

Prim and Tia in "Midnight the Second Tale"

By: Wyland

"There you are! I was wondering if you would ever make an appearance!"

Raising a fist in triumphant, Prim knelt before the small herb she had located at the base of a tree. "You are such a cheeky little thing," she chided as she added it to a pouch she carried. "You and your friends have kept me busy searching much longer than I should have! My Hot-Tits will doubtless be missing me."

She looked into the pouch, taking an inventory. "That would be the last item! Oh, Hot-Tits will be delighted at this! She does love my apothecary skills! Why, this one time, I managed to protect her skin from the sun *and* glue our breasts to one another. Such an exciting time we had! She enjoyed it so much, she brings the matter up often. Quite often, indeed!"

Smiling at the memory, she picked out a red flower from the pouch. She sniffed the blossom. "Now, last time, I could not find the blue flower I wanted and gathered up a different blue one," she told it. "I have learned my lesson. I could not find the yellow flower this time, so no swapping with a flower of the same color!"

Nodding at her clear breakthrough in alchemical philosophy, she returned the flower and closed the pouch. Taking a deep breath of the forest air, she let it out with a satisfied sigh before turning toward the city.

After a few steps, a breeze blew over her. She stopped and sniffed at the air. "Strange," she muttered. "I could have sworn"

With a shrug, she continued on. She had gone no more than twenty feet before she once again stopped, head tilted, listening.

"Whoever that is barging through the woods making more ruckus than a goblin choir at a wedding, come on over and greet me properly," she called out.

The noise she had heard stopped a moment, then began again, growing in volume as the person clearly approached her. She heard muttered curses, grinning as she recognized the voice.

"Why, is that my dear friend Dandelion I hear?" she called out.

"Yar, I do be findin' ye at last," Lilly replied from out of sight. "How do ye be gettin' anywhere in this infernal – ow!" The pirate shouted out various crude insults aimed, it would seem, at various plants.

Prim laughed. "Well, for starters, we do not tend to walk through the patches of thorn vines. Generally speaking, we find it preferable to walk around them."

"Now ye be tellin' me."

"Hold on, I shall be there momentarily."

"I no be the one doin' the holdin'," the pirate said irritably. "These ruddy things no be eager to be lettin' me pass!"

Cresting a small ridge, Prim looked down into a hollow to see the pirate standing in a patch of thorny vines. The plants had a firm hold of her clothes, and her trademark tricorne hat was hanging from a branch. She had drawn her sword and now began hacking at the vines.

"Well, I do suppose that is one way to get through," Prim said, waiting on her friend to free herself. "Next time try not walking into the thorns, perhaps?"

"Yar, next time no be happenin'," Lilly said, now gathering up her hat and putting it on. She winced, taking it back off and finding a bit of vine had found its way inside. She plucked it out before setting the hat back on her head again. "After this, I do be returnin' to the sea, thank ye very much! To the inferno with these cursed woods, I say!" She took a step toward Prim, her foot landing on a small rock which promptly slid from underneath the pirate, sending her falling on her rear. "Yar, be *damned*, ye foul woods!" she cried out as she stood and dusted herself off.

Prim laughed merrily and skipped down to greet her friend. She threw her arms around the pirate, who returned the hug. “Oh, Dandelion!” Prim said. “How delightful to see you!”

“Yar, it do be good to be seein' ye, Primiphi,” Lilly said.

“What brings you out here? You were never one to leave the waters, other than to find a warm bed – and someone warmer to share it with.” Prim playfully reached down to give Lilly a proper squeeze.

The pirate laughed lightly a moment before turning serious. “I need be warnin' ye. Thar be a mad gnome wantin' to find ye.”

“You shall have to be more specific than that, my briny friend!” Prim said, laughing.

“I do be serious, Primiphi!” Lilly said. She frowned, trying to sort out how best to get the flighty bard to pay attention. “She be followin' me in the city. I be leadin' her to a dead end alleyway, where we do be facin' one to the other. She do be trig, she be, much like ye.”

“Then she sounds positively delightful!” Prim said with a laugh.

“Will ye stop be makin' light o' 'er?” Lilly loudly asked. Putting a hand to her forehead, forcing herself to calm down, the pirate recounted the fight between her and Midnight.

“Midnight?” Prim asked. “What a preten ... ” She trailed off.

“Err, Primiphi,” Lilly began. “What be ye doin'?”

