

the GROWLY books

haven

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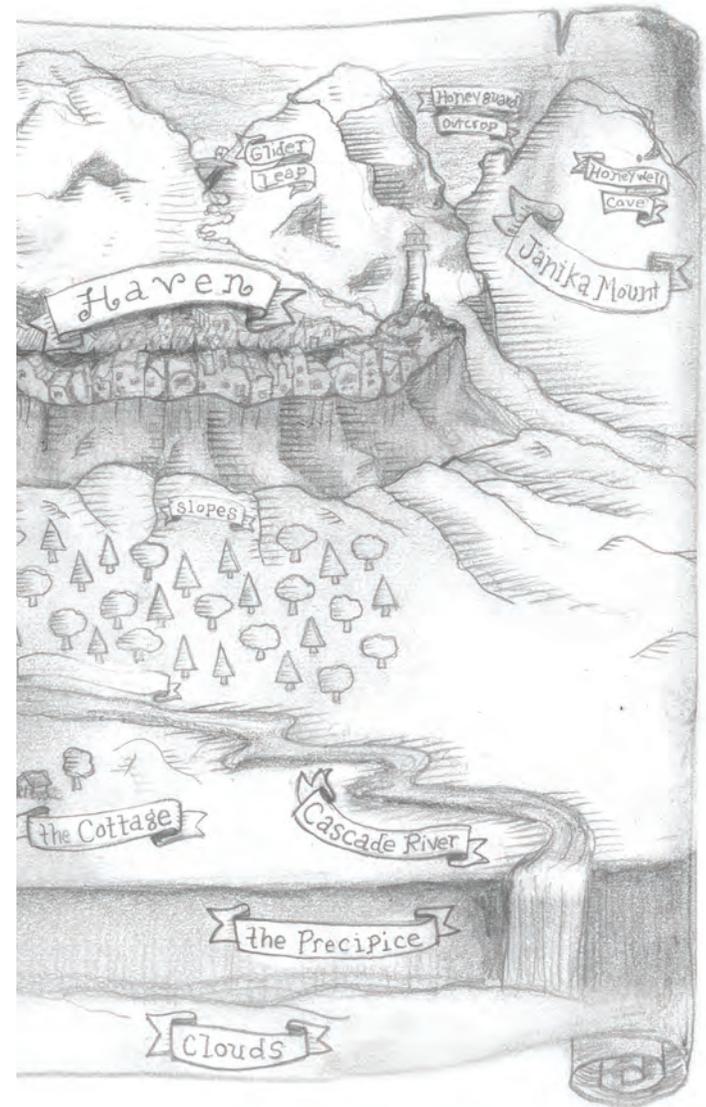
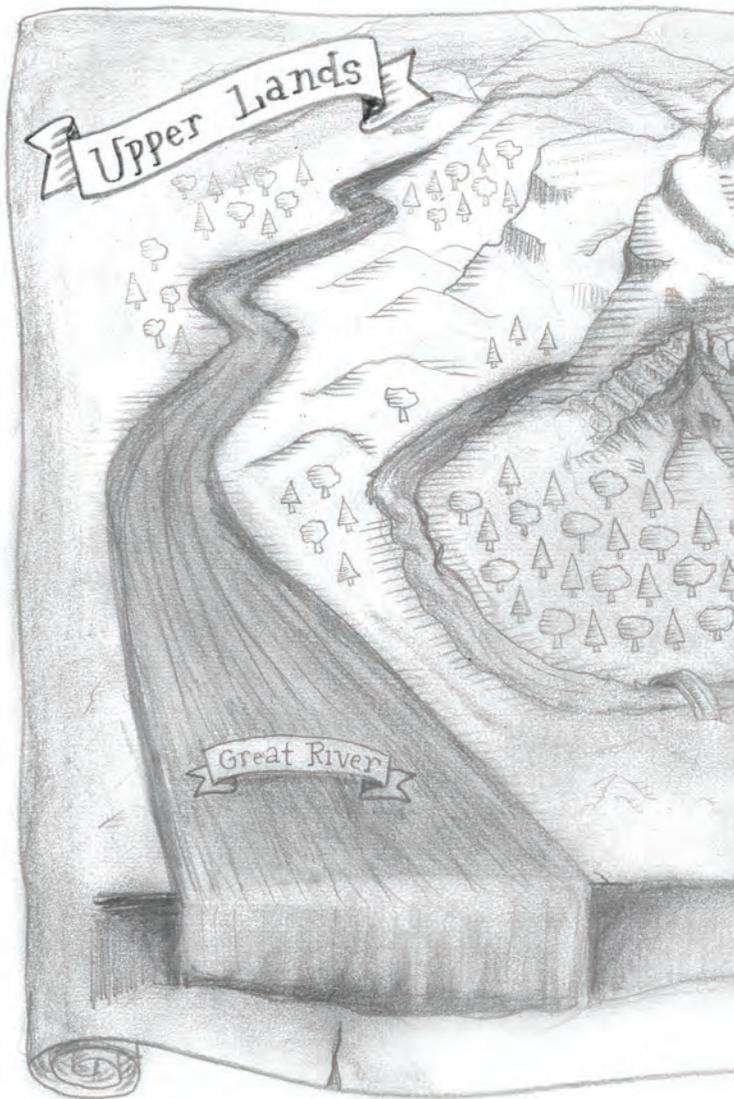
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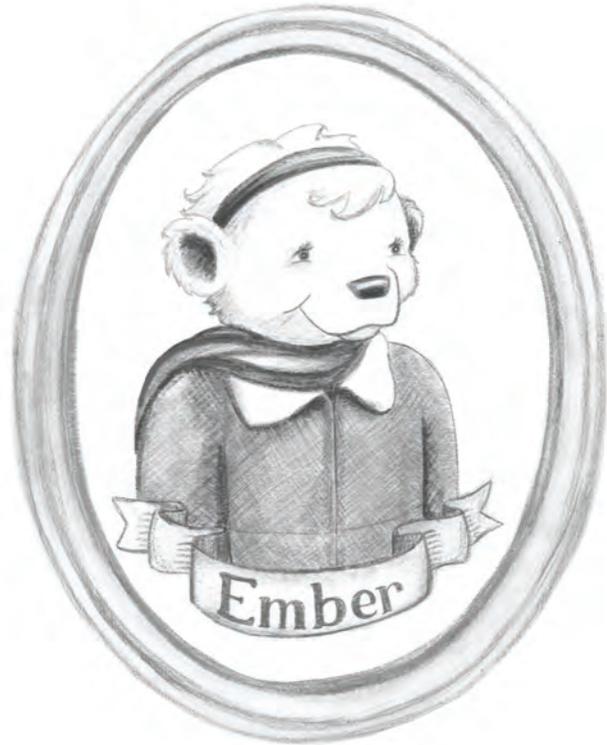
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to our two sweet adventurers . . .







