Vase

by Mika Day

Last month I bought a living vase from the florist down the road. I took it home in its cage and set it on the dining room table, then the mantlepiece, then a dresser next to the windowsill.

It was shaped like a sulfur-crested cockatoo, with no head and an empty body to put flowers and water in, but it came pre-stocked with yellow kangaroo paws that mimicked a crest. I talked to it softly and it gurgled back at me, blowing bubbles in its stomach like a snail.

That night it escaped its cage and destroyed itself as it destroyed the house; it left shredded paper, petals, marbles, bits of porcelain feathers, the noises that kept me from sleeping. On the third day, I put my hand in the cage. It was quiet, shivering, and pressed itself hard against the furthest corner from me. I stroked it and felt the rough clay skin where it tore its feathers out. It felt warm. The florist told me it's only ornamental. It doesn't have a head, it doesn't think the way humans do, so just give it water and it will be fine. But I had seen wild cockatoos eating gumnuts, and giving compost to my garden, so I made tea from worm castings and crushed yellow box fruit and poured it, lukewarm, into its mouth. Throughout the day it drained itself, and it grew new blossoms and glass pinfeathers when I looked away.

At the end of the first week, it escaped when I opened its cage to put my hand in. Its flight pattern was unpredictable and erratic, and it shattered a pinfeather against the window.

It bled viscid sap and I bled as we struggled against each other. It gurgled then choked and vomited what remained of its worm-and-yellow-box insides.

I ripped out its feather, which stabbed my palm and broke into tiny shards. The vase shivered and tried to preen itself without a beak in the corner of the room while I made the sink swallow blood, sap and broken glass.

It refused to be near me, so I had to catch it with a net to replace its insides. I apologized endlessly. It didn't seem to understand my words, so it continued to avoid me.