

Life in Parentheses

I recognize the rusty pigment of a former redhead immediately
They always love it when I tell them so.
Overjoyed that someone recognizes the color of their youth

Rusty pigment and careworn hands are always with me
She was smart as a whip, on the “college track” in high school
(how very odious that we put human lives on tracks to certain destinations we deem appropriate)
Her brother too. He became a doctor in a suburb of Denver
But in 1945, a woman was called to be a mother, and perhaps a nurse or teacher
(certainly not a doctor)

She was
(brilliant, a devoted mother of four, accomplished pianist, math tutor, insurance adjuster, pinochle champion, European castle expert, square dancing instructor)
Never bitter

She kept
(her foot on the gas pedal, her mind active, always reading the latest news and research, clandestine records fill file cabinets of nutrition facts, investment strategies, curriculum ideas, family vacations, sheet music, and historical documents)
A spotless home

Same song, different verse
I stash my wedding ring in my pocket and try
to put my four children out of mind, try to make them non-existent,
like black and white photos left behind.

(Even though they are the reason I’m doing this in the first place)

Because the male interviewer’s feedback was
“It seems the applicant does not understand the time commitment necessary to attend medical school”.
We never talked about time commitment, but we talked about my children.
So, in my next three interviews, I take off my wedding ring and pretend my children don’t exist

These are the only schools to extend offers of admission.

Progress comes in sputtering jolts, and sometimes we just run out of gas
Even as the pigment of my red hair turns to rust, she will be with me

Her wedding picture sits behind me during virtual residency interviews
Black and white smiles, she is saying something hilarious
That no one remembers now

But I remember her in color