Prim was, in fact, sniffing Lilly intently. She reached up into the pirate's hair and plucked out a small blossom. “*Maurisflore*,” she said, frowning. “So, I *did* smell it.”

“What?” the pirate asked, confused.

“*Maurisflore*. A flower with a faint yet particularly distinct scent.” Prim cocked an eyebrow. “Perfect for tracking, especially if the target has an aversion to bathing and has gone scent blind.”

“What do bathing – ” Lilly began, then realized Prim's meaning. “I no be stinking!” she shouted.

“You merely have the aroma of a pirate, yes,” Prim said distractedly. She was now scanning the woods around them. “Why has she not attacked?”

“Who?” Lilly asked, then slapped her forehead. “Ye mean she be using that blasted flower to follow me to ye and do be somewhere watching us.”

“Indeed. The *maurisflore* only blossoms under particular conditions, if I remember. The hair of a particularly pungent and piqued pirate would not qualify as such.” She glanced at Lilly. “You indicated she uses magic to induce plants to grow and attack?”

The pirate drew her sword, expression grim. “Aye, it do be bizarre ta see.”

“Which explains how the seed grew, at least,” Prim said. “It does not explain her hesitation... Oh, of course, how silly of me.” To Lilly's annoyance, Prim let out a light laugh.

“What do be funny?” she demanded.

“Nothing, nothing,” Prim said, waving a hand dismissively. “Perhaps we should head back to town.”

“Aye, that do be soundin' like a fine idea.” She looked around. “Err...”

“This way, silly,” Prim said, laughing as she spun Lilly around and playfully smacked her backside, eliciting a yelp from the pirate. “With your sense of direction, how did you even manage to find my forest in the first place?” she asked as they walked.

“It no be easy,” Lilly said. “Yer landlubber ways do be involvin' far too many twists and turns, ye kin.”

“Not as many, strictly speaking, as you took,” a voice called out from above. They looked up to see the dark-haired Midnight sitting on a branch, swinging her legs in a lazy, idle sort of way. “You walked in circles on

three occasions. It was most amusing. Though I did wonder if you'd ever actually lead me to anyone before we starved here.”

Prim smiled, nonplussed at the presence of the other gnome. “Pre-Dawn, I take it? A pleasure to meet you!”

Midnight blinked a moment, clearly confused at Prim's greeting. “That's not my name.”

“Oh, I know what name you like to tell everyone,” Prim said. “But do you not think that just a tad melodramatic? Rather pretentious if you ask me – picking a moment of darkness as your namesake. How utterly disappointing.”

“So you say, and yet you refer to me as the darkest moment of all,” Midnight countered.

“The moment just before the darkness is so quickly and effortlessly banished by the light, yes,” Prim replied with a grin.

Midnight irritably crossed her arms. “I've barely known you moments, and already I find you insufferable!” she snapped.

“Yarr, ye best do be gettin' used ta that,” Lilly said. She had drawn her crossbow and had it pointed at her antagonist.

“Is that so? Then I'll take great joy in making you two scream,” Midnight said.

To her dismay, Prim laughed merrily. “Come now, Pre-Dawn. You are not fooling anyone with such talk. Whatever imagined injury you may feel you have toward me, you would have attacked much earlier if you were intending to make us 'suffer'. Particularly since vines of a particular sort would work best with your magic.”

Lilly glanced back at the vines and their thorns Prim had led them away from and shuddered at the thought of being wrapped up in them. She looked at Prim. “Ye be movin' us away from the thorns,” the captain said.

“Naturally,” Prim answered. “Unless you prefer to be wrapped up in –”

“Nay!” Lilly said with another shudder. “Yar, let us do be getting' on with – HEY!”

While the pair had been chatting, other vines had slowly snaked toward them along the ground and from the branches above. One of the latter had lunged out and wrapped around the pirate's wrist holding her crossbow. Others quickly secured her ankles and arms. She would have fallen over if not for the vines themselves holding her up.

Prim had not been spared an attack. As the vines made to strike her, she almost casually leapt out of the way, rolling and twirling and cartwheeling about, laughing merrily as she did. “Impressive,” she called out. “If a bit slow.”

“You're quite agile,” Midnight replied. “Much more than I anticipated. Fortunately, we are surrounded by weapons for me to use.” She gestured and branches of trees moved to grab the bard. Even the grass began reaching for her.

