

Prim and Tia in "Fancy Tale"

By: Wyland

At the first sight of the small hamlet, the gnomes realized the town was filled with a most extraordinary energy typically reserved for faires. Wherever the weary pair looked, they saw activity -- the sidewalks were filled with folks moving hither and thither or perusing vendors' wares, squeezing vegetables or haggling over cooked meats skewered on sticks. An unusual number of wagons were parked in the street, the workers busily loading or unloading crate after crate.

What stood out the most, however, was the inordinate number of fine carriages for the important folk. The two gnomes, fresh from the wilderness and wearing hides Tia had scraped together, felt distinctly out of place amidst such a collection of "fine folk" going about their business.

"What have we stumbled into?" Tia asked, stepping aside as a messenger in fancy garb and a bubble of self-importance hustled by.

"I am not entirely certain," Prim answered as she adjusted her hair flame. Tia smirked as her companion was clearly self-conscious in her skimpy hides and minimal makeup when surrounded by so much high society.

The warrior snagged the arm of a passing boy. "Where's the store, lad?" she inquired. He directed her, and she tossed him a coin.

"Give me your skins," Tia told Prim.

"I have been wanting you to take these for weeks!" Prim said cheerfully, dumping the few she carried onto Tia's arms and stretching.

"Right, right. But now we'll have a little coin for once. Without bunny girl outfits." Her face twisted in irritation at the thought as she set off to sell their catch.

They walked toward the general store, passing more street vendors on their way over. "Buy new boots, little miss?" one called out to Tia. "You look like you could use a pair with some quality to them," he continued with a wink.

The warrior, who had made both gnomes' footwear herself, glared at the man, who wilted and turned away. Prim giggled but said nothing lest she offend her proud friend. After all, she enjoyed wearing what Tia created.

Another vendor they passed by offered pastries. "A sweet treat for a sweet gnome?" the lady suggested. Both gnomes declined, but Prim noticed a small group of children standing back and looking longingly at the sweets and frowned.

They arrived at the store. "You stay out here," Tia growled.

"Whatever for?" Prim asked, offended.

"Because you'll sweet-talk the owner into trading all this for a bolt of nice cloth you've no hope of sewing into anything useful, which you'll then trade to someone else for a hair pin, which you'll

promptly lose to the next group of goblins we come across."

Prim giggled. "Fair enough, O Shrewd Trader." She melodramatically bowed Tia into the store. The warrior walked straight and erect like one of the important folk, grinning as she entered the store.

A few minutes later, she stepped outside, her coin pouch significantly heavier, to find Prim gone. She heard fiddling, however, and headed toward the music. She found her companion performing for the group of children they had passed earlier. She was capering about, playing and singing a merry tune.

Tia noticed the kids each had a pastry and were delightfully eating as they laughed and cheered the bard. She sighed, but smiled as she shook her head. She walked over to the vendor.

"How much did she promise?" she asked, nodding her head at Prim.

Settling the account, her purse now a bit lighter, she joined the crowd forming to watch the performance.

"Fascinating lady," a voice near her said. She turned to see a tall man in an elegant suit. His bearing let her know immediately this was a man used to the higher society, even without the suit. His golden hair was impeccably combed, not a hair out of place. His green eyes were watching her intently; his lips curled in a gentle smile. "You're active friend, I mean," he said with a slight nod toward Prim.

Tia let out a small laugh. "'Active' is one way to describe her, yes," she answered, figuring there was no harm agreeing with the obvious -- Prim was currently hopping about on a hitching post, pretending clumsiness while somehow miraculously never losing balance.

"Ah, so I was correct in my assessment of your friendship," he said. "Excellent. Permit me to introduce myself. My name is Alastair Tillman, servant to the Ponsonby family."

"Tia Wildleaf," she answered with a simple nod.

He smiled. Tia thought it might be an indulgence of her refusal to play by his class rules. He continued. "I am interested in your friend's talents. No, no, nothing so uncouth as that!" he quickly added, raising a hand palm toward her to forestall her, having seen her expression darken. "I am in need of an opening act and a Master -- or Mistress," he added with another polite bow, "of Ceremonies."