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The Great River

It thundered out of the mountains, miles to the north, up past the icy cliffs where no bear had ever been. *No bear except Hegel.* At least that's what the bears of Haven hoped. He had gone that way over a thousand years ago and was never seen again. "He must have made it past the Great River," the Elder Bears would say. "If anyone could find a way, Hegel could have."

The younger bears would nod excitedly. Of course *he* found a way. How could such a hero *not* find his long lost love: sweet Janika the Brave with the golden-yellow fur? But no bear since had found a way across. The river was over a mile wide, thundering and hissing with foam as it raced south toward The Precipice. Bears had ventured toward the Gulch, the gaping canyon where the Great River burst out of the mountains. One brave climber had even crept out onto the icy cliffs above the raging torrent. But no bear (since Hegel, of course!) had ever found a way across.

Ember sighed as she peered northward for a moment toward the misty haze that rose above the river. Even on the clearest days you could barely see the other side. The air was always swirling with icy spray, pushed northward by the howling winds that came up over the edge of The Precipice. What hope was there of seeing a tiny bird in all that haze? Even one that was brightly colored blue and red?

A loud rumble of thunder shook her from her thoughts, and she quickly turned back toward the south, where an enormous storm was racing in over the Lower Lands. Storms were common in Haven, but it was rare they looked like this. It was going to be a bad one.

“Oh, Growly,” Ember whispered. There was no sign of him now. She had watched until his glider had gone out of sight around the back of Janika Mountain, a tiny speck in the shadow of the cliffs. Growly on Adventure! She could hardly believe the time had come. Ash was out there, and Skye and Gittel would leave in a few days. And then ... Ember felt her heart leap, “And then it will be me!”

