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A Portrait of My Mother (1927 – 2016) as a Bifurcation Diagram

Launched into life from the Great Depression
the initial soar as your universe expands

Shy and introverted
you were not the daughter with the flirty eyes
(your mother’s favourite)
and your birthday too far from payday for spoiling

Education was your consolation
an equilibrium made stable by universal praise on papers and essays
A dutiful valedictory address full of God, King and Country
penned to a world hobbling through Depression and War

Jostling for attention and limited resources
you wait in hope behind five more important brothers
the air is redolent with potential

It’s decided that a year of secretarial training will do

The decay of knowledge acquisition is increasingly marked as $r \rightarrow b_1^{-}$

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With marriage
the loving wife persona splits from the private essence of you

She executes a courtly dance leading her hidden self
through repeating patterns of afternoon teas and bridge games
a backdrop of daily drudgery is punctuated by five pregnancies

Convergence to a stable 2-cycle for $b_1 \leq r < b_2$

Diagram from http://file.scirp.org/Html/3-9302151_62507.htm (permissive CC license) modified by addition of the points at $b_1$, $b_2$ and $b_3$ and at $1+2\sqrt{2}$.
Pledged to another’s dream
his many fine qualities as husband and father
notwithstanding
you traded a suburban home
and all the comfort that entails
for a hobby farm
made shabby by the hippie commune
that had dwelt there

No kitchen and a family to feed
LSD-infused drawings on the wall
plastic milk jug, cut and jigged to plumbing pipe

Renos inch forward in stolen hours
the hostess waits lonely years to once more
usher her guests
across a plush rug to a smart couch
you always cared what other people thought

I remember you
explaining to me why you earned less than
full-fleshed men
who didn’t mark time by the school bus clock
who didn’t rush home to potatoes
to peel and boil, the dog to feed
it seemed to make sense, besides
I would never throw skepticism in your face
when you spoke about a number that said
all there was to say about ambitions
harboured long ago by a girl
from a family with nothing

Stunted gifts echoed across a modest life
sharp number-sense kept tidy finances
intuition divined when children were lying
and whether or not it mattered

In an unruly family
you hummed below radar
though our craziness could
seize you in a fit of hilarity
red in the face and gasping
and suddenly
we’d notice
But none of us noticed time expiring for exploring who you might have been

I like to think I glimpsed you in a distant past on long afternoons in the quiet space between us

Period doubling and increased complexity for $b_2 \leq r < b_3$

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And the last decade childlike demanding sorting through garbage clutching possessions of no value the legacy of the Great Depression when all else was gone

Rude to friends who’d become strangers and other odd behaviours too intimate to mention spilling from unchecked impulses I lost you in stages never certain how to grieve as tiers of elegance and good grace fell away

Clarity might make a brief and wondrous appearance (see $r = 1 + 2\sqrt{2}$) *It’s hard on your father, I’ve become quite forgetful* before the imp of chaos returned

Pointing to a passing stranger *Is that your mother?* as you puzzled over how we fit the next moment gripping my hand

Only chaos conveys your personality’s disintegration for $b_3 \leq r$

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Perhaps I never saw you clearly maybe I’m taking you for granted one last time seeing only my reflection in you maybe it was everything you wanted
I suppose I could have asked
Instead
I’m left spinning half-truths
and sad tales
with pat phrases and clichés

When I heard of your demise
I sobbed and sobbed
Maybe it was the echo of a door
closing between us