

The Player made his move; and the Opponent, shifting his cigar, made a quick reply.

The Kibitzer shrugged. "You see, the game plays *itself* now. He can't go wrong."

"I suppose I might as well resign!"

"Might as well."

"Yah, well, if you don't mind, I'll play on. I happen to like the game still."

"Suit yourself. I don't care."

The Opponent watched them, amused. The Player moved again.

"Oh, not *that* move, you idiot. This time you *had* to move the bishop."

The Player grunted, but said nothing.

The Kibitzer shook his head back and forth. "It was the only move, and you missed it. *Why* do I watch such playing?" And he leaned closer for a better look.

## A Scrap of Lavender

Judy Bergen

**Y**OU PROBABLY read the story; it was in all the papers. When a man as prominent as Wheeler Dunlop gets killed, it's bound to attract attention. Of course people get hit by cars often enough, and if anyone suspected its having been more than an accident, certainly nothing was said. If I had said anything, who would have believed me?

Wheeler Dunlop was an artist. So am I, but he was a good one, a genius. We met in college and managed to keep contact through the years, years that carried him to heights of fame while they brought me a clientele which kept me eating but nothing more. For several summers we had been going up into the New England region to paint and get away from civilization a little. We always picked a small rural community where Wheeler wasn't known. Somehow we never worried about anyone recognizing me.

Wheeler's last summer was spent in Vermont, in one of the rocky mountainous spots that can be changed, via the paint-brush, from grim reality to picturesqueness. It was here that he was killed. Till now I have never told my story, partly because I didn't want to get involved and partly because I don't think anyone would have believed me. There was a third reason, but I myself wasn't sure just exactly what it was.

We had been working hard that day, tramping all over the hillsides, picking first one spot then another for our sketches, and our luck had been bad. Wheeler was a little out of sorts, a prerogative of genius, I suppose, so I suggested driving in to the county seat, a town about fifteen miles away, for dinner. He instantly agreed, and as soon as we had gotten cleaned up, we were off.

It was a misty evening with a touch of fog in the air, and

Wheeler was driving. Suddenly I saw a figure emerge from the indistinctness ahead.

"Look out," I cried.

The car swerved and just missed hitting a young girl walking along the road. Wheeler stopped the car, obviously shaken by the encounter. We waited till she was beside the car and I asked, "Did we frighten you? The fog is getting bad, and I'm afraid we were driving too fast."

I was struck by the girl's loveliness. She had clear blue eyes and deep auburn hair that came below her shoulders. But it was her skin that was most noticeable; it was clear to the point of translucence. One had the feeling that if it were held to the light one could almost see through it, like fine china. She was dressed in a sheer dress of a lavender color; it looked like the sort of dress a young girl would wear to a party.

She spoke softly. "No, you didn't frighten me. I was on my way into town; I never miss the dance. I live just around the turn." She pointed back the way we had come.

"But," Wheeler said, "you have over a mile to walk yet. That's much too far; if you'll let us, we would be glad to make up for your close call by taking you into town."

She smiled. "If you'd like."

I moved over and she got into the car with us. She didn't seem inclined to conversation, so the three of us rode along in silence. Then I noticed that she was shivering.

"It's getting a little chilly. Would you like to slip my topcoat around your shoulders?"

She smiled in acquiescence and adjusted the coat about her. In a few minutes she turned toward Wheeler.

"I'll get out here, if you don't mind," she said.

We were on the outskirts of town, near an old building which seemed out of place with the modern houses around it. But supposing that she was going to one of the houses, neither of us asked any questions. I opened the door for her and she thanked us, and got out.

We were both silent for the rest of the ride. Then I realized that I hadn't gotten my coat back from the girl. I said this to Wheeler and he answered that we could stop at the house where the girl lived tomorrow and retrieve it.

The next day we drove back to the old house that the girl had pointed out as her home. As we pulled into the driveway a woman came to the door. She matched the house, old and run-down and grey-looking, as though time had dealt unfairly with both. She wiped her hands on her apron and walked over to the car just as we got out.

"You want berries?" she asked, squinting her eyes against the early sun.

Wheeler spoke. "No, we're looking for a young girl who rode into town with us last night. She forgot to return my friend's topcoat, so we stopped by to get it."

The woman stepped back a little and frowned.

"No girl here. Just my man and me, and he ain't here half the time." She started to leave and I stepped forward and caught her arm. She acted as if she were anxious to get back into the house.

"You say there's no girl here? But there has to be; she said she lives here." I must have looked belligerent, because the woman shook her head decisively, a little frightened.

"No there ain't. We had a girl once, but she was killed, fifteen years ago. Killed down the road apiece, walking into town." Her eyes looked bitter.

Wheeler and I stared at her, too stunned to say anything. The old woman glanced at us, then turned around and hurried into the house. We got back into the car. Wheeler started the motor and we backed into the road. Just as we started down the road something caught my eye. By the front steps of the old house was my topcoat, neatly folded.

That evening, after dinner, we discussed what had happened.

"She's lying," Wheeler said. "That's the only explanation. Maybe she resented our picking the girl up. The thing is, we both saw her, and we both saw the coat, there near the house. So there has to be a rational explanation."

