

Prim and Tia in "Strange Sensations Tale"

Part One

By: Wyland

It is a well-accepted law in the Rithian scientific community that when two gnomes debate a topic, an observer could glean no fewer than three opinions from their discourse. These opinions are constrained neither by reason, logic, nor simple common sense.

"You should consider it, Hot-Tits! The health benefits are quite astounding!" Prim said.

"Imagine that, something a ninny says is astounding," Tia replied. "I am shocked. Truly."

"While I do agree I have much to say that more simple minds would have difficulty – "

"You calling me simple?" Tia asked with a glare.

"Naturally," Prim answered, nonplussed. "That is beside the point, however," the bard continued as her companion rolled her eyes with a grin. "I am telling you the practice aids the mind immensely!"

"And I am telling *you* that hanging upside-down for hours at a time clearly leads a mind down the path to pure ninnyness." Tia pointed a thumb at her companion. "Case in point."

"Well, perhaps the world could use more of such ... 'ninnyness', as you so crudely call it!"

"Gods save us!"

Prim drew herself up and, in her most dignified manner, blew raspberries at her companion while the sun began setting behind them.

The pair were heading toward what the sign post a few miles back had called Sepulcroton.

"They must make excellent salads," Prim had earlier said upon reading the sign. In response to Tia cocking an eyebrow at her, she had pointed to the last syllables. "Croutons. Salads."

For the next several yards, the pair traveled in the rather odd formation of an unimpressed Tia pulling a protesting Prim along by a pointed ear....

The duo crested a hill and saw the town below them. As they looked upon it, at its small cabins with windows glowing from candles within and lanterns hanging from posts here and there, the gnomes could also see a general state of disrepair throughout. Fences missing pickets, gates hanging from single hinges, the steeple of the church looking ready to collapse upon itself, the graveyard beside it overgrown with weeds, about everything a mist rising from the ground – all of this led the pair to one inescapable description for the town.

"Creepy," Tia said.

Prim frowned. "Mayhap it is just a peculiar local charm," she offered.

The sun chose that moment to finally give the day a miss. Directly opposite, the full moon began its rise, bathing the landscape in its pale light.

The little town looked no cheerier for it. "Yeah," Tia said as they gazed down. "A creepy charm."

Before having met Prim, Tia would have avoided the place after one look. However, a person is shaped, even if only slightly, by the company they keep. One finds one's behaviors and attitudes adjust somewhat to more align with the person (or ninny) one travels with.

Thus, with a shrug, Tia stepped forward to find the local inn -- and to begin the inevitable shenanigans. What they would be, she did not know. She simply knew experience had granted her a certainty of knowledge: Somehow, someway, Prim would get them into trouble tonight.

The inn stood apart from the other buildings, the first building travelers would encounter along the road. The gnomes stopped in front to examine it. Much like everything else, it appeared to be quite dilapidated. In fact, Tia would have said it looked better than three-quarters ready to collapse.

“It looks better than three-quarters ready to collapse,” Tia said.

“I have seen worse,” Prim said.

“And you still went inside?” The bard hesitated for only an instant, a hardly-perceptible delay before she stepped forward. Only her lengthy time spent traveling with the redhead allowed Tia to even notice it. “Thought not,” she said, following after.

Inside, she nearly bumped into the bard. “What are you –?” she began. Then she noticed the stench and nearly gagged. Looking for the source of it, she discovered the place was filled with a fog, lit by eerie green and purple glows with no apparent sources. It seemed to Tia what was not obscured by the fog was hidden by cobwebs. Then she noticed the patrons.

“I’ve heard of a dead crowd,” she muttered. “But this takes the cake.”

Prim frowned, looking at the decaying corpses sitting at tables and calmly drinking and chatting as if they were still alive. Then a few noticed the gnomes and spoke or elbowed the others. The pair soon found themselves quite the center of attention.

“Ever plan out a performance for such folk?” Tia asked in a soft tone.

“Naturally,” Prim answered in an equally quiet tone, which worried Tia more than if the bard had shouted.

Prim walked to the bar and climbed onto a stool beside a skeleton hunched over a drink. As Tia joined her, the bard set out a few coins.

