My greatest ambition in life is to hold at least one flower. I am beautiful. I have a white base with a swirling crimson design, and ebony colored accents that highlight my elegance. I am old, passed down from generation to generation, and yet I have never in all my years held a flower. I live in a beautiful house, and sit on a beautiful table. The people I live with are beautiful, though robotic, and every day it’s the same routine. They come in, put down their keys, empty their pockets onto the table on the other side of the hall and go into the kitchen. Every day I am passed by and overlooked because the family is so used to my presence, and every day my yearning for a little water and a beautiful flower intensifies. I wish for nothing more.

I am one of the first things people see when they come into the house. Every now and then when the woman entertains guests I receive an “Oh! What a beautiful vase!” and it’s enough, but they don’t know half the beauty I would hold if I could hold a flower. Unfortunately for me, however, there are rarely guests over. It’s usually the same monotony, but today is different. Not different for me, but for the people. The man comes home first, and he never comes home first. He’s carrying flowers, which is completely out of character for him. I can’t remember the last time he brought home flowers. They are especially beautiful flowers; it’s a huge bouquet of white Casablanca lilies. How I wish I could have just one to hold. He walks away into the kitchen.

The woman comes into the house holding the hand of the little girl. The girl is about four years old, and the only one who looks at me when she comes in. I think she likes my colors. The woman goes through the motions: keys, pockets, and starts to walk away. The little girl comes close to the table I sit on and puts her hands on the edge. The woman stops walking away and turns to the girl.

“Honey, don’t touch the vase, it’s an antique.”

“Mommy, why don’t you put flowers in the vase?”

“It’s not that kind of vase, it’s only meant for decoration, so the room is pretty.”

The little girl had acquired a puzzled expression while her mother was talking. It’s understandable she would be puzzled; I am puzzled too. Vases are supposed to hold flowers, are they not? Flowers accentuate beauty, and I would be especially beautiful if I were holding flowers. The girl and the woman walk into the kitchen, and I am alone again.

The next day, the man again comes home first, carrying more flowers. I wonder why he is suddenly bringing home so many flowers. Today it’s yellow roses, with slight tints of orange in places. They’re the color of a sunset, and they are as beautiful as the
previous day’s lilies. They would look lovely inside of me; the yellow and orange would offset the white and crimson of my design wonderfully. The little girl already likes my colors; I think if I had the sunset colored roses she would be in complete awe. However, the little girl isn’t home yet; usually the woman and the girl come home first. I’ve often heard the woman say the man is working late. I wonder why he isn’t working late anymore? It’s a quite puzzling change of behavior.

The following evening, the man, woman, and little girl all leave together. The man and woman are especially lovely tonight; she has on a sparkling black, knee length dress with her hair in an elegant twist. The man has on his usual suit, but has freshly shaven his face for the occasion. I expect them to be out quite late, but they are only gone for a short time before they come back in the door, together, but without the little girl. Something is different than it was when they left. Something is wrong. The woman is crying, and they are talking right there in the hall. They never talk in the hall.

“How could you?” She asks the man.

“It was a mistake.” He told her somberly. “I’m so sorry that I hurt you. It was never my intention.” The woman’s voice was low and dangerous when she next spoke, tears still running down her beautiful cheeks, staining them black with running make up.

“A mistake?” She is now irate and begins to yell. “Forget about how much you hurt me for a minute. How could you do this to our family? How could you do this to Hannah?”

“I’m sorry. I don’t really know what else to say. I was unhappy because I felt like you didn’t love me anymore. You’ve been pushing me away for months, and I got lonely.”

“So this is my fault? Is that what you’re saying? You had a choice. We could have talked it over, we could have gone to counseling, and we could have done things differently. You didn’t have to do it, and now it’s too late.”