Another clap of thunder echoed along the cliffs and seemed to shake the whole mountain. “Hurry up, Growly!” Ember breathed. A twinge of worry was there under all the excitement. He would be all right though. Growly was a sensible bear, *most* of the time. There was that occasion when he and Ash tried to put

wheels on an old bathtub and ride it down through the apple meadow. And the time he almost fell in the Honey Well! Ember smiled to herself. He *was* a good bear ... most of the time. She missed him already. Ember was surprised at a sudden tear that trickled down her cheek.

“He’ll be fine,” she said after a moment, taking a deep breath. Her heart seemed like it was tossing and swirling, rushing this way and that like the waters of the Great River. She took another deep breath and turned back toward the north. That bird! Where could it have gone to? She had seen it. She was sure of that. Just for a moment, out of the corner of her eye. And then it had disappeared down into the Backland Valley. Where could it have gone?

Ember peered over the low wall that ran around the edge of Glider Leap. The valley was dark with shadows that crept up from the banks of the Cascade River far, far below. The cry of an eagle was faint somewhere in the distance, but there was no sign of the little bird. Ember followed the line of the Cascade River out toward the end of the valley, where it turned sharply and made its way down toward the Lower Lands and The Precipice. Beyond the curve of the Cascade River was another wide stretch of land called the Banks, and beyond that, the Great River. The bird couldn’t have gone in that direction. Why would it?

Ember looked toward the Great River for a moment longer. She loved to stare out at the churning waters, especially from up here. At just the right moment you might catch a faint glimpse of green on the other side. You might see ... she suddenly gasped in surprise and almost stumbled backward. It ... it couldn't be! Ember's heart pounded as she blinked for a moment and then peered out at the Great River again. The air over there was thick with mist and haze, swirling in the dim light as the storm closed in. She had only seen it for a moment, but ...

Ember rubbed her eyes and, with her heart still pounding, glanced southward at the storm. It was coming quickly toward the mountains. There wasn't much time. With her legs feeling weak and trembly, she hurried across the platform to the stairs that led down into Glider Leap.

On Glider Leap

The stairs led down into the large storage room where the folded gliders were kept. There were empty spaces on some of the racks that lined the walls—Growly and Ash's storage places as well as those of other Cubs already out on Adventure. Ember glanced at her own glider for a moment as she rushed through the room. It was bundled and tied, leaning up against the wall with the long wing poles almost touching the high ceiling. She ran right by it and soon came to the far wall where a tall row of shelves stretched high above her. The shelves were stacked with ropes and climbing gear, as well as tools and ... there it was ... a long telescope.

Ember touched the cool, polished metal for a moment, trying to catch her breath and make sense of what she might have seen. A flash of light from across the Great River. Like fire in the thick woods that lined the banks of the far shore. Not like a forest fire though. It was like ... like a *signal* fire. She had just seen it for a

moment before the cloud and spray hid it again from view. At least she *thought* she had seen it.

The telescope was long, almost as tall as Ember, and she swayed unsteadily as she took it down from the shelf and heaved it onto her shoulder. The smooth brass felt cool on her cheek as she stumbled across the room, moving as quickly as she could back toward the stairs. She was about to start her way upward when a loud clap of thunder boomed through the building, rattling the shelves and sending a metal plate clattering to the floor. Ember let out a shriek of surprise and then a moment later grinned. "Just thunder, Ember," she whispered to herself. "Just a little ..." Ember felt a sudden twinge of panic deep in her stomach, "... just a little storm!" In all the excitement she had almost forgotten about the storm. She started up the stairs with a groan, straining to keep the telescope steady as she climbed.

Ember came out onto the roof again, puffing and panting as she made her way across the platform to a place on the western side of the parapet wall. There was a stand there, with a swiveling cradle. Ember hoisted the telescope up into place, fastening the clips that held it in the cradle. The wind whistled past her as she swung the lens around and put her eye up to the eyepiece. It took a moment to adjust the focus and find the right area on the far side of the river. Where was it? All she could see was spray and mist and the churning waters

of the Great River. Another boom of thunder cracked above her, but Ember hardly noticed this time. Where was it? There was a brief flash of green as the mist cleared for a moment. Trees and grass and ... there! A sparkle of orange at the edge of the woods. Just for a moment, and then it was gone.



