

Prim and Tia in "Hue and Cry Tale"

Being the Second Part of Gnomish Reflections

By: Wyland

The gnomes lay there, panting, staring at the ceiling above. Meredith's disconcerted face came into view, looking down with concern. "Umm, are you two all right?"

Prim held up the tickets again, trembling.

"Okay, then, let me just check these out," Meredith said, taking their tickets. She shook her head and left their view.

"Which ... of us ... won, anyway?" Tia asked.

"I ... most certainly ... did," Prim said.

"Not likely. I'm the one who got us in here."

"And I am eternally grateful you carried me to my most glorious victory."

"Glorious' ... Yes, that definitely describes us right now," Tia said.

"Perfectly," Prim agreed.

The gnomes burst into laughter.

In the middle of their mirth, a rather large bust moved into view above them. A thin-strapped red gown struggled mightily to contain the enormity of the cleavage. A gnomish face looked down on them from between the hefty mounds, long blonde hair cascading down around it.

"My, my," the newcomer said, raising her eyebrow. "Could it possibly be little Primmy?" She took a slow lick at a small lollipop in her hand.

Prim let out an audible sigh. "Oh, hello, up there. Imagine coming across you after all these years in a place as wondrous and beautiful as this," Prim said. Tia caught a bit of sullenness in her friend's voice and looked over, startled. "Quite the surprise, really."

"A good surprise, little Primmy?" the blonde asked, taking another lick.

"A surprise," Prim answered flatly.

The other gnome cocked an eyebrow. "Little Primmy with her cute little inside jokes, as always."

"And you are quite the same, Ta – "

"Välstånna," the blonde smoothly said, holding a hand out toward Tia. "Välstånna Vindsäck. Daughter of Bedragare Vindsäck, Esquire. I don't believe we've met."

Tia gently brushed her hand away and stood. As she did, Välstånna straightened and threw her hair back with her hand. The action caused no small amount of bobbing...

"Tia Wildleaf," the warrior said simply as Prim got to her own feet beside her.

"Wildleaf," Välstånna said with a false laugh. "What a charming name."

Now she was on the newcomer's level, Tia took a moment to examine her. Vålstånna stood taller than either Tia or Prim, but not by much. Her hair flowed down to her waist, and she wore a skimpy gown that accented her feminine curves. Not that it was possible to miss her curves, as she was quite well-endowed on that score. Tia had never before seen any gnome with such a bust – and would imagine surprisingly few humans matched her.

“‘Charming’ is not the term my family prefers,” Tia said coolly.

“I’d imagine not,” Vålstånna said, giving another false laugh. She turned and reached out to pluck a twig from Prim’s hair. “Dear, dear, such terrible grooming, even by your questionable standards.” Tia noticed Prim’s jaw clench. “Has our little Primmy fallen on hard times? Is that why you are here? Seeking another job along with your serious friend here? You always were a fair hand at cleaning the shelves, I must admit. Then again,” she playfully covered her smile, “I wouldn’t know about such menial things, would I?”

Meredith bustled over, two men in uniforms following. “Hello, Miss Vindsäck,” she said, curtsying. “Welcome back to the Phantasio Majestie.”

The men bowed, though their eyes clearly tracked the well-endowed gnome. Vålstånna gave a smug smile and licked her lollipop again.

“Err, your room, of course, is waiting for you, Miss Vindsäck,” Meredith continued, slightly flustered by her male coworkers’ behavior. “Or would you prefer to refresh yourself with tea and crumpets in the reading room?”

“Yes, I shall take refreshment, Mary dear,” Vålstånna said. “Do bring it to my room.” She winked to the men and popped the lollipop into her mouth as she walked past Prim and Tia, her hips swaying and her bosom bouncing.

“Yes, madam,” Meredith said. The men recovered themselves and set about gathering up Vålstånna’s luggage, which apparently was still outside. Meanwhile, Meredith left to see about her newest guest’s tea.

Prim and Tia stood alone. “Wonderful hospitality,” Tia remarked.

“Yes,” Prim said dully, running her hands through her hair and plucking out a bit of vine.

“Come on, no sense waiting on that lot,” Tia said, striding toward a door. “They’ll have already forgotten us – if they even noticed us at all, what with that piece of work around,” she waved a hand in the direction Vålstånna had left. “We need to wash up, anyhow.”

