

The Pattern of Flowers

The pattern of flowers is one of my first memories, the house we lived in wasn't much more than a small cottage. In my child's memory when I think of it, I think of the children's poem "there was a crooked man"

"There was a crooked man, and he walked a crooked mile,
He found a crooked sixpence against a crooked stile.
He bought a crooked cat which caught a crooked mouse,
And they all lived together in a little crooked house."

Our house always seemed to be crooked, waiting for the one thing that would wax sideways and tumble it down.

I was two years old, and all my memories of that time are visual. I have clips of my mother entertaining a girlfriend at the kitchen table, my mother had just returned from California, I remember crawling under the kitchen table while they spoke, my mother wearing the sandals she had brought back from the California coast with seashells adorning them, I remember these but not her face. As they spoke their feet would cross and uncross discussing experiences that I was too young to understand but felt that I was involved somehow. I remember the linoleum and its pattern, one square after another, all the same and strategically connecting, the shells on her sandals making a soft clashing sound as she spoke.

I remember the voices becoming urgent and full of emotion and my presence suddenly becoming known, things I shouldn't hear even though I was too young to grasp them.

I was lifted gently and removed from the conversation to my crib in a small adjoining room. The room was dark beyond the ability to see its contents, the only light came through a small rectangle window which lit up the curtains in the pattern of tiny golden yellow and orange flowers, a rectangle beacon of order, comforting in its repetition of color and pattern, even to a small child it made sense, and I placed my faith in it. It wasn't long after that our crooked house came tumbling down. My mother explained to my brothers and I that she was going to the store, and she may have gone to the store, but it was irrelevant because she never

returned. She followed her seashell sandals back to California and perhaps kicked them off in the sand, abandoning them for the freedom that can only come from leaving your past behind, letting the sea wash away the chains that bind.

I remember the sun fading and my beautiful flower pattern evaporating from my curtains, from golden comfort to black uncertainty. At some point the sun rose and there were my beautiful flowers again, reassuring, bright, aligned in a pattern of a promise that things are circumvent and there is always an answer, a way to overcome. Put one foot in front of the other and you can walk, a pattern that allows one to move forward.

The pattern of flowers was the visual that told me I could survive, a cognitive process of recognizing patterns allowing me to navigate what is coming, a survival tool. patterns are my recognition of undeniable truth and outcome, a comfort to me as truth is a starting point to healing. I often think of those curtains, a bright rectangle in an obscure darkness and I take comfort in them.