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A story with Snowy and Grimm interacting, maybe with Grimm showing Snowy how to master more advanced blessing abilities - Yajoovya

Grmm-Grmm wants to be excited about going back to Eden. At first they *were* excited. Claire told them first, before anyone else inside her head and out: cuddled up to them in the narrow abbey bed in Mercy and put her mouth to Grmm-Grmm's ear, whispering, "I-I think I'm r-r-ready to try. And I th-think you can show me the best way, can't you?"

Yes! Grmm-Grmm said it without words. They put their heels into Claire's belly and drummed them there. Scratched their claws down Claire's nightgown, pulling out threads while Claire giggled and told them to be careful, careful, shhh, shhhhh, and in their throat a purr swelled up like a sweet melon in summertime, pink and sweet inside. All sugar. All joy!

For forever Grmm-Grmm's just wanted to be with Clementine again. (Well, and they wanted to tear everyone who ever hurt her or thought of hurting her into little bitty pieces, not to mention piss on their shoes: the ultimate punishment!) Once upon a time Grmm-Grmm thought Claire was Clementine. Their scents and shapes are similar. Their voices, though Clementine was loud and big-stumbly with hers and Claire's quieter, not quite as stumbly, a sternness under the quiet reminiscent of sun-warmed rock. Implacable. Firm. Red behind the eyes, glowing—it's why Grmm-Grmm likes her lap so much, and listening to her talk.

But now that they're going back to Eden, Grmm-Grmm's scared. More than scared. Inside they're a jumble of nettles; they could throw up any second, they really could, looking through the gaps of Claire's horns out at the sprawling crowd all marching in the same direction, days eaten up from horizon to horizon and Magpie's wings flickering against the blue-blue-blue sky. More people come every day. Every night Claire sits at the map with Grmm-Grmm and a charcoal pencil and asks them, this way? That way? And Grmm-Grmm remembers, mostly, so they say yes or no, no, not that river, it's too soon, it smells wrong, and Claire will nod and make a correction. Sometimes they pause to help Shards. They do the thing Claire calls ring-o-ring-o-rosie, where most everyone holds hands and surrounds the Shard and takes a portion of its pain, giving back bits of themselves to either help it move on to whatever comes After (in Grmm-Grmm's head it's always capitalized) or help it change into something that hurts less, that can try again.

Claire says Grmm-Grmm shouldn't help when they do the rosie-thing. Claire says, "You've been hurt enough. Y-you don't need to hurt anymore; let others c-carry it." So Grmm-Grmm doesn't hold hands with everyone. Instead they go up to the creatures the Shards turn into, the Blessings, if they don't just get up and run off into the woods right away. They talk to them. They tell them what it's like to try again after feeling

mama papa please no please please no please no hurts hurting me hurting me stop hurting me

so endlessly hopeless.

Some Blessings don't remember what hurt them anymore. That's good. That usually means—or Claire theorizes it means—the Shards the Blessings used to be were so old and so used to agony that the source of it was lost in all the hurting. Maybe it makes it easier to start over. Maybe that's why those Blessings leap up from the cradle of help they've been given and go bounding off into the wilds on the instant, so eager for new life. They go as shining blueberry cobbler-colored deer or rabbits or raccoons. Porcupines with quills all stick-uppy-ouch. And cats! Always there are more cats, bright winking eyes that catch on Grmm-Grmm's in a shrewd shared delight and a mischief-memory tinged in red: the longing to use claws and teeth. Even if it's just to attack a defenseless nightgown.

Some do stay a while. Some wander away and come back and leave again. Only Grmm-Grmm and Snowy stay and stay and stay. Grmm-Grmm wanted—*wants*—to see Clementine again but they don't want to leave Claire, or Marie, or any of them, *any of them*, and maybe the newer Blessings don't remember what started all the hurt for them but Grmm-Grmm remembers how *they* started, and they remember how Clementine helped them, and they remember how everything was fine until it wasn't. How Eden fell into fire and ruin; how the flames ate up the world, and how in the end the hurting all came rushing back and it, it, it ate up Clementine.

She *screamed*. Grmm-Grmm remembers. Can't forget. Wants to. Can't can't can't. The screaming the screaming the *screaming*.

Lupo comes over one day when the crowd's all gathered outside and inside Thronum Mare, throngs on the walls, the sea steps, the beach. Some stupid-idiots are even playing in the water. Grmm-Grmm stays far away from them. When Lupo crunch-crunches up to them he smells like salt, like wet, like happy-sweat. He and the bigger man, Cog, were in the water until just a few minutes ago. So Lupo's a stupid-idiot but Grmm-Grmm likes him anyway, despite themselves.

"Wanna go play volleyball with us, Grimmy?" says Lupo. He sees Grmm-Grmm eyeing the littler waves just below the tideline. Ruffles Grmm-Grmm's hair between their ears, which is nice but also ew because salty, salty. "We can do it outside the water this time."

Part of Grmm-Grmm wants to. Maybe even a big part. But more of Grmm-Grmm is scared, too scared, with the bridge to Eden looming and a week's walk between them and where all the bad

happened. Volleyball? *Volleyball?! No*, Grmm-Grmm wants to curl up around the ball and bite-kick it. Wants to hear the air come out of it like *whieee*. Wants to go home, away from here. Claire's lap. Maman's fingers. Catharine singing and making pudding in the kitchen, except they can't have any of that: Claire and Maman and Catharine are going to Eden with everyone else. With Grmm-Grmm. Grmm-Grmm doesn't want to go to Eden anymore and they don't want to go anywhere else.

