2428 Fairy Godmother  
  
"Auntie Aiko! Auntie Aiko! Let's fly!"  
  
"No. Walk on your two feet."  
  
"Don't wanna! Walking on two feet is stupid!"  
  
"What? How is it stupid?"  
  
"Auntie Aiko. four feet is the way to go. Don't you know?"  
  
"Yes, but wolfie, you are a big boy now."  
  
"Ling Ling is not a big boy. I am only six years old!"  
  
"I mean that you are too big to walk on all fours. The street is not wide enough."  
  
"Oh."  
  
"So."  
  
"So let's fly!"  
  
Aiko suppressed a smile.  
  
Little Ling had assumed his human form, so she was holding his hand as they walked along a tranquil street. It would have been a cute scene, in normal circumstances, but the two of them made for a strange pair - mainly because she was barely taller than the little boy.  
  
Aiko was very petite, while Little Ling had been abnormally large even as a toddler. Now that he was six whole years old, his height was no different from someone twice his age. It was a bit scary to imagine what the boy would look like when he grew up. The rascal would probably dwarf even his inordinately tall mom, which was a rare feat.  
  
Still, his height aside, Little Ling glanced like an adorable six-year-old now. He was a proper child, not the clumsy toddler he used to be. It was very strange to see him all grown up, forming full sentences, and talking like a little adult.  
  
Aiko had not even had to remind him to summon his clothes when he turned into a human! Her chest swelled with pride.  
  
'Ah, time flies.'  
  
And speaking of flying.  
  
She cleared her throat.  
  
"We can fly when we pass the gate, alright?"  
  
Little Ling smiled radiantly.  
  
"Deal!"  
  
He fell silent for a few seconds, and then said thoughtfully:  
  
"But, Auntie Aiko."  
  
"Yes?"  
  
"Ling Ling is six years old now."  
  
"Uh - huh."  
  
"I turned six last week."  
  
"So?"  
  
"My birthday was last week, too."  
  
"Makes sense. And?"  
  
"But Auntie did not come."  
  
"I am here now, aren't I?"  
  
"But! What about my birthday gift?"  
  
Aiko laughed.  
  
"Am I not enough of a gift?"  
  
Little Ling stared at her with wide eyеs, cornered and aghast.  
  
He frowned, thinking hard, and then smiled.  
  
"Auntie Aiko is a gift! But. you are not a birthday gift!"  
  
She grinned.  
  
"Alright, alright. Of course, I brought a gift. Who do you take me for, wolfie?"  
  
Finally, they reached the gate of Effie's estate.  
  
As the Steward of Bastion - and of the entire East - Effie was supposed to reside in the main keep of the great castle. However, she mentioned something about it being too stuffy and remained in her original place of residence, which was a large estate on what had once been the outskirts of the city.  
  
Now, her estate was considered to be in the very heart of it, of course, since the city had grown tremendously. In fact, the very fact that Raised by Wolves herself was residing here made the surrounding area one of the most prestigious and sought-after neighborhoods. The price of land had skyrocketed, and the huge swath of it Effie had claimed when the entire place was a desolate wasteland was suddenly exorbitantly precious.  
  
The wasteland was long gone, naturally. Now, there were only neat streets and green trees around, with tasteful manors hidden behind tall hedges and elegant fences. The people living here were all affluent and powerful, most of them of a high Rank and coming from either the old Legacy clans or from the newly risen Transcendent families.  
  
The gate to Effie's estate stood wide open - it had been left that way when Little Ling dashed outside in excitement after catching Aiko's scent. The gate itself was colossal enough to allow most Saints to pass through in their Transcendent forms, but Aiko still managed to close it behind them with the help of the Aspect.  
  
She did have to catch her breath after exerting herself to accomplish that feat, though.  
  
'Ah. should have just asked Ling Ling to close it.'  
  
That would have been the smart thing to do. but Aiko had her pride, as well! And while she was ready and willing to steal candy from children, if need be, asking a little boy for help was a bit too embarrassing.  
  
Instead, she floated Little Ling up and pulled the giggling boy behind her like a balloon while walking up the wide path.  
  
Effie's estate was truly huge - it was an entire park, really, more than spacious enough for her son to run around in his Transcendent form or for her to lie down and relax on the grass in hers. And that was not even counting the Beast Farm hidden in a dimensional Memory usually kept around her husband's neck.  
  
It took Aiko a few minutes to reach the house. Her stiletto heels were not the best fit for the gravel path, so she ended up flying, as well - the two of them rushed through the air, brushing against the treetops, before landing near Effie's porch.  
  
There, a tall and athletic figure was waiting for them, leaning on a wooden beam.  
  
Effie grinned.  
  
"Well, well, well. Hey there, Tinker Bell."  
  
Aiko glanced up and gave the vivacious huntress a dirty look.  
  
"Hey yourself, Gargantuanne. Look, I brought your Pantagruel."  
  
Effie looked down and then a little more down.  
  
"Why thank you, dear Thumbelina. You are so sweet."  
  
Aiko scoffed.  
  
"No need to thank me, Madam Gulliver. It's my pleasure!"  
  
Little Ling looked between them with a confused expression, then said hesitantly:  
  
"Mom. that's Auntie Aiko. Why are you calling her names?"  
  
Effie laughed, then stepped off the porch and bent down to hug Aiko.  
  
"She had no one to blame but herself! Who told you to be so tiny and so cute, huh, Aiko?"  
  
Instead of an answer, Aiko slammed her fist into Effie's ribs.  
  
"You're going to wrinkle my blouse! Let go, you huge menace!"  
  
Effie squeezed her a little tighter instead, though.  
  
"I am not huge. I am comely, curvaceous, and shapely. Why, jealous much?"  
  
Finally, Aiko was set free. Floating away a few steps, she straightened her blazer and gave Effie a glare.  
  
"As if!"  
  
Little Ling giggled.  
  
Looking at the two women - one extremely tall, the other extremely petite - he raised a hand and waved.  
  
"Auntie! Say bye to mom. Mom's gotta go."  
  
Aiko landed on the ground and blinked a couple of times.  
  
"Huh?"  
  
At that moment, Effie coughed.  
  
"Oh. That's right. I have to run."  
  
Aiko frowned in confusion.  
  
"No, wait a minute. What do you mean, you have to run? I've only just got here?"  
  
Effie backed away.  
  
"Well, you know how it is. I have to steward the East, and all that. They need me in the Castle. and Ling's Dad is off dealing with the city fields."  
  
'What?'  
  
Suddenly, a terrible suspicion hit Aiko. She was so agitated by it that her feet left the ground.  
  
"Did. did you lure me here. to be a babysitter?"  
  
Effie was already a few steps away.  
  
"Sorry!"  
  
Aiko was stunned.  
  
She was scandalized.  
  
"Hey, do you know who I am?"  
  
Turning away, Effie grinned.  
  
"Of course I know! You're the best! Love you, have fun!"  
  
A second later, she was gone, leaving Aiko alone with Little Ling.  
  
Aiko turned her head and looked at the boy in complete shock.  
  
Little Ling smiled and offered her an open palm.  
  
His voice wаs very serious.  
  
"Let's have fun, Auntie. Also. my gift? Where is it?"  
  
Aiko took a deep breath, then forced out a pale smile.  
  
'I'll. kill her, I think.'