

# The Basin Set

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All I knew of us, as a baby and an old woman, was in a photograph with curled edges, small cursive, yellows imbalanced. Not frail, no—she was all arms and breasts; she was farm stock but elegant. Her hair was impossibly white. She hoisted me up on her hip that day, the back says 1976. The roses were still there, and the sun made her squint.

It was a head-on collision, a drunk and my great-grandma and tule fog. Mom demonstrated years later with wooden blocks. My sister, pink and screaming, was named after her, and so we moved into the house that waited for her. The roses were gone, eventually, because of aphids that were the same as drunk drivers that were the same as blue wooden blocks.

Long before her skull was crushed, before the smear of headlights on the 1, before the broad practicality of her dress and her widowhood, I like to think she wore costume baubles and bejeweled combs and a red smear on her lips. I see her

driving through marine layer, the snaky 1, to the Eagles lodge or to Volpi's because they still served in a back room where men like my great-grandpa smoked and rolled and shuffled, these swarthy boatmen from the Azores, from Sicily.

She would return to the ranch in her pa's Model A, roll down her stockings, unpin her blonde. At the basin set, so sturdy and plain and cool, she would wipe her mouth and splash her cheeks. Her room was dark and cattle were shadows outside. Her sex was a secret that the highway knew, that the animals, in the darkness, kept.

And years went by, so many years where the basin set—a pitcher and bowl—sat on a wobbly table with porcelain knobs on a drawer that kept extra sets of keys and coupons and paper clips. The basin set was just a vase that held calla lilies or pussy willows or cattails. The basin set the first thing I'd see when I'd sneak in late, schnapps-drunk, in cliky shoes with smoky hair. It was just a vase, in the entryway, that I forgot to see for forty-one years.

But when the wildfires went—when they tore through, as we say—the basin set turned to dust, as did the photograph, as did the house, as did everything. And how I so clearly remember what it was now.