Tia cocked an eyebrow, then thrust a thumb toward Prim, who was now running around pretending her pants were on fire, much to the delight of the children. "She's the entertainer. I'm just the muscle."

"Ah, yes," he agreed, "but you are -- forgive me for being so forward -- both beautiful and exotic. I am certain our audience would be thrilled to meet you."

Tia shrugged off the flattery. "As I said, you'd need to talk to Prim," she said, annoyed to have to repeat herself. "Feel free to hang around until she's finished with her current performance."

Alastair smiled and bowed again. "Very well."

The two waited several minutes as Prim continued her performance for the kids. Finally, she

escaped her audience and skipped over to Tia, panting from her exertions.

"Hello again, Hot-Tits!" She said brightly. "Get your business taken care of? Who is this fine gentleman?"

Alastair looked confused. "Hot-Tits'?" he asked politely.

Tia rolled her eyes. "Prim, this is Alastair Tillman. Alastair, Prim. He has a 'proposition' for you."

"For you both, actually," Alastair said as he bowed to Prim, who curtsied in return.

"Very well," Prim replied. "What has the dashing Alastair Tillman have in mind for us?"

"Miss...?"

"Primiphi Piltrum Stannumshard."

Alastair nodded politely. "Miss Stannumshard, I could not help but notice you are quite the performer. I am in need of one with your skills. I am also in need of an emcee, and your friend Miss Wildleaf has the proper bearing."

"Sounds interesting," Prim said. "What is it for?"

"My master is part of an organization that holds an annual meeting, where they show off their ... techniques," he said somewhat evasively. "Unfortunately, due to a miscommunication, we are short of help. I was tasked to find it."

"And then you happened to come across us," Tia said.

"Quite so, Miss."

"Good Master," Prim continued, "as you may have noticed, we do not have the means to dress as one would naturally be expected for a performance--"

"We're a filthy mess with common clothes," Tia interrupted. Prim rolled her eyes.

Alastair smiled. "That is not a problem, ladies. I can provide for proper lodging and attire in addition to a generous fee. After all, I am in a bit of a bind."

"Great! When do we start?" Prim asked brightly.

An hour later, the gnomes walked into the fancy bathing hall. They were naked, holding their towels and soaps. Prim wasted no time hopping into the warm water, sighing. "Come on in, Hot-Tits!"

Tia sighed and joined her friend in a more dignified manner. Prim laughed and splashed her.

"Was that necessary?" Tia asked wiping water from her face.

"Absolutely," the redhead replied.

"I dunno, Prim, seems we should act with a bit more ..."

"Enthusiasm? Great idea!" And Prim promptly leapt at Tia, wrapping her arms around her. She whispered into the now-blushing warrior's ear, "this would be the perfect place to get my prize, you know." Once again, she slipped a hand down low.

And once again, Tia found herself unable to react. While she had expected Prim's playfulness again, the immediacy -- before they had even lathered up -- caught her entirely off-guard. Now she felt her companion's warmth and the softness of her skin so close to her, heard the desire in her voice....

Tia's foot slipped, and she tumbled under the water. She surfaced, sputtering, to hear Prim giggling.

"Not exactly the reaction I was going for," the bard said, reaching down to help her up. "I suppose I swept you off--"

"Stop it," Tia grumbled, prompting another giggle. "No bad jokes."

"I can't help myself, Hot-Tits." She leaned in close again. "You just have that effect on me."

But Tia had recovered herself and gently pushed Prim away. The bard gave a look of longing before resuming bathing, making no further attempts at getting close.

The next day, having enjoyed a stay in a luxurious room, the pair found themselves being fitted with outfits for their performance. While Prim enjoyed going back and forth with the seamstress, perfecting her high-class dress, Tia glared at anyone approaching her.

"I'm not wearing that," she growled at the assistant, who was holding a particularly frilly affair.

Prim rolled her eyes. "Come on, Hot-Tits, it's just the one night."

"I don't care. I ain't putting that on."

"But you simply must wear a dress," Alastair said from where he stood several feet away.

"At least give it a try," Prim coaxed.

Tia merely glared at Prim. "Oh, very well," the bard said with a sigh. "Fortunately, I have a plan B."

An hour later, Tia stood in front of a mirror, wearing a tuxedo. Prim and Alastair flanked her. Behind them, the tailor stood looking rather befuddled to be fitting a lady, but he had managed quite the job in so short a manner.