"No!" Ember cried as the mist closed back again and the spray and water were all she could see. She looked up from the telescope and peered in the direction of the river, hoping maybe the mist might clear again. She could feel

the darkness of the storm closing in around her, and to the south she could see thick sheets of rain making their way steadily over the Lower Lands. Ember knew she had to get going. Unfastening the telescope, she heaved it on to her shoulder again and made her way back across the platform, her mind racing as she wondered about what she had seen. A forest fire? Perhaps. There was lightning in the air and it might have struck a tree. But something about it ...

Ember made her way down the stairs and across the storage room, lifting the telescope back up onto the shelf. There was something about that fire which had seemed ... had seemed like it was *made*. Ember shook her head. She had only seen the fire for a moment. There was no sense in imagining that it was *made*.

She came back outside again, hurrying out onto the rooftop as lightning flashed in the dark clouds to the south. "A forest fire," she whispered, nodding her head as if to say there could be no doubt. The other side of the Great River was lost in cloud and mist and gloom now, as the storm closed in on the mountains. Ember shivered a little as the cold wind whistled around her, ruffling her fur and flapping through her clothes.

"You'll want to wear long pants today," Merridy had told her that morning.

Ember had agreed. "But I'm wearing my best dress, too. It is a big day for ... for Growly that is." She

had said that with a blush and wondered if Merridy noticed.

Merridy had looked at her quietly for a moment, a warm sparkle in her eyes. "Yes," she had said finally, giving Ember a wink, "long pants *and* a dress. That's just the thing for a day like this."

Now, Ember hurried down the steep, zig-zagging steps that cut across the cliffs just below Glider Leap. The steps were smooth and worn with age, but there were sturdy rails to hold onto, and if you didn't look down ... well, it wasn't *too* scary. Ember kept her eyes on her feet, and soon she reached the long platform leading from the cliffs to the gentler slopes on the side of the mountain. A narrow path cut along the ridge and then twisted its way on toward Haven.

When she reached the path, Ember took off at a run. She had traveled this way hundreds of times and knew every bump and turn all the way to the Lookout. The storm was almost here. Dark clouds and pounding rain were just ahead, howling up over the Lower Woods and almost to the Little Cliffs below Haven. Ember raced along the path, her boots crunching on the gravel and stones, her heartbeat pounding in her ears. The deafening howl of the wind surrounded her, growing stronger and stronger. Stinging splatters of rain were beginning to fall, and Ember wiped her eyes with her sleeve as she clambered down the slope. She could see the Lookout

and the streets of Haven just beyond. A bear was running down the street, just a tiny speck from up this high, holding his hat as he ran.

Ember pushed on, gasping for breath as she made her way downward. Raindrops were all around now. Little splatters in the dust at first, joining with other splatters until the path was slick and wet. Ember's dress was soon soaked and clung about her as she ran, slipping and sliding on the muddy stones. The wind screamed in her ears, and as she looked down toward Haven, she could see twisting swirls of rain washing over the rooftops. The flags and banners on the town hall whipped wildly in the wind, and as she watched, one of them flew off and away, swirling up into the mountains.

The wind was so strong now that Ember had to push against it, and the stinging rain made it almost impossible to see. She wiped the water out of her eyes again and peered through the dimness. Just a little further to the Lookout. Just a few more turns and ...

Whoosh! Ember felt her boots slip on the muddy path, and she was tumbling and sliding down the slick, grassy slope. She finally came to a stop with a jolting, sloshing thud in a large puddle at the bottom. Pounding rain and wind whipped along the path in twists and swirls. Ember clambered to her feet and leaned against the torrent as she made her way slowly toward a dim shape just ahead. The Lookout. It was not far now. It was

not home, but at least it would be shelter. Ember could feel her muscles aching. The race down the mountain had not been easy. And the tumble down the slope—ouch! The stone walls of the Lookout rose up into the darkness, disappearing into the rain and storm. Just a little further. Ember pushed against the wind, her fur matted and muddy and her face aching from the pelting rain.

“Ember!” The sound of a shout cut through the howling around her. A dark figure had just come out of the Lookout and was running toward her down the muddy path.