a gentle nudge. "*Ash!*"

Suddenly a small face appeared from under the blankets, looking bewildered and bleary-eyed in the dimness as Ash sat up and looked around.

"Growly?" he said, sleepily.

"Ash!" Growly whispered again, almost bursting with excitement. "It's morning! Come on!" He was already scrambling through the doorway of the tent, one boot almost on and the other held tightly in his paw.

Growly toppled out onto the soft grass of the meadow. He couldn't help letting out a joyful cheer. Instead of standing up, he rolled and tumbled a little way down the hill and then rose up, wobbling and dripping with dew.

It was his birthday. But not just any birthday. This was his *Seventh*. Up till now he had just been a Little Cub. But when a Little Cub reached his *Seventh* ... Growly let out another happy laugh as Ash's grinning face appeared from behind the flaps of the tent ... when a Little Cub reached his *Seventh*, he would no longer be *little*.

Ash clambered all the way out of the tent, stumbling for a moment on his untied shoelaces and then letting himself fall in a laughing, tumbling ball, just like Growly had.

By now the light of the sunrise stretched over the Lower Lands and glistened on the dew drops, all the way up the sloping meadow to the dark tangle of bushes at the top of the hill. Growly felt a chill of excitement all the way down his back. That's where it was. Carefully hidden amongst the leaves and branches. His big surprise. It would be *everyone's* big surprise.



Birthdays in Haven are always a special occasion, but when that birthday is a *Seventh* there is an extra special level of excitement. It is the birthday when a Little Cub becomes a Cub, and since before the days of Hegel, the tradition has been that the Cub gets to plan the day's celebrations.

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This usually means a lot of fun for everyone who can attend (and occasionally a few sleepless nights for the parents).

Chocolate Sauce Drizzled Apple Doughnut Sandwiches with Caramel Onion Sugar Cones for dessert? Sure!

A giant rope swing hanging down from the Lookout? Well ... it did happen once ... with close supervision.

A log ride down the Cascade rapids? Umm ... NO! But the Little Cub who asked for that did get her second choice.

And in all the centuries of this wonderful tradition, there have never been any major injuries (though there have been quite a lot of upset stomachs).

Growly's request had been quite mysterious, and his eyes had sparkled with adventure when he handed the request letter to his parents.

"A night camping with just Ash and I ... down in the Apple Meadow.
And an amazing surprise for everyone who can come the next day.
A magnificent, marvelous, astonishing spectacle,
like has never been seen in the history of Haven."

(Merridy, the librarian, had helped him with that last sentence. She knew lots of big words.)

"Is it dangerous?" his mother had asked, looking quite concerned.

"I don't think so," Growly had answered. He stopped to think for a few moments just to make sure. It seemed safe as far as he could tell.

"It *is* in the meadow," Growly's father had said thoughtfully, trying to sound reassuring. The grass is soft, and there's not really anything high to fall off of."

"Well ... I guess so," Growly's mother had answered at last. "We will be staying nearby though, in the Westwind Caverns just over the hill."



And now the day had arrived. As the morning light grew brighter, an enormous gathering of Growly's friends and family made their way to the Apple Meadow, laughing and shouting excitedly when they saw Growly's little tent up on the hill. Ember and the other Little Cubs raced on ahead, bounding up the slope and shouting with glee as they began to lift the flaps of the tent door.

"SURPRISE!!!!" Their voices trailed off in astonishment as they realized no one was inside.

"They're not ... here!" Ember exclaimed. Her sweet voice sounded puzzled as she looked up at the older bears gathering around.

"I'm sure they're fine, dear," Merridy reassured.

Just then, a strange, awful sound came from the bushes at the top of the hill, a wailing screech that grew more and more woeful the louder it got.

All of a sudden, Ember's face burst out in a wide grin. "Growly!!!" she cried. No one played the bugle as terribly as he did! The screech got louder and louder, and a clanging boom joined along with it, and then ...