Prim hopped onto a rock and then flipped onto a branch reaching out to her. Laughing merrily, she dashed along its length, hopping to another branch swinging at her. She leapt up and deftly swung herself onto yet another branch.

Midnight could only stare, mouth agape, as the redhead almost effortlessly avoided her attacking plants while ... “Are you *singing*?” the dark-haired gnome demanded. She angrily stood up. “You dare mock me?” she called out, stamping her foot on the branch.

“Mock you?” Prim asked as she leapt about. “Now, why would I do such a thing, Pre-Dawn.”

“Clearly, because you are an insufferable –” she cut off as Prim landed right in front of her.

"I should duck if I were you," Prim said with a wink as she stepped aside and dropped off the limb the pair were on.

"What are you –?" Midnight began, and then the branch that was swinging toward Prim now crashed into her, knocking her against the trunk of the tree. She slid down, struggling to get her breath back.

Prim, who had grabbed the limb as she dropped and swung herself up, stood before Midnight. "Goodness, Pre-Dawn. Calling it a day so soon?" She casually dusted herself off.

"You – you ..." Midnight panted. She struggled to her feet, a hand on her belly. "How did you –" Midnight began again, then stamped her foot once more. "Whatever. It matters not."

"Does it not?"

"No, because you'll surrender to me now. For I have your friend secured down there."

"Do you now?" Prim asked, grinning. "And whatever does that matter to me?"

Midnight started, surprised at Prim's response. Her mouth dropped open. After a moment, however, her eyes narrowed slyly. "Nice try," she said. "But your kind will always do what it takes to protect their friends."

Prim cocked an eyebrow. "You play a dangerous game. What if I did not care for her as much as you thought? Or what if there was a code for her profession which would require me to consider her expendable?"

Once again, Midnight hesitated, considering Prim's words. And then: "Yar, I do be hearin' ye, ye ken!" Lilly called up. "And thar no be any such foolish professional code, so thar be no needin' fer such talk!"

"Remind me to play strip poker with you sometime, Dandelion," Prim called down, grinning at Midnight still. "Our mutual friend always did prefer the more direct methods. Subtlety has never been her strong suit," she told the latter with a wink.

Midnight could do no more than blink stupidly for several seconds. "Are you real?" she finally asked.

Prim laughed and performed a pirouette on the branch. "Whyever would you ask such a question, you silly girl?" she said. "Did that branch you so ingloriously slammed into your own face knock sense out of you?" She reached forward and pinched the other's cheek. "There! Does that answer your question?"

Rubbing her cheek as if in doubt, Midnight frowned, then stamped her foot again her customary irritation. "Enough of this nonsense! You will surrender now, or –"

"Or you shall torment my friend, yes, yes," Prim said, lazily crossing her arms. "I am supposedly such a paragon of virtue this would disturb my beauty sleep tonight. We have been down this path already, have we not? Rather than worry about such silliness, might I suggest tickling her under her –"

"Yar! What do ye be doin'?" Lilly interrupted. "That do be private between us, that be!"

Prim sighed and rolled her eyes. "Excuse me, kindly," she said to Midnight. "I must have a word with my obtuse friend."

Turning sideways, she fell back off the branch, plunging headfirst toward the ground.

"*Animera växter!*" Midnight cried above, throwing a bit of vine toward Prim. It rapidly grew, one end grabbing Prim around her ankle. The other end quickly wrapped around a limb above her. The redhead slowed and came to a stop, still upside down, with her eyes level with Lilly's.

The privateer looked at Prim in shock. The bard merely watched her, nonplussed, as if she and Midnight had practiced this performance dozens of times together. Up above, Midnight silently watched, eyes wide.

Lilly felt strangely small under the silent gaze Prim held her in, a spark of anger flickering in her eyes.

"Let me see if I have this correct, Dandelion my dear friend," Prim said after a few moments had passed. "You were attacked in a city by a 'mad gnome' seeking after someone you know. This attack wielded plant-based powers against you. After having eluded your attacker, you chose to then head straight to her target and meet with her. In a forest. Surrounded by plants."

Lilly looked around at the flora, then began blushing in embarrassment as Prim's point struck home. "Yar, surrounded by her weapons, she did be sayin'," the pirate said in realization.

"Way to think ahead," Prim said, grinning. "Excellent plan."

"Yarrr...." Lilly sighed in defeat.