"If I might say, madame looks quite distinguished," he said politely.

"I agree," Alastair said. "I admit I had low expectations of this plan B of Miss Stannumshard's."

"That's where you messed up," Prim said. "My plans are always excellent ones."

Tia side-eyed him but said nothing.

Prim giggled, then brushed Tia's shoulders. "You are quite fetching, Hot-Tits," she said softly.

"It's ruddy uncomfortable," Tia complained.

"That means it looks good!"

"The gloves are silly."

"They look distinguished, and they will help the audience see when you guide them along," Alastair said, showing her his own.

Tia rolled her shoulders. "The sleeves are restrictive," she griped.

"Of course they are," Prim said, brushing the warrior's sides, now. "But, you don't need to go crazy with gesticulations. Just wave the crowd to the next act."

Tia grunted, then reached up and rubbed her upper arm. Then, before anyone could say anything, she ripped the sleeve from the shoulder. Prim flinched to see such a thing of excellent workmanship marred. Alastair's mouth dropped open. The tailor, meanwhile, whimpered, nearly fainting, as she pulled the sleeve off her arm. She then reached to the other sleeve, and now the tailor DID faint, dropping over as she pulled the second sleeve off.

She held up both sleeves, looked right at Prim, and dropped them pointedly. "There. Fixed."

Prim giggled and examined the torn jacket. "Well, that's one way to fit it, I suppose," she admitted. With a touch of magic, she reduced the number and length of loose threads at the tear. "I'll leave a few, though," she said as she worked. "I rather think you look better with them."

"I rather agree," Tia said, mimicking her tone. They both laughed.

"Well, that's both of us," Prim told Alastair. "We're ready as ever. Might as well grab a bite, then head over to the theater."

He recovered himself. "Very well. You two may go. I shall settle the account and attend to our proprietor, here," he said, nodding toward the tailor.

They set off, Tia holding a hand up to look at her glove and complain, Prim swatting it back down.

At the theater, music filled the air, evoking love of beauty, the pursuit of knowledge, and not just a touch of elitist snobbery. The crowd settled into their seats, quieting down to enjoy the bonus of an opening act. Onstage, Prim stood alone at center, her fingers dancing on the neck of her fiddle, her bow arm moving with a mesmerizing mixture of grace and frenzy. For several minutes, she captivated the audience, her music taking them to worlds heretofore unimagined. Spellbound, they could do nothing, held in her power.

At last she finished, holding still for the last note to go completely silent. Prim lowered her fiddle and curtsied to the politely-applauding audience, her elegant dress flowing about her.

"Thank you for coming this evening, ladies and gentlemen," she addressed the crowd. "As you are aware, this year we are taking a break from our regular format. Tonight, we are having our first Intellectual Hour." A very slight, hardly-perceptible tug at the corner of her mouth gave a hint at her frustration at losing the debate for naming this portion of the show.

"Rather than the usual shenanigans, which I am certain are very entertaining, we have a guest

commentary on the state of Rithian trade policy in the brooms and cauldrons sector--"

"Prim!" Tia barked from behind the curtains at the side of the stage.

"Oh, right," Prim changed course smoothly. "That petition as a topic was rejected. My apologies, ladies and gentleman. Tonight's topic is in regards to the recent blight on pumpkins in the--"

"Prim!" Tia cried again. "Would you be serious?"

"Pumpkins are a serious business, Hot-Tits," Prim admonished.

"And they are not the topic tonight!" Tia retorted.

Prim gave an exaggerated sigh. "Very well. The topic of sable feline populations will no doubt keep everyone riveted--"

"Try again!" Tia called out, stepping onto the stage.

Prim threw her hands up. "Fine, fine. I'll let our special guest tell everyone. Ladies and gentleman, I am honored to present to you a magician who needs no introduction, whose deeds are whispered far and wide in the coven community--"

"Prim!" Tia cried in exasperation.

"--A person of unsurpassed odoriferous maleficence the likes of which our world has never had the magnificent misfortune to have perceived via olfactory means before..." she paused as the back curtain raised, revealing the guest seated behind a desk. "Deathbreath!"

