

### Lavender

"Lavender" is an *urban legend*, a modern American folk narrative set in the recent past. Like older legends such as those about buried treasure or outlaws, urban legends are "told seriously, circulate largely by word of mouth, are generally anonymous, and vary constantly in particular details from one telling to another, while always preserving a central core of traditional elements of 'motifs'" (Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends and Their Meanings*, p. xii). While such legends are believed to be true by their tellers and are marked by specific—usually local—times and places, the events they portray can seldom be documented, and their truth lies more in the emotional truths they represent, the social values or anxieties they reflect. The "Lovers' Lane" legends in the "Family Matters" section of this volume are other examples of popular urban legends. "Lavender" was collected in 1986 from Bonnie Ables.—Venn Collection, Eastern Oregon State College..

Two men were on their way to the Saturday night dance a few years ago, when they saw a young woman walking down the Mission Highway, near Pendleton. They stopped to ask the woman if she would like a ride. The woman, dressed in a long, flowing, lavender evening gown, got into the beaten-up old Ford pickup with the men. The men asked the woman what her name was, and she replied, "Lavender." Then one of the men asked Lavender if she would like to go to the dance with them. She agreed to go to the dance, and they talked as they rode down the road, on their way to the Vert Auditorium, where the dance was being held.

The threesome had a lovely time that night—dancing, talking, joking, and laughing. After the dance, they dropped Lavender off by the gate in front of an eerie-looking, two-story, run-down old house. They said their goodbyes, and the two men went on their way. The next weekend, the two men stopped by the old house to see if Lavender would like to go to another dance. They stepped up to the door and knocked. An elderly lady answered the door, and they asked if Lavender was in. She invited the men in. Then, she walked over to a desk near a hallway and picked up a picture of a woman. She brought the picture over to the men and asked if this was the woman they were looking for.

The men examined the picture, and one of them replied, "Yes, we picked her up along the highway last weekend and took her to the dance in town."

Then, the other man said, "We would like to take her with us this weekend, also."

Then the elderly lady laid the picture down and informed the men that the lady they were looking for had died ten years ago. She took the men out the back door, where there was a large grave. On the grave was a lavender dress—which the men recognized as the one Lavender had been wearing the weekend before. On the tombstone was inscribed, "Lavender May Holmes." Puzzled, the two men said they would have to be going; then, they left.

Since then, there have been other reports of a woman wearing a lovely evening dress, standing along the Mission Highway.