

## Prim and Tia in "One Minute to Tale"

By: Wyland

The urchin grinned as he decided on a mark – a lady gnome walking alone, wearing a ridiculous tricorne hat. Despite the fact she was armed, the urchin knew the single-minded obsessive nature of gnomes played right into his crew's methods. He signaled his companion down the street, who nodded in reply and stepped out. The urchin followed the gnome, ready to act at the proper moment.

The gnome and his companion bumped into one another, and the urchin swiftly stepped forward and nicked her coin-purse as he passed by. "Scuse me, lady," his companion said. "My –"

And then the urchin felt the gnome grab the back of his shirt. Before he could react, the gnome used his own momentum to shove him around sideways to hit his companion. Both the boys fell to the ground, dazed.

Looking up, they discovered a sword pointed at the pair of them.

"Yar, ye do be makin' a mistake if ye be thinkin' I be easy prey," the gnome said. She wore a patch over her left eye. Her right made it clear she was quite serious.

"Our mistake," the urchin promptly said. "We didn't mean nothin', ma'am."

"No, ma'am, we didn't, that's the gods' honest truth," his companion said.

She let out a grunt. "Yer unusual and bizarre notion o' truth do be a confoundin' one, it be," she said. The pair looked at one another a moment, confused. The gnome rolled her eye and sighed, as if willing herself patience. "Ye be a pair of liars is what I do be sayin'!" she suddenly snarled, glaring at them once again. "I should be guttin' ye and leavin' ye hangin' by yer ears as a warnin' to all liars and thieves."

"No need for that, ma'am!" the urchin squeaked. "Take your purse! We'll leave you alone! We'll tell everyone to leave you alone!"

"Ye be doin' that," the gnome snarled, snatching her purse. "Now, do be gettin' out o' me sight!"

They stood up and made to run off without hesitating. She swatted the urchin on his backside with the flat of her blade, eliciting a startled yelp. The pair soon disappeared in the alleys.

Still frowning fiercely, the gnome raised her eye patch and watched them leave with two healthy eyes. She then smacked her forehead. "*Unusual and bizarre, Lilly?*" she said to herself. "*Counfoundin'?* Why in the briny abyss do ye be usin' such fancy talk? Ruddy Primiphi and her fancy bard talk do be rubbin' off on ya, no doubt."

With a sigh, she lowered the patch and continued down the street. She felt a restlessness she had not experienced in a long while. She felt worn down by a month of being stuck in the same city. The sailor in her longed to get back on the sea, but her beloved ship, the *Scurvy Plunder*, had taken a bit of a beating during their latest raid and would be out of commission for the next few months.

*Methinks I do be needin' to reconsider this privateerin' nonsense*, she thought. *Piracy be more to me likin', anyway.*

Then she recalled, once again, her promise to Prim to not attack innocent ships and stamped her foot.

"Dammit, Primiphi! I do be doin' what I need to be doin'!" she cried out to no one at all, taking off her hat and throwing it on the ground. The people walking nearby decided to give this particular gnome a bit more distance as they passed by.

Her stomach growled loudly. *Yar, I do be hungry and in a foul mood because of it, no doubt*, she considered. She recovered her hat and dusted it off. "Well, fer you me old friend, I do be givin' it another try," she said as she donned it.

Deciding to solve the problem of her appetite, she turned to walk to a better part of town in search of decent food. As she did so, she thought she saw a short figure wearing a hooded cloak lingering at a street corner. Lilly thought the other might be watching her.

*Perhaps, perhaps not,* she thought as she crossed the street.

It was not long before she was in the hustle and bustle of the main markets, where she located a cheese maker's shop and entered. Walking out a few minutes later, taking a bite out of her purchase, she resumed her stroll through the city. Encountering a fruit stand, she added an apple to her meal.

Lilly looked around the street, at the goings on of the local populace and the various buildings and vendor stands, at the trees and flowering shrubs giving the scene a touch of the idyllic. Truly, the scene was one of peace and prosperity.

The gnome felt she would go mad from the utter mundanity of it all.

*"Mundanity" – thar' I do be goin' again with the Primiphi talk.*

While the pickpockets had provided a mild distraction, overpowering a couple of street whelps hardly qualified as exciting material. If the day kept going as it started, she would have to invent a wild tale to tell her crew, lest the truth of her boredom show. An image of Prim reciting stories to the crew of the *Scurvy Plunder* came to her mind, and she let out a chuckle. "Yar, Primiphi do be tellin' the tallest ones, she do," she muttered.

She meandered about the market, looking at various wares and munching on the food. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the familiar hooded figure she had noticed earlier. And now certainty prevailed at the sight of him.

She grinned at the idea of being followed. Perhaps the day would not be wasted, after all.

*Do come on, ye squiffy son of a sea cook. Let us be seein' who be the better in the city.*

Continuing a pretense of examining wares as she walked, the gnome crossed through the market. Once on the other side, she almost lazily strolled down the street. She did not want her quarry to lose her, after all.

*Come on, come on, ye thumb-suckin' narwhal-smelling blowfish,* she thought irritably as she made to read a street sign to give the other time to catch up. Nodding at the sign as if she had gleaned the information she needed from it, she resumed walking.

A few streets down, she turned down an alleyway. She had chosen this one because it made a sharp right-hand turn before being blocked by a fence twenty feet further down. She hurried to the corner and hid behind a pile of trash and broken crates.

She had not long to wait. Her pursuer was mere seconds behind. He passed by Lilly, not seeing the hidden gnome. Lilly quietly stepped out behind the figure just as he turned and saw the fence blocking the alleyway.