Out of the bushes came the most astonishing sight. First, a long, striped flagpole with a wildly flapping flag slowly rose from the leaves. The flag pole began to wave, leaning to the left and then to the right as the bush began to rustle and shake, and the branches began to be pushed aside.

"It's a G!" cried one of the Cubs. "The flag is just a G!"

"For Growly!" Ember squealed. "And look!!"

The front of an old bathtub emerged, and standing in the bathtub was Growly, his poor bugle in one paw and the flagpole waving in the other. And there was Ash, pushing with all his might as the tub rolled out into the sunlight.

"It's got wheels!" cried another of the Cubs. His little eyes were wide in utter amazement.

"Yes it has!" gasped Growly's mother. Her eyes were wide, too.

There was a shout from the top of the hill as the bathtub began to roll, and Ash scrambled up onboard behind Growly. They both stood proudly in the tub as they began to pick up speed. Growly waved the flag wildly, and Ash started the clanging noise again as he pounded a mallet on the side of the tub.

It was a magnificent sight for a moment. A scene like you might find in one of the most glorious and heroic of the old books. Then they hit a bump. And then another ... and the heavy, old bathtub began to quickly gather speed.

"Wow!!!!" cried the the Little Cubs as the tub bounced over a hidden rock and Growly's flag and flagpole sailed high into the air.

"Oh my!" groaned Growly's mother. She looked very pale.

Growly was seated in the bathtub now, his paws grasping the sides tightly and a strange look on his face. It was something like a grin, but not a happy one. More like a grin that got caught out in a blizzard.

Ash's face looked the same. He peered over Growly's shoulder in alarm, seeing the little tent straight ahead of them and the astonished bears who were scrambling out of the way.

"Look out!" Growly warned the crowd.

Hitting another bump, the tub bounced into the air, smashing through the little tent and dragging it along as they continued down the hill. Growly couldn't see a thing. He was covered by the tent and Ash's sleeping bag was wrapped around his leg.

Somewhere behind him, Growly could hear the muffled shouts of bears who were running after them. "Lost a ... eel," he thought he heard someone shout. It was hard to tell with the tent flapping all around him and Ash's sleeping bag now blowing up into his face. "Lost a ... eel?" What could that mean?

"... ackberries," cried another voice.

Ackberries?

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"Blackberries!" Ash cried. He had managed to get his head through the tent fabric and was peering out in alarm at what was just ahead.

"Hold on!" Growly shouted. Then there was an enormous bump. The bathtub bounced into the air again, sailing peacefully for a long, quiet moment that seemed to go on and on.

A line from one of the old books came into Growly's mind. Something Merridy had read to him not too long ago. "*The Seventh is a birthday that should always be remembered. A soaring celebration of the jollity of youth.*" Growly had no idea what that last line meant, but right then he felt he finally understood the part about soaring.

"... old ... on ...!" Growly could hear a muffled shout from far away. A voice that sounded a lot like his father.

Then, suddenly, there was an enormous crash, followed by sounds of scraping and crunching and something ripping. The tent and sleeping bag flew off, and the bathtub came to a screeching stop. They were surrounded by a tangle of prickly vines and branches, all of them covered with juicy, delicious fruit.

Hearing a groan, Growly turned and saw Ash lying flat on the bottom of the tub, looking up in wonder at the tangled branches all around. Then came the voices of worried bears and the Little Cubs who weren't sure whether to laugh or cry. Growly and Ash heard the sounds of older bears crawling in under the thorns, with sighs of relief as they realized the two Cubs were okay.

It took a while for the older bears to reach them. The tub had plowed a long way into the brambly bushes. When they were finally free, they crawled out to see a crowd of astonished faces. It certainly was a spectacle, even though it didn't turn out quite like Growly had planned.

Growly's *Seventh* was truly a day he would never forget. Later there was a lot of laughter and a wonderful feast, with a new dessert that has since become famous—Growly's Ackberry Pie.

And the bathtub? It's still down at the bottom of the Apple Meadow, hidden beneath the bushes. Each year, when blackberry season arrives, parents still take their Little Cubs to the spot and tell the story of Growly's astonishing *Seventh*.