“Do you know where the bathing hall is?” Prim asked, following. Tia scoffed.

“I haven’t the foggiest, of course,” she answered. “I reckon we’ll either follow the hoity-toity lot to it or find someone who works here and hasn’t got his mind between someone’s ...” she hesitated, looking at her friend in concern.

Prim giggled. “She does have a certain effect on the weak-minded,” she said.

Tia laughed, glad to see her friend’s cheer returning. “Come on, then.”

After a few seconds of walking, Prim frowned. “If anyone sees us in this less-than-stellar state, they will cause quite the fuss,” she noted.

“Who cares,” Tia said dismissively. “Let them fuss. Or we could be sneaky,” she added, seeing Prim’s growing worry, “You’re good at that stuff.”

"I do have a knack for avoiding trouble," Prim agreed, provoking a snort of laughter from Tia. Prim waved her hand warningly, and they slipped behind a curtain as a trio of guests walked by. After the others passed, they continued their search. "It just feels so wrong to have finally arrived at the Phantasio Majestie just to have to skulk around," Prim said.

"Would you rather wait until they deigned to help us back there?"

"No," Prim admitted. "Besides," she said, perking up and smiling, "this little game with my Hot-Tits at my side is rather fun."

"That's the spirit!" Tia said, grinning.

The two sneaked through the halls, dashing into doorways or ducking behind ornate columns to avoid more guests. In one case, they dove under a serving cart in the nick of time, which was most fortunate, as the marchioness walking by would have created an international incident had she seen the disheveled gnomes at her favorite resort.

Finally, they spotted a servant walking out of a room with several towels. Looking in, they saw it was a very large supply room. Among the various cleaning supplies and selection of towels and trays, they located bathing materials such as soaps and brushes neatly organized in small buckets, as well as several garments in fancy bags hanging from racks. They noticed the bags were ordered not just by size, but by the color of trim.

"Let us stash our possessions in a corner over there," Prim said. "We would draw attention wearing these packs into the baths. Not to mention your weapons are certain to stand out."

"I suppose the odds are we won't be attacked by anything a good punch can't take care of in this fancy-schmancy place," Tia agreed, unbuckling her weapons belt.

While Prim hid their equipment, Tia walked to the rack and took one that seemed her size with red trim. She unfastened the top button and peered in. "Fancy gowns," she said. Replacing it, she chose another with blue trim. She looked at it with disgust. "Thin robes with tons of fluffy ... bits. Who would wear such a thing?"

"Oh, it is for relaxing in before bed!" Prim said brightly. "They do think of everything here."

"Weird," Tia said, replacing it. "Why would anyone need such a silly thing to sleep?" She tried a bag with yellow trim. "Bathing suits," she said.

"Excellent!" Prim replied. "We can go to the hot springs they have after we clean up!"

Tia plucked another off yellow-trim off the rack and threw it to Prim, who had grabbed a bucket for each of them.

"Wait, why are you picking out our outfits?" Prim demanded.

"What are you talking about?" Tia asked.

"The terms of our contest!" Prim reminded her. "The winner was to pick our outfits, and the loser was to serve the winner's drinks!"

"Seriously? You care about that *now*?"

"Are you welching?" Prim asked with a playful grin.

Tia frowned. "I never welch. You know that."

"Naturally," Prim said, eyeing Tia's facial tattoos. "And I have used that fact to my advantage before."

“And likely will again,” Tia added, rolling her eyes. “But is this really the time to fuss about it?”

“As we are holding outfits only you have seen – ”

“I only looked at the one!”

“And which you have distributed, it strikes me you are most incorrectly laying claim to victory!” Prim finished, pouting.

Tia laughed. “We'll call it a draw. You put on whatever is in there, and I'll serve the drinks, okay?”

Prim made a dramatic show of putting her hand to her chin in thought. “I suppose that is a suitable arrangement,” she said. “It is, after all, only right for the true victor to be gracious and accept an offered compromise after such a thrilling finish to our competition.”

“Then I graciously accept as the true victor,” Tia quickly said.