"Fuck volleyball," Grmm-Grmm says. It's a swear word. It's the kind of word Claire never uses; she tried once when they were alone in their tent and her mouth puckered up like she was chewing a lemon, lips all wrinkly. Marie likes to hiss them under her breath and Rosie belts them out when she's yelling at other people, and with Magpie swear words are music, note to note to sway to step, easy as... well, pie. Grmm-Grmm likes how they taste. Magpie and swear words. They like to chew on both. "Fuck. Fuck it. Fuck-fuck it. No."

Lupo snorts. "Okay then." In his free hand he tosses the volleyball up and down. Grmm-Grmm feels murderous toward it. "Doing all right, Grimmy? You're looking a little, I dunno... upset?" His voice goes high on the last word, making it a question.

The impulse to bite-kick Lupo's whole head surfaces. Grmm-Grmm doesn't act on it, but it's a close thing. "Go away."

Wavering a moment, Lupo looks like he's going to say something else. His sister calls him from down the beach, though, and Cog's waving, so he relents and hurries away again. Grmm-Grmm watches him go, sulking.

They build a sandcastle. It looks too much like the neighborhood around Welcome before that neighborhood went up in smoke; Grmm-Grmm obliterates it, feels bad because in a way it's like killing everyone who lived there all over again. Scrubbing their palms over their face to ward away tears, they end up crying anyway. Salt. Sand. *Yeurghhh*.

"Immy?"

Eyes smarting, Grmm-Grmm looks up. Snowy's there. Snowy's peering at them through wide golden eyes, their face all scrunchy concern, and Grmm-Grmm hackles up and wants to hiss and can't, throat too thick with tears to manage it.

"Immy?" Snowy says again. They're still a cat, the kind of cat that doesn't really talk, can only make sort-of-words. Grmm-Grmm hates it. Grmm-Grmm wants to punch Snowy but their hands are busy so they kick a foot at them instead, spraying sand.

"Don't mew at me! Either talk or don't, stop, stop being so—!" There isn't a good word. Sobbing into their cupped claws, Grmm-Grmm settles on, "Stop being so *stupid!*" and, with that admirable declaration delivered, drops their face into their hands.

You don't need to hurt anymore. Let others carry it. Claire said that. Only Grmm-Grmm's hurting right now, hurting a lot. It seems wrong to let anyone else try to carry it. Lupo's having fun playing his stupid-idiot game with his stupid-idiot friends, all of them splash-hopping in the shallows, shouting, shrieking that it's cold, making no move to get out. And everyone else is so *excited* to be going to Eden. If they're scared, probably they aren't scared like Grmm-Grmm, or if they *are*, what good would it do to tell them?

"Immy." Something touches Grmm-Grmm's forehead. Pets at it. "Immy, Immy. 'Ooka me."

Frowning, Grmm-Grmm lifts their head. Snowy isn't a cat anymore. Snowy's a blobby little cat-shaped kid sitting on the sand in front of Grmm-Grmm, with arms and legs and hands and everything, a kid face, a kid's mouth saying, "Immy. Immy, huh-uh, huh-uh." They lurch forward to pat at Grmm-Grmm's cheek. Silly-clumsy. They poke Grmm-Grmm in the eyeball, not used to fingers. "No, huh-uh," they keep saying. "Huh-uh, huh-uh." The finger that went in Grmm-Grmm's eyeball goes up Grmm-Grmm's right nostril.

"Agh! Stop touching me!" Snowy gets shoved away and comes right back on enthusiastic hands and knees. They rear up on those knees and patter their hands across Grmm-Grmm's face, their chest, beaming: their teeth are sharp. Snaggled, some. It's a little kid's smile. Aw.

Sniffing, Grmm-Grmm looks the rest of them over. Fluffy tail. Wide feet with pale, soft pads on the bottoms. Grmm-Grmm's fur is slick, longer where Snowy's is short and plush and dense, and Grmm-Grmm says, "You're pretty cute, I guess."

"Ute!"

"Yeah. What's my name?"

"Immy. Immy!" Snowy makes to pat Grmm-Grmm's cheek again and Grmm-Grmm stops them. Huh. Snowy has six fingers on one hand, five on the other. That's neat. *"Immy! It-it!"*

Grmm-Grmm's been around enough kids to translate toddler-speak. "That's right. You did it. Good job, kit-kit. Hands up, let me see." Up come Snowy's hands, all eleven fingers wiggling. They forgot the claws. A good thing, since one of those fingers went up Grmm-Grmm's nose, ew. "Okay, now the rest of you. Up! Can you get up?"

Rising to their feet, Grmm-Grmm watches Snowy try to do the same. It doesn't work. Snowy gets partway there before realizing their knees are backwards. They take a tumble first backwards, then reeling forward, and Grmm-Grmm catches them up in their arms and laughs and says, "No no no, like this! Like *this*."

For the new few minutes they help Snowy practice wobbling around on their new feet. They also say, "Sorry I yelled at you," and Snowy nibbles their cheek, lips at it, puts a big sloppy kiss on it. It's gross. It's also okay even though it's wet. "Claire's gonna shit her britches when she sees you."

"Shit-a-britches," Snowy says, with pride. First swear word. Grmm-Grmm grins. Hugs them. Tells them to say it again, and then again, until Snowy's shouting it loud enough to drown out the stupid-idiot volleyball game. They're thinking about Eden still, a little.

But they're also half-carrying Snowy across the beach toward the bridge, toward Claire, who's going to be so surprised and so happy and all sugar-joy-summertime-melon, so: it balances out.

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And that's all for now, darlings! Thank you so much to **Yajoovya** for the excellent prompt! <3

I will write several more of these next week, so please stay tuned, and I appreciate all of you so very much.

Love,
Ash