7633 South Shore Drive

Anna Leahy*

*Iowa State University

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In 1970, Lake Michigan was ours, 
separated from my red-trimmed white stucco 
and from your brownstone 
only by the park 
where you gave me my first cigarette 
on the swings with the black rubber seats. 
The two of us went swimming in double 
layers of underwear; no worry 
about orange-peel thighs, 
suits cut too high 
or too low, 
only worry that you could tell 
it was pre-teen bra and underpants.

Our houses were separated 
only by my garden of marigolds and a peach tree 
and by the row of white birches 
under which we found the box turtle; 
we taunted it for most of an afternoon, 
clicking a stick on its back, 
waiting for it to peek its appendages out, 
clicking a stick again.

At five, we were married 
in a technicolor Polaroid, 
a white slip over my head, 
my hands folded over yellow paper flowers, 
your knees covered by navy knickers, 
our sisters leading us down the living room aisle. 
It was so easy to fall in love then.
At six, we overdosed behind my bathroom door on chewable vitamins, like candy squirreled-away for an afternoon’s feast; I hoarded the pink, cherry flavored Flintstones, you swallowed indiscriminately. Willy Mae found us in time, wrapped us in diapers, sent you home, and put me to bed. We spent three days in bed, recovering from our shared banquet.

You moved to Beverly; we only saw each other for Jack-in-the-Box or Purple Cow where the world was purple—purple sugar, purple candy, purple walls, the color of kings and queens.

Although our mothers exchange Christmas cards, I’ve lost track of who you are. I have moved to the middle of Iowa and have fallen in love with a man who has never tapped the back of a turtle and I have kept the only picture ever taken of just the two of us.