Prim playfully smacked her shoulder, and the pair laughed. They slipped out of the room with their loot. As Tia led the way, she heard a strange sound behind her. Turning, she found Prim trembling with barely-suppressed excitement. Her soap and brush rattled in her bucket.

“Seriously?” Tia asked again. “What is it this time?”

“I am about to bathe in the Phantasio Majestic, Hot-Tits!” Prim said, eyes shining. “How can I be anything but exhilarated, overjoyed, elated – ”

“Gotcha,” Tia said, putting a finger over her friend's lips. “Now, try and focus. Unless you *want* to cause a scene. Wait, you always want that. How about you focus on keeping quiet, anyway? With a week here, you'll have plenty of time for the ... other activities.”

Prim, smiling, nodded. Tia turned back, and they continued down the hallways, still hiding. The warrior found it rather odd to be skulking about like burglars while at a resort. She thought about Vålstånna and how the three servants had cared for the big-busted gnome while ignoring the two of them and scowled. *Prim is right: We really are intruders here, she thought. Even with the tickets. Might as well play the part. And if it fusses the high-falutin resort folks, I'm all for it.*

She glanced back at Prim, whose face was still lit up with a childish glee. The bard's eyes took in every fancy item – the curtains, the rugs, the art on the walls, the busts on pedestals, even the tiles on the ceiling. Tia realized she had not even noticed the swank décor, then shrugged.

*That's Prim's thing, anyway. I'm just along for the ride.*

After several minutes more of sneaking about, they finally located the bathing hall. “Oh, it is so ornate! Even beyond my wildest imaginings!” Prim said. She practically danced on the spot, her bucket's contents rattling once again.

The hall was huge and magnificent, far beyond what the warrior had ever encountered. Tia barely had time to take anything in when Prim dashed by her. “Come along, Hot-Tits!” she called. “Let us finally relax in the comfort we have earned and deserve!”

Tia followed, shaking her head with a smile. There were no other guests in the hall, as everyone else was already out and about enjoying the many other luxuries the resort offered. They selected a cubicle to change in and hung their ill-gotten swimsuits on a hook inside.

“Oh, which soap to use first?” Prim debated, juggling four bars in the air. “They each smell simply divine.”

“Well, I see no reason to make it complicated,” Tia said. She grabbed one from her bucket at random and tossed it into the group Prim was juggling. The bard simply added it to the mix in the air. Tia lobbed a second bar, then a third. She held up her last bar. “There we go, problem solved.”

Prim sent the other seven bars into her bucket one by one, picked up her brush, and grabbed Tia's arm, dragging her to the benches. “I can linger no longer!” she said. “We are so close to soaking in the hot springs of the – ”

“Phantasio Majestie, yeah, yeah. You needn't say its name every single time,” Tia complained as she let herself be pulled along.

“Do not be so grumpy! Now, sit and let me scrub you first,” Prim said.

“Oh? What for?”

“Because you will lollygag if I let you,” Prim said, brandishing the brush at Tia like a blade, “and I am far too close to the springs to be denied because you are too slow!”

With that, she set upon Tia, (mostly) all business. The warrior nearly laughed at her companion's earnestness. “Not so hard,” she said as Prim got a bit over-enthusiastic. “I do like to have skin, you know!”

After a few minutes, Prim dumped a bucket of water over Tia's head to rinse.

“Ack! Cold!” the latter griped.

“Pish-posh, Hot-Tits,” Prim said. “Toughen up some! And now you are all clean and fitting in with the guests. You no longer have no need to slink about as if you were some shifty no-good vagrant!”

“You've been slinking right there with me, you know,” Tia said, wiping the water out of her eyes.

“Yes, which means it is my turn. Go get dressed. I want to see how my Hot-Tits looks in such an outfit!”

Rolling her eyes, Tia walked into their cubicle, shut the door, and opened the bag she had taken earlier. As Prim scrubbed up, the warrior donned the swimsuit. There was a mirror on one side of the cubicle. Looking at herself in it, she frowned at the swimsuit as it strained to hold her bust. She half-turned this way and that, finding the back of the one-piece was little better. “Well, perhaps it isn't so bad as I expected, but still ...”

She gathered up their clothes into a bundle. Opening the door, she stepped out.