"NYARRGH!" the guest complained.

"Would you just introduce her properly?" Tia shouted again, finally walking over to grab the bard's ear and start dragging her off-stage.

"Ow, ow, watch the hair! Alright, she prefers Bonewitch!" Prim told the crowd as she was hauled off.

"NYARRGH," Bonewitch huffed.

Backstage, Tia shoved Prim, who was gleefully giggling, into a remarkably comfortable chair and sat in a second one.

"Relax, Hot-Tits!" Prim said gaily, keeping her voice discreetly low as Bonewitch continued her commentary. ("NYARRGH.")

"Do you ever take anything serious?" Tia asked.

"Oh, the crowd loved it," Prim said, idly waving a hand dismissively. She picked up a kettle on a table in front of the pair. "Tea?" she asked, pouring a cup.

"Not a fan, but they seem to have nothing stronger," Tia said, taking a biscuit. She noticed Bonewitch's voice grow in intensity. "What do you suppose she's off about now, anyway?" she asked.

"The damsel shortage in Rith," Prim said.

Tia cocked an eyebrow. "Really? You can understand that?" She took her cup and had a noisy gulp.

"Of course!" Prim said, delicately sipping her own tea.

"All I hear is 'NYARRGH'--hey, what's so funny?"

For Prim had let out a giggle. "Sorry, Hit-Tits. You just said 'my armpits smell of elderberries.'"

Tia blushed, then gave Prim a skeptical look. "You're having me on again," she said, shaking her head and draining her cup.

Prim grinned, then turned to the stage. "Deathbreath is really getting into it," she noted.

Tia looked up. Bonewitch had magically moved the desk aside and was ranting ("NYARRGH") and gesticulating. "Hrm, if I didn't know better, I'd say--"

"--She's casting a spell," Prim finished. Both gnomes stood, concerned.

"That wasn't in the program," Tia said.

On stage, the floor opened up, and a huge cauldron rose into view. Steams and smokes billowed out of it in eerie colors.

"Nor was that," Prim said.

"Let's get out of here," Tia suggested.

"NYARRGH!!" Bonewitch cried, arms outstretched toward the gnomes. Magical ropes, glowing violet, burst from her hands and ensnared the pair.

"This DEFINITELY was not in the program," Tia complained. "Hey!" she cried out at one as her clothes were dissolved by the magics. The gnomes were pulled face to face, the ropes winding around them, holding them together. The ropes pulled the gnomes out onto stage next to the cauldron.

"Well, I must admit, this is an exciting change," Prim said, grinning as their breasts rubbed against one another.

"Stop enjoying it," Tia growled.

"Can you blame me, Hot-Tits?"

"Seeing as we've been tied up ... yet again ... and I don't like the looks of that cauldron, yes."

"NYARRGH," Bonewitch said.

"Oh, would you can it?" Tia snarled. "This was supposed to be a relaxing, non-smutty pass through a town. For once, I wasn't going to have to get naked or put on some bunny girl costume or mud wrestle--"

"NYARRGH," Bonewitch sighed.

"Yeah, she gets that way when things don't the way she imagines they should," Prim agreed with her.

"NYARRGH."

Bonewitch and Prim laughed. "What's so funny?" Tia demanded.

"NYARRGH."

"I told you to can it!" Tia yelled. She began struggling furiously. "I am so ruddy sick of--"

"Oh, Hot-Tits, I'll never make an escape artist out of you, will I?" Prim sighed, rolling her eyes.

"Don't start with me, Prim."

"Always with the brute strength. While I am thoroughly enjoying how you squirm against me, you are going about it all wrong."

"NYARRGH," Bonewitch agreed.

Tia looked away with a huff. "Umm, what happened to the audience?"

Prim followed her gaze. The crowd was still in their seats but were unmoving. Her eyes narrowed as she examined them. "Some sort of spell," she said. "See the faint aura?"

"No, I just see red," Tia snapped. Prim rolled her eyes.

"NYARRGH?"

"Usually."

Tia glared at Prim, now. "Would you two stop talking about me behind my back."

Prim twisted back and forth, her breasts rubbing Tia's. "But I am so clearly in front of you, Hot-Tits."

"YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN."

