

Prim and Tia in "Upside-Down Tale"
By Wyland

The gnome pair trudged along the forest path up the steep ridge. "Why do inclines have to be so ... inclined?" Prim complained.

"You're the one taking us this way," Tia retorted. "I suggested we head toward Gottins, if that farmer had the name right, off to the south. You had a feeling we should go northwest. Well, there is your northwest." She pointed at the top of the ridge.

"Yeah, well, that was before I knew about these hills," Prim admitted. She sat on a large rock, stretching her legs and tending to her hair.

Tia sat on a log. "You realize we will be here forever if you stop to rest and clean up every fifty paces?" she asked as she pulled out a partially finished vest from her pack and began sewing. Experience had taught her Prim would be several minutes.

"Fortunately, I am not getting any feeling of haste, Hot-Tits." She rummaged in her gear for her makeup kit, as was her usual routine during a rest.

"Are you sure? You seemed hasty to avoid Gottins, it struck me," Tia noted, then stopped sewing and grinned. "Oh, I see, now. You have been there before, haven't you?"

Prim glanced over, then resumed examining herself in the mirror. "Whatever do you mean?" she asked innocently.

"What did you do? Paint the sheriff's boots pink? Con the barkeep out of his finest wine?"

Prim glared at her. "I'll have you know it was nothing like that, Hot-Tits."

"Oh, but it was something, then?" Tia asked, grinning. "Spill it, Prim."

The bard sighed. "It involved a young lady acolyte, the magister's son, and a mule with two tails..."

Tia chuckled. "Oh, this I gotta hear."

Prim quickly put her things away and stood. "Right. We best be getting a move on, Hot-Tits. No more dilly-dallying!" She set off along the path again.

Tia chuckled and followed suit.

Hours later, they finally crested the ridge. Prim dropped her pack and stretched. Tia copied her actions, setting down her own gear. "Well, here we are," the warrior declared. "Nice view. Lots of hills to hike through, too," she added, gesturing ahead.

Prim sighed. "More climbing. Maybe we can weave between those hills over -- hey, what is that?"

She pointed. They stood in a small clearing, the rocks limiting the forest's growth. A dozen yards off the path, there appeared to be a structure of some type where the trees started again.

"It looks like it's hanging," Tia noted. She looked around warily, hands reaching for her weapons.

"Come along, Hot-Tits! Let's see what it is." Prim walked toward it, hopping from stone to stone. Tia followed, disconcerted.

"Perhaps we should continue on?" she suggested. "That looks kind of like ..."

"-- a cage," Prim finished. They were feet from it, now. The foliage had covered the shape of the primitive trap from a distance, but up close the device was impossible to miss.

"Who would bother making such a pitiful cage?" Tia wondered.

"Probably goblins," Prim shrugged. "Doubtless, they baited it with some trinket not worth a busted--" She broke off, then squealed as she saw the bait. "Can it be?" she cried, dashing toward it.

"Prim! Wait!" Tia cried, instinctively stepping forward. Before she could recover from her mistake, Prim had grabbed the item, and the cage fell over them both.

"Umm... oops," Prim said, smiling sheepishly as Tia glared at her. Several goblins approached from the undergrowth, spears pointed at them....

Their captors wasted no time stripping the gnomes and binding their hands before them. The goblins then prodded them along with their spears, forcing them to march down to where they had set up camp.

The only resistance they had allowed came when a goblin reached for the bait. "No! Mine!" Prim cried, thwacking him repeatedly on the head with it. Fortunately for the goblin, it was not particularly hard. Regardless, it was unpleasant, so he left her to it as his fellows laughed.

Having arrived at the camp, the goblins tied the gnomes' ankles and hoisted them, upside-down, from a branch. They then set about dividing the loot and arguing over chores.

"Prim."

"Hrm?" the bard replied distractedly, studying the bait in her hands.

"Is that ... a comic book?"

"Yup. Latest Boffo. I've been so out of touch, unable to find one." She flipped a page, then burst into giggles.

Tia growled. "You got us captured over a ruddy comic book?"

"Seems so."

"This is, without question, the stupidest capture you have gotten us into yet, Prim."