I shook my head in bewilderment. "I don't know. But I'm not going to worry about it. I got my coat back, so I'm satisfied."

I meant what I said, and the next day I got out my paints and easel, all set for a day of sketching. But Wheeler was moody and said he wasn't interested in work at the present. Chalking up the remark to his well-known temperament, I set off in the car alone.

When I came back that night, he was quite elated. When I inquired as to the reason, he said that he was on the tracks of the girl. He had found out that there really had been a girl killed on her way into town and that it really had happened fifteen years before. Furthermore, he said, the old building where the girl had gotten out had been a dance-hall at that time.

For some reason his concern with the whole thing annoyed me. I shrugged, made some remark about coincidence, and went to bed. I thought the novelty of a possible phantom would wear off if Wheeler had no encouragement. Perhaps this would have been the case, but unfortunately he got encouragement. He saw her again.

She was walking along the highway when he saw her, about a week later. He told me afterwards that she smiled, but would not speak to him or stop walking. Then she disappeared into the trees by the side of the road. After that, he gave up all pretense of painting. He spent his days talking to people in town about the girl and his nights driving that lonely stretch of road, hoping to see her again.

His preoccupation was beginning to affect me. We were barely civil to each other in those last days; I was exasperated with his obsession and he was angry at my indifference. Most of the towns-

people, being staid New Englanders, thought him a little balmy, and I was beginning to wonder myself. My work, such as it was, was beginning to suffer, too. I couldn't find a spot for a landscape I hoped to do in pastels, even though I had made countless attempts. It was to be a "bread-and-butter" painting for a lady who wanted it over her fireplace.

Then came that Thursday. I had spent almost the entire day hunting a suitable location to set up my easel, but without luck. As evening approached, I drove along the road where Wheeler and I had first encountered our little friend. About a quarter of a mile from the old house I happened to spot a clearing that looked as if it might have possibilities, so I parked the car and got out. Picking up my equipment I started toward it. It was a pretty little spot, a grassy knoll flanked on one side by a clump of young white birch. To the right of the knoll was a maple which was just beginning to don autumn's colors.

Here, I thought to myself, is my scene. I hoped to work fast enough on the rough outline so that I could catch the colors as the sun was setting. I swiftly outlined the hill and the trees. As I worked I noticed a particularly intriguing shadow just back of the smaller tree, obviously a composite of the tree's shadow and the color of the sunset.

After I got the rough outline drawn, my fingers worked automatically, blending in the colors and shadows. My mind wandered to its usual subject, Wheeler and his strange actions. Why had he become so obsessed by this idea; was he really beginning to lose his mind?

I was brought back to earth by the realization that the sun had set and my light was fast waning. When I focused my attention on the picture I was doing, I was utterly amazed to find that I had unconsciously distorted the purple shadow behind the maple tree. Where the shadow had been I had sketched a girl—a girl in a lavender dress!

I stared at the picture with a feeling of abhorrence as if I had created a monster. Obviously I, too, was becoming obsessed with this delusion. Deciding it was time to halt my work, I started packing up my gear. Suddenly I heard a cry.

It was Wheeler. He was calling to someone, pleading with whoever it was to stop. I ran toward the sound of his voice. Just as I neared the road I saw him running; he was headed for the road, oblivious of an oncoming car.

When I got to him, it was too late to help him. I knelt beside him and lifted his head into my lap. He opened his eyes and grimaced.

"Did you see her? She was there, but she wouldn't wait for me."

That was all he said. And, as I said earlier, no one knew but me about this phantom he was chasing. The police assumed he was blinded by the car's headlights. And of course they saw nothing

unusual in the fact that the driver of the car was the old man who lived in the house around the turn—the girl's father. He had been returning home and failed to see the figure dart in front of him.

Before the police got there, I noticed that Wheeler had something clutched in his hand. I opened his fingers gently: between them was a scrap of lavender material.

## The Sag

Keith Shields

**T**HE SMALL man with the dark goatee and the bald lines cutting into his hair above either temple sat alone at the round-topped table with only a lighted candle to see by.

On a piece of unlined and crumpled paper he wrote:

"Wherein lies the joy of life?

That I should hurt so?

That sunsets say more to color-blind alleycats than they do to the great bearded me?

That the guitar and the horn should win while the human voice does nothing, man, nothing?

That the flaming red billows of hair in the golden sunlight should mean less than the hard red knot of ashes sucked at the opposite end in the darkness of a damp-walled lair?

That the smell of pot should grapple with my guts while I miss the grey-river dawn scent coming in my waterfront window as cool as an angel?

But what are angels to the saintly Us? They are superfluous. They are a dime a greasy dozen.

Yet, wherein lies the joy of life?

O Headless Heaven! Lead me far and wider in my wanderings! Extinguish my sorrows in the stench of side-streets, the garbage of gurgling gutters."

The little man got up to leave the cafe, and he hung the sheet of paper with writing on it on a hook labeled "POETRY." His vacation would be over tomorrow. He would shave off the beard and say good morning everymorning to everyone he met everyday for the next fifty weeks.

Bank telling wasn't such a terrible occupation. He could always look forward to the next vacation and its two-week bender.