Prim immediately looked over with a big ready grin which promptly faded. She let out a disappointed sigh. “A one-piece? Really, Hot-Tits? I mean, you look sexy in it, no lie, but you could have picked anything and still went with a one-piece?”

“It's not like it covers any more than a bikini,” Tia said, turning around to demonstrate. Prim whistled.

“Fair point!” she said cheerfully.

Tia returned to where Prim was finishing. Picking up the bucket of water, Tia cried out “revenge time!” and dumped it onto Prim's head.

The bard sputtered, hugging herself and shivering. “You may have a point about the temperature,” she conceded.

Tia hauled the redhead to her feet. “Get dressed, you silly girl,” she said, smacking her backside and eliciting a squeak followed by a giggle. Prim hustled over to the stall and shut the door.

While Tia gathered up their supplies, she spotted Meredith entering. “Oh, thank goodness I found you!” the hostess said. “I thought you – wait, wasn't there another?” Tia hitched a thumb toward the stall. “Oh, good. I'm sorry, Miss Vålstånna's arrival was as unexpected as yours, and she always creates a bit of a ...” She trailed off, realizing she was breaking professionalism.

“Don't worry, we get it,” Tia said, grinning.

Meredith sighed with relief. “Well, I confirmed your tickets are valid, and I have your room keys.” She handed these to the warrior. “I feel I must warn you,” she continued in a whisper, “that not everyone here will be pleased with your presence. Your having cleaned up will help a lot with that. Here, let me take those clothes of yours.”

“No, that will not be necessary,” Prim said stiffly from inside the cubicle.

“But you can't be seen with these!” Meredith protested. “At least let me have them washed, first!”

“We shall be putting them back on immediately,” Prim stated flatly.

“What are you talking about?” Tia asked.

“My clothes. I want them back.”

“No!” Meredith said, a hint of panic in her voice. She clutched their clothes like a prized possession. “It'll be my job if you do! And you'll get thrown out, too!”

“We shall take the chance.”

“Don't be ridiculous,” Tia said, offering Meredith a towel. The hostess gratefully took it and wrapped their clothes under it. “We'll do no such thing. I'm going to the hot springs, and you're coming with me, Prim. Now, put on your swimsuit.”

“But ... Hot-Tits ...” Prim said in a voice barely above a whisper.

“Hurry! I can hear people nearby!” Meredith whined.

“Open the door, Prim,” Tia said.

“No!” Prim said.

“Open the door now, before I kick it in and cause a bigger ruckus.”

“You can't do that!” Meredith hissed. Tia ignored her. The hostess whimpered, then headed outside to forestall anyone coming in.

“One,” she began. “You know how this works, Prim. Two.”

The bolt to the stall door banged as Prim slid it aside.

“Finally,” Tia said, pushing the door open. “I don't see what – ”

She froze, her mind immediately racing to find the information inside to explain what was wrong with what her eyes were showing her. For Prim stood turned away, arms crossed protectively to cover her breasts. She wore a two-piece bikini with little bows where the pieces tied together at either side of her waist for her bottom and the center of her back for the top. The bright material was far less skimpy than Tia had seen Prim wear before.

Tia could see tears on the side of her face as Prim glanced back at her before quickly turning away, her red hair swishing.

Her mind still trying to piece together the reasons for Prim's distress, Tia's warrior instincts kicked in. She stepped inside the cubicle and closed the door, shielding Prim from outside view.

“Prim,” she began, looking at Prim's hair.

Prim's *red* hair.

Color. The bikini was orange.

“Oh, my,” Tia gasped as understanding clicked in her brain, memories of a drunken Prim telling a story of her suffering in the color she detested.

Prim let out a huge sob and wailed. “Don't look at me, Hot-Tits!” she cried. “I am hideous!”

“Prim,” Tia began, reaching out to take Prim's shoulders, but the redhead shook her off.

“Go away!” she said. “It's all ruined. *Ruined!*”

“It's not – ”

“I always dreamed of this! To come here, to *the* Phantasio Majestie! And I blew it. I got all filthy. We had to sneak around. And then *she* came here,” (Tia had no confusion as to who “she” was), “And n-now I-I am in-in ... *orange!*” She wailed again. “*Orange!*”

She fell to her knees dramatically and put her face into her hands as she wept. Tia stood, feeling helpless and confused.