Bonewitch, meanwhile, had been tossing various items into the cauldron as the gnomes bickered. Apparently finished, she ordered the magicked ropes to lift the gnomes over it.

"Well, have you gotten loose, escape artist?" Tia asked.

"Funny you should ask," Prim said.

"You have?" Tia asked, stunned.

"No. It's funny because these ropes are really, really good at holding me. It is as if they are alive."

"NYARRGH."

"Eww," Prim wrinkled her nose.

"I take it I don't want to know?" Tia suggested.

"I think not," Prim nodded. "But, it does present a bit of a problem."

"You can't escape."

"I can't escape."

"Any bright ideas?" Tia asked.

Prim grinned with that astounding ability to be both sheepish and utterly shameless. "Perhaps you could brute-force your way--"

Tia just glared, unimpressed, deciding words would simply fail to convey the depths of her feelings.

"NYARRGH."

"What do you mean?" Prim asked, suddenly concerned.

"NYARRGH."

Prim looked down, leading Tia to follow suit. "What in the name of wonder is that?" she cried.

Below them, the cauldron's contents had risen up as a black mass with purple lightning dancing about it. The mass was pulsating and shifting, trying to form itself into a sphere. A wild wind picked up, swirling around the stage and over the audience. The lightning crackled and spread about the stage.

"Well, that's rather a dramatic way to go about things," Prim called out to Bonewitch over the wind.

"NYARRGH," Bonewitch declared.

Prim gasped, eyes wide. "An opening to ..." she began but fell silent.

"To...?" Tia prompted.

Prim shook her head. "I can't say it," she said, struggling furiously, now. "We do NOT want to go there."

"I had a hunch," Tia agreed. "Why is she wanting to send us there?"

"Sacrifice, open a portal for others, summon something horrible," Prim said, still tugging at the ropes. "Who really cares? It's the blackest, darkest dimension there is. All the good we know -- hope, beauty, love -- it's the opposite. It's just misery and despair and hate. Hatred of goodness, hatred of everything, hatred even of itself."

"And she's going to drop us in?" Tia asked, stunned. Prim nodded, still struggling frantically. "I'm going to kill that Alastair," Tia declared.

"I don't think that would do us any good, Hot-Tits..."

"It'd make me feel better."

Prim let out a nervous laugh. "Always so determined--"

She was interrupted by a flash of darkness. They both looked down. The blackness below them had managed to shape itself into a sphere at last. Suddenly, despair and hopelessness filled their minds, the power of the darkness blanketing their emotions.

"We're out of time," Prim said, tugging fruitlessly one more time on the ropes.

Tia looked at Prim. "You said it's the opposite of lo--," she faltered, "--of those things."

"Yes, Hot-Tits," Prim sadly said, the despair of the sphere affecting her. "No joy, hope, or anything."

"What happens if--?" A blast of thunder interrupted Tia.

"NYARRGH," Bonewitch declared.

The gnomes' eyes met.

"NYARRGH."

At Bonewitch's command, the ropes began lowering the gnomes.

And then Prim and Tia's lips met.

"NYARRGH!" Bonewitch cried angrily, then fearfully as the sphere lost its shape, writhing as if in agony. The lightning shot out of control, bouncing and arcing throughout the theater. The wind somehow became wilder, then blew away from the blackness, which grew for a moment before splitting apart.

There was a massive explosion of force, destroying the stage and sending the gnomes flying. They held onto each other, the ropes no longer confining them, as they landed and rolled. The crowd, broken of their spell, screamed in terror, though the gnomes could not see them in the sudden, total darkness blasting from Bonewitch's creation.

Moments, or minutes, or even hours later, Tia became aware of light again. She was not certain she had even been conscious. She looked down and realized she was lying protectively over Prim, as if to shield her from debris.

"You okay?" she asked, rolling off.

Prim smiled. "Quite, thanks to you."

"Me?" Tia asked as Prim sat up.

"A fine idea you had, kissing me."

Tia blushed. "You kissed me, if I recall."

The bard grinned. "Either way, it worked. The spell could not handle ..." she trailed off.

Tia, blushing even more furiously, simply said, "hope."

Prim smiled indulgently, then worked on fixing her hair flame. "Hope, then. Years ago, I taught myself to always have hope. For a moment, I feared it had left me."