"Maybe -- but look! It's in excellent condition, Hot-Tits!" Prim held the comic book up -- down -- for Tia to get a better view.

"I don't care. And I suppose you expect me to get us out of this?"

Prim resumed reading. "I cannot very well manage it while reading this, can I, Hot-Tits?"

Tia growled, then began chewing at the knot at her wrist. She knew the goblins -- being moronic creatures ready to brawl over anything (the more trivial the object, the more fierce the fighting) -- would remain distracted for several minutes, which was long enough to get her hands free. She then reached down -- up -- to her ankles, freeing them and falling to the turf with a grunt.

"Well done, Hot-Tits," Prim said distractedly, flipping another page.

Tia ignored her and, instead, crept over to where the goblins had carelessly tossed aside their spears, as well as the gnomes' weapons. Rolling her eyes at their stupidity, she quietly placed them together. She then took her axe and shattered their shafts.

The goblins stopped their bickering and turned at the sound. Their jaws fell as they saw the very angry, very armed warrior and realized they had no weapons of their own.

"Come on, boys, time to play," Tia said with a wicked grin, tapping her axe and hammer together. The goblins shrieked as she charged into them, releasing her pent-up rage at the sheer stupidity of it all.

"And here I was once impressed with how Prim handled your kind," she said moments later as the last goblin collapsed unconscious at her feet. She had refrained from dealing any killing blows, settling for knocking the fools out. "But, you're rather a sorry lot, aren't you?"

"Go get 'em, Hot-Tits," Prim said distractedly.

"Fight's over, Prim!" Tia said.

"Keep at 'em. Rah rah rah."

Tia rolled her eyes, then set to gathering her clothes. As she finished dressing, she grinned and picked up an item, tucking it under her clothes. She then collected Prim's clothes and rummaged through the goblins' pitiful belongings. She sniffed something vaguely resembling food, wrinkled her nose, and tossed it aside.

Suddenly, Prim let out a shriek of misery. "No! No no no!!!" she wailed.

Tia strolled over, holding the bard's clothes. "Problems?"

"The last page, Hot-Tits!" Prim cried, holding the book out so Tia could see. "It's gone! GONE!!!"

"So it would seem," Tia replied dryly.

"What was it all for, if I can't see the ending?" Prim wailed, tears flowing up -- down? -- her face.

Tia rolled her eyes again and, with a single swing of her axe, chopped the rope holding Prim. Despite her emotional state, the bard deftly rolled with the fall.

"We hiked uphill forever," she said, "got captured, fought our way free--"

"You mean I fought our way free."

"--and for what?" She threw aside the comic book. "Is all of this just a cruel joke?"

Tia grinned. "Hey, Prim."

"Wha-what?" the bard sobbed.

"You realize they took us back to the bottom? We have to climb up again."

Prim wailed again and fell onto her side. "No, not that damn ridge again!"

"Our stuff is on top," Tia said, cutting Prim's bonds, grinning wider still at her friend's melodramatic performance. "There is nothing for it."

"Just leave me," Prim said darkly. "What's the use?"

Tia threw Prim's clothes on top of her. "Do you really want to die with your hair looking like that? And your tears have ruined your makeup."

Prim leapt up, wiping her face. "Really? Oh, no, oh no oh no!"

Tia chuckled and left Prim to dress, walking over to where the comic book had landed. Opening it up, she took out from under her clothes the last page, which was what she had discovered earlier. She placed it in position, rubbing it flat a moment before closing the now-complete book.

"You sure you don't want this?" Tia asked brightly, holding the comic book out.

"What's the point?" Prim asked irritably, waving it off. "Come on, Hot-Tits. Let's go see what's over the ridge -- again! Perhaps it is better on a second viewing!" With that, she set off, singing a cheerful tune -- with several grumpy asides about dashed hopes and wasted time intertwined in.

Tia smiled. "Never one to stay down for long, my friend," she said softly. She set off after the bard, picturing Prim's delighted face when she would produce the missing page -- after they got to the top. "I think you will owe me a story about a lady acolyte, a magister's son, and a two-tailed mule..."