

THE OLD GREY LADY
By Paul Lambrecht

Plunko thumped Shenaynay good one day. Right across the thick meat of the face, leaving a raised red welt.

She retreated in shame back to the cave, and the others clumped around the fire in the dusky evening gloom, averted their gaze from Plunko. Plunko stared into the embers unperturbed.

Shenaynay burned indignantly apart from the fire staring at the dank cave wall. A beard of green dripping moss beaded down from the roof in the fissures of the stone wall, and disappeared into a crack in the bottom.

The slick beneath the moss beamed iridescently, and Shenaynay's mood subtly rose.

Fiercely, she awaited Plunko. She would not give into him tonight, not that it would matter. But she would not pet him in the morning after he had bad dreams. And she would not calm him when he stirred out a fitful sleep if the wolves howled.

She would not bathe him either, when he came back to the hut village from hunting tree nenes sticky with sap. Plunko padded back into the cave now, gruff and malicious.

Shenaynay continued to stare at the glistening rock wall. Her ears burned red and she could feel the heat of Plunko's vindictive gaze upon her.

Silently he curled up in their nest of furs.

Now Plunko grunted several times, but Shenaynay didn't move.

He thrashed around a little now unable to get comfortable without a body to jam into.

So he got up, uprooted her by the hair, and tossed her into the furs, and then slept badly, and he felt a pang of

remorse in the dead of night, his body paralyzed by restless sleep, that Shenaynay didn't comfort him. Even when he managed to raise the volume on his whimpering, she stared off into the void of the cave coldly.

The next morning Plunko was in a black bilious mood.

When the wolves had stopped howling and he had fallen asleep again finally, as light trickled in the aperture of the cave, and there was a damp cold in the air, and he could see his breath crystals, he had dreamed of the old grey woman. He awoke really frightened and tired and again, Shenaynay failed to comfort his whimpering.

Then he hunted tree nenes all day and that evening she wouldn't bathe him so again by the fire that night he cracked her crown, and she went into the cave and stared at the glistening bearded man.

Plunko was tired and smelled bad, and was afraid to sleep because of the old grey woman in his dreams, then the wolves started howling, and Plunko started whimpering. And now Shenaynay slept soundly, but Plunko was paralyzed to stop her.

The next day a cold tree nene pecked a hole in Plunko's head, and knocked him clean out. And he was refreshed for a couple minutes until he came to and saw the old grey woman leaning over him, and he screamed his way

into full consciousness. The night was starry and cold, and Plunko despaired because the old grey woman seemed to be drawing closer to him.

The next night was a full moon and the wolves howled loudly all night, which was fine with Plunko because he wasn't sleeping anyways.

The man in the cave with the green mossy beard was putting feelings in Shenaynay's heart she realized.

Plunko had banished her from the furs, because her new quiet malice reminded him of the evil specter of the old grey woman.

Finally Plunko was reduced to a quaking vegetable in the daylight, and a moaning puddle in the nighttime.

Shenaynay took no joy in this. She hadn't eaten in days, but she would not comfort Plunko. She would not restore his health and spirit.

The next morning there was snow everywhere and frost in the old wallman's beard. Freshly laid footprints led from inside the cave, out and across the meadow, and into the woods, down towards the pond.

There was a hole in the fresh crust of ice on the pond.

Shenaynay carefully edged towards the shore. The exposed water was deep blue and calm with a little circle

of foam in the center. Shenaynay gasped at her reflection in the sheen of ice. Her formerly thick black hair had blanched snow white.

She retreated back to the cave in alarm. The beard of moss glistened with dew in the chill clean morning air. It's toothy rock mouth seemed to be grinning. Shenaynay grinned, too, and curled up in the furs. She was starting to look like an old grey lady.

END.