The deceased proprietor moved to them. “That is too much for drinks,” he pointed out.

“Of course it is,” Prim said cheerfully, “as the coin is not just for ale but also for information.”

The innkeeper looked at her carefully a moment, as if considering whether or not she was playing some sort of prank on him. Deciding at last the best course of action was to do his job, he began pouring drinks. While he worked, Tia picked up a nearby mug off the bar top. The battered cup appeared unlikely to ever manage to contain a liquid again. She looked into it. It looked back, blinking an eyeball. Tia blanched and slid the mug across the bar in disgust. As it neared the edge, a purple tentacle reached out of it and caught the surface with its suckers, bringing the ride to a halt. It then grabbed a rusty fork and flung it at Tia, who instinctively batted it aside. The tentacle balled its end and shook at Tia and then withdrew.

“What do you little ladies want to know?” the dead man asked, calmly setting their drinks in front of the pair as if such a display happened daily in his inn. This was not entirely true, as they tended to be more of the “twenty times an hour” sort, but the gnomes were not to know this, were they now?

“Who put this curse on you good folk?” Prim asked.

She was met with the silence of death for several moments as everyone looked at them intently. Tia became acutely aware the only noises were her and Prim’s breathing. The mug in front of Prim sprouted bat-like wings, flapped them, and fluttered about her head while green bubbles floated out of it. Meanwhile, a spider’s leg reached out from the mug in front of Tia and felt around behind the bar. It lifted up a spoon full of what looked to be tiny eggs, which it poured on itself. The warrior carefully pushed the drink away from herself while the skeleton rattled with laughter.

“If you know we’re cursed,” the innkeeper finally said, taking the spoon from the spider leg and nudging the appendage back into the mug, “then I’d suggest getting out while you can. Before you join us.”

“Balderdash,” Prim said. “I do not fear this curse.”

“Then you are a fool.”

Prim laughed lightly. Reaching up, she grasped the handle of the mug. “To your health, good sir,” she said.

“Wait, you're not – ” Tia began, then she and everyone else in the bar physically capable of it gasped in shock as Prim raised the mug to her mouth and drank deeply.

The bard wiped her mouth with a sigh. “My compliments,” she said, gesturing with it to the innkeeper. Another silence fell, interrupted briefly by the skeleton's jaw falling onto the bar and rattle around a bit.

“Umm, how was it?” Tia asked.

“Surprisingly not bad, honestly,” Prim said. She raised the mug for another drink.

“Okay, yes, that's definitely bothering me.”

“Pish-posh, Hot-Tits,” Prim said airily. “It is merely an exercise in mind over matter. I know this is a curse, not reality.”

“It's real enough for me!” a corpse-patron called out. A few others shouted agreement.

Prim waved a hand at them. “Of course it is,” she said. “You are the objects of the curse, after all. Whereas Hot-Tits and myself are merely bystanders wandering in.”

Tia looked about the place. “I'm seeing the curse,” she said, confused. “And smelling it, as well,” she added.

“As am I,” Prim said. “I merely choose to ignore it and drink my ale. For it really is an ale, not some odd chiropteran goblet filled with a gurgling virescent muck, regardless of the evidence of my eyes. After all, is not the point of the curse to deceive one's senses?”

“Err,” the innkeeper said.

“Precisely,” she agreed demurely.

Another silence fell on the room. To be more accurate, it radiated out from the gnomes, as the “dead” people had difficulty understanding what they were seeing. To be even more accurate, their difficulty was less in the “what” as it was in the “why”, as in: “Why in the name of wonder is she drinking that stuff?”

Tia groaned, breaking the silence at last. Prim did not respond but, rather, had another pull at her mug.

“What's wrong?” the innkeeper finally asked.

“I just realized, this means she's going to help you lot break your curse. And that means I'm going to be dragged along into the mess.”

“Nonsense, Hot-Tits,” Prim said. “You shall be dragged nowhere.”

“Oh, good.”

“You can walk along with me, after all. There is no need for talk about dragging.”

Tia roared at the ceiling, which was having none of it and roared right back at her.

To be continued ...