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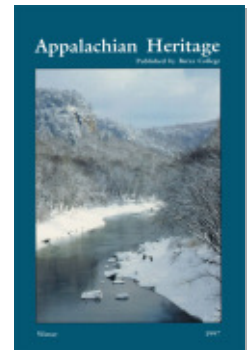
## Bringing Eulene Home

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# Bringing Eulene Home

Agnes Scott Stevens

Until Eulene died at eighty-three—that's Mama's oldest sister—she'd never been to a flea market, maybe even never heard of one. Now she practically lives in one. Someone's always spotting her, saying, "That *has* to be Eulene." Crazy, you say. Maybe. It's like this.

Eulene, it's said, was a fast learner of anything she set her mind to. She'd have a quilt pieced, off the frame and on the bed while the weather was changing.

She could crochet, tat, knit, spin, weave, and do any embroidery stitch you could name. They say the day after a flour sack was emptied, Eulene had it washed, ironed, and a crocheted border around it, not to mention a colorful spray of flowers at each end.

Turkey-red was her favorite color, and it's rumored she'd boil up a rooster's cockscomb to get that exact color. I suppose that's all hog-wash. Maybe not.

After Eulene died, her highfalutin daughter, Bernice, who had gone away to Birmingham, sold all the stuff her mama had made to a flea market woman. There were trunks and boxes in the attic stuffed with dresser scarves, crocheted doilies, and pot holders. The colder and longer the winter, the more she'd turn out, and there had been a lot of winters in her life. I guess that red thread she was so fond of cheered her up.

Anyway, this woman who bought all of Eulene's stuff—that is, except for a Rose of Sharon crocheted bedspread that Mama got ahold of—paid a fraction of what it was worth. That's how anxious Bernice was to get rid of everything and get back to Birmingham, which was, according to her, just loaded with "kul-chure."

And what did she do after collecting all that money but put one of those little markers on her mama's grave—the kind you have to stand over and look down on to read the name and date. Not even room for a nice inscription like "Rest in Peace." Mama about had a conniption fit when she saw it, and couldn't stop talking about it. "It's enough to make her mama rise from her grave," she said.

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*Agnes Scott Stevens has numerous credits in both literary and popular journals. She says, "I indulge myself in writing about the South and the people I have known. By the way, Eulene is the name of a cousin of mine, a dyed-in-the wool Southerner and still very much alive."*

Anyway, Bernice didn't leave a thing here to come back to, having sold everything that her mama owned, lock, stock, and barrel. She can't sew a stitch, and buys all her clothes right off the rack.

So what does she do but show up here one day, not to move back she hastens to add, but to buy that crocheted Rose of Sharon bedspread Mama has. Says she's now married to a Mr. Barney Popper who's rich as sin and who bought her this huge two-story house they're restoring to its "Victorian splendor." And what her guest bedroom is crying out for is that Rose of Sharon bedspread.

You'd have thought she'd have high-tailed it back to Birmingham after Mama told her flat out that she didn't have enough money to buy that spread, and that she shouldn't have been in such a hurry to sell her mama's things in the first place.

"But I didn't want those other things," Bernice wailed. "Just that spread. I'll give you a hundred dollars."

"Well, it's not for sale," Mama said, "now or ever."

"A hundred-fifty!"

Mama just clamped her lips shut and started for the house.

I'll be around for a day or two," Bernice called after her. "I'm looking for an old rocker, too. If you know of anybody that has one, I'll pay good money. That is, providing it's an authentic antique."

Mama asked, "Did you say a 'rocker'? Why don't you check back with me tomorrow, Bernice." Mama's mind was working a mile-a-minute.

"You think she'd be interested in that old rocker Uncle Silas made—the one's been settin' in the barn ever since he died seventeen years ago?" It's so out of balance it would start rocking if somebody walked across the floor, or at the slightest breeze. Mama had moved it out of the house when she went over backwards one day. "Now what makes you think I'd do a thing like that?" she asked and headed for the barn.

"All it needs is a little sprucing up," she said. "You're now looking at a genu-wine antique rocker, made by Bernice's great-great Uncle Silas Bonifay. Many a baby has been lulled to sleep in its arms."

"And many a mother flung backwards while she was rocking."

Mama gave a cackling laugh that sounded like the Wicked Witch of the West.

"You think she'll be satisfied with just the rocker?" I said. "She's got her mind set on that spread of yours."

"I hope so," she said. "Remember that Rose of Sharon spread Suzie Harper made from Eulene's pattern?"

"The one with all the mistakes in it? So many Suzie hid it in a trunk when she finished and said she never wanted to see it again."

"Exactly." Mama had a sly-fox smile.

"But won't Bernice know the difference?"

"You and I both know Bernice wouldn't know quality if she met it in the road because she refused to learn all those things her mama could have taught her. Too busy running around and having a good time. And now she's out spending that poor Mr. Popper's money on junk because she doesn't know the difference."

When Bernice came back the next day, Mama was ready for her, and all smiles. "Bernice, because of your dear mama, and because you are, after all, my niece, I have had a change of heart. It not like things are leaving the family. I am sure you will cherish and keep them in memory of those who have passed on."

Bernice had an unmistakable gleam in her eyes and was practically licking her lips. "You mean you have decided to sell me the spread?"

"Not only that," Mama said. "I am going to let you have a family heirloom—a very old rocker made by your great-great Uncle Silas that goes back over a hundred years. Some say that Uncle Silas still comes to sit in it every now and then, as you may see it rocking slightly. But, shucks, that's just part of the magic and history."

"Oh-ooo." Bernice clasped her bosom and squealed with delight. "I can't wait to tell Mr. Popper. He'll be so thrilled."

Bernice left with the rocker and Suzie Harper's bedspread that Mama got off her for fifty dollars and sold to Bernice for a hundred-fifty. The rocker brought two hundred, a real steal, Mama told her regretfully, as if she didn't want to let it go.

So here was Mama standing there with three hundred dollars, more than she had seen in a long time. "And just what are you going to do with all that money?" I said, "Or should I say ill-gotten gain?"

"Maybe ill-gotten," she said, "but I'm making Bernice do proper what she should have done in the first place."

"Such as?"

"Such as putting a proper headstone to Eulene's grave. Andy Bell is going to do a nice one for two hundred dollars, with an inscription that says 'Now With the Angels.'"

"So that still leaves a hundred," I said.

"Well, I thought you and I would take in a few flea markets and buy back some of that stuff Eulene made. It's time she came home, don't you think?"