“Don’t say that. At least I told you. We could have gone on like this for the rest of our lives and I could have never said a word. You never would have known. But I told you. I told you because I want to fix us, and you aren’t giving me any credit at all for that.” The woman looks at him with tear filled eyes, the rage and hurt evident within them. She is beyond words. The man takes her silence as a cue to keep going. He moves forward and embraces her; one arm around her waist and the other behind her head, holding her close to his body before he speaks again. The woman, shocked, stands there and listens. “I know now that everything I could want or need is right here with you and with our daughter. Please.” He said the final word so pleadingly, so hopelessly; it was heartbreaking. It felt like I had a crack opened right in the middle of me, where my heart would have been if vases had hearts. The woman is wracked with renewed sobs and wrenches her body out of the man’s embrace.

“Don’t touch me. You lost that privilege the minute you crossed that line. Get out. I hope you found what you were looking for. I hope you found whatever it is that this family couldn’t give you.”

The man turns around with downcast
eyes and walks back out the door. I wonder what the man did to make the woman so sad and angry. Still enraged, she picks up the keys on the table and throws them at the closed door the man just walked out of. Her evident anger ebbs, and in its place is a face contorted with grief. The grief consumes and crushes the woman, and she crumples to the floor right here in the hall and cries for some time, wallowing in a deep pool of lament and self-pity. Eventually she cries herself out, stands up slowly and with the help of the wall, wipes off her face, sniffs, and walks away into the kitchen, turning off the hall light behind her and leaving me in darkness.

In the morning following the fight, the woman leaves and comes back with the little girl. The little girl stares at me for a few minutes before following the woman into the kitchen. The man comes back for the first time since the previous night. He has more flowers. White roses. The kind people give while in mourning. I have never held a white rose, or any other flower for that matter. How I wish I could have just one, just for a little while. He walks into the kitchen. He isn’t there for long. Soon, he comes back down the hall, wheeling a large suitcase and still holding the white roses. The little girl has followed him into the hall.

“Daddy, where are you going? Is it a trip? Can I come?” She is excited at the prospect of a trip, but I hope she doesn’t go on one because she is the only one who ever pays me any attention. The man sets the roses on the table usually reserved for keys and kneels down so he is eye level with his daughter.

“Daddy has to go away for awhile Hannah, and you have to take care of mommy while I’m gone.” The little girl starts to cry.

“Can mommy come too? We can all take a trip!” The man looks at her hopeful eyes sadly.

“I have to take this trip alone sweetheart, but I love you more than anything, and no matter what happens you can never forget that.” The puzzled expression has returned to the girls face. The same puzzled expression she had when the woman told her that flowers don’t belong in certain types of vases.

“I love you too, Daddy.”

The man kisses her on the forehead and stands up, grabbing his suitcase. He leaves the flowers sitting on the table, the little girl staring after him, and walks out the front door, closing it softly behind him. After the man is gone, the little girl turns and looks at me. She stares for a few minutes, an odd expression on her face, and then walks into the kitchen. She returns a minute later with a cup full of water. She walks to my table, but I hardly dare hope for fear of disappointment. She empties the water into my opening. It is cool and wonderful. I feel the water rising up; I feel the cool splashes and waves. I can only imagine what it must feel like to hold a flower when simply holding water is such a glorious experience. I feel the crack where my heart would be expand. Then, making the crack bigger with her simple kindness, the little girl walks to the table, pulls out a single white rose, and places it in the opening.

“There” she says, pleased with her handiwork. “That’s better.” The woman walks into the hall, looking for the little girl.
“Honey, what are you doing?”
“The vase needed flowers mommy, so I put one in.”

The woman turns around and looks at me with my one flower, and a tear falls out of one eye.

“It looks beautiful Hannah.” The woman turned around and gathered up the rest of the roses. She placed them inside the opening with the first white rose. The woman looks sad, and tears are again rolling down her cheeks. I wonder why she’s sad? This is the greatest day of my existence. I am finally holding not just one flower, but a dozen white roses. A drop of water slips through the crack and rolls down my body.

“Look mommy! The vase is crying too!”

“Sometimes it’s the simplest things that cause the greatest happiness. We could all use a little more beauty in life.”