“I wouldn't have had our entrance any other way,” she said softly, to her own surprise.

Prim looked up from her hands, stunned, but did not turn around.

“You and I, we have our own style, and our entrance was something to treasure. And as for sneaking around,” the warrior continued as Prim turned and looked at her in disbelief, “it makes our stay here more memorable. You may be able to tell people all about the furniture and art and what it all means, but not me. Now, though, I can tell stories about how we gate-crashed,” she spoke in a haughty tone, “*the* Phantasio Majestie – and right under all the snooty-mcsnoots' upturned noses!”

She saw Prim now wore a grin.

“Meanwhile, we'll just let that pompous, blowhard airhead who can't even see her own feet keep everyone distracted,” Tia continued. “That'll make it easier for us to claim the best food and drink in the house.”

Prim laughed and hiccuped. “My Hot-Tits, always so opportunistic,” she said.

“I learned from the master,” Tia said, winking.

“The usual compliment when you seek something. What do you want of me this time?” She asked, grinning.

Tia reached down and pulled her to her feet. She gently wiped the tears off Prim's face. “I want you to go out there,” she began, “and show everyone you can make anything, how did you say it before? You can make anything *look gorgeous.*”

Prim smiled. “Even orange?”

“*Especially* orange,” Tia said. She stepped back and looked Prim up and down. “Besides, you ninny,” she said softly. “I think you look quite fetching in it.”

Prim blushed, staring at Tia, who blushed in her turn. She half-turned and coughed into her hand, avoiding meeting Prim's eyes. They remained quiet for several seconds. Tia nervously scratched the side of her nose with a finger, finally risking a glance back to her friend.

Suddenly, Prim threw her arms around Tia's neck, her face beside Tia's. "H-hey, now," the warrior sputtered, but Prim merely squeezed tighter in reply.

Slowly, Tia put her arms around Prim. "You really are a silly girl," she said.

She put her hands on Prim's shoulders and held her out at arm's length. They looked at each other and smiled.

"All better now? Get it out of your system?" Tia asked.

Prim nodded. "Mm-hmm."

"Want to go to the springs, now?" she asked, half-turning to the door.

"I want ...," Prim hesitated, "my prize."

Tia blinked, confused, and looked back at her. Their eyes met, a powerful intensity in the violet pair. Tia found herself frozen, trapped by her gaze. She could see Prim's eyes were puffy from crying. She felt a joy within as she thought of how Prim had stopped crying and had smiled again because of her. When did she learn to make her friend so happy?

Their faces drew closer together. Prim shut her eyes. Tia felt her breath on her face. Part of her brain told her she was supposed to back away now. Instead, she found herself leaning forward. Her own eyes closed...

"This is shaping up to be the *worst* visit to this over-rated establishment I have simply ever," an unfortunately-familiar voice said – at significant volume.

They broke apart with a start.

"We're truly sorry, Miss Vindsäck, but the mulled wine should arrive this evening," Meredith's voice said, much less loudly but still carrying in the cavernous room, despite their walking in the corridor and not the bathing hall.

"I wonder why my father even pays for your services," Vålståna said, her voice diminishing as they continued past the baths.

Inside the stall, the pair stood quietly for several more seconds, their breathing heavier than normal. Suddenly, Prim nudged Tia aside and stepped out of the cubicle.

"What in the name of wonder are you just standing around here for?" the redhead asked. "Let us go out and enjoy the beauty and wonder that is this place I am not supposed to call by name anymore!"

"Right, because *I'm* the one keeping us from the fancy food and drink and whatever else these muckety-mucks have to overindulge themselves with," Tia said as she followed her outside, rolling her eyes upward.

*It really is a nice ceiling*, she thought as she noticed the perfectly-set tiles and patterns, with colors bouncing off silver beams. She grunted and shook her head. *Great, now she's rubbing off on me.*

"Hurry up, Hot-Tits!" Prim called from the corridor. "I simply cannot delay any longer!"

Tia laughed. "Glad to have you back again, my cheerful and crazy friend," she said softly as she hustled to catch up with Prim.

*To be continued in "The Past is Present Tale"*