Lilly grabbed the hood and yanked it back. The hood's owner, of course, turned and stepped away from her. The pair looked at one another for a moment, Lilly with a hand on the hilt of her sword, the other with her hand inside her cloak.

Her pursuer was not a he but a she. Lilly had expected a gnome based on her height and had not been mistaken. She was quite young, with deep blue hair and a fierce expression.

"Nice trick," the pursuer said. "Studied the city?"

"What else do I be havin' to occupy me time?" Lilly grinned wickedly. "Which is why I must be thankin' ye."

"Breaking up the monotony for you? You're welcome."

Not quite knowing what to make of this, Lilly decided to return to the more important matters. "And who do ye be?" she demanded.

"No one of consequence to you."

“Oh, I do be thinkin' ye be wrong,” Lilly said. “I do be findin' it a matter o' *consequence* when I do be followed by a jelly-boned landlubber.”

“I only followed you to ask you a question, hot-head,” the stranger said.

“I do be in a good mood,” Lilly said. “Do be askin' yer question.”

“Where is she?”

“She?” Lilly repeated.

The stranger's eyes narrowed. “Don't play coy. I heard you earlier.”

“Did ye now?” Lilly asked.

“Yes. So we both know you know her and can answer my question.”

“Perhaps I could, aye,” Lilly said.

“Then do so,” the stranger said irritably. “You said I could ask a question.”

Lilly gave another wicked grin and wagged a finger at the other gnome. “But I no be sayin' I do be answerin', aye?”

“What? You – ” the stranger stammered a moment, then stamped her foot. “That's most unfair!”

Laughing at this display of childish temper, Lilly said, “ye be a cute one, ye be.” With a shake of her head, she added, “but ye do be needin' to be doin' yer homework before ye stick yer nose into others' business. Do ye any idea who I be?”

“Captain Lilliene 'Lilly' of the *Scurvy Plunder*,” the stranger said. “A privateer and former pirate.” She eyed Lilly warily. “Though there is some doubt about the 'former' part,” she added thoughtfully.

“Thar do be doubt, ye say?” Lilly asked, her grin now covering up her surprise at the knowledge of her the other gnome already had – and concern as to why she had researched Lilly. “Perhaps I should be bolsterin' me reputation ta be removin' all doubts. Mayhap I do be startin' with sendin' a bilge-suckin' whelp on her way without her coin ... or her clothes. That do be a fine cloak ye be wearin', after all.”

The stranger blushed, eliciting a laugh from the pirate. “You really are a scoundrel,” the stranger said irritably.

“Glad we do be clearin' the air.”

They stood glaring at one another a few moments. “Well, what happens now?” the stranger asked. “We call a truce, go our separate ways?”

Lilly laughed. “So ye can later be sneakin' up on me again? I no be thinkin' – ”

As Lilly was speaking, swift as a serpent strike, the stranger brought her hand out from under her cloak and lashed out with a vine. The pirate – no stranger to dirty tactics – drew her sword as the vine grew and extended from the stranger's hand and wrapped around Lilly's wrist.

“Ye feculent, cow-hearted simpleton!” she cried as the vine swiftly grew, reaching her other wrist and pulling it to her other. “What do ye be thinkin' ye doin'?”

The stranger threw the other end of the vine toward the ground at her own feet, where it rapidly rooted itself. Lilly found herself having to fight the vine's pull, one foot in front of the other as she strained.

“Disappointingly easy,” the stranger said. “Your reputation clearly is greater than your ability.”

“Yar, ye do be thinkin' that, do ye?” Lilly asked, trying to get at the vine with her sword. The plant seemed unusually durable, the blade merely nicking it as her foe walked to stand beside the vine.

“Naturally,” the stranger said, gently stroking the vine. “You're caught in the power of my plants, after all. And you've shown yourself easily – ”

Lilly lunged forward, outpacing the vine's pull, and struck the stranger in the stomach with the hilt of her blade as she passed by. The other gnome doubled over as the pirate stumbled a few feet and dropped to her knees to fight the vine's pull.

"You ... dirty ..." the stranger said, gasping for air. She grabbed another vine and flung it at Lilly's ankle, trapping the pirate's foot in place.

"I'll just have to take my time with you," the stranger said.

Lilly laughed.

"What are –" the stranger began, but stopped as she heard an odd sound at her feet. Looking down, she found a little black sphere with a white skull painted on it ... and a fuse which seemed to be rapidly diminishing.

The stranger let out a cry as she realized her peril. The sphere exploded in a cloud of smoke. She staggered backwards, coughing.

Lilly, meanwhile, finally managed to maneuver her sword to properly cut through the vine holding her hands in place. She turned toward her foe, her ankle still trapped in place by the second vine.

"F-fine," the stranger said between coughs. "You're better than I gave you credit for. I'll be leaving, then. Until next time, pirate."

Rubbing her injured stomach and letting out another cough, she turned toward the street.

"And what do I be callin' ye?" Lilly asked.

The blue-haired gnome turned back to look at Lilly. "Midnight," she said. Turning away again, she exited the alley into the street.

Frowning, Lilly sliced through the vine holding her ankle trapped. She tore off the remnants of the plant from her wrists and ankle, muttering angrily.

*Whoever this Midnight do be, she thought, she do be one focused on her target. And I no be it, so she do be continuing her hunt.*

Midnight had said she heard Lilly speaking earlier. The pirate remembered mentioning Prim after her encounter with the pickpockets, even letting out she was a bard. It therefore seemed clear Midnight was after Prim for some reason.

*Yar, Primiphi, what be ye doin' this time?* she wondered, removing her hat and dusting it before setting it back on. As she made her way back to the *Scurvy Plunder*, she wondered how she could manage to warn her friend about this new development with her ship unable to sail.

TO BE CONTINUED