"I doubt anyone would blame you, about to be dropped into wherever it was we were headed," Tia said, fairly.

"Regardless," Prim continued softly, "thank you. For my hope."

Tia wondered if there was a double meaning in Prim's words. "Well, it beat that Bonewitch's spell, at least," she said, trying to change the subject. "Where is that old hag, anyway?"

The pair looked around. The audience was knocked out, fainted from the terror and the blast. The backstage area was open, everyone there unconscious, as well. On what was left of the stage, several beams had fallen over. The gnomes discovered Bonewitch bent over one, her derrier up in a most unladylike manner.

Tia laughed uproariously. Prim giggled. "So, our foe prepares for the final encounter," she said.

Bonewitch stirred. "Nyarrgh..." She turned and saw the gnomes.

"Weren't you going to send us to -- where was it, Prim?" Tia asked, cracking her knuckles.

"The name doesn't matter," Prim said.

"Right," Tia agreed, her anger growing. "What's in a name? We all know what it would have done to us. And that's just one on the tally," she continued, her face darkening, menace building in her voice. "I had to deal with that frilly Alastair. I had to get all dressed up for this, and you ruined it. You then tied and stripped us in front of everybody." Bonewitch, unsettled, tried to scoot back but bumped against the beam she had been on.

"And then," the warrior continued, angrier still, "you had the nerve to use us in your spell? To send Prim to that place of darkness? YOU BITCH!" she screamed this last, and a dim aura of fire appeared around her, an inch of flame running along her body.

"The Gift of the Rage," Prim thought, recognizing it.

Bonewitch, clearly also recognizing the flames and her own danger, wailed out another "NYARRGH!" and turned aside to flee.

"Oh, no you don't!" Tia shouted. She dashed forward and leapt at Bonewitch, bringing her fists down on her foe before she had taken two paces. The witch cried out as she was knocked to the floor, a plank cracking.

Tia kicked her in the stomach, sending her flying back to crash against the wall, coughing. The

warrior stood, glaring angrily at the witch, then ran at her.

She had given her experienced foe a moment too long to recover. As Tia approached, she disappeared, her hat falling to the floor where she had been, a faint "NYARRGH" echoing in the otherwise-silent stage.

Tia lifted the hat, found it empty, and angrily tossed it aside. She then jumped and turned as hands touched her shoulders.

"It's me, Hot-Tits," Prim said gently.

Tia sighed. "Yeah, who else is here?" she asked. "Sorry, I thought I had her."

"She's a slippery one," Prim said, noticing Tia's aura had faded. She doubted her friend had even known she had it.

And then Prim hugged her. "Gah, really? Now?" Tia asked.

"No, nothing like that," Prim said gently. "I just wanted to thank you, my brave warrior, for what you said."

Tia blushed. "Umm, what I said?"

Prim giggled and let her go. "Be that way, Hot-Tits, if you prefer."

Tia wracked her brains trying to remember what she had said. The details were hazy, lost in her rage -- she could have said anything. She decided to take Prim's lifeline and move on.

"Well... what now?" she wondered aloud.

"First thing's first," Prim said cheerfully. She grabbed a patron's jacket and put it on. Tia followed suit, and the pair then worked their way backstage. Prim gathered her fiddle case and slung it over her shoulder. Looking around, they found Alastair still unconscious. Prim rifled in his vest and removed his coin purse.

Tia chuckled. "This kind of feels like theft."

"Nonsense, Hot-Tits. It's merely payment for our services."

"What services?" Alastair gasped, having woken up.

"Well, we did save everyone's life," Tia said. "I should expect a little gratitude."

Alastair scoffed. "Gratitude? For wrecking our theater? I should have known better than to trust low-class filth like you! I'll see you never perform anywhere again, you third-rate--"

Prim smacked him on the head with the coin purse, and he slumped back over. "Third-rate?" she huffed indignantly. "Low-class?"

She turned and gracefully walked out, head held high as though she were royalty. Tia, suddenly feeling a bit self-conscious about her own stomping gait, followed. She paused at the entrance to the main hall and looked back at the wreck of the stage.

"When you put on a show, Prim ..." she softly said with a smile. She turned and followed her friend outside.