

FLORABELLE

She - was - rich.
I mean she had money and things,
and her only heir apparent was a mynah bird
that repeated only what the old lady told it to,

Florabelle! Florabelle!

while relatives circled her carrion wealth waiting.

As a child, I was taken
to her house to sit obediently while she poked
my chest with a ring-gaudy finger on the one
hand and waved the other toward
her prized prism lamps.

These are hers when I go!"

she announced in third person.

Cranberry bases etched with silvery filigree
stood shaded with fluted silk, and cranberry bulges
hung all around with dangly spears of sparkling glass.

They're crystal!

and we were not, my brother and I, supposed to touch them.

Still,
I studied those lamps those long afternoons stretched
out like talons to hold me there. And over the years,
while everyone waited, my mother reminded me
that those lamps were worth a lot of money.

Only if you want them,

I whispered out of earshot.

Didn't matter anyway. The old lady lived
to be a hundred. Then her niece and my
brother squirreled everything away when
they moved the old lady to a nursing home.

I don't know what happened to the mynah bird
— maybe one day found the cage door open
and just flew, dropping

Florabelle! Florabelle!

all along the way
like tiny shards
of cranberry glass.

-Trecia R. Greene, 1991